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Article

"Mummy is in a Call": Digital Technology and Executive Women's Work–Life Balance

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Abstract

Research findings confirm the contradictory impact of mobile technology on work–life balance, as these tools both guarantee greater flexibility and contribute to blurring boundaries between private and working spheres. Several articles have been published on women executives' work–life balance in Western countries; however, their usage of mobile devices remained almost unexplored in the post-socialist region, where in the wake of the transformation not only the unquestioned neoliberal change of the corporate sector but also refamilisation took place. This article gives an overview on the issue of how women executives make use of mobile technology during their everyday activities in Hungary, where not only are the signs of 'corporate colonization' present, but also motherhood plays an important role. Based on twenty semi-structured interviews with Hungarian women in senior management positions carried out in 2014 and 2015, the article discusses the perceptions and narratives explained by these women. Results contribute to the ongoing debate on the paradoxical impacts of modern technology on work–life balance and its specificities in the post-socialist context.

1. Introduction

Almost all research findings confirm the contradictory impact of mobile technology on work–life balance: While widespread use of mobile technology facilitates the co-ordination of various tasks, there is a danger of employees active in knowledge intensive sectors being engaged with work not just anywhere and anytime but more like everywhere and all the time (Crowe & Middleton, 2012; Dén-Nagy, 2014; Kossek, 2016; Towers, Duxbury, Higgins, & Thomas, 2006; Wajcman, Rose, Brown, & Bittman, 2010).

Despite the continuously growing working hours and work pressure, which are also accelerated by the easy access to employees' private life, limited complaints have been formulated among managers regarding organiza-

tions' potential responsibility to ease this. Moreover, new turns, often labelled as postfeminist or neoliberal, further advocate for the importance of individual responsibility and agency. This rhetoric and imagery increasingly underline the importance of individual choice even in questions of gender equality and work–life balance, thus reinforcing gendered tensions of work–life balance (Adamson, 2017; Sørensen, 2017). In the present coronavirus pandemic, the huge burden placed on mothers' shoulders, such as home schooling, makes these gender inequalities even more salient, and the topic even more relevant.

The article has a twofold contribution to the research of technologies and work–life balance. On the one hand, it depicts how naturally top-level managers at large companies in a post-socialist Central and Eastern

European country accept the norm of endless working time. Moreover, corporate norms regarding work–life balance practices and borderless wage work remain unquestioned. There are arguments that these practices have been imported particularly strongly in transitional countries, which thus have become the special 'victims' of neoliberalism (Jessop, 2013).

The other contribution is to the discussion of post-socialist refamilisation. The long-lasting effects of refamilisation are manifested in narrowing public childcare opportunities, limited access to flexible working conditions and excessively long parental leave, which together, but also individually might limit working mothers' equality in economic life (Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2006). The widespread phenomenon of refamilisation puts pressure on working mothers to excel at being devoted mothers and devoted employees at the same time. This article intends to analyse the narratives about work–life balance explained by twenty top women executives working at business companies in Hungary.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Theoretical Overview of the Impacts of Mobile Technology

Extensive diffusion of the Internet and mobile telephony has brought major spatial and temporal changes including an increasing likelihood of transgressing boundaries between work and home life (Wajcman et al., 2010). Initially, it was assumed that the advent of mobile technologies would cause private life to fall victim to mounting work demands (Chesley, 2010; Towers et al., 2006), and work would become more intensive. However, positive aspects have also appeared in the debate: on the employee side, for example, increasing flexibility gives more opportunity to micro-coordinate and reduces commuting time (Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008).

Boundary management is undoubtedly a critical issue as dissolving boundaries have spatial and temporal signs. The line of divide between work and private sphere has, to some extent, been permeable before but separation of the two worlds has been considerably reduced by the use of mobile technologies (Currie & Eveline, 2011; Duxbury & Smart, 2011). Technological devices allow the individual to be present virtually, if not physically, at a different location or in the life of another community. 'Absent presence' (Duxbury & Smart, 2011) has thus been created. The question is to what extent these 'integrating' or, as the case may be, boundary-blurring devices promote or hinder employees' well-being (Chesley, 2010; Kossek, 2016).

