



## FEATURED SCHOLAR

Each month the Work and Family Researchers Network spotlights the contributions of a scholar who is making significant advances in understanding work-family concerns. We are delighted to present the following interview with Professor Winny Shen.



### Winny Shen, Ph.D.

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Experts Panel Link: <https://wfrn.org/expert/winny-shen/>

**WFRN - *How did you first get introduced to work-family issues and become a researcher in this field?***

**Winny - *As a child of immigrants who grew up in a highly diverse enclave (Los Angeles, California), I have always been interested in issues of diversity and inclusion. However, in my early research forays in graduate school, I largely focused on these topics in the selection and leadership realms. As I became increasingly interested in understanding women's under-representation in leadership roles, discussion of work-family challenges kept cropping up and my research increasingly started to incorporate these issues. Another serendipitous occurrence was meeting my "research bestie", Kristen Shockley,***

*at a National Science Foundation workshop for early career academic women. In our discussions, we realized that there were many assumptions, particularly around gender, that remain empirically untested in the work-family literature. Therefore, we decided to embark upon a program of research to address these questions that is still keeping us busy!*

**WFRN - How did you first get involved with the WFRN? What do you value most about the organization?**

*Winnie - I first attended the WFRN conference (in New York!) as a relatively new faculty member. Kristen Shockley and I were presenting a meta-analysis on gender differences in work-family conflict, which eventually evolved into our Journal of Applied Psychology monograph published in 2017. I found the conference to be such a rewarding experience, and I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to learn and think about work-family concerns from different disciplinary perspectives and levels of analysis. This rich interdisciplinary tradition, alongside WFRN's commitment to translate this knowledge to benefit individuals, organizations, and society, is what keeps me coming back to the organization.*

**WFRN - Tell us about your current research, what are you studying?**

*Winnie - One of the projects I'm currently working on with my colleagues is understanding the division of cognitive labor among heterosexual couples during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this shapes women's participation in the workforce. There has been a lot of discussion regarding how the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, but much of this talk has focused on childcare. We believe that more invisible forms of labor that have likely also increased and are necessary to manage a household during this stressful time may be getting overlooked, but may also be contributing significantly to women's exhaustion during this time.*

*In another project, some of my collaborators and I are exploring how nurses' concerns regarding bringing the coronavirus home due to their exposure on the job and potentially infecting their family members can negatively impact their well-being and work outcomes. We see this as a specific instantiation of work-to-family conflict that has arisen due to the pandemic, and we are interested in understanding what can be done to help address these worries and concerns among healthcare workers, perhaps in the form of organizational supports or government policies.*

**WFRN - How does your research connect to social policy?**

*Winnie - I believe, collectively, work-family research has a lot to offer in the formulation of social policy. For example, in my role on the executive team of the Canadian Society for Industrial & Organizational Society (CSIOP), we recently responded to the Government of Canada's call for consultation regarding developing a policy giving federally regulated*

workers the “right to disconnect”. In our response, we were able to summarize a lot of the wonderful research being conducted by work-family scholars around the world on the impact of technology on work-life boundaries to highlight the importance, but also acknowledge the challenges that would be involved in the creation of such a policy.

**WFRN - How does your research inform workplace practice?**

**Winnie** - I strive to do research that can inform workplace practice. Namely, I am interested in identifying the work-family challenges faced by different segments of the workforce while ensuring that we don't put all the onus on individuals to resolve these issues themselves because there are often resource and structural constraints. As an example, a meta-analysis that we published in 2017 reveals that generally men and women tend to be more similar than different in their experiences of work-family conflict, which indicates that organizations should ensure all have access to policies and resources (e.g., flexible work arrangements) that allow them to balance responsibilities in multiple life domains.

**WFRN - What directions hold the greatest promise for discovery in the work-family field?**

**Winnie** - One of the directions that I think holds a lot of promise involves further breaking down disciplinary siloes in work-family research. For example, one of the disconnects I always find interesting is that there tends to be substantial gender differences in division of labor, a key construct in many subfields involved in work-family research, but these differences don't seem to be mirrored in people's reports of work-family conflict, a central construct of interest for organizational psychologists and management scholars. Therefore, I firmly believe a lot more could be done to clarify and unpack the process via which people mentally translate and evaluate their investments in work and home domains.

Another direction that would reveal valuable insights is to consider if we've optimized the measurement of work-family constructs. Although some of our measures are well-validated and commonly used, I sometimes wonder if they capture the right level of specificity to allow for effective intervention. As an example, many work-family measures simply refer to work or family demands, but the nature of those demands may necessitate very different solutions. Thus, I wonder if many interventions designed to help workers with work-family or work-life management are not as effective as we would hope because they are too broad or insufficiently targeted to address the wide variety of responsibilities that different workers are faced with.

**WFRN - What advice would you give to graduate students or those early in their professional careers?**

**Winnie** - My first piece of advice would be don't be afraid to tackle the big questions. When you're new to this field, it could seem daunting to think how you're going to contribute because there is so much research on this topic already. However, when you

*read carefully and peel back those layers, I am often surprised by the untested assumptions or important gaps that remain to be filled.*

*My second piece of advice would be to find good collaborators. I think what defines a good collaborator can be a bit elusive, but for me, it definitely involves someone who is more invested in the process than the outcome, has a perspective that is different enough from my own to challenge me, and who has a somewhat similar working pace and style. I hope I'm not an anomaly in this case, but research projects often take much longer than I planned to come to fruition. Working with other smart and passionate individuals makes this journey so much more enjoyable!*

## **ABOUT THE WFRN**

The Work and Family Researchers Network's mission is to facilitate virtual and face-to-face interaction among academic work and family researchers from a broad range of fields as well as engage the next generation of work and family scholars. The WFRN welcomes the participation of policy makers and workplace practitioners as it seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of work and family issues among the community of global stakeholders.

During 2021, the WFRN will host a series of virtual conference events. We look forward to our next in-person conference June 23-25, 2022 in New York City.

To learn more about the WFRN, please visit our website [WFRN.ORG](https://wfrn.org). To become a member, please click on this link <https://wfrn.org/become-a-member/>.