
Lawyer Satisfaction in the Process of Structuring Legal Careers

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This article proposes a new approach to the study of job satisfaction in the legal profession. Drawing on a Bourdieusian understanding of the relationship between social class and dispositions, we argue that job satisfaction depends in part on social origins and the credentials related to these origins, with social hierarchies helping to define the expectations and possibilities that produce professional careers. Through this lens, job satisfaction is understood as a *mechanism* through which social and professional hierarchies are produced and reproduced. Relying on the first national data set on lawyer careers (including both survey data and in-depth interviews), we find that lawyers' social background, as reflected in the ranking of their law school, decreases career satisfaction and increases the odds of a job search for the most successful new lawyers. When combined with the interview data, we find that social class is an important component of a stratification system that tends to lead individuals into hierarchically arranged positions.

The published literature on lawyer satisfaction tends to take one of two forms. One comes from those seeking to make the profession, and especially corporate law firms, more open and humane. This literature paints a “gloomy” (Rhode 2000) picture of a profession in “crisis” (Kronman 1993), relying on data on depression and alcohol use in the profession, or on more general measures of career dissatisfaction (e.g., Glendon 1994; Schiltz 1999; Rhode 2000). Much of this work highlights the lack of equal opportunity within the bar, focusing on the relative dissatisfaction of women and lawyers of color (e.g., Rhode 2000). These findings

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are often picked up on, repackaged, and transmitted by the popular press—with media headlines often reflecting data from bar surveys or polls with relatively low response rates, tending to overrepresent the more dissatisfied population of lawyers (Dolan 1995:A1; Muir 1995:16). The overall picture is one of a profession not doing enough to respond to perceived dissatisfaction.

By contrast, a second literature, typically stemming from more systematic social science, tends to minimize the problem of lawyer dissatisfaction. This empirical research often finds that lawyers are relatively satisfied across a range of measures (Hirsch 1985; Taber et al. 1988; Tucker et al. 1989; Gellis 1991; Heinz et al. 2005) and that this finding is fairly stable across gender (Chambers 1989; Hagan & Kay 1995) and race (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya 1999). These reports of relative satisfaction, however, need to be contextualized by the more general finding that most people, across most occupations, tend to report that they are “satisfied” with what they do (e.g., Firebaugh & Harley 1995).

Underlying both strands of work on satisfaction is the implicit assumption that differences in satisfaction are symptoms of discrimination or inequality within the profession. This assumption is not surprising. Decades of work on the legal profession have confirmed that there are hierarchies in the profession that every lawyer knows. Access to the most prestigious positions has not been attained by women and minorities in proportion to their representation in the lawyer population (see, e.g., Carson 2004; NALP 2004). At the same time, however, this inequality is not consistently reflected in measures of job satisfaction—and it is this disjuncture of expressions of job satisfaction within structures of inequality that calls for a new approach to understanding lawyer satisfaction. We therefore seek in this article to steer the literature on job satisfaction in the legal profession away from models that evaluate the internal interest of lawyers’ work or explain differences in satisfaction based solely on the obstacles or rewards that lawyers enjoy within the profession.

Rather than assuming lawyer satisfaction to be a persistent problem, no problem at all, or simply one of discrimination, this article argues that job satisfaction should be understood as both a manifestation of and a factor in a stratification system that tends to lead individuals into hierarchically arranged positions. We argue that job satisfaction depends in part on social origins and the credentials related to these origins, with social hierarchies helping to define the expectations and possibilities that produce professional careers. As Bourdieu (1996) demonstrated in his work on *The State Nobility* in France, for example, class positions not only explain which schools students will attend, but these social origins also determine how well students will fit with the mission of particular

schools. Indeed, Bourdieu's work has clearly demonstrated the ways in which individuals' dispositions across a range of fields—from their taste for film, food, music, or art (Bourdieu 1987, 1993) to their career aspirations (Bourdieu 1998)—both reflect and legitimate social differentiation. A Bourdieusian approach thereby emphasizes that social stratification is not merely externally produced, but that individuals, through their habitus—the set of practices and dispositions acquired through the repetition of living life—internalize what they can reasonably expect in life and, more important, what they cannot (Calhoun 2003). And in this way, it is often *their* choices and expectations that reproduce patterns of stratification, so long as we recall that the “dispositions that incline them toward this complicity are themselves the effect, embodied, of domination” (Bourdieu 1998:4).

This connection between social origins, hierarchical structures, and dispositions is further supported by empirical research in the sociology of work, with studies finding that “job values”—what individuals expect and seek to obtain from their jobs—are themselves shaped by social origins, rather than inculcated through particular job settings (McClelland 1990; Jacobs et al. 1991; Johnson 2001, 2002; Halaby 2003). Similarly, expressions of job satisfaction are intimately linked to career expectations and aspirations. As Seron (1996) found in her study of solo and small-firm lawyers, many of these attorneys were from less-advantaged social backgrounds and came to the profession with hopes for jobs that would provide them with independence and autonomy—and they did not desire positions in large firms (1996:12).

Taken together, this work leads us to inquire whether comparatively lower career expectations—particularly for those for whom joining the profession is itself a ticket to a bourgeois professional status—can keep large numbers of lawyers satisfied, despite positions offering relatively few possibilities to move into elite legal or other careers. Others, who expect naturally to be given a position within the elite, may grumble about their work because it does not comport with their image of where they belong or because they know already that they are passing through to something higher—perhaps in business or the state. And still others, in between these poles, may express dissatisfaction with relatively elite opportunities less because of an expectation of something more elite, and more because they feel they are not welcome in a particular setting. They may translate their dissatisfaction into a need to leave their jobs or possibly even the profession, with likely downward effects on their professional trajectories.

In this article, we therefore conceive of job satisfaction as a *mechanism* through which social and professional hierarchies are

produced and reproduced, and we argue that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are part of a process that links particular people to particular careers—supplying, stratifying, and legitimating the legal profession with its various hierarchies. Relative satisfaction is produced out of the chemistry of people and their backgrounds, expectations, and career possibilities. The process can only be understood by looking at who goes to which law school, what they expect, what they get from practice, and how they view their future. Job satisfaction, in this way, is a mechanism (Stinchcombe 2005:178–80) that connects earlier social backgrounds with the maintenance of professional hierarchies.

This article builds our argument along five sections. We begin with a discussion of the design and methodology of the larger project on which this article is based. The second section provides a review of the literature on lawyer satisfaction. In the third section, we begin the analysis by drawing out the contours of the satisfaction data, and in the fourth section, we combine satisfaction data with variables that are not often linked to satisfaction, such as law school attended, grades, and social background. The fifth section seeks to distill the analysis by drawing on in-depth interviews to construct models of lawyer careers that flesh out the relationships between lawyer satisfaction, social and academic background, and particular practice settings. This analysis brings into relief the processes of constructing satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and it also reveals some of the challenges faced by the legal profession today, which the conclusion then addresses.

Data and Methods—The *After the JD* Study

This article relies on the first wave of data from the *After the JD* (AJD) study, a national longitudinal survey of law graduates designed to follow a sample of slightly more than 10 percent of all the individuals who became lawyers in 2000 (Dinovitzer et al. 2004). The study is based on a sample representative of the national population of lawyers who were admitted to the bar in 2000, and was designed by using a two-stage sampling process. In the first stage, the nation was divided into 18 strata by region and size of the new lawyer population. Within each stratum, one primary sampling unit (PSU)—metropolitan area, portion of a state outside large metropolitan areas, or entire state—was chosen. The PSUs included all four “major” markets, those with more than 2,000 new lawyers (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC); five of the nine “large” markets, those with between 750 and 2,000 new lawyers (Boston, Atlanta, Houston, Minneapolis, and San Francisco); and nine of the remaining, smaller markets (Connecticut, the

remainder of New Jersey, the remainder of Florida, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Indiana, St. Louis, Utah, and Oregon). In the second stage, individuals were sampled from each of the PSUs at rates that would, combined, generalize to the national population. In addition, the study included an oversample of 1,465 new lawyers from minority groups (black, Hispanic, and Asian American).¹ The final sample included 9,192 lawyers in the 18 PSUs.

Data collection was based on a mail questionnaire that included sections on the respondent's job history and search process; the nature of the respondent's current job, including its content, the work environment, and the respondent's satisfaction with it; the respondent's law school history; and a variety of background and contextual information. Following the initial mailing of surveys in May 2002, nonrespondents were followed up by mail and telephone (with the telephone survey using a somewhat abridged version of the mail questionnaire). Approximately 100 in-depth-face to face interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents.

About 20 percent of the individuals in the sample could not be located, and roughly 20 percent of those located proved to be lawyers moving from one state bar to another rather than lawyers entering a bar for the first time. These "movers" were included in the sample so long as they had graduated from law school no earlier than 1998. (Consequently, about 6 percent of the AJD sample began law practice in 1999, and 1.5 percent began practice in 1998.) Of the original sample members who were located and who met the criteria for inclusion in the study, 71 percent responded to either the mail questionnaire or a telephone interview, for a total of 4,538 valid responses. The analyses in this article rely on data from the national sample only (i.e., the minority oversample is not included), comprising 3,950 respondents.²

Comparisons with external data indicate that the AJD sample is representative of the general population from which the sample was selected. When comparing the sample with young lawyers in the 2000 U.S. Census, we find that the racial composition of the sample is almost identical (US Census Bureau 2002, 5% Public Use Microdata Sample Census 2000, all lawyers and judges, ages

¹ The sample also included respondents who self-identified as Native Americans. However, the number of respondents in this category was too small for the analyses in this article.

² Based on the standard definitions provided by the American Association for Public Opinion Research, the response rates for the AJD study range from 53–55%, due to the unlocated sample members. The analyses in this article rely on unweighted data, so the bivariate results should be interpreted with some caution. In separate analyses, all bivariate tables were also run using version 1.0 of the AJD weights (on file with authors), with the results varying only marginally and our essential findings remaining very similar.

27–32). To the extent that practice settings can be inferred from census data, the sample also closely approximates the distribution of lawyers across firms, government, and business employers (US Census Bureau 2002, 5% Public Use Microdata Sample Census 2000, all lawyers and judges; Carson 2004). Finally, the gender distribution in the sample closely matches data published by the American Bar Association (ABA; American Bar Association 2005).

Satisfaction Debates

Academic research on the legal profession finds generally high levels of satisfaction. In one of the original studies of lawyers' job satisfaction, Hirsch (1985) reported on a random probability survey of lawyers in the United States finding that overall levels of reported satisfaction were high (68 percent of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with their current job). Similar results have been found from research surveying lawyers across the country (Hirsch 1985, Tucker et al. 1989; Chambers 1989) and in particular cities or regions (Taber et al. 1988; Gellis 1991; Adams 1994; Hagan & Kay 1995; Lempert et al. 2000; Heinz et al. 2005; Boon et al. 2001). Yet the popular press, along with some academic work, continues to proclaim that law is a dissatisfying career (e.g., Tazian 2005; Pedone 2004; Ranalli 2003; "Lawyers Express Dissatisfaction with Stress Levels and Long Working Hours, Survey Shows," *National Post*, 6 April, p. C7; Eviatar 2000).

Sorting out this divergence—and in particular, determining *who* is satisfied and who is not—has become the key source of debate in this area. Faced with a generally satisfied set of lawyers in their sample, the most recent study by the Chicago bar asks if "Chicago lawyers are special" (Heinz et al. 2005:257). Most research similarly tries to parcel out satisfaction by asking whether certain groups within the bar—in particular, women and minority lawyers—are where one finds dissatisfaction within the profession. Here too, however, researchers have been stymied: women (Taber et al. 1988; Chambers 1989; Tucker et al. 1989; Gellis 1991; Hagan & Kay 1995; Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya 1999; Lempert et al. 2000:486, Table 33; Reichman & Sterling 2004; Heinz et al. 2005; Boon et al. 2001) and minority lawyers (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya 1999; Lempert et al. 2000; Heinz et al. 2005) continue to report high rates of overall job satisfaction, even if they are less satisfied with certain aspects of their workplace or certain elements of lawyering. Since women and minority lawyers do not, in fact, enjoy the success of white male lawyers (e.g., Hagan & Kay 1995; Wilkins 1999; Chambliss 2000), this has led to a "paradox" of satisfaction (Hull 1999) that researchers continue to investigate.

