

Title:

Fatherhood, Male Lawyers and Work-Life Balance in the Legal Profession: Rethinking the Relationship Between Masculinities and Law

Abstract:

Focusing on the views of male lawyers in large corporate law firms, this paper interrogates a range of issues around work-life balance, parenting and gender equality in the legal profession by 'shifting the gaze' towards men's practices and experiences at the interface of work and family life. It argues there is a pressing need to address the relative absence of research to date on male lawyers *as men* in law firms; that is, as gendered subjects. Drawing on interviews with male lawyers at different stages of their careers, and with Human Resource Managers, it suggests the contemporary debate about work-life balance within the legal profession in England and Wales is being shaped by drivers of change that are deeply contradictory with regard to assumptions they make about men, gender and parenting.

Via an exploration, in particular, of how normative ideas about fatherhood are conceptualised within law firms, understood here *as* gendered organisations, the paper charts a gap between the rhetoric of change in the profession, an idea which has secured traction at an organisational level, and the reality of practices on the ground. This paper suggests that a realignment around and re-gendering of ideas of professional success in law may be taking place in certain contexts in law firms as new adaptations, forms of attachment and commitment emerge on the part of men. At the same time, however, unpacking the idea of transnational business masculinities in this context, the paper highlights a range of deeply entrenched gender divisions shaping this debate.

The formation of professional identity as a successful male lawyer emerges for these fathers as a process that, in different ways during the life course, draws on ideas about familial responsibility, consumption, status and management of the body, emotions, appearance and deportment. The paper, ultimately, questions the associations that have been made within much legal scholarship between law and masculinity, suggesting this relationship is far more complex than it has often appeared.

Brief Bio:

Richard Collier is Professor of Law at Newcastle University, UK. He has published widely in the area of law and gender and his books include *Men, Law and Gender: Essays on the 'Man' of Law* (Routledge, 2010), *Fragmenting Fatherhood: A Socio-Legal Study* (with Sally Sheldon, Hart, 2008), *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology: Men, Corporeality and the Criminal(ised) Body* (Sage, 1998), *Masculinity, Law and the Family* (Routledge, 1995) and *Fathers' Rights Activism and Law Reform in Comparative Perspective* (edited with Sally Sheldon, Hart, 2007). He is presently completing a funded project 'Male lawyers, Masculinities and Work-life Balance in the Legal Profession' and is researching the book *Family Men: Fatherhood, Law and Gender from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Richard is an editorial board member of *Social and Legal Studies: An International Journal*.