
Gendered Biographies: The Czech State-socialist Gender Order in Oral History Interviews*

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Abstract: A large collection of autobiographical life story material available in oral-history data is used to examine how women and men of different socio-political groups (workers, intelligentsia, dissidents, and communist functionaries) narrate their lives in the time of state-socialist Czechoslovakia. Of particular interest is what these narratives imply for an understanding of the state-socialist gender order. The analysis combines quantitative (the frequency of word co-occurrences) and qualitative (a hermeneutic reading of text fragments) approaches. The results provide evidence that empirically supports what has previously been suggested in the literature: there was an interdependence of private and public spheres, with the family sphere differing in importance for women and men. Additionally, the discursive density and arrangement of these spheres in the life stories differs according to socio-political groups, and a third sphere, which we have labelled 'politics', emerges for some groups. The findings reveal insights into the relationship between the gender order and the life course through a narrative articulation of life stories of different social groups in Czech state-socialist society.

Keywords: life-course narratives, oral history, gender order, Czech Republic, qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis, socio-political groups

Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review, 2015, Vol. 51, No. 6: 1077–1104

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2015.51.6.229>

Introduction

There is widespread agreement that the gender order in state-socialist societies in Central and Eastern Europe was of a particular kind and thus differed from that of Western democratic and capitalist societies. However, the exact nature of the

* Acknowledgement: We would like to thank the Centre of Oral History at Czech Academy of Sciences for providing us with oral history interviews. Also, we thank reviewers and editors for their helpful comments. MH was supported by the Centre for Collective Memory Research at Charles University.

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socialist gender order is still discussed and seems unresolved even more than two decades after the fall of state socialism [Havelková and Oates-Indruchová 2014; Penn and Massino 2009; Johnson and Robinson 2007]. As was the case in other Soviet satellites, socialism in Czechoslovakia was based on the Soviet model 'founded on a "gender regime" that ... serves to reproduce both the labour supply (i.e., concrete individuals) and the prevailing symbolic order' [True 2003: 29]. According to official ideology, the basic liberation of women and their equalisation with men had been achieved with the socialist revolution; in reality, the situation was more complicated and less favourable. The objective of massive participation of women in higher education and the labour market had been achieved, but women were concentrated in traditional female areas with significantly lower wages and occupational prestige [Wolchik 1979].

In families, women's labour force participation did not significantly impact gender roles. As Einhorn notes, 'the fundamental contradiction inherent in the paradigm adopted by state-socialist countries lay in a definition of women as workers and mothers without any parallel conceptualization of men's role' [Einhorn 1991: 19]. There was no counter 'equality' in terms of men's involvement in the domestic sphere [LaFont 2001]. 'Instead of truly liberating women, state communism turned into a system that doubly exploited women in their roles as producers and reproducers. Their official glorification, represented in propaganda and the numerous statues of strong women proletarians standing beside their male counterparts, unfortunately, did not reflect the reality of women's lives.' [LaFont 2001: 205] Most family issues, such as sexual life and intimacy, individual autonomy, or domestic violence, were considered too insignificant and basically non-socialist to appear in public discourse dominated by ideological concerns of building the socialist society.

There is little research investigating women's and men's subjective experience of the gender order under state socialism. True argues that rather than being based on the equalisation of men's and women's roles, 'the gender regime that emerged under socialism was based on unofficial, embedded gender divisions that effectively homogenized women's lives and distinguished them from men's' [True 2003: 30]. However, some authors point out that the shared experience of being oppressed citizens gave birth to a certain, albeit limited, solidarity between women and men [Šiklová 2008; Šmausová 2011]. On the other hand, as Einhorn emphatically suggested, 'women in state-socialist countries felt thoroughly overstretched and overstressed' [Einhorn 1991: 20]. A more recent account of women's experience shows that the identity of a 'Czech socialist woman' included the unfulfilled desire for gender equality in work as well as in domestic life, the fear of losing femininity through the ideological neutralisation of gender differences, and women's identification with sexist discourse [Zábrodská 2014: 126].

The aim of the present research is to investigate how the gender order under state socialism is reflected in the discourse of women and men from different socio-professional groups in life-story interviews. This allows for an examination of

the life course, in which oral history interviews are used as 'data for restructuring social and cultural milieu' [Heinz and Krüger 2001: 31] in that they represent how people experience and attach meaning to transitions and phases in their lives. The focus is on the narrative connection between individuals and the historical context in which they live. The 'added value' of this life-course approach is that it 'integrates the investigation of individual agency representing the tension at the intersection between institutions and biographies' [Reiter 2009: 239]. Narratives are a particular discursive form which (among other things) transmit meanings, often creating or justifying roles and power relations [Srangi and Coulthard 2000: xxxii], framing these meanings as a set of shared beliefs and understandings [Briggs 1996: 14]. They also attribute moral meaning to events [Fincher 2004: 330]. Narratives may reveal an emphasis on certain themes, through which it may be possible to see how (normative) thinking about gender and the life course is articulated [Fincher 2004: 331].

Our study is based on the analysis of oral-history life-course interviews produced by the Centre for Oral History (Czech Academy of Sciences) between 2002 and 2012 as part of a project on Czech society in the period of normalisation. The data set includes approximately two hundred biographical narratives of blue-collar workers, intelligentsia, dissidents, and communist functionaries born roughly between 1935 and 1955, who were in their active age during the last twenty years of the communist regime. Average age of interviewees was 61–62.¹ In accordance with a post-structuralist approach we understand the gender order as a *praxis* or a sum of practices that are performed in an ongoing manner and so reproduce or alter the order from situation to situation. That is why we have chosen oral-history biographical interviews as data; they refer to the everyday life activities of various actors in Czech pre-1989 society, both women and men, politically engaged and non-engaged, with and without higher education. The autobiographies were not produced in order to describe or interpret the gender order of the socialist era; nevertheless, they enact it in two ways: as detailed testimonies of late-middle- or older-age people who lived their lives in socialist society, and because the gendered identities of the narrators were lifelong products formed in conformity with but also in resistance to the socialist gender order. We are well aware of the retrospective, selective, and performative nature of oral histories and therefore our aim is to study how the gender order is discursively represented in personal biographies. Finally, to prevent a one-voice reading of our data we intentionally assembled our team as a non-Czech woman and a Czech man, the former without direct experience of life in socialist society, the latter having grown up in it.

¹ The interviews were recorded as parts of the two projects: 'Political Elites and Dissidents during the Period of So-called Normalization—Historical Interviews', (2003–2004), and 'An Investigation into Czech Society in the "Normalisation" Era: Biographic Narrations of Workers and Intelligentsia', (2006–2007). More details about both collections can be found on the COH website <http://wwwcoh.usd.cas.cz/en/catalogue-and-interview-collections>.

