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 **Camille Desjardins**.

Camille Desjardins

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Experts Panel Link: https://wfrn.org/expert/camille-desjardins/

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

Camille – I got introduced to work-family issues while working with Dr. Marion Fortin, professor at the Toulouse Capitole University, as I was pursuing my Master of Science. At the time, Marion had just secured a national grant to study organizational justice dynamics around maternity leave, and she took me along on this research adventure. During my master's thesis, I began exploring how mothers retrospectively viewed their justice experiences at work after childbirth and the career decisions that followed. My interest in this topic deepened as I worked toward my PhD, where I continued investigating women's justice and work-life experiences around maternity leave, conducting a four-wave interview study with 35 highly educated women in France, from their pregnancy announcements to six to eight months after their return to work. As my PhD coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, I expanded my engagement with work-family issues through a multi-method project exploring the work-life experiences of teleworking parents of young children during the first lockdown wave in France. These projects fueled my interest in understanding how work and family demands intersect in contemporary organizations and new ways of working such as remote, hybrid work, and gig work.

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

Camille – Dr. Ariane Ollier-Malaterre of the Université du Québec à Montréal, one of my PhD External Examiners, now co-author, and a long-time member of the WFRN, first introduced me to the network after my PhD defense and encouraged me to join. She emphasized the valuable conversations taking place within the network, its brilliant and supportive group of scholars, and the potential for developing new collaborations and research projects. At the time, I was in the process of moving to China for work and could not attend the 2022 conference in New York. However, I did not want to miss the 2024 conference. Ariane also encouraged me to submit my application to the Early Career Fellowship Program led by Dr. Nicole Denier and Dr. Yang Hu, which I did, and I was accepted. While attending both the Early Career Fellowship Program and the conference, I got to meet work-family researchers from a great variety of disciplines and exchange information about the latest developments in the field. This paved the way for new research projects with co-authors from different disciplines and continents. I am grateful for the supportive community I found in the WFRN. It has become my scholarly home, and I cannot wait to reunite with my research peers at the 2026 conference.

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

Camille – My research takes a gender perspective on new ways of working, exploring the work norms and norms of control associated with them. I examine these topics using conceptual and empirical approaches, primarily qualitative. Several of my research projects explore gig workers' experiences on digital platforms. Dr. Brendan Churchill (who I first met at the 2024 WFRN conference!) and I wrote a conceptual paper on the gig economy from a gender perspective. In this manuscript, we review the literature on women's experiences in the gig economy and shed light on both the harmful and helpful mechanisms producing tensions for women's work, well-being and work-life outcomes. In another project with Dr. S. Susie Lee, I am conducting interviews with platform workers to investigate the prevalent work norms on digital platforms that are often enforced by algorithmic management. We also explore how these norms affect workers' work-life balance and well-being. Beyond gig work, I am also interested in flexible work arrangements. Together with Dr. Sarah Bourdeau (whom I also met at the 2024 WFRN conference!), Dr. Laura Urrila and Dr. Ariane Ollier-Malaterre, we are conducting interviews among executives, managers and employees to investigate how flexible work arrangements are implemented in organizations, the control practices surrounding them, and how employees react to them.

WFRN – *What are your big findings? Did you make any unexpected discoveries?*

Camille – There are three main findings that come out of my research so far:

1. During my pursuit of my PhD, I discovered that inactions (as opposed to events) from managers or colleagues could also be powerful drivers of career attitudes and decisions at times of heightened uncertainty such as around maternity leave. Managerial inaction has been overlooked in the literature, perhaps because inactions are difficult to study and are often not directly observable. However, my research with Dr. Marion Fortin suggests that they deserve attention.

2. One of the important findings that surface out of my research projects on platform and remote work is the "flexibility mystique". Although workers often turn to these new ways of working to gain greater flexibility, there are several mechanisms—either adopted by managers or enforced by algorithms—that control workers and diminish their freedom to choose when and how to work. For example, in the interviews we are currently conducting with Dr. S. Susie Lee, we find that although platform workers value flexibility in their work, they end up working most days of the week, including weekends. They constantly check the platform for work, even late at night or early in the morning, and feel pressured to respond quickly to

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clients in order to earn badges, which are important for securing jobs on the platform.

3. Finally, despite promises that platform work could reduce gender inequality at work, the conceptual paper I wrote with Brendan Churchill qualifies this claim. Several mechanisms perpetuate harmful gender dynamics on digital platforms. Platform and task segregation reinforce gender disparities. Similarly, algorithmic management that rewards gig workers for taking night and weekend shifts, while penalizing those who do not, also contributes to these dynamics. Finally, selection and evaluation bias by clients, who favor men in the selection process and give women harsher evaluations, exists and reinforces gender inequality on digital platforms.

WFRN – How can your research guide the formulation of social policy?

Camille – My PhD research on the injustices women experience around maternity leave can inform social policy. Specifically, it suggests that not only protections during pregnancy and work reintegration after maternity leave must be strengthened, but also that we must make sure that they are enforced by managers and HR departments. Childcare subsidies for all families must also be developed further to support working mothers in balancing work and family life. My recent research on digital platforms can also inform the development of social policy. By shedding light on the shortcomings of digital platforms and the mechanisms that perpetuate gender gaps, my research can guide the development of policies that regulate platform work. For instance, to adhere to the principle of equal pay for equal work, regulations could be enacted to prevent platforms from compensating workers differently for completing similar tasks.

WFRN – *How do you integrate work-family topics in your teaching and/or training? Do you have an assignment or approach that is especially effective?*

Camille – I teach students the theoretical foundations and the latest research on work-family and gender equality. Recently, I was struck by how many – especially students who have little or no work experience – were unaware of the workplace gender dynamics and the work-life challenges workers face. This shows how important it is for us to address and discuss these topics in class, as students will face these challenges at some point in their careers, not only as employees, but also perhaps as managers. To this aim, I find it particularly helpful to present students with real-world examples and case studies of work-life challenges. We address these challenges through personal reflections and in-class discussions. I

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recently gave a seminar to graduate students on the "Gendered Dynamics in New Ways of Working" and I asked them to choose one or two mechanisms hindering gender equality on digital platforms and to propose a policy suggestion to address them. Their suggestions were fascinating!

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

Camille – I am still early in my professional career but if I can give a few pieces of advice…

… to graduate students:

- Choose a research topic that genuinely interests you, as you will spend countless hours exploring, doubting, writing, and rewriting it.
- Find a supportive PhD advisor who will help you grow. This may not be easy to discern at first, but it has been paramount in my experience. My PhD advisor helped me gain confidence in my ability to conduct research projects and develop into a capable, rigorous researcher.

… to my fellow early career scholars:

- Surround yourself with supportive colleagues and co-authors. Although research can sometimes feel daunting and isolating, you don't have to do it alone. For me, working with supportive and invested co-authors has made all the difference.
- Join the WFRN to enter a supportive community of scholars and attend the conference to meet potential new co-authors working on fascinating research topics ☺

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.

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

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