Analyses of data on Chicago lawyers collected through nearly 800 personal interviews have made an important contribution to this literature (Heinz et al. 2005). Based on these data, Hull (1999) distilled two major components of job satisfaction: context satisfaction, which comprises measures that relate to lawyers' workplace, such as satisfaction with salary and opportunities for advancement; and content satisfaction, which includes the content of work, control over the amount of work, and level of responsibility. Hull found that there are in fact different predictors for different types of satisfaction—for example, money and prestige of practice area increase context satisfaction, while working in a larger organization decreases content satisfaction—calling attention to the need to incorporate more sophisticated approaches to the study of job satisfaction (Hull 1999:694; see also Heinz et al. 2005).

Research has also provided a number of additional insights into the relationship between job satisfaction and important structural features of legal practice, such as income and practice setting. The Chicago Lawyers survey found that income was a positive predictor of high satisfaction, but that lawyers practicing in large law firms were less likely to be highly satisfied than lawyers practicing elsewhere (Heinz et al. 2005). Similarly, Hagan and Kay (1995:170–2) found that lawyers who earn a higher income are more satisfied with their jobs, but that among private practitioners, there is no effect of firm size.³ Analyses of University of Michigan alumni data (Lempert et al. 2000) suggest that law graduates with jobs in government, legal services/public interest law, and education are significantly more satisfied than those working in private practice, despite their lower incomes. Other have found that even after controlling for a wide range of factors, private practice in large firm settings is the least satisfying type of practice, even though it is the most lucrative (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya 1999:362). The consensus from these studies is fairly strong: while higher incomes lead to greater satisfaction, those working in large private firms are relatively less satisfied with their jobs.

We can draw on a number of additional findings to better contextualize this strong relationship between income, setting, and satisfaction. Sandefur and Heinz (1999) found that satisfaction with income decreases as income inequality within a field increases (1999:14), and that satisfaction with chances for advancement tends to decrease as income inequality increases (1999:15). Other features of practice settings that have been found to increase sat-

³ Since the measure of practice settings only distinguished between those working in firms of 20 or more lawyers and those in smaller settings, it is worth noting that respondents with a large corporate practice were significantly less satisfied with their jobs; these lawyers may also be more likely to be working in larger firm settings.

isfaction include autonomy and decisionmaking (Hagan & Kay 1995; Heinz et al. 2005; Wallace 1995) and mentoring (Mobley et al. 1994).

While the majority of research has focused on expressions of satisfaction, a number of studies have relied on turnover and job changes as indicators of dissatisfaction—with researchers assuming that those who are unhappy change jobs, or intend to change jobs (see generally Kalleberg 1977). There is no doubt that the legal profession is characterized by high rates of job mobility, especially among new lawyers,⁴ and studies have found clear links between expressions of satisfaction and job mobility. A recent ABA (American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division 2000) survey reports that respondents' general job dissatisfaction and desire for greater financial rewards are the strongest reported motivations for leaving their current employer (see also NALP 2001). Kay's (1997) examination of exits from the practice of law concluded that job satisfaction is one of the keys to understanding the "causal forces and motivations that lead to job exits and lateral mobility in law" (1997:327). Furthermore, in a recent analysis of lawyers' intentions to leave their employer and the role of trust within law firms, Kay and Hagan (2003) argued that "intention to leave the firm can also be viewed as a more concrete, or even behavioral, measure of job satisfaction" (2003: 512). They found that satisfaction with both the intrinsic (e.g., intellectual challenge and enjoyment in legal work) and extrinsic (e.g., pay, workplace benefits) aspects of lawyers' work increases intentions to stay with the firm. And it is not surprising that much of the research on mobility, like the research on job satisfaction, focuses on issues of inequality, with studies finding higher rates of mobility among women (Kay 1997; Kay & Hagan 2003;⁵ Sommerlad & Sanderson 1998) and minorities (Heinz et al. 2005; Wilkins & Gulati 1996).

⁴ A recent report from NALP (2003) found that 8.4 percent of entry-level associates who graduated law school between 1998 and 2002) departed their firms within their first 16 months, with an even higher percentage (12.4 percent) leaving the large (but not largest) firms of 251–500 attorneys. Studies have documented an increase in these rates of mobility over the past few decades (Heinz et al. 2005; American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division 2000), with one study estimating that lawyers beginning their careers in small private firms experience one move every 7.7 years (Heinz et al. 2005) and another finding that within six years of graduating from law school, almost half of lawyers in private practice and almost two-thirds of those with government are no longer working for their first employer (American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division 2000).

⁵ Women are more likely to express an intent to leave the firm. For men, the intent to leave the firm is influenced by their satisfaction with firm promotion opportunities, pay, job security, and benefits, but for women, plans to leave the firm are more strongly influenced by lack of intrinsic rewards, including limited opportunities to demonstrate legal skill and to attain a sense of accomplishment through the practice of law.

Table 1. Means and Percentages for Measures of Job Satisfaction

Mean scores for detailed satisfaction items (scaled 1–7)	
Level of responsibility	5.6
Recognition for your work	4.9
Substantive area of work	5.3
Tasks you perform	5.1
Opportunities for advancement	4.7
Compensation	4.5
Control over amount of work	4.6
Control over how you work	5.4
Relationships with colleagues	5.7
Opportunities for pro bono	4.3
Intellectual challenge	5.4
Opportunities to build skills	5.3
Amount of travel	5.0
Diversity	4.4
Performance evaluation process	4.0
Value of work to society	4.7
Job security	5.2
Satisfaction with decision to become a lawyer	
Extremely satisfied	35%
Moderately satisfied	44%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8%
Moderately dissatisfied	11%
Extremely dissatisfied	2%
Length of time expecting to stay with employer	
already looking	13%
< 1 year	10%
1–2 years	21%
3–5 years	20%
5+ years	36%

Basic Contours of Satisfaction in the AJD Data

Consistent with prior research, reported levels of job satisfaction in the AJD study are high: when asked to rate their satisfaction with 16 specific dimensions of their jobs, respondents consistently rate themselves as more satisfied than dissatisfied (see Table 1). In particular, lawyers express higher levels of satisfaction with their relationships with colleagues, their level of responsibility, the control over how they work, and the intellectual challenge of their work (all rated 5.39 or higher on a scale of 1–7), with somewhat lower ratings given to their performance evaluation process, the diversity of their workplace, and their opportunities for pro bono work (all rated 4.4/7 or lower). More strikingly, respondents' satisfaction with their career choice is very high: fully 79% of respondents report that they are extremely or moderately satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. In contrast, however, when asked how long they plan to stay with their current employer, the data suggest a different pattern, with 44 percent of respondents expressing that they intend to be looking for a new job within two years—and almost one-quarter of these respondents express that they are already looking for a new position or plan to within one year.

Table 2. Law School Ranking and Measures of Social Stratification

	Father Occupational Prestige Score (ISEI) (mean) ^a	Father With Graduate Education ^b	Total N
Top 10	65.795 (16.525)	68%***	174
Top 11–20	63.677 (17.228)	54%***	253
Top 21–40	63.257 (17.506)	54%***	310
Top 41–100	60.272 (18.230)	42%	686
Tier 3	58.471 (17.617)	33%***	383
Tier 4	57.231 (18.298)	34%***	318

^aResults from One-Way Anova: $F = 13.099, p < 0.001$. Bonferroni post hoc tests reveal significant ($p < 0.05$ or better) contrasts between: Top 10 graduates and those from schools ranked 41 and below; Top 20 graduates and those from schools ranked 41 and below; Top 40 graduates and those from Tier 3 and 4; Top 100 graduates and those ranked in the top 10, top 20, and Tier 4; Tier 3 graduates and those from Top 10 through Top 40 schools; and Tier 4 graduate and all respondents except those from Tier 3.

^bSignificance tests are for selected law school tier compared to all others.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

These data present somewhat of a paradox: on the one hand, we find very high levels of reported satisfaction with the decision to become a lawyer, while on the other, we find fairly high levels of job mobility expectations, often taken as indicating lower levels of professional satisfaction (Kay & Hagan 2003). To get underneath this tension, we disaggregated these findings by the prestige of the law school attended by the respondents. As Bourdieu has argued (1977, 1998), schools are a key site through which students acquire their professional expectations—schools thereby play a critical role in the reproduction of social stratification, with students not merely acquiring the skills they require for professional life, but perhaps more trenchant, adapting to the dispositions necessary for the professional roles they are destined to take. This can be achieved because schools are themselves embedded in the reproduction of students' social origins: the prestige of the school that individuals attend is itself a function of their social class, so that in bestowing degrees and credentials, schools confirm and reaffirm students' anticipated status within the profession (Bourdieu 1998). Research on law schools—from Granfield's (1992) study *Making Elite Lawyers* to Stover's (1989) *Making It and Breaking It* and to Mertz's (forthcoming) work on the *Language of Law School*—indeed establishes that these are key sites in the development of students' expectations and aspirations.

Our measure of the law school hierarchy is derived from the rankings published in the *U.S. News and World Report* for 2003; each school in the AJD data set was assigned its corresponding *U.S. News* score and was then placed into one of six major groupings: the top 10, top 11–20, top 21–40, top 41–100, schools in the third tier, and schools in the fourth tier. Analyses reveal that these rankings

Table 3. Law School Ranking and Practice Settings

	Ranked 1–10	Ranked 11–20	Ranked 21–40	Ranked 41–100	Tier 3 (101 through 137)	Tier 4 (138 through 178)
Solo	0.0%***	2.5%	2.5%*	4.2%	6.4%**	7.8%***
Private firm 2–20	2.5%***	12.1%***	18.7%*	27.2%**	33.6%***	39.2%***
Private firm 21–100	6.3%	12.1%***	13.2%	14.5%	13.9%**	10.2%***
Private firm 101–250	12.9%***	13.3%***	10.1%***	7.0%***	5.1%***	3.0%***
Private firm 251+	53.3%***	37.7%***	28.4%*	13.6%***	8.3%***	4.0%***
Federal government	6.9%	4.5%	7.7%**	5.4%	2.9%*	2.7%*
State government	2.5%***	6.2%***	7.7%**	13.3%**	13.3%	16.9%***
Nongovernmental public	9.1%*	7.1%	4.9%	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%
Business	6.3%	4.7%**	7.0%	9.3%	11.0%*	10.8%*
Total N	317	406	514	1128	590	498

Note: Significance tests are for selected law school tier compared to all others.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

correlate well with the measures of lawyers' social background available in the AJD data. Table 2 indicates that students attending top 10 schools report fathers' occupational prestige scores that are significantly higher than those from the fourth-tier schools, with reports of fathers' occupational scores declining in a linear fashion along with law school tier. The data on fathers' educational attainment display a similar pattern: more than two-thirds of top 10 school graduates had fathers who had completed some graduate education, compared to one-third of fourth-tier graduates.⁶

The law school rankings also map directly onto the settings within which law graduates work, an indicator that the social hierarchies that led students into particular law schools will also continue to be reproduced in their professional careers. The data in Table 3 indicate that more than half of the graduates from top 10 schools work in the megafirms of more than 250 lawyers, compared to just 4 percent of fourth-tier graduates, who are instead working predominantly in small or solo practices. Even when they work in the public sector, graduates of elite schools are more likely to be working in the more prestigious federal government positions, while lower-tier graduates are more likely to work for state government.

Given these patterns, it is perhaps not surprising that measures of job satisfaction also track the hierarchy of law schools. While our initial examination of job satisfaction resulted in somewhat of a paradox, noting high levels of satisfaction at the same time as high job mobility intentions, examining these same measures by law school tier sheds considerable light on this disjuncture. The data in

⁶ We rely here on measures of father's occupational status, since about 10 percent of respondents reported that their mother did not work in the paid labor force. Father's occupational status is therefore a more reliable indicator of the respondents' socioeconomic background.

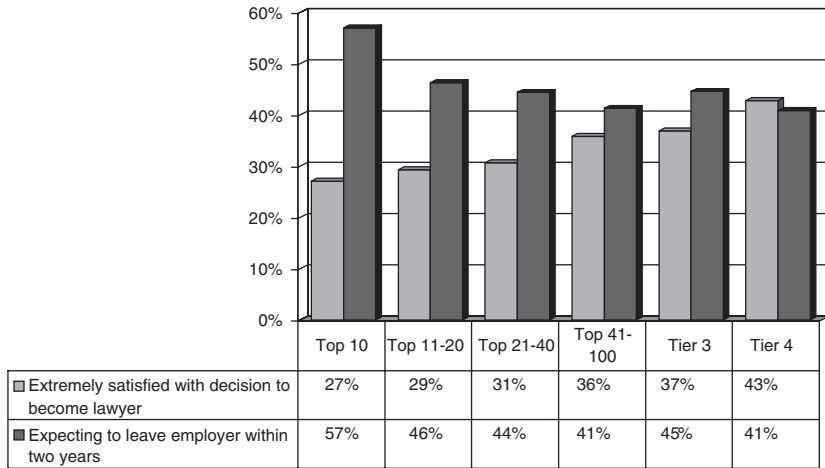


Figure 1. Measures of satisfaction by law school tier.