Men and women in a state-socialist society: a gender order

Since the term 'gender' refers to the social categorisation of sexual identities, the concept of a 'sex/gender system', introduced by Gayle Rubin [1975], denotes 'the set of conditions and expectations which define "being a man" and "being a woman" in terms of division of tasks and responsibilities and attribution of rights and duties, typically to women's disadvantage' [di Giulio and Pinnelli 2007: 25]. We follow Rubin's anthropological line of thinking, which emphasises socially imposed sex/gender categories, but we prefer to use the term 'gender order' [Connell 1987: chapter 6] over 'sex/gender system' because the term 'system' implies functional or structural consistency and empirical rather than normative existence, which is not always the case in sex/gender issues. An inherent feature of gender order (as an important part of a broader social order) is that it is permanently 'ordering the disorder' and is normative rather than empirical (concerns what is expected to happen and not what actually happens). Thus we align our research with the post-structuralist assumption that 'a tissue of gender-based organization is present in every part and at all levels of the life of a society, and also the thoughts and actions of all members of a given community, irrespective of sex, participate actively in shaping it, whether in sustaining and reproducing it or by continuously modifying and so transforming it' [Havelková and Oates-Indruchová [2014: 5].

As a part of the effort to build socialism, the construction of gender identities was manipulated by the state [Johnson and Robinson 2007: 7]. Behind the official ideology proclaiming gender equality, there was a complex and sometimes contradictory matrix of gendered expectations about 'being a woman or a man' nourished not only by vaguely defined ideas of equality but also by the memory of interwar and even pre-WWI male-female relationships. Many studies have been published on various aspects of gender order during the period of communist rule and on changes that the order underwent from the fifties to the end of the eighties [for a review of the literature, see Havelková and Oates-Indruchová 2014: 3–28]. For the present purposes we summarise its main features:

(1) The gender order was not stagnant during the socialist era; it began with enthusiastic emancipatory changes in the early 1950s (women entering the labour market and higher education [Wolchik 1979], the establishment of services assisting household work and child-rearing, the greater representation of women in political bodies, etc.). However, the promise of breaking down the traditional gender order was fulfilled only partially, since women had been enabled to act in the public sphere but had not been freed from traditional female roles of mother and wife [Zimmermann 2010]. Moreover, despite propaganda the necessary material and symbolic preconditions for gender equality were not provided. The extensive dissatisfaction with the double or even triple burden that resulted produced a return to a more conservatively oriented gender order in the 1970s and 1980s that emphasised a woman's role as a mother and a man's partner.

Men's roles remained traditional; a male was considered a worker, a father, and a citizen, but did not face a practical conflict in enacting all these roles at the same time. In communist ideology, a good citizen meant a good worker, and a good father should be primarily a good worker too; the only change was that masculinity was more than ever linked to work. The situation evolved after 1969, when 'public civil and political activities ceased to exist and the public sphere merged with the sphere of work' [Havelková 1992: 88], but, simultaneously, much work became alienated from any authentic meaning and therefore could not be used as a common source of identity. Nevertheless, a significant part of the male population joined the Communist Party and for them a work career could flourish alongside traditional masculine identities.

(2) During the period of normalisation, (1970s and 1980s), a peculiar kind of gender order was established, described by Havelková as 'a period of resignation and stagnation in terms of the state-socialist aspiration about social change in the area of equality of the sexes' [Havelková 2014: 44], 'marked by an ideological return to a conservative conception of gender relations' [ibid.: 14]. On the one hand, women's participation in higher education, the labour force, and political organisations was relatively high compared to Western countries [Wolchik 1979], which made it possible for women to experience professional competence and personal independence. On the other hand, women were concentrated in certain types and branches of education, certain professions, and certain levels of public administration, which had lower prestige, wages, and power [Hájek 1997]. The only available 'feminine' domain that had lost none of its prestige and relative power was the role of mother so many women sought their self-respect in that. This was encouraged by communist propaganda (e.g. in a famous slogan, 'family is the foundation of the state'). Havelková refers to this period as 'the era of the family' [Havelková 2014: 44].

In the same era, however, fatherhood was not considered a dominant male identity. The paradox has been captured well by Ivo Možný: 'A man lives in the family of (his) woman. A woman lives in the family she is not satisfied with. A man lives in the woman's unhappy family.' [Možný 1990: 111; cited in Vodochodský 2007: 21] Successful male characters presented in widely watched TV films and series and performed by popular actors, were highly qualified professionals such as engineers, physicians, criminal detectives, or justice-driven workers; as a matter of course, they were mostly CP members and were not always dedicated fathers. As a result, the possibility of a politically non-partisan (not to mention free-thinking), professionally successful and self-assured male was minimal, and even as an image it was unrealistic. For most men, the only widely accepted masculine identity that remained accessible was as a good worker/professional but not a zealot, a useful but not eager husband, a loyal member of a group of friends. Because that identity was passively accepted rather than deliberately chosen, men were not proud of it and even joked about it in favour of more virile masculine identities (see Vodochodský [2008] for a description of men's and Zabrodská [2014] for a description of women's identities).

(3) The gender order was not homogeneous, structurally or biographically. Although late socialist society was rather egalitarian, with the notable exception of the ruling elite, and economic capital did not vary significantly across the population, unlike in Western societies, cultural capital was the source of considerable distinction and consequently of variation in the gender order. Education maintained its high prestige, even if it did not function as a direct elevator to economic or political power; for that reason most families with some cultural capital invested much effort to get their children into higher schooling and universities [Wong 1998]. The typical life courses of men and women differed in several aspects. Men's identities were formed by the accumulation of roles, from a simple boy and student, to a man (after military service), and then to a worker and a father later on, following the standard male life-course model. Women's biographies, on the other hand, are characterised by 'sequences of partial or double integration in family and employment' [cf. Heinz and Krüger 2001: 43]. A socialist woman was expected to change roles and identities during the life course: 'young women would obtain their education and contribute to society by working; they would then focus on their maternal roles and, supported by maternity leave and mothers' allowances, remain at home to take care of small children. Once their children reached school age, women would once again become workers' [Wolchik in Gal and Kligman 2000: 65].

(4) There is very little in the gender literature referring specifically to the groups in our sample: workers, intelligentsia, dissidents, and communist functionaries. A fictional, nevertheless in large measure shared, life experience of working-class women was portrayed through the dramatised image of Anna, heroine of the popular 1977 series by Jaroslav Dietl, 'Woman Behind the Counter'. Anna was the socialist superwoman 'because she is able to fit more hours and minutes into the day than seems humanly possible. She is a single mother of a needy seven-year-old son and a difficult teenage daughter; she begins her job behind the delicatessen counter at 5:30 a.m. to be ready for the 6:00 a.m. store opening; she also becomes the "mother" to the entire staff at the supermarket, solving problems where need be, helping out when necessary, and creating order and calm where originally there was none' [Bren 2010: 165].

Women functionaries were also portrayed using 'superwoman rhetoric'. According to a newspaper article based on interviews with women who were either party members or highly politically conscious: 'She stretches days into nights. There has to be time left for a children's bedtime story, for knitting and sewing whatever is needed for the children.' [Dragounová et al. 1989: 3, cited in Oates-Indruhová 2014: 193]

Intellectuals whose career prospects were blighted, in reality or in their imagination, dedicated themselves to their personal and family lives [Healy 2001]. True [2003] quotes Šamlová [1996: 50], who explained that dismissed intellectuals could no longer avail themselves of the public spaces such as universities, editorial offices, film studios, theatres, newsrooms, or even meeting rooms, so the

locus of activities of the parallel culture and society shifted to the only available private space, the home. According to Healy [2001]: 'Educated women in Prague have been and still are pre-occupied with caring for their PI [Prague Intelligentsia] menfolk and their offspring, or, all too often, with surviving after divorce. Their income from a public sector job, like that of their man, is meagre. However, the family's lifestyle and aspirations require not just two incomes but also plenty more from free-lancing.' [Healy 2001] As the author suggests, these women experienced a kind of *triple* burden. She goes on to describe the intelligentsia as 'a men's club anyway', which prefers to welcome women only as accompanying persons.