Researchers tend to emphasize conflict, as both spheres draw on the same resources, primarily time (Duxbury & Smart, 2011). Mobile devices enable people to perform work-related activities outside working hours, which may increase the time pressure as well as the amount of time spent with work (Mullan & Wajcman,

2019). Moreover, there is often a higher demand of being instantly available (Kossek, 2016).

Edley (2001) describes these phenomena as corporate colonisation. Employees are expected to be fully committed to work; mobile technologies involve extended working time and greater flexibility, which enables companies to colonise private life. Paradoxically, mobile devices simultaneously reinforce the employee and organisational control: They promote parents' productivity and the appearance of strengthening the position of the working parent. Corporate demands, however, supersede family demands (Edley, 2001).

2.2. Special Effects of Motherhood

Women's and men's labour market positions are markedly different. Gendered role expectations dictate that women should be the primary family carers and home-makers. This situation is exacerbated when women engage in child rearing (Hays, 1996). Cultural demands of motherhood engender a sense of guilt in women, including those in high-commitment careers.

As more and more women enter the workplace and take up management positions, social expectations attached to motherhood have likewise changed (Badinter, 2012; Hays, 1996). Describing an ideology of intensive mothering, Hays (1996) draws the picture of a mother sacrificing herself for her children. According to this ideology, mothers must put their children's needs before their own, and must always respond to their children's needs and desires to ensure their children's emotional and intellectual development.

Mobile technologies carry the promise of a more seamless coordination of gainful work and private life. Edley calls supermothering women who try to have it all by using technology "busy maternal cyborgs" (Edley, 2001, p. 32). Technology and particularly mobile phones permit remote mothering, which can take the form of phone calls or alerts in case of emergency. As she puts it: "Another indispensable item for some cyborgs is their cellular phone—the electronic extension of their motherly bodies" (Edley, 2001, p. 32). This enables women to work two shifts at the same time.

Nevertheless, this practice where women are seemingly in control and make their own decisions does not necessarily protect them from corporate colonisation. On the contrary—it covers up tensions and strengthens the myth of individual agency (Sørensen, 2017).

Here we have to note that due to their weaker economic positions, post-socialist countries and organizations might be even more intensely exposed to global systems, thus becoming 'victims' of this new world order (Jessop, 2013). As multinational companies became important employers with dominant impacts on the local labour market after 1989, their employees in knowledge intensive sectors might suffer more from the consequences of corporate colonisation, working in more intensive and extensive ways. We might assume that

Hungarian women managers, who are also mothers, are in a worse situation while bargaining with the corporate system.

3. Previous Empirical Findings

3.1. The Impact of ICT on Work–Life Balance

Early publications were dominated by the proposition that mobile technologies erode work–home boundaries and allow companies to colonise the space and time that was once reserved for family life (Wajcman et al., 2008). Data highlight an increase in transgression; however, Australian employees were found to use ICT for personal purposes during work time to a greater extent than for work purposes outside work time. Use of the Internet for work purposes outside working hours occurred in certain groups of managers and professionals but it had a positive effect on work–family balance (Wajcman et al., 2010).

Their survey on mobile phones also put forward surprising findings: The main purpose of mobile phone calls in daily life is to maintain connection with family and friends (Wajcman et al., 2008). Individuals exercise control over the extent to which work invades their personal life. This pattern is particularly observed in managers and professionals.

Cavazotte, Lemos, and Villadsen (2014) explored smart phone use of professionals at a Brazilian law firm. Users appreciated the flexibility and autonomy provided by mobile technology. At the same timem they expressed concerns regarding demands from superiors that negatively affected their private spheres.

Studying colonisation of private sphere by ubiquitous mobile devices, Mullan and Wajcman (2019) analysed time use data gathered in the United Kingdom and found evidence of a small increase in work extension. The increase was significantly greater in the case of managers and professionals. Lack of time was explained by a structural change in working conditions rather than by mobile phone use.

Mobile device usage relatively easily gives rise to a pattern of employees working anywhere any time. In Edley's (2001) survey, employees took some work home on a regular basis, thus relinquishing part of the time they had for themselves. Those who were busy performing work related activities after putting the children to bed or before the family got up in the morning were described as "corporate after-hours homeworkers" (Edley, 2001, p. 31).