Figure 1 indicate that almost 60 percent of top 10 graduates expect to leave their positions within two years, while only 27 percent report that they are extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. However, substantially fewer (41 percent) of the fourth-tier graduates intend to leave their employer within two years, while substantially more (43 percent) of these graduates are extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. These patterns suggest that there is in fact a convergence, rather than a divergence, between expressions of career satisfaction and job mobility intentions: the most elite students are the least satisfied with their career choice and the most likely to be thinking of leaving their employer, while lower-tier graduates express high levels of career satisfaction and high levels of commitment to their employer.

It may be, however, that this relationship between law school tier and job satisfaction has more to do with the practice settings in which these lawyers work, rather than being a direct consequence of the law schools they attended. After all, the most elite students are the most likely to be working in large corporate law firms (see Table 3), so their lack of satisfaction may be the result of where they work, rather than the dispositions they acquired in law school. To investigate this possibility, we restricted the sample to those respondents working in firms of more than 100 lawyers. The data in Figure 2 confirm that even within these large law firms, the most elite graduates continue to express lower levels of career satisfaction than those from the fourth tier (26 percent of elites report extreme satisfaction, compared with almost half (49 percent) of those in the fourth tier). Similarly, we find that top 10 law school graduates are more likely to intend to leave their employer within

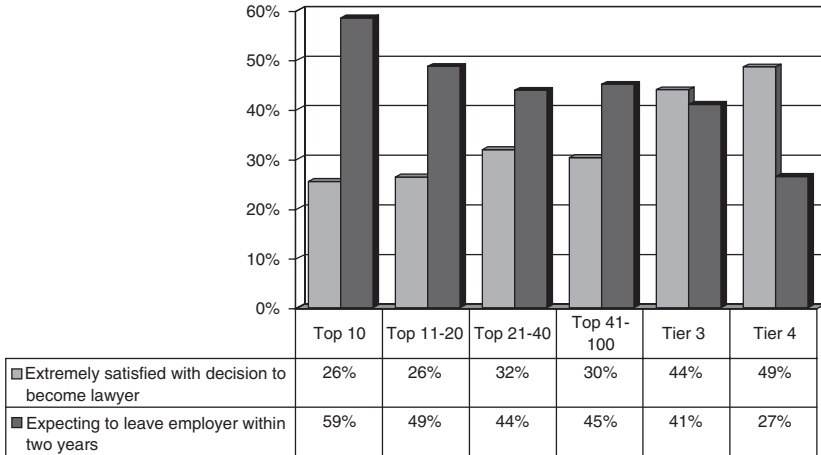


Figure 2. Measures of satisfaction by law school tier (subsample of large firm (> 100) lawyers).

two years, compared to their fourth-tier counterparts (59 versus 27 percent). These patterns suggest that the relatively lower satisfaction of elite graduates is not merely driven by their work settings, and that there is an independent relationship between law school tier and expressions of satisfaction that requires further investigation.

By incorporating patterns of social stratification into our analysis of satisfaction, we find that expressions of satisfaction map fairly clearly onto the hierarchy of law schools—and that attention to social hierarchies resolves the apparent tension between lawyers' career satisfaction and their mobility intentions. We find a pattern consistent with Bourdieu's (1998) model, in which schools not only play an important role in the transmission of social reproduction but are also important predictors of the dispositions and aspirations that shape new lawyers' careers. Below, we build on this approach by relying on multivariate analyses, which allow us to further explore the interplay between the social origins, values, and credentials of lawyers across various practice settings.

Satisfaction as Process: Mapping the Structure of the Legal Profession

Four Measures of Job Satisfaction

We begin by exploring the determinants of job satisfaction, which Hull (1999) has argued are best conceptualized as a

multivalent concept. Following this approach, we conducted a factor analysis of the 16 measures of job satisfaction reported in Table 1, which reduced the 16 measures of satisfaction into four factors; factors were extracted using principal component analysis and were then saved as standardized scores with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.⁷ The first factor represents “job setting satisfaction,” consolidating ratings of recognition received at work, relationships with colleagues, control over the work, and job security. The factor for “work substance satisfaction” reflects the intrinsic interest of the work, while the third factor, “social value satisfaction,” concerns the reported relationship between work and broader social issues (workplace diversity, opportunities for pro bono work, and the social value of the work). The fourth factor, “power track satisfaction,” comprises two items: satisfaction with compensation levels and satisfaction with opportunities for advancement. We then estimated four separate models of job satisfaction—one each for satisfaction with job setting, substance of work, the social index, and the power track.

Table 4 outlines the means and standard deviations for the variables used in all analyses.⁸ Just over half of the respondents are male and just over half are married, but fewer than one-third have children and only 16 percent are more than 36 years old. Eighty-three percent of respondents are white, with 38 percent living in major metropolitan areas (New York; Chicago; Washington, DC; Los Angeles; San Francisco; and Boston) and another 23 percent living in other metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Houston, Minneapolis, and St. Louis); each region was modeled as a dummy variable, with the excluded category representing those living in nonmetropolitan areas. To control for the effects of practice setting, we relied on a series of dummy variables; the measure of firm size relies on the total number of lawyers employed by the entire firm.⁹ The excluded category is small private firms (of two to 20 lawyers), which also accounts for the largest concentration of respondents (28 percent). The mid-sized firms of 21–100 account for 14 percent of respondents, 9 percent work in large firms (101–250 lawyers), and 25 percent work in the megafirms of 251+lawyers. We find a

⁷ Alpha scores based on the individual items result in the following scores: setting = 0.85, substance = 0.88, social index = 0.584, and power track = 0.62.

⁸ We discuss here the descriptive statistics based on the four ordinary least squares (OLS) models of satisfaction, though Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for all analyses. Please refer to Dinovitzer et al. (2004) for the distribution of respondents across these settings in the sample as a whole.

⁹ While the analyses reported here rely on the measure of firm size based on the number of lawyers employed in the entire firm, all analyses were also tested using the measure of firm size derived from the number of lawyers employed in the particular office in which respondents work. Generally, the results were almost identical; any substantively interesting differences are reported in footnotes that accompany the discussion of results.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics (for Each Multivariate Analysis)

	Four Models of Satisfaction		Career Satisfaction		Likelihood of Leaving Employer	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
Demographics and Background						
Male	0.570	0.495	0.546	0.498	0.570	0.495
Married	0.570	0.496	0.563	0.496	0.564	0.496
Has children	0.260	0.441	0.273	0.446	0.264	0.441
Over 36 years old	0.160	0.363	0.175	0.380	0.157	0.364
White	0.830	0.376	0.832	0.374	0.829	0.377
Father socioeconomic score (ISEI)	60.413	18.216	60.543	18.099	60.326	18.224
Family lawyers	0.201	0.401	0.202	0.401	0.200	0.400
Region						
Major metro (NY, LA, DC, Chicago, SF, Boston)	0.380	0.485	0.380	0.485	0.377	0.485
Other major metro area	0.230	0.420	0.216	0.412	0.226	0.419
Setting (excluded category is private firms 2–20)						
Solo	0.020	0.147	0.034	0.181	0.022	0.146
Private firm 21–100	0.140	0.349	0.125	0.331	0.142	0.350
Private firm 101–250	0.090	0.289	0.077	0.266	0.091	0.288
Private firm 251+	0.250	0.433	0.210	0.407	0.247	0.432
Federal government	0.033	0.179	0.049	0.217	0.032	0.176
State government	0.081	0.273	0.112	0.316	0.081	0.273
Nongovernmental public	0.040	0.203	0.062	0.241	0.043	0.203
Business	0.070	0.251	0.085	0.279	0.068	0.252
Prestige and Performance (excluded category for law schools is Tier 4)						
Law school GPA	3.296	0.344	3.279	0.348	3.294	0.344
Top 10	0.070	0.261	0.072	0.259	0.073	0.260
Top 11–20 law school	0.120	0.330	0.114	0.318	0.123	0.329
Top 21–40 law school	0.160	0.369	0.163	0.370	0.161	0.368
Top 41–100 law school	0.320	0.466	0.331	0.471	0.320	0.467
Tier 3	0.190	0.391	0.181	0.385	0.189	0.391
Salary (/1,000)	85.547	39.336	80.910	39.165	85.296	39.207
Percent zero debt	0.130	0.331	0.128	0.335	0.125	0.331
High debt (75th percentile)	0.251	0.434	0.247	0.432	0.251	0.434
Prior positions	0.300	0.458	0.321	0.467	0.302	0.459
Consulting or investment banking ^a	0.322	0.467	0.317	0.011	0.318	0.010
Networks with senior lawyers ^a	0.639	0.480	0.627	0.011	0.624	0.011
Satisfaction with job setting	–0.026	1.016	—	—	–0.025	1.017
Satisfaction with substance of work	0.011	0.999	—	—	0.008	1.001
Satisfaction with social index	–0.025	0.978	—	—	–0.028	0.982
Satisfaction with power track	0.001	0.993	—	—	–0.003	0.992
Likelihood of leaving employer	—	—	—	—	1.464	0.499
Career satisfaction	—	—	0.334	0.472	—	—
<i>n</i> of analysis	1485		1899		1467	

^aMeans and standard deviations are calculated by averaging across the five multiply imputed data sets.

smaller proportion of respondents working outside of private practice, with 8 percent working for state government, 3 percent for the federal law government, and 2 percent working in sole practice; less than 11 percent of respondents work in nongovernmental public settings and in business. Of course, the grouping of lawyers in private practice according to firm size conceals much variation within each of the work settings—for example, even among the megafirms of 251+lawyers there exists a hierarchy of firms according to profitability, associate-to-partner ratio, and whether

firms have a two-tier partnership track (e.g., of equity and non-equity lawyers) (see, e.g., Henderson 2006). While this article cannot address the full range of variation within each setting, the groupings employed in the analyses below reveal important cleavages in the hierarchy of lawyers working in private firms.

Our analysis included measures of respondents' social status, law school prestige, and law school performance. We included two measures of socioeconomic status. The first relies on the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) of occupational status scores (Ganzeboom & Treiman 1996), which ranges from 16 to 90. The second is a dummy variable indicating whether any of the respondents' immediate family members are lawyers. Tier of law school attended was also modeled as a series of dummy variables, with tier four as the reference category.¹⁰ Just under 10 percent of respondents attended a top 10 school, 12 percent a top 20 school, 16 percent graduated from a top 21–40 school, 32 percent from a 41–100 school, 19 percent from a third-tier school, and 14 percent from a tier-four school (categories according to *U.S. News & World Report*). We also included a measure of respondents' self-reported final law school GPA, which was originally measured on an eight-point ordinal scale, with 0.25 increments; the bottom category of the scale was classified as "under 2.25" and the top category as "3.75–4.0."¹¹ We assigned midpoints to each category to create a continuous GPA variable, and as indicated in Table 4, the mean GPA in the sample is 3.3. We also included a measure of respondents' salary¹² (mean = \$85,547), which is divided by one thousand so that results are discussed in thousands of dollars. Two measures of debt were included: first, a dummy variable to represent the 13 percent of respondents reporting zero debt; second, a dummy to represent respondents reporting a debt load that is in the top quartile of all respondents reporting any debt (i.e., above \$90,000). As a measure of respondents' prior job mobility, we included a dummy variable to represent those who have held at least one prior position (30 percent of respondents) compared to those whose current job is their first job after law school.

¹⁰ Following the suggestion of Herbert Kritzer, we also undertook a series of interactions to explore whether law school tier itself structures the very factors that affect job satisfaction and mobility intentions. The results of these analyses are described in Appendix B.

¹¹ All data in this analysis were reported on this scale (some respondents likely converted their GPAs from other scales into the format on the questionnaire). Less than 1 percent ($n = 28$) of respondents report that they did not receive grades; these cases were dropped from the analysis.

¹² Outliers with reported salaries of \$201,000 or higher ($n = 25$) were removed from the analysis.