As to dissidents, women were a significant presence among the original signatories of *Charta 77*, constituting almost one-third of the movement's spokespersons between 1977 and 1989 [True 2003: 49]. These women risked police harassment and their careers and livelihoods; they went to prison as often as men [Jancar 1985: 184]. Several had sizeable families. 'Women dissidents were able to adapt their own political resources ... networking at the grassroots, organizing in homes, dealing with crisis situations at the same time as mundane everyday tasks—to the activities of dissent.' [True 2003: 50] They often made use of features which were very common and specific to women, and apolitical at first sight. For example, documents for copying were often carried in baby carriages and baby blankets or hidden under dirty laundry or in the garbage [Hašková 2004].

Of course this meant these women also had to bear a triple burden. In line with common gender roles, they usually were the main family caretakers, in a situation of 'full employment' they had regular jobs, and on top of all that they were involved in protest activities. The permanent shortage of some products contributed to the household burden placed on these women, making it even more difficult to balance all of these activities. In addition, many dissident families experienced livelihood problems, since they often were offered low-salaried jobs when they returned from prison. This only made it all the more difficult to harmonise professional, civil, and family lives [Hašková 2004].

Women dissidents were not unaware of the irony of their situation. Bren [2010] describes a recollection (by Mirek Vodrážka) of 'an ironic private exchange between "two prominent female dissidents" in the late 1970s, at the height of government repression, about whether they should create a Charter for women. Their sarcastic quips, he writes, were motivated by their shared situation: both had husbands who, on the one hand, fought for human rights and, on the other, represented repressive power at home' [Bren 2010: 174].

Gendered biographies

In accepting the idea of a gender order we also must reflexively acknowledge that narrative accounts of individual and collective life are formed by the current gender order. The issue of gender differences in autobiographical narration has

been studied in the United States; the findings may be useful also in our context. In general, simple differences between male and female narration are linked to expected gendered identities, which presuppose women to be more loquacious and emotionally oriented: 'as adults, females recount longer, more detailed, more vivid, more emotionally laden, and more relationally oriented narratives about their personal experiences than do males' [Fivush 2011: 569]. Pillemer et al. [2003] found strong and consistent gender differences in memory styles in the life histories of older adults. Women recounted a greater number of specific memories than men, and women's narratives contained more specific episodes per transcribed page than men's narratives [ibid.: 529]. Fivush suggests that women, as daughters, are trained 'to be more elaborative because this conforms to societal expectations of female roles and behaviors, to be the keepers of family histories' [Fivush 2011: 569; see also Rosenthal 1985].

In oral-history interviews gender plays an important role for reasons linked to the gender order in society. Not every aspect of life experience is easy to communicate, especially those aspects which do not match dominant gender identities. As Anderson and Jack put it, 'oral [history] interviews are particularly valuable for uncovering women's perspectives' [Anderson and Jack 1991: 11]. And we may add, they are good for uncovering men's perspectives as well. During a narrative interview the interviewer usually encourages the narrator to be steered by her own relevance only, because only such an attitude makes it possible to compose the life story (for an elaboration of this argument, see Hájek, Havlík and Nekvapil [2014]). Female narrators sometimes hesitate to compose their life story in the semi-public situation of an oral-history interview from their own perspective (e.g. 'That's just an old woman talking.') but eventually arrive at communicating their life experience in the form of narrative [Summerfield 2004].

Research design, data, and methods

This research was based on the assumption that narratives make explicit the implicit meaning of life [Widdershoven 1993: 2]. In modernity, biographical narratives are considered a privileged means to express the life experience of an individual in the process of narrative identity formation [Holstein and Gubrium: 2000]. Biographical narratives can be approached, basically, in two manners without losing their value as data sources for implicit meanings of human experience. On the one hand, they can be analysed as meaningful wholes, drawing on the need of any narrator to produce a narrative plot and *ipso facto* to give meaning to his or her life course in its entirety; this is the approach preferred by structuralist and partly also by hermeneutic approaches [Squire 2008]. On the other hand, narratives also can be analysed as meaning structures of relevance for a narrator and brought to light through the autobiographical storytelling [Schütze 2007: 20–25]; the narrator, in order to provide a listener with a trustworthy life story, has to create a 'possible world' for the listener where the events of her life

take place. We employed the latter approach mainly for two reasons: first, we were interested in the gender order, that is, in a kind of experience structure that could be captured by analysing all the content of the stories rather than individual plots; second, there was also a pragmatic reason for having a large collection of data, which implicated the advantageousness of the use of computer-assisted text analysis. A combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques enabled us to obtain insight into the context-dependent construction of meaning in narratives, but, at the same time, not to lose the awareness of robust discursive structures.

Data

The study draws on an analysis of two collections of digitised biographical interviews acquired from the Oral History Centre, Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences: (1) A collection of thirty-one life stories from communist officials (30 males and 1 female—eventually excluded from our quantitative analysis) and sixty-seven from representatives of anti-regime dissent (57 males and 10 females; see footnote 1). (2) Biographic narratives of fifty-six workers (31 males and 25 females) and the same number of 'intelligentsia-class' members (36 males and 20 females; see footnote 1). In sum the corpus consists of 210 life stories. The assigned group membership of the narrators may sometimes overlap in the sense that a person categorised as 'dissident' could have been a communist functionary in his early career (not *vice versa*, though) or a 'communist official' could have been a worker before entering the Party apparatus. Therefore, during the analysis we considered the categories of narrators (functionary, dissident, intelligentsia, worker) as valid, nevertheless external, labels, not the narrators' possibly inconsistent identities. Consequently, the research was focused on life experiences linked to these categories of people, not on how narrators from different categories produced distinctive biographical experiences in order to accomplish satisfactorily identities ascribed to them by the interviewers.

All the interviews were carried out by researchers affiliated with the Oral History Centre in Prague. Interviewers ranged in age (from 26 to 70) and were of both genders. Oral-history biographical interviews [Thompson 2000: chapter 7] were employed in order to capture the subjective interpretation of the narrators' life experience during the socialist period in former Czechoslovakia (1948–1989). The interview started as genuinely autobiographical and was usually complemented later on by an additional interview, focused on the biographical 'blank spaces' in the narrators' lives or on political and everyday life in socialist society if that was not included in the first interview (e.g. holidays, elections, savings). Therefore, the speech infrastructure included both narrative and conversational forms, and both interviewers and narrators sought to be relevant to their biography, actual identity, and a legitimate version of history (for a detailed analysis of this issue, see Hájek, Havlík and Nekvapil [2014]). Although the collection

represents almost all social groupings of the socialist Czech Republic, we do not pretend it possesses any probability-like representation or proportionality. This is not necessary because we are not going to generalise our results to the population; we are simply focusing on the phenomenon of the representation of the gender order. Finally, we acknowledge that most of the data relative to the gender order in the narratives refer to the narrators' adulthood, thus the years 1965–1988 constitute the main timespan for our findings.