3.2. Special Effects of Motherhood

The difficulties of balancing motherhood and career are commonly known. Women in executive positions also expounded on the challenge (Adamson, 2017). Submissive intensive mothering is typically expected of middle and upper middle classes (Hays, 1996).

Investigating North American employed mothers, Christopher (2012) found that work and family were equally important for them. Married mothers involve babysitters and domestic help in childcare and domestic chores and are ultimately responsible for delegation. Day-to-day mothering included selection and microcoordination of appropriate help.

Work–life balance is imbued with competing gendered demands. Even today women are faced with a strong cultural expectation of family devotion even if their demanding executive careers expect work devotion (Blair-Loy, 2005). Women in executive positions must find ways to reconcile the conflict between intensive work demands and family devotion.

Remote access to work through technology created a parallel pattern for remote mothering. At the same time, Edley finds that "the lives of employed mothers constitute a gendered paradox of trying to succeed at two jobs that are simultaneous and contradictory" (Edley, 2001, p. 31).

A survey exploring the smartphone use of Canadian professional women working long hours revealed that the respondents used phones to manage family and work related tasks simultaneously, and they were mindful of the need to be available outside of working hours (Crowe & Middleton, 2012). They regularly checked their e-mail to show responsiveness and responsibility for their colleagues' work. Women used their smartphones for 're-mote mothering' but also for the opposite: to work whilst they were really mothering.

Adamson (2017) found that motherhood is one of the biggest challenges to professionalism. Autobiographies of celebrity CEO women reveal that the traditional image of perfect motherhood features their ideals in a redefined fashion. In a workplace where demands are suited to men, women found individual solutions to reconcile the pressures of work and home. Redefinition and negotiated balance could be "achieved by abandoning unreasonable expectations of perfection and applying further business-like efficiency to home and private life" (Adamson, 2017, p. 321). Outsourcing and reducing other duties were also mentioned in the narratives about how celebrities challenged reconciliation of work and mothering and intended to normalize this 'imperfection.'

3.3. Previous Hungarian Research

In her analysis of a multinational company operating in Hungary, Tóth (2005) explored male and female managers' differing tactics to cope with the tension of constant time pressure: Women having young children only had time for the family besides work, while men's previous friendly relations were gradually replaced by corporate friendships. The respondents reported to constantly juggle with time and responsibilities and used their mobile phones mainly to ease time-related conflicts.

Investigating employee-friendly companies Primecz et al. (2016) found that when shaping flexible working hours in HR systems, the main focus was on mothers

with young children returning to work from childcare leave. Mothers with young children benefited from flexible hours but work they regularly had to attend to work at night. ICT use often led to dependence, mental exhaustion, burnout, or a compulsion of permanent accessibility.

Exploring the work practices of highly qualified women in executive positions working part-time, Oborni (2018) found that women are not protected from the encroachment of work on days when they were not supposed to be working. Being contactable outside of working hours when urgent work came up was a widespread practice. Women checked their messages on their mobile phones several times on their days off. The state of working part-time but actually working more than they officially should is fuelled by their desire to meet the demands of intensive motherhood and function as ideal employees.

4. Research Questions

Two main questions arise from antecedent research: What do women in executive positions say about their use of different mobile technologies, and to what extent do they thematise the ambivalent need to simultaneously meet the demands of motherhood and workplace?

5. Method

The two questions were addressed in the context of semi-structured interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015 with twenty women in senior management positions. Recruitment of some of the respondents was done by personal networking based on an informal organisation of female executives. Other respondents were found by snowball sampling. All interviews took place in Budapest and in its conurbation.

The majority of the respondent women were married, and some of them were divorced. Every respondent had children, their age varied widely, the youngest going to lower grades of primary school, and the oldest being adults. The husbands of married respondents were also professionals, many of them also in executive positions. There were a few husbands who held back their careers to help with childrearing, for example to take children to extracurricular activities. In one case, the husband, who worked in a totally different field went on paternity leave with the children and is still actively engaged in childcare. The interviews were audio recorded, and after transcription they were thematically analysed by NVivo 11 software.

6. Findings

6.1. Narratives and Perceptions about the Impacts of Technology Use in Work–Life Balance

The respondents use their mobile devices virtually on a continuous basis: "Effectively we are accessible from zero to 24 hours" (10). Although they called mobile technology a double-edged sword, in their own lives every respondent emphasized its advantages rather than its drawbacks. The advantages mentioned were basically related to speed, temporal and spatial flexibility, and a sense of staying in control of processes; disadvantages were related to erosion of the boundaries of the private sphere.

