

# Professionalism in everyday work: women lawyers' strategies to exercise control over their work in Finland, French Canada and Poland

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## *Abstract*

This chapter focuses on professional autonomy, which has been a touchstone of professions and professional work. Here, professional autonomy is examined from a gender perspective, focusing on women lawyers' strategies to cope with their disadvantaged positions and discriminatory professional environments across three civil law countries. The examination draws on two ideas of professionalism: as a 'third logic' (Freidson 2001) and as 'organisational' (Evetts 2006, 2011). The analyses are based on interview data collected from 42 women lawyers from Finland, French Canada and Poland. The results show that women lawyers are capable of acting resourcefully to exercise control over their work and the professional market. The results demonstrate five strategies that these women used: (1) highlighting the status of the profession, to additional educational qualifications and to the title of law firm partner, (2) highlighting altruistic aspects of legal work, (3) the 'typing' of clients and cases, (4) personalising relationships with clients, and (5) establishing joint law offices with friends and sharing office space. This chapter contributes to the '**between**' dimension of professionalism as it demonstrates differences in the strategies women lawyers use to strengthen their professional autonomy across professional systems and structures.

**Keywords:** Professional autonomy, Professionalism, Between, Legal profession, Strategies, Women lawyers.

## **1. Introduction**

The disadvantaged position of women lawyers in the legal profession is an ongoing topic of research. This study approaches the phenomenon through the lens of professionalism and, specifically, its touchstone: professional autonomy. Autonomy has been regarded as central to the interlinked concepts of professions and masculinity – i.e. professions have been considered masculine projects rooted in qualities and values culturally assigned to men (Davies 1996; Hearn et al. 2016). Autonomy permits professionals to control the future of their own professions and to conduct their work in line with professional values and interests (Freidson 1986; 2001). In contrast to their male colleagues, women in male-dominated professions have faced numerous challenges in exercising their professional autonomy (Davies 1996; Hearn et al. 2016; Choroszewicz and Adams 2019).

Because of the historical disadvantage women lawyers have experienced in pursuing their careers, the legal profession offers an important case study to examine women's strategies to attain and maintain their professional autonomy. While globally, the feminisation of legal professions has significantly improved over the past 30 years (Michelson 2013), it has not yet led to full gender equality (Kay 2019; Choroszewicz and Kay 2022). The culture and structures of the legal profession continue to undermine women lawyers' integration into the profession and their recognition as professionals. For instance, women lawyers are more likely than their male colleagues to work in the public sector than in the private sector and in lower-status legal specialties and positions, some of them precarious (Sommerlad 2016; Kay 2019). They are also more likely to leave the profession (Kay et al. 2013; 2016). Their unequal treatment and limited career opportunities in legal professions have relegated them to work that reflects gender-specific expectations in which they experience more control over their work (Bolton and Muzio 2007; Choroszewicz 2014; 2018). The ongoing commercialism in the legal profession has further challenged lawyers' autonomy to control their work. Today, lawyers must accommodate the commercial pressures of being business-like and entrepreneurial while remaining loyal to professional values and interests

(Wallace and Kay 2008; Dinovitzer et al. 2014; Collier 2015). Lawyers are increasingly employed –and thus controlled– by organisations, and they therefore enjoy less professional autonomy and authority than they had in the past (Flood 2011; Muzio and Faulconbridge 2013).