Quantitative analysis

Before proceeding with analysis we removed the interviewers' questions from the data and carried out a lemmatisation (the automatic replacement of inflected forms of words by their lemmas; we used the MorphoDiTa tool, <http://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/morphodita>). We began the analysis by examining the most frequently occurring lexical (semantic) words in the interviews. We selected the 50 most frequent words and further analysed the text by observing their mutual co-occurrences in a given contextual unit (for more details, see Hájek and Kabele [2010]). The frequency of a co-occurrence of a given pair of words in the same chunk of text was considered in the analysis to be a measure of their distance in the text: the more often two words occur in a response, the mutually closer we consider them to be discursively. Automated frequency analysis of word occurrences and co-occurrences was performed with the help of software (COOA—Co-occurrence Analysis) developed especially for this purpose. A narrator's turn (an uninterrupted piece of speech) in the interview was chosen as the unit of analysis within which word co-occurrences were counted. A symmetrical matrix emerged from the frequencies of pair co-occurrences and it was then normalised using Jaccard's similarity coefficient [Chung and Lee 2001]. To transform the large data matrix into a synoptic two-dimensional space (a 'map') multidimensional scaling (MDS) was applied (Proxscal, SPSS).

Qualitative analysis

Displaying discursive structures is useful for revealing aggregate patterns, but this cannot provide us with insight into how gender is discursively articulated in actual speech (a transcript).² To achieve this we tried to perform a more hermeneutic kind of analysis consisting of reading and open coding of selected fragments of the narratives. We preferred to sample fragments over narrators because

² A discursive structure means here any pattern found in the corpus of texts that can be meaningfully interpreted in relation to the discourse under study [Foucault 1972; Fairclough 2003].

we sought to preserve the heterogeneity of the corpus—it is too difficult to find 'average' or 'representative' life stories in the collection. In order to obtain fragments from all the narratives we selected five terms as keywords. The terms needed to meet several criteria that severely narrowed our choice: a moderate (not too low, not too high) frequency of occurrence in all groups, a lack of semantic ambiguity, and a potential for gendered use linked to human agency. There were a few keywords that actually met these criteria. Words such as *work, children, to live, home, family, Party, school* were too frequent; words such as *husband, wife, boy, girl, mother, father* were gender-specific; some keywords occurred in various forms (e.g. *boss, leader, director, head*) and some were overly political (*communist, politics*). Therefore, we shortlisted six keywords (*car, to fear/fear, to die, money, war, get on*) for analysis. After analysing four of them we decided not to continue with the remaining two (*war, get on* /'nastoupit' in Czech/) because of data saturation. The final fragments of narratives for analysis were generated by selecting sentences (i.e. a text within two full stops) in which the keywords occurred. One copy of the fragments was subjected to machine translation (Google Inc.) into English so that one of the researchers (B.V.) could understand it.

Findings

The gendered discursive structure of narratives for individual groups and genders

Diagrams 1–7 offer visualisations of the discursive structures calculated from frequent word co-occurrences in the biographical interviews for the seven groups under study. We identified and highlighted the main discursive domains in each diagram and labelled them accordingly. The graphic delimiting of the domains is approximate and based entirely on the common meanings of the keywords. The diagrams are read as follows: (a) the more dense a domain is, the more focused the narrators' speech; (b) the greater the distance between two domains are, the less frequently the narrators used words from one in the context of words from the other; (c) large and dense domains indicate their importance in the narrators' biographical discourse and *vice versa*; (d) the orientation of the diagram has no meaning, so it can be rotated at will.

First, we consider all the groups together. What is apparent immediately is the overall similarity of the domains. The narrators dealt with their natal and procreational families, work, and politics as the main topics, along with some other specific topics. The family domain is always located against the domains of work or politics. However, when we look more closely we find that the term *work* is almost always in the centre of the diagram, not in the centre of the respective discursive domain. This is very interesting because it supports the thesis that work in Czech socialist society was the place where the private and the public merged [Havelková 1992]. It is worth mentioning that, ironically, the gendered nature of the socialist work sphere has been and still is overlooked in Czech schol-

Diagram 1. Female workers

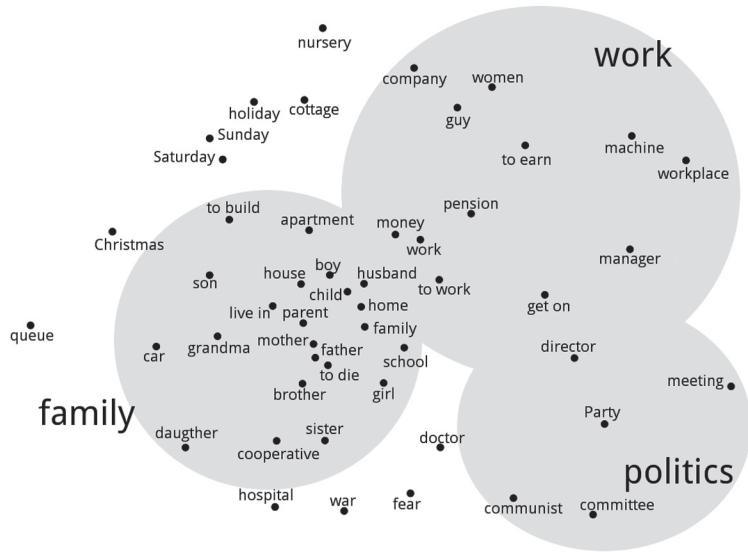
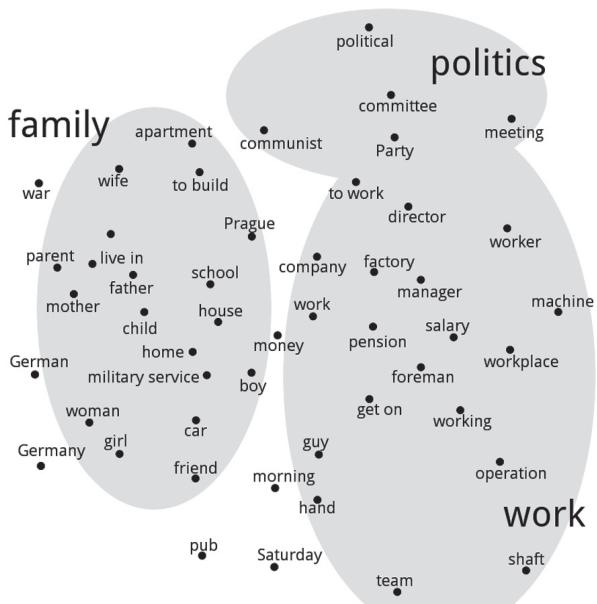


Diagram 2. Male workers



arly literature [see Madarász 2006 for East-Germany; Verdery 1996 and Massino 2009 for Romania].