Enthusiasm was tinged with verbalisation of efforts to keep technology within bounds. Typically, the respondents mentioned some conflict, fight or catch situation. They described the situations as if the 'enemy' were a device detrimental to privacy rather than an expansive economic system:

> I'm trying to use it very consciously for, or in a way that it doesn't upset my life completely, so it's not [the phone] to rule over me but I'm ruling over it. (1)

None of the respondents said directly that mobile technologies were tools for corporate colonisation; at the same time, when they referred to mobile devices as threats, they generally meant permanent accessibility which could be abused by colleagues or customers. Some of them took it for granted and did not see it as a problem, not even when it disrupted vacation; they considered it as part of the (well-paid) executive function:

> I think a top manager, but even a medium level manager or from medium level manager upwards…so it's not something that mobile devices bought on, it comes with the position, it's a matter of responsibility to be always available. (5)

While the respondents made a conscious effort to limit incoming calls to working hours, they generally did not see it a problem when they made calls in their private time in business matters. Several of them tried to explain this paradox by their own interest: They took a deep interest in their work and were keen to keep track of the tasks and challenges it involved. They formulated (self-)criticism, if at all, from the aspect of dependence and the learning process rather than corporate expansion:

> I don't answer the phone in the evenings and at weekends, only if it's critical. But not to check e-mails. I'm interested, not because I can't get away from it but because it's my life, I'm interested. (13)

However, there were critical voices indicating that the system is operated not so much by individual choice but rather by social pressure and demands, although even this respondent did not specifically emphasize intrusive corporate demands:

> It's a terribly big pressure on you that when you check your e-mail everybody knows in theory that you could just as well reply any time. (4)

The organisation can colonise employees' time and capacity by making them perform more work in a given time—in other words, the working day is intensified. For example, face-to-face meetings with customers can be replaced by virtual conferences, and a new task can be assigned instead of travel time. E-mails also significantly reduce the time required for reaching agreements on issues. Almost every respondent enthused about the advancement of videoconferencing. One reason may be that videoconferences replace travel abroad, which facilitates simultaneous parenting and work. In all, the use of mobile devices makes work significantly more intensive and speeds up work processes. The aspect of expedition was sometimes mentioned obliquely:

> I think it's good not to feel that you have twenty-six hours instead of twenty-four, because it's actually still twenty-four but somehow we live it in a higher gear. (2)

At the same time extensive work is not only an individual but also a corporate problem. In one interview it was raised that the company also has to show responsibility in considering whether to expect online accessibility or night work. Women with young children can feel they have to prove their devotion to work, which may lead to staff burnout and quitting:

> Because I see, at night, I check how many people are online in the intranet communication system and it's almost like checking it during the day. (4)

Another unlimited corporate demand was the seasonal obligation of executives to work every evening and always be available to customers and colleagues. This meant that every week on four weekdays she had to go online and back to work from home. This implied that her colleagues also worked in the evening and at night.

The most extreme case was that of the respondent who said as a positive example that she was able to work via mobile technology while at home sick in bed:

> I had this herniated disc I got because of this sedentary job, and there were some three weeks when I couldn't move, so I could work from home, from my bed. (8)

A less inimical but very widespread practice was checking e-mails while on vacation, forwarding urgent messages and working through the mails on the last day of the vacation. It is also typical that the executives did not want to leave an endless flow of unanswered mails to the next day and, after the family goes to bed, they start processing them.

New challenges arising from corporate operation are contrary to the amount of work that can be completed or is 'cleverly' doable. Several of the respondents working in global positions often referred to global processes:

almost every hour there was a site actively working. ICT technologies boosted this process as new mails to be responded and tasks to be handled were coming in nonstop:

> We are present in a hundred and one countries. You look at the time zones, someone is already up ahead of us in the Asian region, we are up now, and America will be up in six hours from now. (8)

As every respondent was a senior manager, they were often flexible to tackle certain tasks. This was particularly important when a child suddenly got sick. With one or two exceptions, the women almost never mentioned the fathers' role. In the case of divorced women, the father's contribution never arose.