This chapter contributes to the ‘**between**’ dimension of professionalism (Bellini and Maestripieri 2018; CH 1) by examining the ways in which women lawyers from three civil law systems circumvent the obstacles and barriers to their professional autonomy and strive to control their work within the highly competitive professional market. In Canada, professional regulations vary across provinces (see CH 11). French Canada covers the province of Quebec and has a civil law system, in contrast to the rest of Canada that belongs to the common law tradition. In French Canada, Finland and Poland, the growth in the number of women lawyers has coincided with increased competition due to the high number of qualified lawyers and the expanding supply of legal services (Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020; Gadowska 2020). The proportion of women lawyers is higher in civil law countries – for example, in Quebec and Poland, women make up 50% of lawyers (Redzik 2018; Choroszewicz and Kay 2022). Traditionally, in civil law countries, the state has provided legitimacy and leeway for professionals to exercise market control (Abel 2020). However, due to concerns about equal opportunities for disadvantaged social groups in accessing legal professions, in the last three decades or so, civil law countries have expanded public education and increasingly recognised private universities (Abel 2020). While Poland, Finland and French Canada all have civil law systems, there are important differences in their professional structures and cultures. For instance, in Canada, women leave private practice in larger numbers and earlier in their careers than men, and small firms are even less successful in retaining women lawyers (Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020). Also in Canada, women lawyers are also more likely than their male counterparts to report actively seeking new employment outside of law practices (Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020). When they practice in law firms, Canadian and Polish women must fit into existing working norms (Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020; Gadowska 2020). In Finland, women lawyers experience less pressure to conform to masculine ideals of an uninterrupted career, face time at the office and long working hours (Choroszewicz 2014). Flexible working arrangements are also less popular in Canada and Poland compared to Finland (Kay et al. 2013; Choroszewicz 2014; 2016; 2018).

## **2. Women and changing professionalism in the legal profession**

Scholars have pointed out the masculine character of professional projects (Davies 1996), including the legal profession (Leiper 2006; Bolton and Muzio 2007). Even though the work of lawyers is performed under different national regulations and cultures, women uniformly share a disadvantaged position due to the gendering processes on which the masculine character of legal professionalism is built.

The two ideas of professionalism –specifically its ‘third logic’ (Freidson 2001) and ‘organisational’ professionalism (Evetts 2006; 2011)– discussed in this chapter can also be considered as rooted in the cultural ideas of masculinity, specifically with regard to authority over professionals’ own work, clients and other occupations. Yet, the marketisation of professional work and professions has prompted changes to the authority of professionals. Sociologist Eliot Freidson (2001) defined occupational professionalism as the ‘third logic’ – a method of organising work based on the key notion that professionals organise and control their work by drawing on their social recognition. Freidson perceived professions as occupations capable of creating exclusive shelters for practitioners through the monopolisation of educational training and credentials, which guarantees professionals privileged access to the market. These institutional mechanisms enable professions and their members to maintain control over their own tasks and behaviours as well as the production and management of professional bodies of knowledge (Freidson 1986; 2001).

In the case of lawyers, their power and autonomy historically originated from the high social status of the legal profession, the monopolisation of educational training and credentials, a commitment to public service, and privileged access to the legal market. The core of their knowledge is proficiency in legal regulations and the capacity to convert them into reasoned argumentation in both speech and writing

(Leiper 2006, p. 31). Yet, this form of ‘third logic’ professionalism has been contested in the legal profession in the face of ongoing commercialism and deregulation, making lawyers more susceptible to the influence of their clients and their workplaces, lessening concerns about their professional conduct and career advancement (Heinz et al. 2005; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008; Muzio and Faulconbridge 2013). Evetts (2006; 2011) coined the idea of ‘organisational’ professionalism to account for changes in occupational control related to hierarchy, bureaucracy, output, performance measures and the standardisation of work practices. These changes have been well documented by scholars of the legal profession, who have noted that commercial pressures are especially strong in private law practice, where law firms and professional service firms operate as the primary locus for professional socialisation and development (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008; Flood 2011). The emergence of professional service firms and global law firms has also intensified competition in the market for legal services, increasingly subordinating lawyers to the values of efficiency and entrepreneurialism, and employing the language of the market in assessing lawyers’ performance and commitment to their careers (Wallace and Kay 2008; Sterling and Reichman 2016). ‘Organisational’ professionalism has exposed lawyers to market forces and rendered them less capable of resisting the pressure to be available for work 24/7 in the interest of maximising their firms’ profits. Lawyers, especially those in private practices, have become increasingly subject to the economic power of clients (Heinz et al. 2005). Professional autonomy has thereby become subject to social forces within professional workplaces, including relations with clients, law firm partners and other lawyers (Dinovitzer et al. 2014).