Concerning differences between groups, we can observe a 'political gradient': a rising significance of political matters in life biographies from workers (having a small political appendix to the work domain), to intelligentsia (where politics are firmly integrated into their work domain), and further to dissidents (where life in opposition has replaced work as the main domain besides the family), and finally to male functionaries as the narrators with the most politically saturated biographies. This should not surprise us because the narrators were selected with respect to their political engagement (political elites *vs* 'ordinary people') by oral historians. For our analysis of their life stories this means that, when accounting for differences between, for example, female workers and female dissidents, what matters is that in their narratives the former could have left the political dimension of their lives relatively aside, but for the latter, this dimension is relevant to their life story. Although seemingly all the narrators performed the same task—talking about and narrating their life—in fact they had different opportunities for choosing their narrated identity. It is imaginable that both dissidents and functionaries could recount their lives without prioritising their political side. We should add that the political gradient is the only difference between groups that is pervasive but non-gendered.

Diagrams 1 and 2 depict the discursive structure of workers' autobiographical narratives. From the gender order perspective it is noteworthy that speakers of both genders share a similar overall pattern (family *vs* work and politics), the differences being only quantitative. We could also add a small fourth domain referring to leisure, which would occupy the upper left corner for females and the lower left corner for males, in both cases on the opposite side of the politics domain. In spite of the similar structure, male workers have a more developed work domain than women. It means that they had more to say about it; however, the male-specific words (*factory, worker, foreman, operation* etc.), do not indicate any new or particular topic. The family domain seems equal for both genders, the only difference is that women more frequently used terms for relatives (*grandma, sister, brother, son, daughter*) and the verb *to die*; men often mentioned, when talking about the family, their *military service*, moving to/from *Prague*, and the words *German, woman* and *friend*, which probably occur in various contexts. The political clusters are almost identical. To sum up, on the macro-discursive level the gendered performance of worker narrators occurs from quantitative rather than qualitative differences between the family and work domains: male discourse includes more attention to work matters while female discourse shows a richer capture of kinship relations and events.

Gendering in the intelligentsia's narratives is certainly more pronounced than in those of the workers (see Diagrams 3 and 4). The diagram for the female intelligentsia somewhat resembles that of male workers (although politics is incorporated here into the work domain rather than an almost separate domain),

Diagram 3. Female intelligentsia

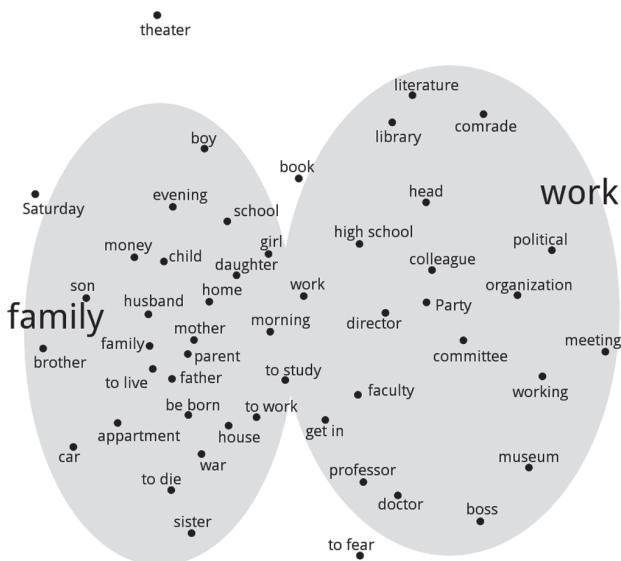
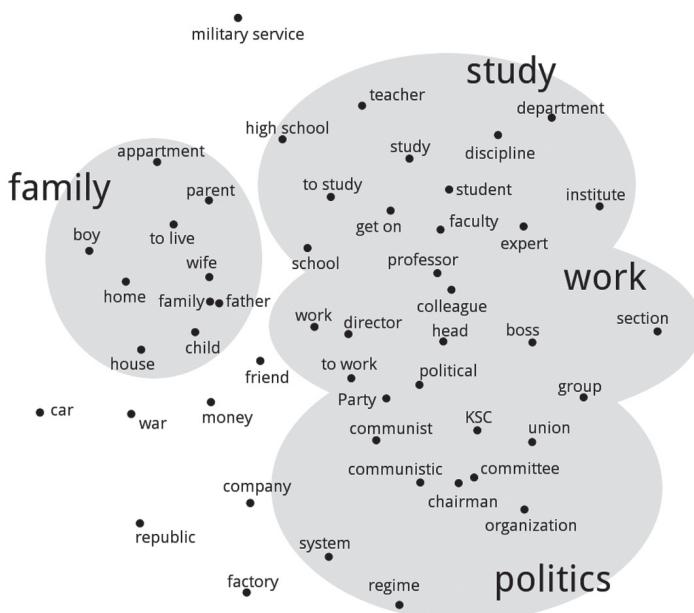


Diagram 4. Male intelligentsia



which seems fairly counterintuitive considering the distinct life experience of these groups. The cause for the apparent similarity is the equal role work plays in their narratives. What differs between them is the strength of politics in the narratives: for the female intelligentsia it occupies the central position in the work domain (*Party, committee, organisation, political, meeting*), whereas it is exogenous to work in male workers' discourse. A comparison of the female and the male intelligentsia suggests that the role of politics is different. Whereas politics is a separate domain for men (with some overlap with work), women did not talk about work without talking about politics. To put it in other words, while members of the female intelligentsia spoke about politics in relation to their work experience, males differentiate it more as a particular topic *per se*. The effort to keep domains apart is, after all, characteristic for the male intelligentsia (as well as for male dissidents). As we can see in Diagram 4, their narratives contain a cluster we have labelled 'study' as an additional discursive domain. This makes sense for people who spent about ten years in education; however it distinguishes them from female members of the same group who did not produce such a discursive cluster. What relates female discourse across groups is a richer reporting of family members manifested in the frequent use of the terms *brother, sister, daughter, son*, which, on the other hand, are absent from the male diagrams. That does not mean men did not talk about siblings and offspring at all but they talked more about other things (e.g. study, politics).

We see gendering in biographies also in that the female intelligentsia (and to some degree women in other groups) include as frequent terms *to be born*, and *to die*, referring to the starting and ending points of the life cycle, and *morning* and *evening*, likely referring to the beginning and the end of the day. This suggests a more cyclical dynamic in recounting their life stories, compared to a weaker linear-like dynamic in male accounts of their life course (my childhood – my study – my work – my retirement).

Gendered differences in the discursive structures of dissidents (see Diagrams 5 and 6) resemble the intelligentsia because they too show more encompassing female biographies and more segmented male ones. Note that the circles we have marked in the female dissidents' diagram do not fit well because the discursive core is located in the overlapping part and is represented by words from different life spheres (study, work, family, household). On the upper side of the diagram a typical story could unfold from the words present there: in a family house/apartment there was a typing machine on which the illegal books were copied, which introduced the risk of a secret police visit and interrogation and threat of prison, resulting in a permanent fear at home. On the right side of the diagram we labelled words relating to protest activities (e.g. *demonstration, civil, revolution, Charta, dissent*) as 'opposition'. Some words left outside of any domain, such as *vicar, church, Party, military service* or *to sign*, probably relate both to family life and life in opposition, but in neither do they form a constitutive part of that domain.

