

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Jean McKenzie Leiper, *Bar Codes: Women in the Legal Profession*. University of British Columbia Press, 2006, 256 pp. \$29.95 paper (978-0-7748-1320-4), \$85.00 hardcover (978-0-7748-1319-8)

Bar Codes explores the work experiences of 110 women attorneys in Ontario with a particular focus on the fit between women's lives and the demands of legal practice. The interviewing process began in 1994 in Toronto with 30 women. An additional sample of 30 lawyers practicing in London was interviewed two years later. Between 1998 and 2000 McKenzie Leiper re-interviewed the 60 women from the first two samples and interviewed an additional sample of 50 women recruited from a stratified random sample drawn from the Law Society lists and included "women of all ages and practice types, representing a broad range of racial and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 15).

The book offers rich descriptions of the difficulties women face as they try to integrate their personal and professional lives. Although readers may find familiar themes from the growing body of research on professional women, the survey responses and qualitative quotes reported in *Bar Codes* offer compelling empirical examples and insight into both the tensions between women's personal lives and the professions they aspire to join, and the discrimination women continue to face.

With a nod to Portia from the Merchant of Venice, the book begins with a discussion of how women experience the donning of robes that signals their formal entry into the profession. The robes, for most women, provide a source of professional legitimacy and increased confidence; they are now "real lawyers." Important as they are to women's professional identity, the robes do not always fit, neither metaphorically nor literally. Made for men originally, the robes can be uncomfortable or unwieldy, particularly during pregnancy. The book turns to the lack of congruence between a masculine professional practice and women's lives.

The problems of gender incongruence can begin as early as law school, according to many studies. While gender matters in Leiper's account, women's experiences are far from homogeneous, influenced as much by personal background as by gender. Her data expose a wide range of questions about the impact of social class that need to be ad-

dressed in an effort to assess whether and how law school experiences foreshadow future stresses that women will face in law practice.

One of the key problems that women face is time — time to get it all done. McKenzie Leiper examined the time pressures women face using measures adopted from the Time Use module of Statistics Canada's General Social Survey. She found evidence of even more "time crunch" and stress among the women she interviewed than is evident in the general survey of employed women. Regional differences are also in evidence with Toronto lawyers experiencing the most time stress. Quotes from the interviews illustrate that much of the stress relates to having time to spend with their families.

Time stress relates to fundamental challenges in syncing the organization of women's lives with the organization of legal practice. Chapter Five highlights the kinds of complex schedules that are typical of women's lives with detail from twelve of the lawyers McKenzie Leiper interviewed. She concludes that women are often caught between different kinds of time structures — professional time and family/personal time, the first being linear, the second polychronic. The complexity and necessary flexibility of women's schedules rarely fit neatly into the linear accounting of professional time. Thus, it is not simply a problem that will be solved by finding more time, as we so often believe. Caught between two types of time, professional women are often powerless to control either.

A final empirical chapter explores the variety of career paths taken by the women interviewed. Women's careers defy easy categorization, according to McKenzie Leiper. Several different options are briefly described from the classic linear pattern to short-term stop outs to women in search of lives outside of law. More work needs to be done to develop these brief descriptions into models and then to account for the variety of paths women take.

Despite a strong grounding in literature about professional careers and rich description of women's lives, sociologists may find this book somewhat frustrating. A complicated and opportunistic sampling structure makes it difficult to put the interview responses into context — a problem McKenzie Leiper refers to in her conclusions. There is no direct comparison of the demographics and work histories of the women in each sample and, thus, it is sometimes hard to make sense of the claims about differences or, more interestingly, the lack of difference between samples and/or the diversity of women's experiences on key survey questions. We don't know, for example, if the samples differ only by where the women practice law or by other key variables such as age, law school attended, years in practice, or family status. Quotes from women

called to the bar in the early 1980s are presented alongside quotes from those called to the bar in 1997. Some responses are retrospective, others more contemporary. Readers are left to assume, not unreasonably, that the passage of time has not made it any easier for women but if that is the gist of the argument then rigorous presentation of the methods and data analysis is required to make that case.

The focus on only women raises additional questions. McKenzie Leiper claims that men were not included because “without doubt, their [women’s] experiences differ from those of most men engaged in the practice of law.” This may well be true. However, if the goal of the project is to demonstrate a lack of congruence between women’s lives and legal practice, it would seem necessary to demonstrate that women’s experiences are wholly different than men’s and that men actually experience more congruence with legal structures.

Notwithstanding some of its methodological limitations the book offers a useful window into professional women’s lives that scholars interested in further study of professional women will find most helpful. In particular, McKenzie Leiper’s work suggests that looking for work-life *balance* will always be elusive due to fundamental asymmetries between existing professional and family systems. As she suggests, much more work needs to be done to “crack the code” of the legal profession and even more to re-imagine the law in ways that can better integrate the structures and responsibilities of family and professional life.

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