Two additional variables were included to reflect respondents' career preferences and networking activities. As a measure of respondents' interactions within the firm, we included a dummy variable that equals 1 if respondents report that they join partners or senior attorneys for meals, or if they spend recreational time with partners or senior attorneys; 64 percent of respondents report these networking activities. In order to account for respondents' career preferences, we included a measure capturing whether they considered a business career in addition to, or instead of law; 32 percent of respondents report that they considered this option. Both variables derive from the subset of respondents who completed the mail questionnaire ($n = 2,266$); these data were not collected from the respondents to the telephone survey ($n = 1,627$). In order to reduce the potential bias resulting from the additional listwise deletion of cases, missing data were filled in for these two variables by relying on multiple imputation (Allison 2002; Little & Rubin 1987; Schafer 1997); we display the results of analyses relying on these variables as separate models in each of Tables 4–8 below.¹³

Focusing on the first model of each of the four OLS regression models in Table 5, we find a number of patterns that are consistent with prior research: men are more satisfied than women with their job setting ($b = 0.139$, $p < 0.01$) and the social index ($b = 0.172$, $p < 0.001$), but they are less satisfied than women with the substance of their work ($b = -0.165$; $p < 0.01$).¹⁴ Coming from a family where one's father works in a more prestigious occupation increases satisfaction with the substance of work ($b = 0.004$; $p < 0.05$), which suggests that one is more prepared for the work of lawyering if one's father is involved in more professional work. Almost across the board, we find that living in a metropolitan area decreases satisfaction (except for satisfaction with job setting) (b ranging from -0.176 to -0.249 in each model, $p < 0.05$ or better). It seems, then, that working life in large cities—with its higher cost of living and longer commutes—is in and of itself a more challenging experience, since this effect persists even after controlling for practice setting and hours worked.

The effects of practice settings are as follows: sole practitioners are more satisfied with their practice setting ($b = 0.365$, $p < 0.05$)

¹³ We relied on NORM (Schafer 1997) to create five multiply imputed data sets. Data were imputed by relying on other variables in the data set. All analyses were conducted on each imputed data set, and we then relied on NORM to combine the coefficients and standard errors for the five sets of results; it is these combined results that are reported in Tables 4–8.

¹⁴ While issues of race and gender are included as important dimensions in the analyses below, our discussion focuses on issues of social class and credentials since these aspects of job satisfaction have received less attention in prior research.

Table 5. Four OLS Models of Job Satisfaction (n = 1485)

	Satisfaction With Job Setting		Satisfaction With Job Substance		Satisfaction With Social Index		Satisfaction With Power Track	
	Model 1	Model 2 ^a	Model 1	Model 2 ^a	Model 1	Model 2 ^a	Model 1	Model 2 ^a
Demographics and Background								
Male	0.139 (0.052) ^{**}	0.141 (0.053) ^{**}	-0.165 (0.054) ^{**}	-0.157 (0.056) ^{**}	0.172 (0.051) ^{***}	0.164 (0.052) ^{**}	-0.030 (0.043)	-0.031 (0.044)
Married	0.044 (0.037)	0.035 (0.037)	0.052 (0.039)	0.043 (0.039)	0.018 (0.036)	0.015 (0.036)	0.012 (0.047)	0.010 (0.047)
Have at least one child	0.042 (0.067)	0.037 (0.067)	0.006 (0.068)	0.007 (0.069)	0.018 (0.065)	0.015 (0.065)	0.035 (0.055)	0.033 (0.055)
Over 36 years old	-0.107 (0.075)	-0.110 (0.074)	0.010 (0.077)	0.010 (0.076)	-0.025 (0.073)	-0.027 (0.073)	-0.159 (0.062) ^{**}	-0.160 (0.062) ^{**}
White	0.026 (0.070)	-0.007 (0.073)	0.111 (0.071)	0.078 (0.071)	0.063 (0.068)	0.056 (0.068)	0.068 (0.057)	0.059 (0.058)
Father SES score (ISEI)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002) [*]	0.004 (0.002) [*]	0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
Family lawyers	0.090 (0.070)	0.100 (0.071)	-0.123 (0.071)	-0.111 (0.074)	0.069 (0.068)	0.075 (0.068)	0.002 (0.057)	0.006 (0.058)
Region								
Major metro (NY, LA, DC, Chicago, SF, Boston)	0.032 (0.070)	0.041 (0.070)	-0.176 (0.071) [*]	-0.167 (0.072) [*]	-0.252 (0.068) ^{***}	-0.249 (0.068) ^{***}	-0.220 (0.057) ^{***}	-0.217 (0.058) ^{***}
Other major metro area	0.122 (0.069)	0.118 (0.069)	0.011 (0.071)	0.007 (0.072)	-0.022 (0.067)	-0.022 (0.067)	-0.031 (0.057)	-0.032 (0.057)
Setting (excluded category is Private firms 2-20)								
Solo	0.365 (0.176) [*]	0.384 (0.176) [*]	0.210 (0.180)	0.223 (0.179)	0.744 (0.171) ^{***}	0.749 (0.172) ^{***}	0.164 (0.145)	0.171 (0.145)
Private firm 21-100	-0.156 (0.088)	-0.142 (0.087)	-0.067 (0.090)	-0.052 (0.090)	-0.349 (0.085) ^{***}	-0.343 (0.085) ^{***}	0.112 (0.072)	0.117 (0.072)
Private firm 101-250	-0.620 (0.108) ^{***}	-0.561 (0.111) ^{***}	-0.134 (0.111)	-0.070 (0.113)	-0.202 (0.105)	-0.186 (0.106)	0.210 (0.089) [*]	0.229 (0.090) [*]
Private firm 251+	-0.569 (0.103) ^{***}	-0.524 (0.102) ^{***}	-0.132 (0.105)	-0.081 (0.107)	0.026 (0.100)	0.037 (0.100)	0.211 (0.084) [*]	0.225 (0.085) ^{**}
Federal government	0.044 (0.152)	0.079 (0.151)	0.153 (0.155)	0.189 (0.155)	0.355 (0.147) ^{***}	0.367 (0.148) ^{***}	-0.199 (0.125)	-0.187 (0.125)
State government	0.199 (0.102) [*]	0.239 (0.104) [*]	0.215 (0.105) [*]	0.253 (0.106) [*]	0.235 (0.100) ^{**}	0.249 (0.100) ^{**}	-0.611 (0.084) ^{***}	-0.598 (0.085) ^{***}
Nongovernmental public	0.147 (0.134)	0.182 (0.133)	0.201 (0.137)	0.232 (0.137)	0.658 (0.130) ^{***}	0.674 (0.130) ^{***}	-0.641 (0.110) ^{***}	-0.629 (0.111) ^{***}
Business	-0.098 (0.111)	-0.026 (0.118)	-0.209 (0.114)	-0.130 (0.115)	0.100 (0.108)	0.113 (0.110)	-0.179 (0.092) [*]	-0.159 (0.094)

Table 5. (Continued)

	Satisfaction With Job Setting		Satisfaction With Job Substance		Satisfaction With Social Index		Satisfaction With Power/Track	
	Model 1	Model 2 ^a	Model 1	Model 2 ^a	Model 1	Model 2 ^a	Model 1	Model 2 ^a
Prestige and Performance (excluded category for law schools is Tier 4)								
GPA	0.006 (0.085)	-0.001 (0.084)	0.131 (0.087)	0.118 (0.086)	0.037 (0.082)	0.038 (0.083)	0.211 (0.070)**	0.209 (0.070)**
Top 10 law school	-0.056 (0.128)	-0.047 (0.130)	-0.083 (0.131)	-0.078 (0.132)	-0.065 (0.125)	-0.067 (0.125)	-0.148 (0.106)	-0.147 (0.106)
Top 11-20 law school	-0.024 (0.107)	-0.030 (0.107)	-0.131 (0.109)	-0.142 (0.109)	-0.141 (0.104)	-0.144 (0.104)	0.056 (0.088)	0.055 (0.088)
Top 21-40 law school	-0.003 (0.099)	-0.009 (0.099)	0.046 (0.101)	0.037 (0.101)	-0.143 (0.096)	-0.147 (0.096)	0.080 (0.081)	0.079 (0.081)
Top 41-100 law school	0.049 (0.085)	0.046 (0.085)	-0.039 (0.087)	-0.042 (0.087)	-0.130 (0.082)	-0.135 (0.082)	-0.049 (0.070)	-0.051 (0.070)
Tier 3	0.042 (0.092)	0.039 (0.092)	-0.002 (0.094)	-0.009 (0.095)	-0.229 (0.089)**	-0.231 (0.089)**	-0.073 (0.076)	-0.073 (0.076)
Salary (in 1,000 s)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.003 (0.001)*	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.010 (0.001)**	0.010 (0.001)**
Zero debt	0.026 (0.080)	0.034 (0.079)	-0.051 (0.081)	-0.038 (0.082)	0.134 (0.077)	0.134 (0.077)	-0.089 (0.065)	-0.087 (0.066)
High debt	0.020 (0.061)	0.019 (0.061)	-0.030 (0.063)	-0.030 (0.064)	0.101 (0.060)	0.099 (0.060)	-0.017 (0.050)	-0.018 (0.051)
Prior positions	-0.038 (0.056)	-0.028 (0.056)	0.073 (0.058)	0.085 (0.057)	0.077 (0.055)	0.079 (0.055)	0.074 (0.046)	0.077 (0.046)
Network		0.281 (0.093)*		0.278 (0.093)*		0.109 (0.054)*		0.087 (0.064)
Consulting or investment banking		-0.074 (0.088)		-0.116 (0.061)		0.032 (0.072)		-0.013 (0.058)
Constant	-0.103 (0.288)	-0.210 (0.291)	-0.767 (0.294)**	-0.841 (0.295)**	-0.247 (0.280)	-0.314 (0.283)	-1.596 (0.237)**	-1.632 (0.240)**
Adjusted R-square	0.107	0.10958	0.033	0.03495	0.091	0.07664	0.367	0.35633

^aModel 2 displays results from multiply imputed data. Please refer to text for discussion of missing data procedures.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

and with the social index ($b = 0.744, p < 0.001$), while those working in large and megafirms (100 through 251+lawyers) are less satisfied with their job setting (b ranging from -0.569 to -0.620 ; $p < 0.001$). Lawyers in the large and megafirms are also more satisfied with the power track ($b = 0.211, p < 0.05$), reflecting satisfaction with their high levels of pay and opportunities for advancement. In contrast, just about every setting outside of private practice suggests an increased dissatisfaction with the power track (b ranging from -0.179 to -0.641 ; $p < 0.05$ or better), and every public sector setting is related to an increase in satisfaction with the social index (b ranging from 0.235 to 0.658 ; $p < 0.05$ or better). Finally, working in smaller firms of 21–100 lawyers leads to significantly lower levels of satisfaction with the social value of jobs ($b = -0.349, p < 0.001$), as does having graduated from a third-tier law school ($b = -0.229, p < 0.01$).¹⁵

Salary, as expected, is a positive predictor of satisfaction with the power track ($b = 0.010$; $p < 0.001$). We find that a \$100,000 increment in salary leads to a one standard deviation increase in this aspect of satisfaction, while it leads to a three standard deviation increase in satisfaction with job substance ($b = 0.003$; $p < 0.05$). But more unexpected is the finding that respondents with a higher GPA are also more satisfied with the power track ($b = 0.211$; $p < 0.001$). One might have expected that the grades would no longer be relevant once lawyers begin working in particular job settings where they are evaluated according to their professional work. But apparently the perception of a fast track associated with good grades continues—at least in the minds of those who achieved those grades. We also find that debt is generally unrelated to job satisfaction.

The data in the four equations for Model 2 in Table 5 suggest that social networks play an important role in lawyers' satisfaction with their job setting ($b = 0.281, p < 0.05$), the substance of their work ($b = 0.278, p < 0.05$), and the social index ($b = 0.109, p < 0.05$), suggesting that relationships with more-senior lawyers result in better, or at least more interesting, work assignments. As we later discuss, this finding has interesting implications for graduates of elite law schools, who—at this point in their career—do not seem to be investing as much as others in these types of social networks. While the introduction of these variables slightly moderates the effects of salary and firm size in two of the models, the main

¹⁵ Relying on the measure of office size, we also find that respondents in the mid-sized offices of 21–100 lawyers are less satisfied with their practice setting, and that lawyers in the largest offices (251+) get an additional “bonus,” expressed as a greater satisfaction with the social index. The analysis based on office size also indicates that even controlling for networking and career aspirations, lawyers in the largest offices (251+lawyers) continue to be significantly more satisfied with the power track.

patterns of sign and significance are generally unchanged across the four measures of job satisfaction.