These changes in the legal profession have further hindered the integration of minority members, increasingly subjecting them to treatment as a ‘disposable resource’ (Sommerlad 2016). Women and ethnic and sexual minorities continue to face barriers to their career choices and career progress (Choroszewicz and Kay 2022). Behavioural scripts, values and attributes, as well as work and career patterns, have been re-capitalised in the promotion of male lawyers’ legal careers (Choroszewicz 2020a). Organisational practices that determine compensation and promotion continue to hinder the advancement of women, who also suffer from a lack of transparency about key performance metrics and reward structures (Sterling and Reichman 2016; Choroszewicz and Kay 2022). Women are specifically discriminated against when they are unable to conform to male working patterns and career models (Boni-Le Goff et al. 2019; Pickert 2019; CH 4). Thus, women who stay in the profession develop alternative ways of working or create enclaves in which their work and expertise can be better recognised (Biese and Choroszewicz 2018; Kay 2019).

In the face of the ongoing transformation of the legal profession, it is important to comprehend how historically disadvantaged members of the profession –specifically women lawyers– navigate different forms of professionalism in their everyday work to circumvent obstacles and barriers to their professional autonomy. I have therefore examined the strategies through which women lawyers mobilise particular resources that relate to ‘third logic’ professionalism and ‘organisational’ professionalism to exercise control over their work and the professional market.

### **3. Data and Methods**

Women lawyers from private law practices in Finland, French Canada and Poland provide an interesting case study for investigating the ways in which contemporary lawyers attempt to attain and maintain control over their work. The data sets used for the analysis originated from two separate projects on lawyers. The first project was conducted in 2009–2014 and focused on the careers of female lawyers in Finland and Poland. The second project was conducted in 2016–2018 and focused on how lawyers reconciled their legal careers and family life in Finland and French Canada. In total, 76 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 34 male and 42 female lawyers from the largest cities in Finland, Poland and French Canada (Helsinki, Warsaw and Montreal).

All women interviewees were middle-class, highly-educated professionals between the ages of 30 to 81. The majority of interviewees (65%) were either married or cohabiting. At the time of the interviews,

sixteen interviewees worked in solo practices, 10 in small law firms, and 14 in medium-sized or large law firms, while two interviewees had left private law practice to work as legal academics.

The scope of thematic data analysis for this chapter is based on the interviews with the women lawyers, since they are more likely to face barriers in pursuing their legal careers (for more, see e.g. Kay et al. 2013; 2016; Sommerlad 2016; Choroszewicz and Kay 2022). The focus of thematic data analysis was on the micro-dynamics of women lawyers' work practices and strategies as recounted by interviewees, using an inductive approach. The data analysis proceeded in three stages and was guided by the following research question: how do women lawyers across three civil law countries cope with the constraints regarding their control over the organisation of their work and the professional market? The first analytical stage identified interview passages relevant to the research question. The second stage involved reading and organising these passages into different strategies related to the interviewees' decisions concerning their work organisation, workplace and encounters with clients. In the third stage, the empirical material was reread in light of 'third logic' and 'organisational' professionalism and the masculine character of professional projects. During this stage, five strategies were identified and examined for differences and similarities related to professional systems, structures and cultures.

#### **4. Results: Women lawyers' strategies**

The results yielded insights into five strategies through which women lawyers exercise control over their everyday work practices and the professional market: (1) highlighting the status of the profession, their additional educational qualifications and the title of law firm partner, (2) highlighting altruistic aspects of legal work, (3) the 'typing' of clients and cases, (4) personalising relationships with clients, and (5) establishing joint law offices with friends and sharing office space. Each of these strategies is discussed below.