Diagram 5. Female dissidents

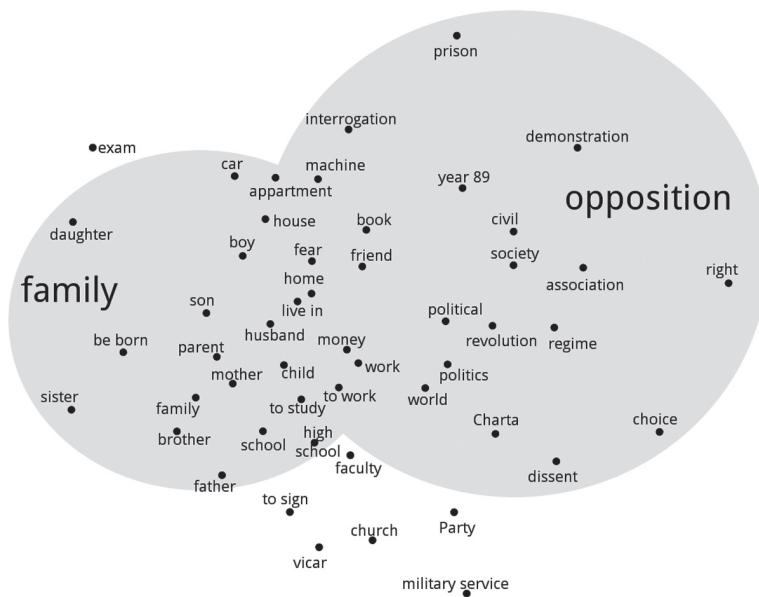


Diagram 6. Male dissidents

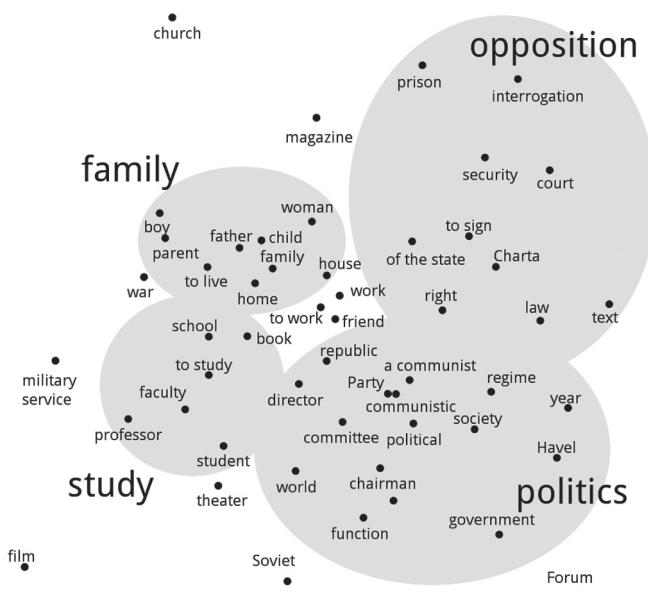
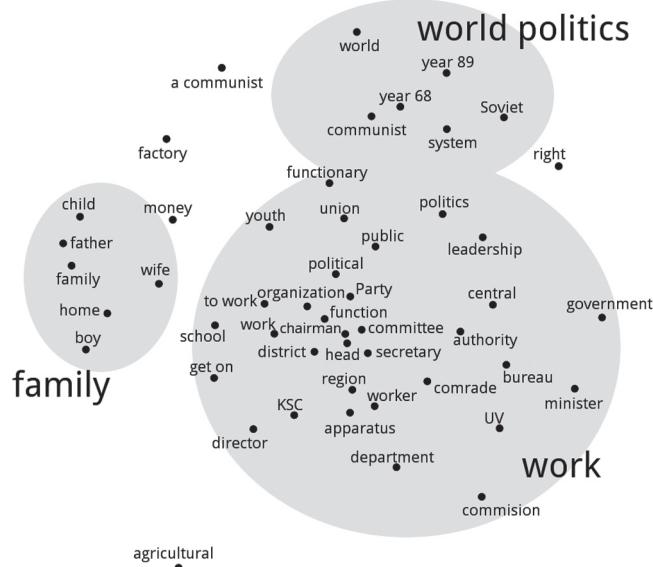


Diagram 7. Male functionaries

The diagram for males is different from the one for females in that it has four more or less clear cut discursive domains, each referring to the particular biographical phase of narrators (family – study – politics – opposition). Work does not form a discursive domain, be it either for its replacement by a political career in the 1960s or because, as dissidents, they were prevented from getting an appropriate job with which a man could identify himself. Thus, the biographical narratives of dissidents give us a strongly gendered view, where female life is presented in terms of involvement in many activities at the same time (a dense overlapping zone in their diagram), whereas male life recounting shows a sequence of stages with a respective activity for each one.

It is somewhat symptomatic that only one female functionary was interviewed. Despite the rhetoric of emancipation, women were not present in communist bodies at high levels. Women were 'extremely rare in the top decision-making body of the party, the Presidium or Politburo, and ... underrepresented on the Central Committee of the Communist Party in relation to their proportion of party members' [Wolchik 1979: 593]. In the diagram for male functionaries we only see that they align with the male intelligentsia and dissidents in discursively limiting family life to a relatively small domain, which does not communicate with the work domain.

The contexts of selected words

A macroscopic perspective on life stories is useful in order to unveil dominant discursive structures but cannot provide us with insight into how gender is discursively articulated. Therefore, we carried out a detailed analysis of fragments containing selected keywords. In reading the fragments we particularly focused on the instances, conditions, and evaluation of agency. It should be acknowledged that the contribution of both authors to the analysis was not equal given the imperfectness of the machine translation of the fragments into English, which left many nuances of meaning and connotations inaccessible for the English-speaking analyst. However, on the positive side it served to prevent the Czech-speaking analyst from disregarding the explicit meanings and getting literally lost in reading 'between the lines' and self-projection into the text. Our findings are therefore based on a dual reading, taking into account both explicit and culturally implicit content.

Car

There were 947 fragments containing the word car in the corpus: 714 occurrences from males and 233 from females, with 5 and 3 occurrences per interview on average, respectively. Male workers used the word most often, and dissidents of both genders the least.

In general, the most pervasive are the expected differences between groups regardless of gender: for dissidents a car plays a minor but important role in narrating their lives in opposition to the regime (secret police cars, conspiratorial transports, car searches by police, etc.). For functionaries, a Party/company car was a natural part of their function; they had to be mobile to perform their tasks, but they complained that it was generally perceived as an unnecessary privilege; for workers and the intelligentsia having a car was described predominantly as a stage or achievement in their life course and, at the same time, a sign of affluence and independence. This is reflected in a folk dictum that circulated during the normalisation period: the three keys to happiness were the key to the apartment, the key to the car, and the key to the cottage [Agnew 2004: 277].

Gender differences are more subtle and pronounced in the worker narratives, but also, to a lesser degree, in the other narratives. 'I [was] twenty-three when I started to build a nest and [at] thirty I had already bought my first Žiguli, a car, it was a [good] car then, you know?' (male worker). Men more often than women described their car as their property, even if it was the shared property of the family. Female workers referred to 'our car' ('We bought a car') and female dissidents and intelligentsia sometimes mentioned the importance of knowing how to drive ('He [my husband] could drive, I couldn't.')