The option of flexibility very often led the women to the conviction that they were in control and free to make decisions. As the Hungarian labour market gives very little flexibility to employees, this option coming with a job is rated very highly. This is true even in cases where the working time regime fully clashes with the time when reproductive responsibilities must be attended to, for example a videoconference is scheduled when the mother should be picking up the child from kindergarten or school. In such cases it is not the workplace, but the employee and her family are flexible:

> I often go to pick up the children with the earplug in my ear and I just wave at them to get in the car, and they have to be very cooperative then, they must know that mummy is in a call. (2)

Many feel they have to 'repay' flexibility by working at night the time spent with managing private affairs, visits to the doctor's, school functions, etc. The reverse, i.e., taking time off and working less in return for night or weekend work never arose. Yet it is part of the employee's flexibility to interrupt her summer vacation is the company's operation so requires:

> Yes, sometimes it's awkward, it did happen that I had to be on the alert while I was on my summer vacation, I had to know when the next airplane flew out of which airport in case I had to fly back home in an emergency. (8)

Sometimes the perception of flexibility and freedom of choice masks the fact that these women executives work as parts of an extensive work regime. The amount of work to be done is always considerably more than can be handled within the normal working time. This issue, however, was not raised by the respondents. In fact, some of them considered it a matter of choice whether they should work in the evening at home or whether they should stay in the office overtime.

Although considering their own practice, the majority of the respondents felt they were quite successful in

managing boundaries, they generally admitted to performing work-related tasks in the evenings and often over the weekends. While they did not consider this a good thing, they insisted that they were only taking away time reserved for themselves.

Use of ICT technology for private purposes during working time, while it occurred, was very limited. They generally used the devices for logistics, i.e., for micro-coordination. The most frequently mentioned purpose was communication with family, primarily with the partner, child, parents or teachers. To remember, plan and undertake these logistic tasks generally remained the woman's job.

Permanent time pressure compelled respondents to use any filler time anywhere to work—during the children's extracurricular lessons or parent-teacher meetings, on the motorway, in traffic jams. Those who commuted daily found utilising travel time particularly important. They were also positive about better exploitation of the 'free time' generated by business trips. They never mentioned that these business trips often encroached upon the individual's personal time or weekends.

There were significant differences in setting borders. Flexible but controlled device use for micro-coordination was continuous on weekdays. Mobile phones promoted getting information without allowing uncontrolled infiltration of one sphere into the other. They were typically in alert mode. Protection of private sphere was only limited on weekdays. Respondents differed most markedly in protecting their weekends and even more whilst on vacation. However, keeping private life out of work seemed to be more effective than vice versa:

> My daughter knows I want to know how she did, she doesn't call me but snaps her A+ maths test and sends me the picture. (20)

The respondents are positioned along a continuum from separation to integration. Some felt they almost always had to be accessible for their office and showed only minor signs of setting boundaries. They do not necessarily consider vacation sacrosanct, and one of them said vacation means there is no limit between work and leisure. In this exceptional case boundaries were entirely porous. At the other extreme were those who separated the two domains more clearly and tried not to work from home in the evening and either left their mobile devices in the office for the weekend or only checked on their phone whether they received any important e-mail.

Small practices protecting nights and weekends from the intrusion of mobile phones were quite widespread: instead of putting the phone on the bedside table they left it on the desk, in the kitchen or on another storey of the home in an effort to keep away from the phone and e-mails.

They also developed tactics for work to find them in several stages if their involvement is necessary. In urgent cases they receive a text or call telling them to check their mail. Several respondents mentioned this also eased the pressure on underlings.

No respondent mentioned company policy regulating technology use. However, some respondents raised corporate responsibility issues: work tasks dumped on continuously by e-mail day and night and weekends is oppressive and obstructs rest.

Despite perceiving this as a potential problem, respondents took informal and inconsistent rather than formalized steps. The respondent who stated colleagues leave each other alone in the evening actually worked regularly on her laptop every evening and kept sending e-mails to colleagues.

6.2. Mothering and Mobile Technologies

Around the system change thirty years ago the ideology of intensive mothering was less pressing, not least because the system was based upon dual earner families. Still, it is important to note that the early signs of refamilisation and intensive mothering were present in the last decades of socialism, for example, through the introduction of a lengthy parental leave scheme. Today the social pressure of intensive mothering conspicuously affects women. Executive mothers were often denigrated in their environment, by female family members or friends and nursery teachers for spending little time with their children.