##### *4.1 Highlighting the status of the profession, additional educational qualifications and the title of law firm partner*

Women lawyers in all three countries appeared to specifically mobilise different aspects central to the 'third logic' of professionalism (Freidson 1986; 2001), including high social status, legal knowledge, educational credentials and job titles, in order to acquire more credibility and authority as lawyers in encounters with powerful clients. This pattern was characteristic of those interviewees who worked in originally male-dominated legal specialties, such as criminal and corporate law.

For example, Finnish and Polish interviewees referred to the internal hierarchy within legal professions, in which obtaining the title of attorney-at-law is considered a status symbol in itself because it involves additional credentials and bar membership.

*I have always perceived the profession of attorney as more prestigious (...) although I also knew that it is difficult to obtain admission to an attorney apprenticeship. [Polish, 40, partner in a large law firm].*

*But I think it is a great profession, it is an old profession, and to me the title 'attorney' means a lot and I am proud that I am not just a lawyer but an attorney because that brings some history and a kind of professional pride in what you do and it kind of also gives you expectations that you have to follow certain rules of behaviour that society expects of you. [Finnish, 34, senior associate in a medium-sized law firm].*

In addition, Polish solo practitioners argued that additional educational qualifications, such as doctoral degrees, can be a powerful resource, especially for women lawyers who work as solo practitioners:

*Undoubtedly for a woman attorney, this title of Doctor of Law will help me to gain people's trust, especially in my legal specialisation, as I exclusively work with criminal law. So it will mean I do not need to spend two hours convincing my clients*

*that I know something, but they will see that I have this title of Doctor of Law, so it will speak for itself, I think.* [Polish, 34, solo practitioner]

In Canada, it was argued that the title of ‘partner’ in a law firm improved women’s career opportunities by giving them more credibility in the eyes of clients even though they acted as non-equity partners:

*It gives you... more status in front of clients. From the outside, they assume that if this big firm is willing to make you a partner, I am in good hands. (...) That helps you in terms of credibility to be able to develop business as well. (...) that when you are working at a big firm, being a partner, it gives you a stamp of approval from a client’s perspective.* [Canadian, 53, partner in a large law firm]

#### 4.2 Highlighting altruistic aspects of legal work

A commitment to public service is an important feature of professional work (Freidson 1986). Lawyers fulfil this commitment by providing legal services to poor and/or disadvantaged members of society or to non-profit organisations. This commitment can be undertaken through state-sponsored legal aid and pro bono – i.e. free of charge – work (see, e.g. Choroszewicz 2020b). Pro bono legal services can be provided by lawyers individually or through their law firms. This form of public service is also increasingly endorsed and remunerated by law firms (Kay and Granfield 2022).

For women lawyers, pro bono work emerged as a source of control over their decisions about what types of legal cases to accept, and generated a feeling that they were doing meaningful work. Specifically, women lawyers from larger law firms across the three countries argued that pro bono work provided them with a sense of doing socially valuable work, which they did not necessarily feel when serving corporate clients.

*Actually, I started to do a little of it [pro bono] because I think now, at this point, I can even afford to do it (...) It makes you feel good, it gives you a good conscience in a different way than just finalising a new transaction.* [Finnish, 42, associate in a large law firm]

Furthermore, Polish solo practitioners admitted that pro bono work provided them with new career prospects and strengthened their reputations, especially when they handled publicly important cases. This is particularly salient in Poland, where attorneys are not allowed to promote their legal services by distributing business cards or taking out advertisements. Some of the Polish interviewees stated that they had already begun to give free legal counselling when they were at law school with the expectation of acquiring practical legal skills and accessing networks of potential clients. For instance, one interviewee argued:

*But once, at my department, I learned that an association needed volunteers to help accident victims. I got there like that (...) I worked there as a volunteer and, at some point, we established a civil-law partnership outside that association. (...) I can’t deny that I counted on the fact that some of the people I would meet there would later come back to me as my clients in this office.* [Polish, 35, solo practitioner]