Our theoretical approach led us to expect to find a relationship between law school credentials and job satisfaction. Yet none of the models in Table 5 show any sustained association between law school tier and any of the measures of satisfaction.¹⁶ One may be tempted to conclude from the above analyses that satisfaction in the legal profession is unrelated to social background, and that while law school credentials may be important for getting jobs (see, e.g., Heinz et al. 2005), the effects of these credentials equalize once lawyers enter their practice settings. There are other reasons to question that conclusion. In particular, the overwhelming importance of job setting in the four models of satisfaction may mask more subtle relationships. To probe further, we considered two additional measures of satisfaction that provide a broader perspective on lawyers' careers: satisfaction with the decision to pursue a legal career and job mobility intentions.

Exploring Career Satisfaction

We began by investigating the determinants of respondents' satisfaction with their decision to become a lawyer. Rather than focusing on specific indicators of job satisfaction—which, as earlier models suggested, are conditioned by one's immediate environment—focusing on satisfaction with career choice provides a much broader indication of career strategies and preferences. Prior research has already suggested links between social background, aspirations (e.g., Seron 1996), and job values (McClelland 1990; Jacobs et al. 1991; Johnson 2001, 2002; Halaby 2003), and Bourdieu's work has provided further insight into the roles of schools in this process. Indeed, Bourdieu argues that it is in school that students “acquire not only the assured manners and style that are among the surest signs of nobility, but also the high opinion of themselves that will lead them . . . towards the most lofty ambitions and the most prestigious enterprises” (Bourdieu 1996:112). Career satisfaction, then, is the product of expectations and circumstances,

¹⁶ In separate analyses (on file with authors) we modeled the four satisfaction regressions with law school tiers only the first step in the model. We found that graduates of top 10 through top 40 law schools are significantly less satisfied with their job setting ($p < 0.05$ or better), with satisfaction decreasing as law school tier increases. Graduates of all law schools other than the top 10 are significantly less satisfied with the social index ($p < 0.05$ or better). We also found that graduates from top 10 through top 100 law schools are significantly more satisfied with the power track than fourth-tier graduates ($p < 0.05$ or better), and satisfaction with the power track increases with law school tier. As we describe in the text, however, the effects of practice settings (among others) moderate these initial relationships.

which themselves are largely shaped by individuals' social background.

In the analyses below, we draw on responses to the question, "How satisfied are you with your decision to become a lawyer?" which were provided on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 ("extremely satisfied") to 5 ("extremely dissatisfied"). Since the distribution of responses is skewed toward the satisfied end of the spectrum (35 percent report that they are "extremely satisfied," while an additional 44 percent indicate that they are "moderately satisfied"), we focus here on those respondents who report that they are extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer.¹⁷ Satisfaction, therefore, was modeled as a dummy variable, and we again employed logistic regression, drawing on the same set of variables described in Table 5.

The results of this analysis both confirm some of our earlier findings and suggest additional patterns (see Table 6). In the first model, we find that the demographic factors that are related to career satisfaction reflect a particular life stage: respondents with children are more likely to report that they are extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer ($b = 0.280$, $e^b = 1.323$; $p < 0.05$), as are respondents who are more than 36 years old ($b = 0.329$, $e^b = 1.389$, $p < 0.05$). This demographic of respondents—those who are beginning their careers later in life or who have a family to support—is clearly satisfied with their choice to pursue a legal career. We also find a positive and significant relationship between father's occupational status and career satisfaction ($b = 0.008$, $e^b = 1.008$, $p < 0.05$). This effect is difficult to explain, but it may be that the children of higher-status parents know better what to expect from the legal profession.

We also considered the relationship between practice setting and career satisfaction, again relying on small private firms (two–20 lawyers) as the reference category. The data indicate that sole practitioners are as satisfied as small firm practitioners with their decision to become a lawyer. For lawyers working in private law firms, the pattern is clear: the larger the firm, the lower the expressions of career satisfaction, with satisfaction decreasing as firm size increases (b ranging from -0.400 to -0.864 ; $p < 0.05$ or better). Outside of private practice, we find that respondents working in state government are significantly more satisfied with their career choice ($b = 0.578$, $e^b = 1.783$; $p < 0.001$).

¹⁷ We modeled an additional regression to predict the likelihood of expressing dissatisfaction with the decision to become a lawyer (which represented 13.3 percent of respondents). The results were generally consistent with those described below, with the addition of the finding that men have significantly lower odds of expressing dissatisfaction with their career choice than women.

Measures of prestige and performance are also related to career satisfaction. The effects of law school tier reinforce the patterns related to practice settings: lawyers graduating from elite law schools are significantly less satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. When compared with graduates of fourth-tier schools, graduates of top 10 schools have the lowest odds of reporting that they are extremely satisfied ($b = -0.646$, $e^b = 0.524$; $p < 0.05$), followed by graduates of top 20 schools ($b = -0.465$, $e^b = 0.628$; $p < 0.05$). While not quite attaining significance at the 0.05 level, we also find that graduates of top 40 schools express lower levels of satisfaction than their fourth-tier counterparts ($b = -0.349$, $e^b = 0.705$; $p = 0.06$); respondents graduating from all other tiers report levels of satisfaction that are no different than respondents who graduated from fourth-tier schools. Finally, we find that salary is positively and significantly related to the odds of being extremely satisfied with the decision to become a lawyer ($b = 0.009$, $e^b = 1.009$; $p < 0.001$).

We include the effects of networking and aspirations in the second model in Table 6. We find that new lawyers who network with senior lawyers have 1.33 times the odds of expressing strong sentiments of satisfaction with their decision to become a lawyer. Reinforcing the pattern of eliteness and diminished enthusiasm about their legal career is the finding that respondents who considered a career in investment banking or consulting have significantly lower odds of reporting that they are extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer ($b = -0.276$, $e^b = 0.759$; $p < 0.05$).

This analysis confirms the important relationship between measures of social stratification and expressions of satisfaction. We find that respondents with the most elite credentials—graduates of top law schools working in the most prestigious settings—are the least satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. However, those graduating from the less selective law schools and working in the less prestigious (and remunerative) settings are the most likely to express extreme satisfaction with their decision to become a lawyer. There is no doubt that for many of the graduates of lower-tier law schools, gaining entry to the legal profession is part of the project of upward mobility. Yet the patterns of satisfaction seen in this analysis legitimate and reinforce a system of stratification that places particular law graduates into particular practice settings, with law schools playing a pivotal role in the reproduction of this hierarchy.

Job Satisfaction and Plans for Job Mobility

We further explored sentiments of satisfaction by considering respondents' intentions to leave their employer. Expressions of intentions to leave one's employer embody relative dissatisfactions

Table 6. Logistic Regression Models of Satisfaction with Decision to Become a Lawyer (n = 1904)

	Model 1		Model 2 ^a	
	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)
Demographics and Background				
Male	-0.011	0.989	0.009	1.009
Married	-0.099	0.905	-0.108	0.897
Have at least one child	0.280	1.323	0.287	1.333
Over 36 years old	0.329	1.389	0.341	1.407
White	-0.162	0.851	-0.199	0.819
Father socioeconomic score (ISEI)	0.008	1.008	0.008	1.008
Family lawyers	-0.025	0.975	-0.031	0.970
Region				
Major metro (NY, LA, DC, Chicago, SF, Boston)	-0.036	0.965	-0.021	0.979
Other major metro area	-0.001	0.999	-0.001	0.999
Setting (excluded category is private firms 2-20)				
Solo	0.393	1.481	0.439	1.551
Private firm 21-100	-0.400	0.670	-0.377	0.686
Private firm 101-250	-0.582	0.559	-0.517	0.596
Private firm 251+	-0.864	0.422	-0.809	0.445
Federal government	0.129	1.138	0.177	1.194
State government	0.578	1.783	0.617	1.854
Nongovernmental public	0.342	1.408	0.369	1.447
Business	-0.287	0.751	-0.174	0.840

Table 6. (Continued)

	Model 1		Model 2 ^a	
	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)
Prestige and Performance (excluded category for law schools is Tier 4)				
GPA	0.220	1.246	0.198	1.219
Top 10 law school	-0.646	0.524	-0.618	0.539
Top 11-20 law school	-0.465	0.628	-0.477	0.621
Top 21-40 law school	-0.349	0.705	-0.364	0.695
Top 41-100 law school	-0.056	0.946	-0.053	0.948
Tier 3	-0.104	0.901	-0.101	0.904
Salary (in 1,000 \$)	0.009	1.009	0.009	1.009
Zero debt	-0.148	0.862	-0.118	0.889
High debt	0.078	1.081	0.082	1.086
Prior positions				
Network				
Consulting or investment banking				
Constant	-2.083	0.125	-0.276	0.870
-2 log likelihood	2332.608		2318.851	1.326
Nagelkerke R-square	0.062		0.071	0.759
				0.118

^aModel 2 displays results from multiply imputed data. Please refer to text for discussion of missing data procedures.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

with and expressions of uncertainties about chosen career paths, but they are also an indicator of the pattern of moves and adjustments that people make as they build their careers. While prior research has tended to understand job mobility as a manifestation of dissatisfaction, which is of course true, we argue that this research must also take into account the structural features of mobility. Mobility may take someone onto a more lucrative or prestigious path, or it may be a move spurred by a sense that chances for success may be better in a different but less prestigious environment. Either way, understanding mobility requires understanding where someone came from and where that person may be going, with intentions to move acting as indicators—and aspects of—the sorting process.

We modeled respondents' intentions to leave their employer using multinomial logistic regression to explore the factors that influence the likelihood of respondents' intentions to leave their employer within each of four different time frames: (1) currently or in less than one year, (2) within one–two years, (3) within three–five years, and (4) in more than five years. Multinomial logistic regression models calculate the log odds of being in a particular category of the dependent variable relative to some reference category of the dependent variable (Long 1997); we relied on the fourth category—expecting to remain with their current employer for at least five years—as the reference category. The regressions are modeled with the set of independent variables described above, with one exception: in order to control for the possibility that job search intentions are related to the conditions of one's work, these models also include controls for job satisfaction by relying on the four measures of job satisfaction described above. While the results are complex, the patterns are fairly consistent across all the categories of the dependant variable; as a result, we distill below the major findings and patterns, with the full results displayed in Table 7.

Demographic factors are important predictors of job search intentions. Compared to respondents expecting to remain with their employer for more than five years, men have significantly lower odds than women of thinking of leaving their employer within one year ($b = -0.573$, $e^b = 0.564$, $p < 0.01$), as do respondents with children ($b = -0.571$, $e^b = 0.565$, $p < 0.05$) and those who report their racial or ethnic status as white ($b = -0.530$, $e^b = 0.589$, $p < 0.05$). We also find that living in a large city results in a significant increase in the odds of intending to look for new employment—respondents living in major metropolitan areas have more than twice the odds of intending to leave their employer within two years compared to respondents living in nonmetropolitan areas ($b = 0.754$, $e^b = 2.126$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 7. Multinomial Logistic Regression of Intentions to Leave Employer (compared to those intending to leave in 5+ years) (n = 1467)

	Already Looking and <1 Year		1-2 Years		3-5 Years	
	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)
Demographics & Background						
Male	-0.573 (0.188)**	0.564	-0.315 (0.169)	0.730	-0.237 (0.167)	0.789
Married	-0.081 (0.202)	0.922	-0.251 (0.182)	0.778	-0.046 (0.179)	0.955
Have at least one child	-0.571 (0.241)*	0.565	-0.224 (0.206)	0.799	-0.559 (0.205)**	0.572
Over 36 years old	-0.055 (0.266)	1.056	1.126 (0.236)	1.134	0.005 (0.240)	1.005
White	-0.530 (0.250)*	0.589	-0.456 (0.228)*	0.634	-0.336 (0.231)	0.715
Father socioeconomic score (ISEI)	0.006 (0.006)	1.006	0.007 (0.005)	1.007	0.000 (0.005)	1.000
Family lawyers	0.072 (0.252)	1.075	-0.048 (0.222)	0.953	0.379 (0.214)	1.461
Region						
Major metro (NY, LA, DC, Chicago, SE, Boston)	0.323 (0.251)	1.382	0.754 (0.228)***	2.126	0.271 (0.222)	1.312
Other major metro area	-0.271 (0.252)	0.762	0.377 (0.214)	1.458	-0.163 (0.213)	0.850
Setting (excluded category is private firms 2-20)						
Solo						
Private firm 21-100	0.228 (0.597)	1.256	-2.177 (1.070)*	0.113	-0.650 (0.600)	0.522
Private firm 101-250	-0.422 (0.317)	0.656	-0.271 (0.274)	0.762	-0.252 (0.276)	0.777
Private firm 251+	0.101 (0.391)	1.106	0.388 (0.333)	1.474	0.029 (0.350)	1.029
Federal government	0.734 (0.379)*	2.084	0.794 (0.325)*	2.212	0.831 (0.323)**	2.295
State government	1.004 (0.618)	2.729	1.299 (0.521)**	3.665	1.505 (0.521)**	4.505
Nongovernmental public	0.864 (0.359)*	2.373	0.362 (0.341)	1.436	0.766 (0.333)*	2.151
Business	1.315 (0.495)**	3.725	0.641 (0.472)	1.897	1.326 (0.436)**	3.766
	0.156 (0.393)	1.169	-0.274 (0.367)	0.760	0.493 (0.332)	1.637

