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 Matthew Perrigino.

MATTHEW PERRIGINO

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Experts Panel Link: https://wfrn.org/expert/matthew-perrigino/

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

Matthew – Prior to entering academia, I worked in corporate finance. I was fresh out of college and living at home with my parents to save up for the future. On the occasional evening when I was held up at the office, I experienced a sense of frustration – later, what I learned this field refers to as "work-family conflict" – when I missed family dinner. This coincided with recognition that I was more interested in people-related issues (e.g., why is the individual in the office next door staying late to keep up appearances when they just told me they completed their work for the day?) than I was in finance-related issues. Between always anticipating that I would return to academia to pursue a business-related graduate degree and the realization that I wanted to study people-related issues, the best pursuit of my vocational interest seemed to rest in applying to OB/HR doctoral programs. My statement of purpose crystallized my interest in researching the work-family interface, and I sought out programs that included faculty with whom my research interests aligned. While I have often heard that doctoral students change their research pursuits between the time they enter and complete their PhD programs, my interest in the work-family interface and experiences in academia have been intertwined since Day 1.

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

Matthew – Ellen Ernst Kossek joined the faculty at Purdue University during my second year as a student in the doctoral program, and she encouraged me to submit a poster presentation for a paper on which we were working to the 2013 WFRN conference. I have fond and still-vivid memories of that morning. One memory is feeling a bit starstruck in seeing that Nick Beutell was presenting a poster right next to mine; at the time, Nick was "famous" to me, as he was one half of the Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) duo responsible for the seminal paper on work-family conflict. Another memory is that I met Kimberly French, another early-stage PhD student like me.

I mention these specific names because I most value the intimacy of the connections that WFRN has afforded me. Nick and I became colleagues and

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overlapped for three years as faculty at Iona University's LaPenta School of Management. Kim and I are not frequently collaborators, but – as members of the 2022-2023 Early Career Fellows cohort – always manage to pick up where we left off, even if that means we go two years without seeing each other between conferences. Ellen, who is responsible for introducing me to WFRN, attended my wedding. Simply stated, the WFRN organization is a collection of down-to-earth, bright, and friendly colleagues who are the types of individuals with whom I most enjoy associating.

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

Matthew – My research focuses on work-life flexibility policies that provide employees with control over when and where they work. In tandem with my close and frequent collaborator, Roshni Raveendran (University of Virginia), my current research addresses the intersection of work-life flexibility and technology. One recently completed project is our *Academy of Management Review* article that re-envisions the notion of "boundary control" and theorizes the different ways that organizations govern where, when, and how work occurs based on how they view their employees and the extent to which work is interdependent. A second recently completed project is our *Human Resource Management* article that explores how organizations can make employees "want to" return to working on-site versus feeling "forced to" do so. Ongoing work includes trying to bridge epistemology with ontology, specifically by considering how employees use technology to create their own socially constructed boundaries that transcend space and time.

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

Matthew – In fairness, I am overreaching to call this an unexpected discovery since the paper is an integrative review based on the findings of others, but one of my biggest findings is accounting for the various ways in which work-life flexibility policies yield unexpected and unintended, negative consequences (as summarized in my *Academy of Management Annals* paper on work-family backlash). This includes (1) an inequity mechanism, such that the availability and implementation of work-life flexibility policies may prioritize some while neglecting others, (2) a stigma mechanism, such that the use and uptake of

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work-life flexibility policies may result in career or social penalties, (3) a spillover mechanism, such that work-life flexibility policies may lead to increased work-related disruptions during family time, and (4) a strategic mechanism, where CEOs and administrators are skeptical about or unable to quantify the actual benefits that work-life flexibility policies are said to bring organizations (e.g., financial performance). I've always enjoyed taking a contrarian view in my research and find that the complexity of work-family issues lends itself to such approaches – thus creating opportunities to make unexpected discoveries that can further refine extant knowledge.

WFRN – ***Does your research inform workplace practice? How?***

Matthew – Overall, my research informs workplace practices by continually attempting to break down monolithic views. It is well understood that "one-size-fits-all" approaches are often limited or inadequate for organizational leaders, HR departments, and line managers to effectively support their employees' pursuit of work-life balance, so the next question becomes: what are the relevant contingencies to consider? The *Human Resource Management* paper on return-to-office emphasizes the importance of promoting and enhancing employees' quality of work-life when working on-site. Yet it distinguishes the need to consider whether employees are more intrinsically versus extrinsically motivated which should refine which action(s) organizations take. For example, offering opportunities for social gatherings may cater to employees who seek camaraderie and human interaction whereas providing compensation for commuting costs may cater to employees who view the employment relationship as more transactional in nature.

WFRN – ***What directions hold the greatest promise for discovery in the work-family field? I am thinking here of theory, methods, or research questions that might be posed.***

Matthew – This is a tricky question due to the rapidity with which the work-family field changes, and I am keenly aware that a research question I state here could be outdated within only a few years' time. Indeed, I dare say that parts of the paper I published in *Business Science & Policy* that addresses how to manage remote workers during quarantine (as part of their special issue on the pandemic) are already outdated, even though it was published in 2020.

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I'll answer the question this way: the greatest promise for discovery rests less in charting a new or novel direction as it does in staying the course – that is, working within the newest frameworks and – most importantly – staying current. Above I alluded to a gap between ontology and epistemology: specifically, work-family practice tends to outpace work-family research and theory. I state this as agnostically as possible, in that I see this as a product of two divergent forces: (a) work-family issues are dynamic and change frequently across societies, organizations, and families, and (b) it takes time for the inception of a research idea to come to full fruition. This is a double-edged sword: scholarship may view new and in-press research with a critical eye; yet this critical eye is the foundation to stay current and generate new discoveries based on the latest ideas and findings (rather than go in a completely unexplored direction).

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

Matthew – Although far easier said than done, for both graduate students and young professionals my advice is: exercise patience and stay open-minded to new/different career pursuits. As a young professional, I wasn't sure whether corporate finance was the right career path for me. I approached the job with enthusiasm and interest yet also was intentional about keeping open other options – such as setting aside time to study for the GMAT, if I ended up following-through on my plan to pursue a graduate business degree. The same is true of my experience as a graduate student. While I enjoyed both research and teaching, it created ambiguity as to whether I wanted to pursue the proverbial "research," "teaching," or "balanced" school once I was on the job market. This only accounts for the work-related side of my life: I was simultaneously "balancing" family and personal pursuits. If, like me, you feel a sense of pressure that you need to have it all figured out immediately (such as starting at the company/university in which you want to finish your career; being married by a certain age; and so on), I recommend giving yourself grace and trying to accept that you may not always get it right on the first try!

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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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