While state funding in all three countries gives support to their legal aid systems, Finnish and French Canadian lawyers have no obligation to work on legal aid cases (Choroszewicz 2020b; Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020). Thus, the Polish interviewees appeared to be more critical of pro bono work because mandatory legal aid cases are imposed on attorneys in Poland. Furthermore, legal aid cases are more financially rewarding in Finland and French Canada, and thus appeared to be favoured by those Finnish and French Canadian interviewees who worked as solo practitioners, for whom legal aid cases guaranteed a stable income. However, more professionally established women lawyers in all three countries tended to avoid these cases, instead opting for pro bono work remunerated by their law firms.

#### 4.3 The ‘typing’ of clients and cases

Commercial pressures and the need to resolve them while remaining loyal to professional values were mentioned by interviewees from all three countries. These pressures were specifically related to clients' wishes or demands for more customised, personalised and tailored legal services, which appeared to challenge the lawyers' autonomy in fulfilling their professional roles (Foulconbridge and Muzio 2008; Wallace and Kay 2008; Dinovitzer et al. 2014). This issue appeared to be particularly important in legal specialties and law firms that dealt with wealthy and prestigious clients, with whom it was also important to retain long-lasting lawyer-client relationships (Heinz et al. 2005).

Some of the women interviewed appeared to cope with commercial pressures through the so-called 'typing' of clients and cases. This strategy encompassed the lawyers' autonomy to use their market power to select their clients. This strategy appeared to be more popular with well-established solo practitioners and lawyers working in small law firms in all three countries than with lawyers in larger law firms. The women lawyers who chose this strategy argued that in the course of their careers they have learned to recognise and avoid clients and cases that might generate more problems than benefits. These interviewees tended to have more authority in their lawyer-client relationships, as they dealt with fewer powerful and predominantly individual clients. For instance, one interviewee recommended avoiding nervous and anxious clients, walks-ins and self-represented clients:

*Most walks-ins are not great cases. They don't really have a legal problem or they've waited too long to do anything about it (...) at the beginning I needed to take all cases. I could not say to a client that 'No, I don't want your case, I don't like you, I don't like your personality'. Now I don't mind saying that. Now when I talk to them and I don't get the feeling that I can trust them, I don't take the case and I refer them to someone else. I just kind of flush out everybody that I don't like. [Canadian, 34, solo practitioner]*

*We don't need to take all the cases, so I have the courage to refuse a case when I see there might be some problems [...] I try to avoid difficulties with clients beforehand. [Finnish, 46, small law office]*

Another tactic that fell under the typing of clients and cases were price variations. Specifically, the Polish and French Canadian interviewees argued for the use of price variations to target their services to a certain type of client. This, however, was possible only for women lawyers who were already professionally well-established and so had the luxury of carefully selecting the recipients of their legal services. For example, some of them established extremely high fees for their services in order to exclude groups of clients they wanted to avoid and who would be unable to afford them. As one interviewee admitted:

*One of the reasons I started to increase my hourly rate is because I do not want to work so hard anymore. So I figured if I increase my rate, I will have less people and maybe avoid the problematic clients. [Canadian, 62, owner of a small law office]*

#### *4.4 Personalising relationships with clients*

Commercial pressures have made it necessary for lawyers to engage in boundary work between rainmaking, client services, quality assurance, managing teams of lawyers and complying with the expectation of 24/7 availability (Dinovitzer et al. 2014; Sterling and Reichman 2016). The latest technological advances have contributed to an emphasis on good-quality client services, such as promptly responding to clients' emails and calls as well as making oneself almost constantly available to answer clients' inquiries (Choroszewicz and Kay 2020). Furthermore, as lawyers' professional roles are no longer predominantly only to respond to clients' needs but now also include the creation of the need for legal services, lawyers are expected to be increasingly flexible and fluent in so-called 'soft skills' (Choroszewicz 2020a).