(Continued)

Table 7. (Continued)

	Already Looking and <1 Year		1-2 Years		3-5 Years	
	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)
Prestige and Performance (excluded category for law schools is Tier 4)						
GPA	-0.839 (0.308)**	0.432	-0.742	(0.273)**	-0.519	(0.268)*
Top 10 law school	1.037 (0.487)*	2.819	0.981	(0.432)*	0.869	(0.435)*
Top 11-20 law school	0.071 (0.383)	1.073	-0.372	(0.349)	0.234	(0.325)
Top 21-40 law school	-0.073 (0.358)	0.929	0.106	(0.304)	-0.004	(0.304)
Top 41-100 law school	-0.236 (0.302)	0.790	-0.291	(0.268)	-0.444	(0.265)
Tier 3	-0.354 (0.328)	0.702	-0.440	(0.291)	-0.195	(0.282)
Salary (in 1,000s)	-0.004 (0.004)	0.996	-0.005	(0.004)	-0.008	(0.004)*
Zero debt	-0.523 (0.285)	0.593	-0.433	(0.248)	-0.533	(0.256)*
High debt	0.032 (0.219)	1.033	-0.144	(0.198)	0.016	(0.192)
Prior positions	-0.190 (0.205)	0.827	-0.016	(0.180)	0.188	(0.175)
Satisfaction with job setting	-1.306 (0.108)***	0.271	-0.799	(0.100)***	-0.592	(0.100)***
Satisfaction with substance of work	-1.348 (0.105)***	0.260	-0.861	(0.098)***	-0.455	(0.101)***
Satisfaction with social index	-0.803 (0.101)***	0.448	-0.514	(0.089)***	-0.423	(0.088)***
Satisfaction with power track	-0.980 (0.118)***	0.375	-0.548	(0.107)***	-0.106	(0.110)
Intercept	3.028 (1.069)**		2.850	(0.962)**	2.462	(0.947)**
-2 log likelihood	3256.759					
Nagelkerke R-square	0.432					

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

These models also evidence important patterns of mobility intentions that are related to social stratification. Respondents working in the largest private law firms and graduates of the most elite law schools have the highest odds of reporting that they intend to leave their employer within the next five years. For example, respondents working in megafirms (251+ lawyers) are more than twice as likely to be thinking of leaving their employer within five years as are respondents in small private firms (of two–20 lawyers) ($b = 0.831$, $e^b = 2.295$, $p < 0.01$);¹⁸ a similar pattern of a higher odds of mobility intentions emerges among respondents working in prestigious federal government positions ($b = 1.505$, $e^b = 4.505$, $p < 0.01$). We also find that graduates of top 10 law schools have 2.4 times the odds of intending to leave their employer within five years as do graduates of fourth-tier schools ($b = 0.869$, $e^b = 2.385$, $p < 0.05$); indeed, across all models, top 10 graduates have higher odds of reporting mobility intentions than comparable fourth-tier graduates. Finally, having received good grades in law school significantly decreases the odds of intending to look for a new job within a five-year period; this confirms the earlier finding that lawyers who earned higher grades perceive that they are investing in the fast track and are committed to pursuing it. We also modeled the same set of multinomial regressions with the addition of controls for networking and career aspirations, and the results are presented in Appendix A. These variables were not significant predictors of mobility intentions and did not substantially alter the sign or significance of the independent variables in the original models.

It is important to note that these relationships between law school credentials, practice settings, and job mobility intentions all hold even controlling for measures of satisfaction. As indicated in Table 7, all four measures of job satisfaction are significant, and all decrease intentions to leave one's employer. Yet despite these workplace satisfaction measures, we continue to find a strong relationship between social stratification and satisfaction. In short, these findings indicate that the relationship between stratification and job satisfaction is not the result of the conditions of lawyers' work, but is in fact an expression of the expectations and aspirations that stem from particular positions within social space (see generally Bourdieu 1987).

Summary

By relying on a range of measures of job satisfaction, these multivariate analyses have provided insight into the relationship

¹⁸ When relying on the measure of setting based on office size, we find that there is no significant relationship between office size and intentions to leave the firm. In these models, the effect for top ten law schools remains the same as reported in Table 7, however.

between social class and satisfaction. We found that while measures of social class contribute somewhat to the variations in specific types of workplace satisfaction (context, substance, social index, and power track), these forms of satisfaction are best explained by lawyer demographics and the settings within which lawyers work. However, the more general measures of career satisfaction and mobility intentions are clearly related to patterns of social stratification. The analyses revealed that lawyers most satisfied with their career choice graduated from less selective law schools and work in less prestigious settings, thereby legitimating a hierarchy in which it is the most privileged who attain the positions of high prestige and pay in the legal profession. Similarly, lawyers least committed to staying with their employer are those who have the most options: graduates of top-tier law schools, working in larger private firms and in the federal government. In short, these patterns reinforce a structure of the profession whereby lawyers from the less selective school remain in the positions that are relatively less prestigious and remunerative, with expressions of satisfaction playing a key role in this process.

Models of the Role of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

The analyses we have presented provide compelling evidence for the relationship between stratification and satisfaction. As we argue above, this relationship is produced not merely by external structures of domination, but is instead internalized in individuals' expectations. While these patterns are evident in the quantitative analyses above, the full extent of the embeddedness of hierarchical structures is often clearly revealed through a study of individual biographies (see generally Dezalay & Garth 2002). In this next section, we draw on in-depth interviews with AJD respondents in which they recount how they found their jobs, describe their practice settings and work life, and discuss their expectations for the future. These accounts reveal the ways in which individuals make meaning of their lives and find satisfaction in the positions that they occupy (Lamont 2000), while they also act as mechanisms through which stratification is reproduced and legitimated.

The discussion below constructs six major categories of lawyers, based on the tier of law school¹⁹ they attended; this discussion is exploratory, informed by the findings discussed above and on the bivariate statistics provided in Table 8 and in previous tables. These groupings are intended to provide a first approximation of the

¹⁹ We rely on the rankings provided by *U.S. News & World Report*, but our approach is focused on understanding the relationship between career outcomes and law school credentials; that hierarchy may differ in some way from the rankings produced by *U.S. News*.

Table 8. Key Statistics for Measures of the Lawyer Sorting Process

	Top 10	Top 11–20	Top 21–40	Top 41–100	Tier 3	Tier 4
Rating of reason went to law school (mean percentile)						
Helping	51	50	48	50	52	49
Careerist	47	46***	49	51	52	51
Elite	54*	52	51	49	48	49
More likely (p < 0.05) than other groups to report		Investment banking	Community organizing			Starting a business
having considered a career in . . .						
Received two or more offers in private sector		62%***	54%	45%***	44%*	40%***
Received no offers in private sector		10%**	13%	19%***	19%*	17%
Rating of why chose sector (mean percentile)						
Lifestyle and interest	40***	46*	48	54***	52	50
Prestige and mobility	57***	52	52	51	46**	46*
Salary	52	53	51	48*	49	51
Ratings of opportunities for advancement (scale = 1–7) (mean)	4.59	4.81	4.78	4.73	4.42***	4.62
Networking with senior partners or lawyers ^a	54%*	60%	67%	65%	63%	59%
Salary (mean)	\$122,147***	\$104,213***	\$91,256***	\$77,222***	\$67,757***	\$69,365***
Hours worked per week (mean)	51***	49	49	48	48	49
Rating of satisfaction with (mean percentile):						
Job setting	43***	43***	49	52**	53	53**
Substance of work	46*	48	51	51	50	52
Social index	49	50	46**	51	47	54*
Power track	63***	61***	56***	48**	42***	40***
Percent reporting that they have not yet changed jobs	67%*	68%	65%	64%	61%	64%
Percent living in major metro area	77%	59%***	48%***	32%***	35%**	19%***
Total n of tier	332	430	539	1176	619	536

Note: Significance tests compare selected law school tier with respondents from all other tiers. Values are percentages except where otherwise indicated. The number of missing cases varies across variables.

^aWe draw on the subset of cases from the mail survey for this cross-tabulation.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed).

kinds of people who graduate and make careers from the different law schools, building on the basic insight that the higher-ranked the law school, the more likely the graduates are to have come from privileged backgrounds—and it extends this insight by including a range of factors that grow out of, and are reinforced by, one's class position.

In constructing these analyses, we draw more explicitly on Bourdieu's theoretical framework, relying on two concepts central to Bourdieu's understanding of how social class is reproduced. One is the notion of the ability to "play the game." From this perspective, career success depends on an ability to master particular rules of the game; however, the key is not so much learning the rules, but anticipating developments that provide opportunities to be seized by the most natural players. As Bourdieu (1998) explains, individuals who are well-socialized in a particular field are able to master it because they have a "feel for the game"—they know what they should be investing in and how to position themselves and, like a good tennis player, they position themselves not where the ball is but where it will be (Bourdieu 1998:79). It is important to note that for Bourdieu, these moves and strategies are not conscious.

Having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to have a sense of the history of the game. While the bad player is always off tempo, always too early or too late, the good player is the one who *anticipates*, who is ahead of the game. Why can she get ahead of the game? Because she has the immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state: she embodies the game (Bourdieu 1998:80–1; emphasis in original).

In a similar way, lawyers building their careers are playing a game, and those who succeed anticipate the right move at the right time. Intentions to change jobs and expressions of job satisfaction, then, are part of this process, suggesting some of the strategies these new lawyers are forming.

These strategies are also related to individuals' preferences and dispositions, which are best understood through Bourdieu's concept of making a virtue out of necessity. From this perspective, individuals' aspirations and motivations are not constructed in a vacuum. Rather, Bourdieu argues that individuals adjust their dispositions to the set of possibilities that are available to them, valuing those within reach and excluding those that are not. In other words, the conditions within which people live "engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, [thus] the most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination, as *unthinkable*, or at the cost of the *double negation* which inclines agents to make a virtue of ne-

cessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable” (Bourdieu 1977:77; emphasis in original). As a result, those who do not have access to high-paid elite positions may, for example, celebrate that their job provides them the opportunity to do socially fulfilling work or, as we observe in the analyses above, those from lower-tier schools may place more value on settings that accommodate their lifestyle, making a virtue of their necessity.

While we draw fairly strong characterizations of individuals in the descriptions below, we also recognize that these are not determinative—some individuals can convert their capital (see Bourdieu 1977) so that their law school tier, for example, does not always necessarily dictate their career trajectory. Furthermore, as the respondents in this study continue to build their careers, they may accumulate a wider range of capital that may enable this process. Such conversions are difficult, but it is important to note that our approach incorporates these possibilities. As a whole, this analysis provides a way to tie together the parts that make up the stratified legal profession. The social hierarchies within the legal profession, as we see, produce—and reproduce—different goals, expectations, rewards, and satisfactions.

The Elites: Biding Time

Brian²⁰ comes from an elite law school and a well-connected family in the South, and he works in a large firm in Chicago. He is on the fast track to pick up more credentials, reflected in his comment that “I don’t consider myself an attorney . . . going to law school was more to me as a way to . . . just get a great degree.” He pays relatively little attention to what it might take to make partner because he has no intention to stay at the firm, seeing it as “more of a testing period.” He is in no hurry but expects that he will go into business or public service in the city where his family is located. He knows he has many options, not limiting himself “simply because I have the law degree.” His behavior suggests that he is not “satisfied” with his job setting but is confident that he is on a power track, which might or might not involve law.