The second difference is that in the narrative accounts a car had an empowering function, especially for men, for whom it was not only a status symbol

but also a means for action: 'I came from the night shift, took the girls in the car, went to Lysá to my parents, we had dinner, [put] the children in the car again and [went] for cakes' (male worker). We found in the narratives many similar descriptions in which the car makes it possible to move people and objects, and this action is associated with a male (the narrator himself or another man). Women are depicted mostly as passive users and the beneficiaries of cars. One female member of the intelligentsia described the 'fairly good life' in this (not so good) time when the roles relating to cars established themselves naturally: 'we had a cottage, we could go there regularly, my husband had a car, he managed to maintain it, he drove it, I didn't, yeah'''. (There are only two instances in the 946 fragments where a man admitted he could not drive and that his wife drove their car.)

Fear

There were 884 fragments containing the word *fear* or *to fear* (*bát se, mít strach* in Czech) in the corpus: 594 occurrences from males and 290 from females, with 3.7 and 5.5 occurrences per interview on average, respectively. Female dissidents used the word far more often (9.1 per interview), male workers the least (2.6 per interview).

Unsurprisingly, the major difference here is between dissidents and all the other groups of narrators, as the former were almost in a permanent state of fear of persecution from the (secret) police and the state authorities, while the latter were not. Functionaries feared mostly provocations, extremism, or their own failure. Workers of both genders experienced fear during specific events (during the war or the Soviet invasion in 1968) or in relation to particular persons or groups (the Gestapo, Russian soldiers). Members of the intelligentsia referred to fears about problems that could block their careers or those of their children.

If we disregard the pure frequency of use of the term, we find gender is not too pronounced across the categories, but there is a tendency for women to acknowledge that 'people were afraid' and 'I was afraid' more often than men. Some female dissidents confessed that being in opposition meant experiencing fear of persecution almost daily, but sometimes the fear was positive because it prevented them from taking too many risks and thus protected them from, for example, being beaten by the police or sent to prison for a long time. Male dissidents also acknowledged a fear of prison or of victimisation; however, it was more frequently in the context '(all) people feared', so that besides their own fear they acknowledged that ordinary people feared sanctions and the communists feared themselves. For male dissidents, fear represented a weakness, and was not limited only to them alone (all society was in a sense 'weak'), and there were no positive aspects to fear. Another gendered difference was that women spoke about non-political fears (regarding school, starting a new job, losing a job, having a baby, etc.), which were almost entirely absent among men.

To die

There were 889 fragments containing the verb *to die* (*zemřít, umřít* in Czech) in the corpus: 544 occurrence from males and 345 from females, with 3.5 and 5 occurrences per interview on average, respectively. There were few differences between either the groups or genders (there were approximately 3–4 occurrences per interview), with the exception of female workers and intelligentsia, who used the word twice as often (6.7 occurrences per interview).

We found a modified version of a 'political gradient' here that was manifested in talk about the deaths of public personae. Male dissidents in particular mentioned that the death of a public person and the subsequent funeral were political events that were controlled and sometimes disrupted by the secret police. We noted that a particular 'death talk' linked dying and political events: 'He died a week before I signed Charta' or 'he died shortly before the revolution'. This was typical for male dissidents but was present in the interviews of functionaries too: 'My father had just died on the anniversary of the Great October Revolution.' Members of the intelligentsia also mentioned the death of a politician (the president or the general secretary of the CP) as an important event for understanding their life, at least indirectly, through a depiction of the situation in which they lived and acted. This was not the case for workers, who referred mainly to the death of family members.

Gender differences emerged through a feature other than the public status of the person who had just died, in terms of the function the death had in the life story. For (male) functionaries, the death of someone in the Party organisation was connected to the narrator's career advancement because he could then occupy the position that had been vacated. Male workers and intelligentsia did not integrate dying into their biographies; females, however, did. Women were able to integrate the death of relatives into larger life-course trajectories, especially when they talked about what happened after someone died. The death of a parent in particular had important consequences in their stories, as it meant that the family had to adjust to the new situation. Female workers' descriptions of what happened after the death of a relative on whom the family had depended were sometimes sad stories. Male dissidents are in this sense an exception, because for them too, the death of a relative meant an important change in their life situation.

Money

The term *money* (*penize* in Czech) appears in 1731 fragments: 1214 occurrences from males and 517 from females, with 7.9 and 9.2 occurrences per interview on average, respectively. Differences between genders are not important, but those between groups are remarkable. Workers of both genders used the word the most often (12–13 times per interview), followed by the intelligentsia (8–9 times), male functionaries (7.6 times), and dissidents the least (4 times per interview).

As the numbers above indicate, another version of a political gradient can be observed here, one that differentiates between the narrators according to their political role. Money was apparently not a political issue in this period, since it mostly occurred in everyday life stories; only (male) functionaries sometimes referred to their role in distributing money in the national or regional economy. Money became political, and this holds for all groups, when the narrators described the current state of the society. One functionary laconically commented: 'Today, the dictatorship of ideology has been replaced by the dictatorship of money.'

The gendered use of money in the narratives is hidden behind the numbers. Male workers recounted how good money could be earned and in what jobs they received a handsome salary (e.g. heavy labour in coal mines, metal factories, working on construction far from home). Although they mostly talked about the money they earned in terms of quantity (a nice, decent, good amount of money), money seemed to be an identity-boosting entity as, for instance, one narrator explained: 'always, when I had some money, I knew what I got it for, I always had to somehow earn [it]'. This implies the stereotype of a male breadwinner who works in heavy labour somewhere and brings in the money. On the other hand, female workers were not concerned as much about earning money as about having and spending it; they more often than men mentioned an acute shortage of money and the need to save. They framed money as a means of subsistence rather than an identity booster. The link between money and male identity was demonstrated by one female narrator who acknowledged, 'I earned more money than him, right?', but did so with modesty in order to avoid hurting her husband's identity. Another notable case of resistance to male workers' money-driven identity was one narrator's rejection of her husband's well-paid but remote job: 'And I said, I don't want money, I want a dad for [the] boys and a husband at home for me.'

The male intelligentsia spoke about money as a means of realising their professional and life projects. They almost never used the discursive frame of subsistence or referred to family issues. As one of them explained: 'You know, I didn't feel I was going to work uselessly and just for money.' They proudly admitted they earned decent money but that that was merely a side effect of using their abilities and competences. On the other hand, the female intelligentsia spoke of money mostly in the context of family and family life. They were proud of their ability to do all the things they enjoyed (traveling, spending time at the cottage, cultural activities) with the little money actually available to them: 'We were hard up all the time but we always managed to find money for books and traveling.' Like their male counterparts they mentioned they liked their work, even if they had low salaries; one narrator, however, said she sometimes earned more than her husband, who worked in industry.

Interestingly, money was not important in the biographies of dissidents. Female narrators hardly mentioned it, and if they did, it was in the context of a lack of it or in reference to a particular family issue. Male narrators used the term money more often than females and in various contexts (work, prison, politics,

philosophy, family, etc.). They were ambivalent about the value of money. For example, they noted their low income, but for the most part did not regret it, as if it was right not to live comfortably in the given regime. On the other hand, they welcomed the money that came from Western supporters, which sometimes made it possible for them to buy things other people did not have (e.g. a colour TV set, an electric typewriter).