Similarly to the general consensus that mobile technologies were both a blessing and a curse, the feeling was the same in the context of mothering. At the level of standards and rhetoric it was beyond question that the respondents considered time with their children to be paramount and needing protection. They felt that mobile technologies increased their accessibility, and while this was regarded as an advantage during working hours, it was a disadvantage in their leisure.

Several respondents tried to return to their pre-childbearing pace of work but soon realised this had to change. In the new situation the mobile phone extended work time and the interviewee managed to conduct the day's opening and closing meetings with staff whilst commuting:

> That's superb, totally great as it was the first thing that got me out of a fix, hands-free car phone. So I extended my working time morning and evening as I could make a conference call, or summarized the day with the people. (3)

Delegating household tasks to paid help was also subordinated to extended working time. A sign of extensive mothering, it allowed women executives to work longer hours and spend less time on domestic responsibilities. Outsourced tasks were generally undertaken by other women (babysitters, housekeeper), but there are jobs typically relegated to men. Mobile phones were indis-

pensable for organising their involvement as it reinforced the attentive and caring mother image.

Skype talk was also raised in the interviews. For women travelling a lot technology helps create intimacy and connectedness with the family. Absent presence was made possible by mobile technologies:

> My child was crying in the small hours, my husband called me to go on skype, I was in Cape Town and they were back home, and the child was pacified and went back [to sleep] all happy. (13)

On the other hand, some did not prefer remote mothering. Instead they collected their children at 5 PM, the official end of working hours, and continued working at night through their devices as a matter of course. Many of the respondents defined it as part of a mother's job to be with the child:

> So I make a point of getting up at five from the desk and going to the nursery because it's very important for me that the child should feel mummy is not just mummy at a distance or stumbling home at seven but she is involved in these things. (10)

Some respondents stayed home after school with their teenage children and continued with their professional tasks in home office mode, replying to mail and attending videoconferences. Others had reservations whether this would work with very young children.

Third sites also had a role in working and mothering simultaneously. Mobile technologies enable mothers to work in situations where the child is engaged in sport or school activities. This is similar to the figure of 'busy cyborg mums' who lie in symbiosis with technology and workplace professionally managing two roles without contravening the demands of good mothering:

> I was at my child's fancy dress ball and there was a half-hour telephone conference I couldn't do anything about. The ball was on and I went out and sat in the car, called in on my phone and stayed on half an hour. The kid had a great time at the ball, I went back in, everything was okay, no one had any idea I was actually coming out of a fancy dress ball, I just connected on the mobile and that was it. (4)

Quality time regularly recurred in the narratives: the respondents tended to mute or set aside their phones to have undisturbed family time. But there in some cases the respondents never even noticed they used their phones excessively. The following is a particularly interesting narrative that shows no self-reflexion as the respondent later talked about the negative effect of device use on her children:

> When my daughter said, "you're always busy and even when you're home you're fiddling with your gadgets

all the time," well, she was nine at the time and it was like looking into a mirror. I never thought I was overdoing it, I don't, even now…but it was too much for the kid. The little one hates the phone. Whenever he sees it, he tries to hide it, so if I leave it in sight I'll have a tough time finding it. He abhors the phone. (15)

The phone is the object of fear, when in effect children protest against the work regime that intrudes home life, distracting the parent who is devoted to both her work and her family.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The article focused on the impacts of technology, particularly mobile technologies, on women's perception of work–life balance and their use of devices in trying to meet the demands of being devoted mothers and being devoted employees. We sought answers to these questions by interviewing twenty Hungarian women in executive positions.

Previous studies had contradictory conclusions: there were significant concerns about using mobile technologies for fear of the incipient possibility of continuous work and the colonisation of private sphere and time (Edley, 2001). On the other hand, increasing flexibility reduces the friction between the two domains and the time spent commuting (Wajcman et al., 2008, 2010). Work is intensified by device use as more tasks can be accomplished, but it also becomes more extensive (Mullan & Wajcman, 2019). An additional complication for women is their dual commitment to work and family (Blair-Loy, 2005). Women who apply mobile technologies professionally in meeting the demands of these competing spheres realise that some aspects of the double shift can be conducted simultaneously. Others argue that mothering can be extended without disrupting work (Christopher, 2012).