Jennifer works in a major San Francisco firm. Her father worked at a prominent law firm as well. She attended an elite law school, joined a firm to do litigation, and left at a time when the economy was down. Using a headhunter, she moved to another leading firm, but she complains of “lack of mentorship, lack of interest,” in a firm that sees associates as “here to bill hours to make them money.” There are women partners, but most partners are “basically men.” She is not looking immediately to move, but she is not happy with the situation.

²⁰ All names are pseudonyms, to protect respondents’ anonymity.

Graduates from top 10 schools are overwhelmingly the children of advantage (see Table 2). In contrast to those who attended the lower-tier schools, their reasons for attending law school focused on the intellectual challenge of law school or developing a satisfying career—reasons that are less tied to lifestyle and financial success.²¹ At the same time, they are more likely than graduates of other tiers to have considered alternative lucrative and prestigious options, such as a career in investment banking. Their options in the legal field are plentiful, which is reflected in the number of job offers they received in the private sector; very few of them even sought positions in the public sector. Once on the job market, they were drawn to the four major metropolitan areas, to the large law firms (100+lawyers), and (compared to the sample as a whole) to public interest firms—which for them does not necessarily foreclose other options in private practice. They are on a fast track, and they are there by choice, which is reflected in their valuing prestige and mobility versus lifestyle in their choice of legal practice sector.

Graduates of top-tier schools have all the advantages, but the data suggest that they do not necessarily appreciate them. While they are significantly less likely to have already changed jobs, they are more likely to express plans to leave their employer in the relatively near future; when compared to their counterparts from all other tiers who are also working in large firms, we continue to find that they are more likely to express intentions to leave their employer. Their practice settings require them to put in significantly longer hours, which translates for them into much less satisfaction with their job setting. This sense of ambivalence about their job is paralleled by their ambivalence about their choice of career, reporting the lowest level of satisfaction with their decision to become a lawyer. This relative ambivalence is also seen in their involvement at work, with the elite students reporting less contact with partners, suggesting that they are not investing much in accumulating social capital where it requires the most effort. The combination of privileged position and relatively less satisfaction suggests that these top-tier graduates take for granted that they will be successful but at the same time that they also have some regret about other options they could have pursued, options they know may have been at least as satisfying. These elite graduates are ready and expect to move if and when something better comes up, but their relative lack of mobility to date suggests that the grumbling seen in plans to move does not necessarily lead to actual moves in

²¹ Respondents were asked to rate eight goals in their decision to attend law school. These were reduced into three factors relying on factor analysis. The first factor, “helping,” comprises items reflecting their desire to help others; “prestige” comprises items reflecting the intellectual challenge of law and a desire to defer entry into the job market; and “careerist” reflects a concern with financial security and building skills.

the short term. At this stage of their career, they are still going through the motions that were planned for them by their enrollment in elite law schools.

Yet the path of the elite is not of one piece. As the story of Jennifer suggests, even among the elites women and minorities continue to face obstacles. Thus while the elite credential bestows—and reaffirms—a successful trajectory for most graduates, it does not wholly overcome the well-established structures of inequality in the profession. These obstacles are not the focus of this article, but it is clear that the institutions of the legal profession are structured such that mastery of “the game” of success in the legal profession comes easier to elite white males.

The “Almost” Elites—Always in Second (Top 11–20)

Kate enjoyed 21 callbacks when she was on the job market, confidently saying that she “whittled it down to three . . . that’s all I bothered doing.” She decided to work in a smaller branch of a large firm, because it provides “a nice family sort of feel.” And like Brian, she chose a large firm because she “wanted to keep [her] options open.” She is working hard, on track to bill 2,800 hours, and has already learned that she “wasn’t as pushy” as she should have been in her first year. She is also gaining experience through her extensive pro bono work, which counts toward her billable hours. She knows that if she “wanted to,” she could “go on and become partner,” but might move into government if the hours impose too much on her personal time. Her parents were not professionals, however, and her approach is not one of entitlement—she says, “It’s just up to me to learn how to manage my time and say no.”

Across nearly all measures, graduates of schools ranking in the top 11–20 are “almost” identical to the elite students. The background of these respondents is clearly privileged, reporting significantly higher levels of occupational prestige and education for their fathers compared to respondents from all other schools, and they also have invested heavily in the private sector. And while they are privileged compared to the average respondent, they are not given quite the same opportunities as the elite group, which is reflected in comparatively fewer offers, a lower likelihood of working in the largest law firms, somewhat lower salaries and hours worked, and more attention to salary as a factor in their choice of a position. Many of them also had to work harder to get their positions than those from the elite schools, suggesting that grades matter more as one moves down the law school hierarchy.

It is not surprising that those who worked harder to earn their positions are not as casual about leaving them. These graduates

report a high rate of prior job stability, and they are not more likely than other graduates to express intentions to leave their job within two years. While they express the same relative dissatisfaction with aspects of large firm settings as the elite graduates, more of them are satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer (though they are still less satisfied than graduates of all other tiers). Their greater commitment to their jobs is also reflected in the fact that a larger percentage of these graduates network with partners, reflecting an effort to build relationships in their settings; we also see this commitment in their ratings of their opportunities for advancement, which are relatively high. In short, while the group is rather close to the elite in terms of where they work, they tend to be more grateful for the place they have found, sharing some of the characteristics of those from lower-ranked schools.

Between Elites and the Middle (Top 21–40)

Mike's father held a relatively low-prestige white-collar position. Mike graduated from a leading state university law school and found work doing employment law in a large law firm. He is married, likes his work, and would move only if one of the leading partners in his group moved. His approach is somewhat less confident than that of the higher-tier graduates, as he says, "I just kind of focus on day to day, doing my job, trying to do it as best I can and quite frankly hoping that things fall into place." And whereas Brian and Kate are exceeding their billables, Mike says, "We have a 2,000-hour minimum. I personally actually work pretty much the 2,000 hours." He believes he is learning important skills and is on track for partnership, and he has little to say by way of complaint.

Graduates of law schools ranked 21–40 have social backgrounds similar to those of the groups described above. But the lines of demarcation become much stronger at this level. On almost every measure other than social class, graduates of top 21–40 schools are below those from top 20 schools: they received fewer job offers, a smaller proportion of them work in large firms, and they earn less. They also express sentiments that diverge from those of the elite: they are less likely, for example, to have gone to law school to "help" others. Grateful for the opportunities they have, when compared to graduates of the tiers above them, they are more committed to their employers, network more, and are more satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. While still below the median for the sample, they are more likely than the elites to express a preference to work in settings that are identified with a better lifestyle than is found in the large corporate firms. Valuing "lifestyle," we see here and within the lower-ranking tiers, is not just a

preference that some people express. It begins to come into play at this stage to help adjust law graduates to the fewer hours, less intense, and less prestigious work that is for the most part available to them. A law graduate who cannot gain access to the most elite positions tends, therefore, to find “lifestyle” reasons to accept that fate.

Happiness at the Top of the Middle (Top 41–100 Schools)

After graduating from an urban law school, Robert, whose parents were not college graduates, found a position in a relatively large insurance defense firm, where he says “the training . . . is unbelievable.” Working in a firm is therefore more than just a credential for him, and while he is also happy with the experience he is getting in litigation, with mentoring, and with relationships at the firm, he envies those in “silk-stocking firms.” Also in contrast to the higher-tier graduates, he says that the “toughest part of this job is the . . . billing requirements. It’s a source of constant stress, it’s a very tough goal to meet.” His plans for the future are to move into commercial litigation, and then he hopes to land a job as in-house counsel. He recognizes that he is fortunate to date, but that it is up to him to build the career he wants. He cannot count on professional success.

Those who graduated from the top 41–100 schools come from less privileged backgrounds than those at the higher-ranking schools, and they understand law school as part of a project of upward mobility. When asked why they decided to go to law school, for example, they give somewhat higher than average ratings to careerist reasons. Their prospects are limited, with far fewer offers in the private sector and only 10 percent of these graduates making it to the larger firms (of at least 100 lawyers). These respondents give significantly higher ratings to lifestyle in their choice of practice setting, as could be expected, but they are still close enough to the top that they continue to emphasize the importance of prestige in their choices.

With law providing them with upward mobility, we find this group investing strongly in their career paths. A large proportion of these graduates expect to be staying with their current employer for more than two years. They know that law school made a difference in their career prospects, with more than one-third extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. They do not take for granted that they will have a successful career, working fairly long hours and working hard, even at networking. They are trying assiduously to learn the rules for advancement rather than relying on a feel for the game. The payoffs for these investments are also tangible: while their salaries are below the average in the sample, they are higher than those of graduates from the lower tiers, while their hours of work are no different than the average.

Furthermore, their satisfaction with their job setting is higher than the average but their satisfaction with the power track is comparatively lower—at the same time, their position in the hierarchy means that they are still more satisfied with the power track than graduates of the tiers below them. They know they have achieved upward mobility and are pleased, even though they do not have the same actual career prospects as those who start at the top.

The Third Tier—The Battle for Upward Mobility

While she graduated from a slightly higher-ranked urban school than the third tier, Mary's experience is instructive. An evening student from a blue-collar background, without high grades, she found a job only by extending her part-time employment into full-time employment for a collection firm. She continues to have a difficult time, "looking at a lot of nonlawyer positions or staff-attorney position actually." She rejects the idea of aspiring to be a partner in a firm based on lifestyle reasons: "Working 70, 80 hours," she says, "it's like no." Thinking of going back to school to somehow acquire more skills, her career is not moving at this stage. She does not like the job she has, and says the same is true of her law school classmates: "We're pretty much all in the same boat actually . . . [n]one of us want to do what we're doing."

Heather attended a third-tier school's evening program and accepted a coveted job in the federal government. She explains that while the "law school name itself wouldn't have gotten [her] the position," she used the *U.S. News* specialty rankings to prove that she had the right background and experience for the job. Heather says she has always been an "average student" and her parents had working-class jobs, but she is investing heavily in her future, working 10- to 11-hour days and many weekends. Her outlook is optimistic, seeing many opportunities for advancement, "so you never, never say never." And while she is single now, she believes that even with a family, her workplace is one in which "the work-life balance . . . is achievable."

In terms of socioeconomic background, law school for the third tier appears to represent an aspiration of upward mobility: more of these graduates report that they went to law school for careerist reasons, but they also went to law school to help others—perhaps because they remember where they came from. Their experience on the job market is fairly similar to those in the tier above them, but they tend to work predominantly in solo or small practice. Many of them justify that choice as a lifestyle decision—with Mary's comment about the hours required in private firms exemplary of this perspective—again reflecting their "choice" not to work in environments that were not in fact available to them.

The experiences of this group also suggest a continuing struggle. They are less settled than other respondents, with a combination of high mobility in past employment and expected high mobility in the near future. Evidence of this struggle is also reflected in their ratings of their opportunities for advancement, which are the lowest of all groups. These low ratings reflect a very different strategy when compared with the low ratings reported by elite students, who take for granted that they will start and end at the top. Graduates of the third tier are working hard as they try to build their careers, working the same number of hours as those in the tiers above. The benefits do not come as easily to them, however, as they are earning less and express low levels of satisfaction with the power track. Yet the legal profession continues to offer them some satisfaction, particularly with their job setting, which they rate somewhat higher when compared with the average respondent. And for those who have made it into the largest firms the commitment is clear, with their expressions of intentions to leave their employer among the lowest for those working in large firms. Thus despite their lower pay and hard work, they are aware of their upward mobility, with more than a third reporting that they are extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer.

The Fourth Tier: The Most Satisfied?

Anna graduated from a low-ranking urban law school while running a business part-time. For Anna, law is an upwardly mobile career path: "My mom was a housecleaner . . . I knew that's not what I'm going to do." While in law school, a faculty member helped her secure an externship with a judge, and after graduation she began a clerkship for a busy urban court. And when asked if she would work in private practice, she points to lifestyle reasons, explaining, "It's too many hours, you know. And I knew I didn't want to do that." Excelling through hard work, she has succeeded in acquiring skills and now works as a local attorney general, getting trial experience and credentials that will keep her career moving. She is an exceptional example from the fourth tier but instructive in the steps she had to take to get on a path to a "respectable" career.

Susan graduated near the top of her class and is working in a law firm of 100 lawyers. While she "originally thought [she] wanted to go with a large law firm" of a few hundred lawyers, she says that "after looking at how many billable hours are required at those firms . . . I do not want that." In contrast to the elite graduates, Susan says she chose this setting because "[t]he law is not my life," and while large law firms have an "incredible reputation," she "really wanted . . . a family orientated firm." Susan is doing well in

this setting, evidenced by her statement that “I cannot get over how happy I am.” And again in contrast to the expressions of dissatisfaction and mobility intentions expressed by the elite graduates, when asked where she will be in five years, Susan responds, “I will be a partner, I will be married and I will have two children by that time. I will have argued . . . before State Appellate Court, I will have several more clients . . . I will have published at least four more times . . . that’s what I know for now.”