Some of the women interviewed coped with the commercial pressures caused by increasingly demanding lawyer-client relationships by establishing meaningful and trusted connections with their clients, which provided them with more control to decide on the frequency and conditions for communicating with them. They argued that good personal relationships with clients helped to make clients more understanding concerning the commercial expectation of 24/7 availability. This was especially possible for women lawyers from solo practices and small law firms in French Canada and Poland who had more leeway not to give their private phone numbers to clients, but instead instructed them to contact them via email. Others argued that it was sometimes enough to provide some of their clients with opportunities to contact them whenever they wanted so that they felt important. For example, one interviewee argued:

*All clients would want that [to be able to reach their attorneys in the evenings] and you need to let some do that [...] Some [clients] like, for some reason, to contact us in the evenings, so as I said, you need to let some of them do that and you should not let others do it. [Polish, 34, owner of a small law office]*

By contrast, in larger law firms, the commercial pressure to be constantly available appeared to be stronger, and thus the interviewees from all three countries argued that they felt obliged to communicate with clients even on weekends and during their holidays. Yet, maintaining good relationships with clients allowed them to better evaluate whether or not they needed to react immediately to clients' requests:

*My clients know that I am available for real emergencies. Normally, I can easily recognise if it is a real or fake emergency. If it is real, I get it done even if it is the weekend. Otherwise I just try to tell them that I will send them a reply that 'Okay, I will look over your file by Wednesday morning or something like that'. Usually this works. [Canadian, 42, senior associate in a medium-sized law firm]*

#### *4.5 Establishing joint law offices with friends and sharing office space*

Women lawyers have been put at a great disadvantage by the male networking and socialising patterns prevalent in law firms (Leiper 2006; Kay and Gorman 2008). Thus, in countries like Poland and Canada, women lawyers are more likely to work in small law firms or as solo practitioners. This is in contrast to Finnish women lawyers, most of whom, in this study, were employed in larger law firms (Choroszewicz 2014; Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020).

The results indicated that the Finnish, Polish and French Canadian women solo practitioners, aiming for a more pleasant and collaborative working environment and lower expenses for their solo practices, established joint law offices or shared office space with trusted female friends or colleagues. They also often shared secretarial staff. These interviewees also established their own forms of collaboration and work organisation. In this way, they remained independent practitioners but, if they needed to consult others on particular legal cases, they had trusted female colleagues nearby whose advice they could seek.

*Here, we work together in a co-working space, but each of us has our own solo practice. At the moment, we are three women here (...) We are a really well-matched team. We often meet just to have a chat. We also have common projects. Recently, as a co-working space, we issued a legal guidebook together (...) We have many meetings just like that in order to be together and invite other people, to keep in contact with other people, judges and prosecutors in order to keep these relations friendly, because these are often also people from university. It kind of helps [to keep in contact with them]. [Polish, 35, solo practitioner]*

The women lawyers argued that these shared office spaces or joint law practices afforded them more opportunities for assistance in case they fell ill or when trials were re-scheduled at short notice and they needed help with trial preparation or substitution. Furthermore, sharing office space or running a joint law practice appeared to also help expand their pool of clients and grow professionally, since these women

lawyers learned from one other and referred clients to each other when their cases did not match their own legal expertise or there was some kind of conflict of interest.

*I find sharing an office very useful for planning together, bouncing some ideas off each other, and then doing it and debriefing after. I have noticed that I have improved as a lawyer so much faster because of sharing an office. [Canadian, 37, solo practitioner]*

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study identifies five strategies through which Finnish, French Canadian and Polish women lawyers strove to act as resourceful agents to exercise professional autonomy by mobilising different logics of professionalism over their everyday work practices and the professional market. Their strategies are as follows: (1) highlighting the status of the profession, additional educational qualifications and the title of law firm partner, (2) highlighting altruistic aspects of legal work, (3) the typing of clients and cases, (4) personalising relationships with clients, and (5) establishing joint law offices and sharing office space with other women lawyers. These results contribute to the **‘between’** dimension of professionalism (Bellini and Maestripieri 2018; CH 1) by advancing our understanding of how women lawyers’ strategies are embedded not only in the increasingly business-like and hyper-competitive market of legal services but also in the differential professional systems, structures and cultures of the legal profession across these three civil law systems.