Consistent with the literature, our findings reveal that the use of technology greatly promoted women executives' ability to simultaneously meet the demands of work and family (Christopher, 2012; Currie & Eveline, 2011). Several respondents felt they could not have tackled potential crises without relying on their devices, nor would they have managed to build a professional career whilst running a family. Tóth (2005) had similar findings analysing Unilever Hungary's managers, where managers, typically fathers, travelling home stretched the otherwise rather short 'family time.'

Narratives of mobile technology use and practices were contradictory and highlighted the priority of work. The world of work had colonised private sphere even though employees considered the two to be parallel and equal, and thought they made the ultimate decision. Similarly to Wajcman et al. (2008) we found the insight that the executives controlled their technology use. This was reinforced by the finding that they often used their mobile phones for micro-coordination

(Duxbury & Smart, 2011), which strengthened the perception of flexibility.

On the other hand, while they described their relationship with technology and particularly to mobile phones as conflict-prone and aggravating, they did not reflect on organisations behind the devices demanding full commitment. Organisations have a direct economic interest in executives being accessible virtually anywhere any time. This is consistent with the narratives of American women executives (Adamson, 2017).

Another similarity with the findings of the research on American women executives was the reformulation of 'smart' relationship with the smartphone as individual responsibility. However, their narratives confirmed earlier research findings (Currie & Eveline, 2011; Edley, 2001) on the encroachment and intensification of work and its spatial and temporal expansion.

A clear sign of corporate colonisation work after the children have gone to bed. If this was done online or by e-mail it had a particularly oppressive effect on mothers with young children who were doing their best to prove their commitment. Researching, among others, Australian executives and professionals, Wajcman et al. (2008) also found that mobile technologies often impinged upon private life and guaranteed flexibility.

Still, the Australian or Western models are only partially relevant to the Hungarian situation. The reason behind this is the limited agency of employees working for these subsidiary companies in post-socialist countries, also called 'victims' of neoliberalism. For the latter, managerial work has become almost limitless: typical at night and frequent at weekend and during vacation. However, these behaviours were always interpreted as a matter of individual decision, thus shifting stress on personal responsibility. This is obviously explained by Hungarian organisations' greater exposure to global economic and political systems. Exploring the signs of this exposure might be a contribution to previous research findings.

The women executives talked most about individual coping tactics and solutions, and their responsibility; moreover, they considered responding a matter of individual choice. Some mentioned they had to be strict with themselves and set up rules. These self-regulatory remarks are in line with Adamson's (2017) findings. They took mostly individual steps to protect themselves from their job.

Besides individual responsibility, the importance of flexibility provided by mobile devices also arose. Even in blatantly obvious clashes, when the respondent had to attend her child's school event and participate in a conference call at the same time, i.e., when she had to work two shifts simultaneously, she felt there was a genuine choice, whereas in these situations obviously it was not the workplace but the employee and her family that had to be flexible.

The findings reveal primarily individual micro-level practices: muting phones, limited handling of e-mails at weekends and using filters were all applied by the women executives. Some of these practices improved work–life balance only on an individual level but did not resolve the overall situation causing tension. They reproduced the system with limited criticism, and personal examples reinforced rather than questioned these practices.

Beyond the well-documented post-feminist and neoliberal turns in Western scholarship, special attention should be paid to the phenomena caused by refamilisation in post-socialist countries. Results supporting the effects of refamilisation depict the difficulties of managing work–life balance. The situation of women executives was paradoxical: they clearly had to prove their commitment to family and job simultaneously and successfully. Despite having sufficient financial tools to cover the costs of outsourcing various child related tasks, they were warned by their environment to be good and available mothers. Mobile technologies have become important in meeting this challenge, enabling women to embrace the extensive mothering model (Christopher, 2012).

The use of mobile technology reinforces the image of self-disciplined, hard-working cyborg women, without changing the organisational and social status quo based on gender inequality. The flexibility and control provided by mobile devices underpin the perception of tensions and boundaries being manageable while it distracts from the fact that work is becoming increasingly intensive and extensive. It seems women executives receive precious little organisational and social support.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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