Graduates of fourth-tier schools come from the least advantaged social backgrounds; their parents are the least educated and have the lowest occupational prestige scores in the sample. They are more likely than others to have considered starting their own business as an alternate career strategy, a dramatic contrast with the aspiration to work as an investment banker that was expressed by elite graduates. Moreover, the interviews again reveal the influence of a lifestyle preference for these graduates, who reject the long hours associated with working in a large law firm. At the same time, their experience on the job market suggests that they are fulfilling a particular market need—while fewer of them received more than two offers, their odds of receiving at least one offer is no different than the average. Their work settings are a stark contrast to the settings of the elite graduates: almost half of the fourth-tier graduates work in small or solo practice; they are also the least likely of all respondents to express that prestige and mobility were important in their choice of sector of practice. Perhaps this reflects the somewhat limited choices they faced in the job market.

Graduates of the fourth tier are working hard to make it. They work as hard as most other new lawyers (except for the elites)—yet they earn the least. They have experienced some instability already, with about 35 percent of this group having already changed jobs at least once. Their commitment is clear, however, with almost 60 percent intending to stay with their current employer longer than two years and expressing that they see some opportunities for advancement. Given that they are staying where they are, they report high levels of satisfaction with their job setting, the substance of their work, and the social index—again making virtues out of necessities. A higher percentage of these lawyers than any other group reports being extremely satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer. Thus despite the worse objective circumstances compared with graduates of other law school tiers, these graduates are well aware of the boost that the law degree gave to their careers. They believe that they are lucky, and that it makes little sense to want the professional rewards that are unattainable to them. They are therefore more or less pleased with where they are and plan to stay, especially if they are one of the few who made it to a large firm—if they can hang on to the position.

Mixing and Matching Careers and People: Social Class in Professional Sorting

At this early stage of lawyer careers, it is already clear how sentiments of satisfaction and dissatisfaction play into and legitimate the hierarchical structures of the legal profession. Those who can obtain the most prestigious and lucrative positions in large corporate law firms do so, they work long hours, and they internalize a relative dissatisfaction that encourages them to move. The relative unhappiness with the work and job setting in the large corporate law firms helps those from the lower-ranked schools—who typically are from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds—to feel pride in other choices, or to find what Lamont (2000) calls “dignity.” As McGill (2003) has shown in her study of law school culture, the lower-ranked law schools themselves encourage students to make a professional virtue out of the careers that are available to their graduates. They emphasize values such as service to clients or the achievement of gaining access to the legal profession. In the meantime, the rite of passage of some tenure in large corporate law firms is so built into the elite opportunity structure that few from the top tiers of schools turn it down at the initial stages of their careers. The difficulties of that work are part of a process that makes it easier to accept the unequal access to high-paying and prestigious law jobs.

The relative lack of elite satisfaction, we note, also plays a role in the internal dynamics of the large corporate law firms. It is clear that the economics of the large law firm depend on relatively few associates making it to partner (Galanter & Palay 1991). Meanwhile, the long hours that associates work are essential to partner profits. Too many partners would depress those profits. This basic structure is the basis of Galanter and Palay’s hypothesis of the “tournament of lawyers.” It is difficult to administer a tournament, however, when there are too many contestants and the criteria for victory are not very precise. Our hypothesis is that relative dissatisfaction encourages attrition and makes the screening process far more manageable for law firm managers. While there is no detailed research about the partnership decision as such, it would be difficult for partners to make defensible decisions if all the associates sought to stay. It is probably relatively easy to use evaluations to determine workplace success among associates, but difficult to determine who is so outstanding as to warrant partnership. The difficult lifestyle of the large law firm that encourages very high attrition makes this decision somewhat easier.

The patterns of expected mobility raise some cause for concern, however, when examined by race and gender. Our data indicate that women are more likely than men to be planning to leave

their employers within one year and that minorities are also more likely to express these intentions. Law firms are under strong pressure to hire and retain more women and minorities (see, e.g., Wilkins 2004; McDonough 2005), but the system of high attrition reaffirms the patterns of the large corporate law firm as still a white male institution. One minority woman in the AJD sample, for example, attended a reception at a corporate law firm designed to encourage minorities to consider careers in such firms. Feeling “out of place and weird” during the reception with discussions of golf and similar subjects, she took away a different message—and ultimately pursued a career in the public sphere. Another minority respondent with a working-class background and elite credentials stated that the corporate firm for which he works “wants him to succeed,” but he feels like an “outsider” “faking it” to get along in an environment where he does not fit in. These expressions are relatively common among interviewees. Minorities and women who choose to leave may believe that it is their own choice—perhaps for lifestyle reasons—but the cumulative impact and sentiments such as those just quoted suggest that the institutional dynamics of law firms are also part of this process.

Conclusion

The implications of the system of stratification documented in this article and in others (e.g., Heinz et al. 2005; Hagan et al. 1988; Auerbach 1976) are significant. We know for example, from the pathbreaking work of the Chicago Lawyers project (Heinz & Laumann 1982; Heinz et al. 2005), that the legal profession is divided into two hemispheres, with one sphere serving corporations and the other serving personal clients. It is clear from the AJD data that this segmentation of lawyers into separate spheres begins early in their careers, and that it is related to patterns of stratification. According to the data in Figure 3, top 10 law school graduates report, on average, that they spend 69 percent of their time serving corporate clients and 35 percent of their time representing personal clients or small businesses.²² The patterns almost reverse as we follow the hierarchy of law school tier, with average fourth-tier graduates devoting 28 percent of their time to representing corporate clients and 57 percent of their time to personal clients or small businesses. The direct correlation between law school tier and client type, and the step-graded pattern of this correlation,

²² Corporate clients are defined as Fortune 500 business services and other large or middle-sized businesses; personal clients are defined as high-, middle or low income individuals and small businesses; Other clients were defined as government, start up businesses, insurance companies, non profit organizations and other.

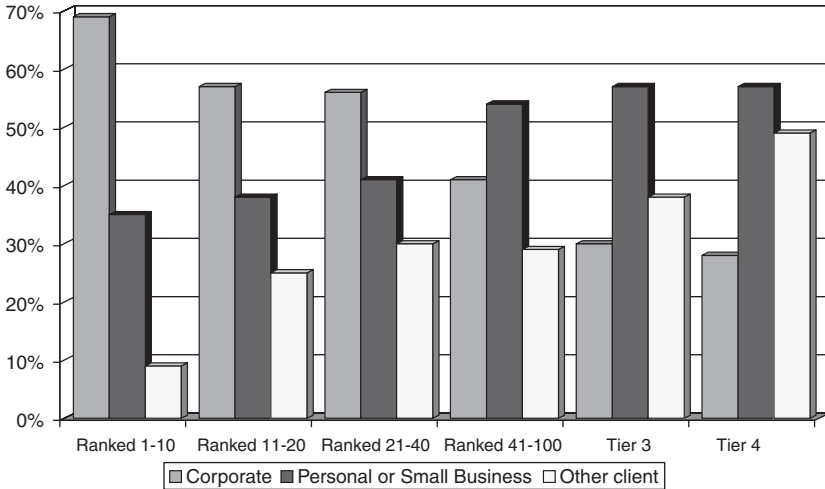


Figure 3. Mean percent time representing client types by law school tier.

demonstrates that the system of stratification in the legal profession is even more complex than the two-hemispheres thesis suggests.

The streaming of top law graduates into the corporate sphere has long raised questions about the ways in which the resources of the legal profession are expended (e.g., Abel 1989; Hadfield 2000), and the patterns we document in this article call for further reflection on the implications of stratification for the legal field (Bourdieu 1987). With lawyers from lower-tier law schools not only accepting of their place in the profession's hierarchy, but also extolling its virtues by relying on the benefits of lifestyle, we find a continued convergence of elite lawyers and corporate clients that is reproduced through career preferences. As recent research indicates, it is precisely this elite convergence that continues to provide law firms with their own status and underwrites their ability to retain and bill corporate clients (Uzzi & Lancaster 2004). That this hierarchy is legitimated through individual career aspirations ensures that any change would be difficult to effect—and elite law schools, continuing to draw their students from predominantly privileged social origins, will continue to place their graduates in large, urban law firms generating wealth for corporate clients. This is a paradigm that some of these new elite lawyers may be challenging, as they look outside of the large law firms for opportunities. The implications of this challenge, however, remain unknown: while it may result in reform of law firms, it may instead work to their advantage by differentiating among elite students, with departures even extending the influence of firms and law schools beyond the legal field. Lawyer satisfaction, as a result, provides an early signal for how law's symbolic value may be remade—or reproduced—in the coming decades.

Appendix A. (Continued)

	Already Looking and < 1 Year		1-2 Years		3-5 Years	
	b	exp(b)	b	exp(b)	b	exp(b)
Prestige & Performance (excluded category for law schools is Tier4)						
GPA	-0.832	0.435**	-0.741	0.477**	-0.528	0.590*
Top ten law school	1.019	2.771*	0.972	2.645*	0.861	2.367*
Top 11-20	0.085	1.088	-0.363	0.696	0.235	1.265
Top 21-40 law school	-0.071	0.361	0.111	1.117	-0.001	0.999
Top 41-100 law school	-0.236	0.304	-0.292	0.747	-0.442	0.643
Tier 3	-0.351	0.331	-0.435	0.647	-0.193	0.825
Salary (in 1000s)	-0.004	0.004	-0.005	0.995	-0.008	0.992*
Zero Debt	-0.545	0.287	-0.452	0.636	-0.540	0.583*
High Debt	0.026	1.026	-0.150	0.861	0.016	1.016
Prior Positions	-0.208	0.206	-0.024	0.976	0.189	1.208
Satisfaction with job setting	-1.283	0.110	-0.784	0.457***	-0.584	0.557***
Satisfaction with substance of work	-1.323	0.107	-0.842	0.431***	-0.449	0.638***
Satisfaction with social index	-0.797	0.102	-0.509	0.601***	-0.420	0.657***
Satisfaction with power track	-0.975	0.119	-0.543	0.581***	-0.105	0.900
Networking	-0.302	0.253	-0.189	0.828	-	0.920
Consulting or investment banking	0.258	1.294	0.226	1.253	0.049	1.050
(Constant)	3.118	22.600**	2.909	18.330**	2.530	12.554**

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

^aAppendix A displays results from multiply imputed data. Please refer to text for discussion of missing data procedures.
^{*} $p < .05$, ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{***} $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix B

We also tested for interactions to explore whether law school tier itself structures the very factors that affect job satisfaction and mobility intentions. This involved splitting the sample into six subsamples based on law school tier, and building all the models presented in the article within each of these subsamples. We then compared the *b* coefficients produced in each model across the law school tiers (using the appropriate Z tests) to test for significant interactions. While the results are complex, they continue to complement the findings presented in the article, and we report here on some of the most salient and significant findings ($p < .05$ or better for all effects reported below).

Modeling respondents' intentions to leave their employer, we find that top 10 graduates with high debt are more likely to be thinking of leaving their job within two years compared to fourth-tier graduates. We also find that satisfaction with job substance and the social index reduces job mobility intentions for top 10 law school graduates compared to all other law school graduates.

In the models for career satisfaction we find a significant effect for gender: men from top 10 schools report higher levels of satisfaction than women when compared to graduates of top 40 and fourth-tier schools. We also find that for graduates of top 40 schools, having had a prior position reduces career satisfaction significantly when compared to graduates of schools ranked 100 or below.

The models for the four types of job satisfaction suggest that salary can work in different ways for respondents from different law schools: salary significantly increases setting satisfaction for fourth-tier graduates compared to top 10 graduates, and it increases the power track satisfaction for graduates of third-tier schools compared to top 10 graduates. The models also indicate that father's socioeconomic status is conditioned by law school rank: for top 10 graduates, increases in father's socioeconomic status result in significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the job setting compared to graduates from all other law schools (except those from the third tier). The data also suggest that age interacts in important ways with law school tier. Respondents who are over 36 years old and who attended a law school in the top 20 report lower levels of satisfaction with their job substance than graduates of the lower-tier law schools. We also find that law school GPA significantly increases setting satisfaction for top 10 graduates compared to those from the top 40, top 100, and third tier.

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