The first two strategies draw on the mobilisation of core elements of ‘third logic’ professionalism (Freidson 1986; 2001), which include legal knowledge and educational qualifications, the high social status of the legal profession, the title of law firm partner and the lawyers’ commitment to public service. Educational qualifications and titles appear to be particularly effective for solo practitioners and lawyers of small law firms (see also, e.g. Schultz 2003, p. xlv). In larger law firms, lawyers’ control over their work and careers is related more to job titles and being business-like (see, e.g. Collier 2015; Sterling and Reichman 2016). Regarding the strategy of highlighting altruistic aspects of legal work, Finnish and French Canadian women lawyers are more positive about the altruistic character of legal work because, in contrast to Poland, legal aid cases in these two countries are taken up by lawyers voluntarily. Furthermore, for some interviewees in all three countries, pro bono work serves as a strategy to accrue professionally critical resources at the early stages of their careers (see also Dinovitzer and Garth 2009). For experienced interviewees from larger law firms, pro bono work serves as a way to reconcile the traditional principle of public service with the commercial pressure of generating profits for their firms (see also Wallace and Kay 2008).

The third strategy (picking and choosing clients) is related to the commercial pressures of ‘organisational’ professionalism (Evetts 2006; 2011), and is intended to help women lawyers cope with their clients’ influence over their ability to act as autonomous professionals and fulfil their professional roles. Through this strategy, women lawyers seek to gain more authority in their encounters with clients and over the legal cases on which they chose to work. The results show that the experienced solo practitioners and lawyers from small law firms in all three countries appear to have more autonomy in choosing clients and cases compared to the lawyers from larger law firms. This capability is especially important in French Canada and Poland, where clients can represent themselves in simpler civil cases and are therefore not accustomed to consulting lawyers unless they are obliged to do so (Dinovitzer and Dawe 2020; Gadowska 2020). Self-representation and lack of being accustomed to consult lawyers appear to be particularly problematic for the French Canadian and Polish interviewees who, due to discriminatory professional structures and cultures, choose to work in small law offices and in solo practices more often than their Finnish colleagues.

The strategy of personalising relationships with clients appears to also be beneficial for women lawyers in larger law firms, especially in Poland and Canada, with regard to gaining more understanding concerning clients’ expectations of round the clock availability. In Finland, these expectations appear to be lower due



to, among other factors, the popularity of flexible work arrangements and less pressure regarding face time at the office.

The joint law office and shared space strategy in particular points to women lawyers establishing their own patterns of networking and socialising, which can help them overcome the professional disadvantage of a masculine professional culture and structure. Networking and socialising are popular especially among women lawyers in Canada and Poland, where the professional landscape of the legal profession is dominated by small law offices and solo practices. Thus, in these countries, women lawyers create gender enclaves, such as small all-women law offices specialising in family law, to gain greater control over their working conditions.

The last two strategies also relate to valuing connectedness – an attribute that has been culturally associated with femininity in contrast to authority, which is regarded as a culturally masculine attribute (Davies 1996). These strategies highlight mutual support and collaboration among women as central to the successful performance of legal work and as an alternative to male networking and socialising patterns.

This study demonstrates that even though Finnish, French Canadian and Polish women lawyers operate in the global economy, which exposes them to market-oriented competition over client services and business development, differences in professional systems, structures and cultures impact their strategies for circumventing barriers and obstacles to their professional autonomy. Future research should examine the strategies male lawyers use to defend their professional autonomy and, more specifically, whether the strategies identified in the present study are also relevant for them. Finally, further studies could compare professionals' strategies across a number of professions and their impact on the professionals' collective claims to professional autonomy.

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