In the sample of functionaries (males only) money was an object to earn and a means of realising some project. The narrators' accounts are similar to those of male workers in that they acknowledged the need for money to maintain a satisfactory family life and in how they evaluated and compared their salaries with others; however, they are similar to the male intelligentsia in that they ascribed money a role secondary role to their professional success and discussed it in the larger social context.

Discussion

What knowledge does this research bring us about how the gender order under state socialism is reflected in the discourse of women and men from different socio-professional groups in life-story interviews? First, it provides evidence that empirically supports what has previously been suggested in the literature: heterogeneity of the gender order among various social groups and work as the zone where the private and public spheres merged. Second, it casts light on the nature of this heterogeneity and how it related to the main social groups in state-socialist society; the qualitative study in particular shows that it is not always the presence or absence of certain activities, roles, or obligations, but the distinctive understandings of them (e.g. as a status symbol, a means to personal autonomy) that create differences. Third, what adds particular value to our contribution is the inclusion of men and thus the ability to compare how gender is represented in the discursive structures of women and men in different social positions.

That the gender order under socialism was not 'monolithic' [Havelková and Oates-Indruchová 2014: 5] is partly reflected in research by Zábrodská [2014], who has described the various and contradictory discursive repertoires used by Czech women to construct their identities in relation to Czech men. This is an indication of the situational dependence of relationships. Our findings that female and male workers used similar vocabularies and had a similar topical structure in narrating their lives indicate that (a) female workers perceived their paid work involvement as an important part of their life story and thus their identity, and (b) the family was important for male workers too, albeit it did not form the core of their stories. However, in both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis we have seen that the discourse structures of male and female workers paralleled each other to an extent in that both inhabited similar worlds of family and work, where politics did not interfere significantly with either. The gender order al-

lowed for the maintenance of traditional roles, which, in the narratives, occurred through men driving *cars* and getting *money* and women's concern with family members (*to die, to fear*) and care-taking (exchanging *money* for goods).

The life stories of the female intelligentsia included roughly the same amount of attention to work and to family, making their narratives different from the more family-oriented ones of female workers. Their political involvement in the workplace was considerable but seemingly non-conflictual, as the discursive spheres of work and politics often merged in their accounts, unlike in the case of both workers and male intelligentsia. From the analysis of narrative fragments we also obtained evidence that many women performed activities that were related to family but actually transcended it: promoting children's higher education, traveling abroad, participating in cultural events. The traditional gender roles survived in large measure but were also challenged in various situations. Most notably, if men's careers were thwarted for political reasons and the traditional male identity could not be performed by them [Vodochodský 2008], women had more space to develop their identity and feel more confident. For these women particularly it holds true that they 'became adept at juggling day-to-day mechanics of the double burden and gained a deep sense of pride from their ability to do so' [Ferber and Raabe 2003; see also Zimmermann 2010: 18; Massino 2009].

The putative role of work as the zone where the private and public spheres merged [Havelková 1992: 88] seems to be well documented in our data. In all the groups, the term *work* is located at the centre of the diagram. But what does the notion of 'merging' actually mean? If we take an example of a male worker's sentence in the *car* fragments (see above), in which he talked about coming from work and driving his wife and daughters to his parents to have dinner and then home again, the public and private overlap only discursively; in reality they exist side by side. Other examples from fragments about *car* and *money* indicate that a better way to view this is as the interdependence of the private and public spheres: work provided both men and women with economic and symbolic means that were made use of in families. The intensity of the interdependence was not the same for all groups; it was strongest among workers and weaker among the male intelligentsia, dissidents, and functionaries, in whose stories work is more interdependent with politics (or public matters in general) than with family. For example, the money earned by the male intelligentsia may not have reflected their personal capabilities and usefulness for their families but the importance of the (public) projects in which they were involved. In a similar vein one female physician noted that her self-satisfaction did not originate in the money she was earning but in the (public) prestige of the profession. There was hardly any worker who performed the job of a miner for the prestige of it; what counted here was the relatively large amount of money miners received for their hard and health-damaging work.

As a result of our analysis we suggest adding a political sphere to the schema as the third domain. In various intensities politics was interdependent with

work (weaker for workers, strongest for dissidents and functionaries) and work was interdependent with family (weaker for intelligentsia and stronger for workers). Because communist functionaries were expected to regard their public function in line with the Party mission, which actually forbade them having other strong commitments—for example, to family or to a profession (they constantly complained of opportunists prioritising their families or companies over the Party's interests; see Kabele and Hájek [2008: 122–132]) Entering the public sphere directly (by accepting a purely political function) or through work achievements (becoming a member of a political body as representative of a non-Party organisation, such as an industrial firm) implied an apparent resignation of the commitment to family, which was more difficult for women than men.

Although dissidents were not numerous in relation to the rest of society, the accounts of their lives played an important symbolic role in influencing how the gender order in Czech state socialism was portrayed after its collapse in 1989. This was partly due to their privileged (but sometimes contested) moral status in post-1989 society and partly because several Czech women who were instrumental in the rebirth of a gender/feminist movement in the 1990s had directly participated in dissent (e.g. Jiřina Šiklová) or had inhabited the 'grey zone'. Whereas male dissidents' narratives were career-like, one could say even heroic, women dissidents presented more family-and-political-opposition, manager-like biographies, representing a more integrated female career pattern.

Concluding (methodological) remarks

In their autobiographical narratives people recall relevant memories and organise them into a consistent life story in order to contextualise their present (being) and their potential future (becoming). Oral-history narrative interviews provide historians with the possibility to record an articulated personal experience of past events and, at same time, provide eyewitnesses with an opportunity to semi-publicly ratify their desired (narratively constituted) identity [Hájek, Nekvapil and Havlík 2014]. For social-scientific research oral-history data represent a rich albeit very complex and not easily analysable source of information about the past and present of individuals, groups, and even societies (for a sceptical view of the usefulness of autobiographical data in sociology, see Bourdieu [1986]). In our research we tried to use oral-history data to obtain knowledge of how a gender order of state-socialist society is represented in life-course narratives. Rather than using a single method and single perspective, a triple methodological blending should have protected us against any undesirable simplification (quantitative and qualitative analysis, insider and outsider perspectives, and women's and men's personal experiences). Although the research did not produce path-breaking outcomes in terms of novel discoveries, in that our findings are largely in direct or indirect accordance with already published knowledge, its value consists in achieving an empirically grounded linkage between macro- and micro-level de-

scriptions of the gender order in the former Czech(oslovak) state-socialist society. We demonstrated the differences in a discursive representation of life courses both on the level of large social categories (gender, education, political involvement) and on the level of individual accounts (how a gender order is implicated in particular life situations).

In a similar vein we propose the direction further research in the area of gender and life course narratives could take. Our experience of the difficult but fruitful collaboration within a research team leads us to encourage forming such gender-heterogeneous teams, especially when the problem under study has a strong gender dimension. Similarly, we are convinced that social-scientific research benefits from allowing the interaction of insider and outsider perspectives. Despite the somewhat painful achievement of shared structures of relevance [Schütz 1966] as a pre-condition for the interpretive consensus among researchers, which may weaken unambiguity and decisiveness of conclusions, in the long term this can also facilitate discussion across national disciplinary communities. Last, but not least, the need to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches in social research is one more frequently declared than practised and our research may encourage others to embark upon this path.

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