

Lawyers at Mid-Career: A 20-Year Longitudinal Study of Job and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

This study is the first to our knowledge to simultaneously measure the predictors of lawyers' satisfaction *with their careers* and the predictors of lawyers' satisfaction *with their lives more broadly*. One class of the University of Virginia School of Law was studied between their matriculation in 1987 and their graduation in 1990. All 360 living graduates of this class were contacted in 2007, with a response rate of 72.2%. Descriptive information was obtained and empirically validated measures of both career satisfaction and life satisfaction were administered. Respondents were found to have taken many diverse career paths, with most (85%) having changed jobs at least once, and half having changed jobs at least twice. Gender differences in the personal and professional lives of respondents were pervasive. Women graduates were far more likely than men to interrupt or forego full-time employment (39% v 1%), mainly in order to care for children, and were also more likely to have a spouse or partner employed full-time outside the home (77% v 24%). Working conditions at large private law firms emerged as a significant problem for many respondents; half of those who started their careers in large firms left to go to a different type of employer. Finally, both career satisfaction and life satisfaction were found to be high, with 81% of the respondents satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer, and 86% satisfied with their lives more broadly.

I. Introduction

This article reports an empirical study of lawyer satisfaction that differs from the bulk of existing research on this topic in three fundamental ways—the first two methodological and the third substantive. First, this study is longitudinal—the same respondents were extensively studied during the three-year course of their legal education, and again 20 years after they began law school, permitting performance on a number of factors relevant to satisfaction to be studied over time. Second, this study achieved a response rate that is unusually high—high enough to obviate most concerns with sample bias. Finally, this study is the first to our knowledge to simultaneously measure the predictors of lawyers’ satisfaction *with their careers* and the predictors of lawyers’ satisfaction *with their lives more broadly*.

Before describing the study and its findings, it is necessary to briefly situate them within two disparate research traditions, the body of work specifically addressed to career satisfaction among lawyers, and the empirical literature on life satisfaction more generally.

II. The Career Satisfaction of Lawyers

There are two literatures on lawyer satisfaction, and their findings differ so starkly that one might wonder whether they are studying the same phenomenon.¹ The first literature is vast and much better known both to lawyers and to non-lawyers alike. In this body of work, lawyers in practice are “unhappy, unhealthy, and unethical.”² Compared

¹ Ronit Dinovitzer & Bryant Garth, Lawyer Satisfaction in the Process of Structuring Legal Careers, 41 Law & Soc’y Rev. 1 (2007).

² Patrick J. Schiltz, On Being a Happy, Healthy, and Ethical Member of an Unhappy, Unhealthy, and Unethical Profession, 52 Vand. L. Rev. 871 (1999). See also Martin E. Seligman, Paul R. Verkuil, & Terry H. Kang, Why Lawyers Are Unhappy, 23 Cardozo L. Rev. 33 (2001).

to those in other professions, lawyers are reported to be prone to depression,³ anxiety,⁴ alcoholism,⁵ drug abuse,⁶ physical illness,⁷ divorce,⁸ and suicide.⁹ The dissatisfaction lawyers experience in their jobs is said to be “widespread, profound and growing worse.”¹⁰ These surveys are often, although not always, characterized by very low response rates, and therefore are open to methodological challenge on the grounds of sample bias, i.e., the possibility that the dissatisfied portion of the legal profession is heavily overrepresented among those who respond to the survey.¹¹

³ North Carolina Bar Association, Report of the Quality of Life Task Force and Recommendations 4 (1991).

⁴ Id at 4.

⁵ Eric Drogan, Alcoholism in the Legal Profession: Psychological and Legal Perspectives and Interventions, 15 Law & Psychology Rev 117 (1991).

⁶ XXXG. Andrew Benjamin et al, The Prevalence of Depression, Alcohol Abuse, and Cocaine Abuse Among United States Lawyers, 13 Int'l J. L. & Psychiatry 233, 240 (1990).

⁷ Marc Schenker, Muzza Eaton, Rochelle Green, & Steven Samuels, Self-Reported Stress and Reproductive Health of Female Lawyers, 39 J. Occupational & Env'tl. Med. 556, 557 (1997).

⁸ Teresa Cooney & Peter Uhlenberg, Family-Building Patterns of Professional Women: A Comparison of Lawyers, Physicians, and Postsecondary Teachers, 51 J. Marriage & Fam. 749, 751 (1989).

⁹ Susan Swaim Daicoff, Lawyer, Know Thyself: A Psychological Analysis of Personality Strengths and Weaknesses (2004).

¹⁰ David Margolick, More Lawyers are Less Happy at their Work, a Survey Finds. N. Y. Times, Aug. 17, 1990 at B5.

¹¹For an excellent review of methodological problems in much of this literature, see Kathleen Hull, Cross-Examining the Myth of Lawyers' Misery, 52 Vand. L Rev 971, 972 (1999) (“For example, we have no way to assess the quality of the data produced by the fax poll conducted by *California Lawyer* magazine [“It’s Become a Miserable Profession,” March 1992, at 96], which finds over half of all lawyers in that state dissatisfied with their careers. Because this survey does not use a random sample of lawyers, but instead relies on the voluntary participation of the magazine’s readership, it is highly unlikely to provide a representative picture of the target population... The magazine does not even report the total number of respondents to the poll, further diminishing its value as a measure of the attitudes of its target population.”)

The second body of literature on lawyer satisfaction derives from more traditional social science methods,¹² rather than from low-response surveys.¹³ This work finds that lawyers—including women¹⁴ and minority lawyers¹⁵—are not nearly as dissatisfied with their jobs as the popular literature would have us believe. Indeed, “the most valid, well-designed research has produced little if any support for the notion that lawyers are unhappy in their work.”¹⁶ For example, three surveys of graduates of the University of Michigan Law School between 1976 and 1979 were reported by Chambers.¹⁷ The surveys took place 5 years after graduation. He found that 82% of female and 83% of

¹² See in particular John Heinz, Kathleen Hull, & Ava Harter, *Lawyers and Their Discontents: Findings from a Survey of the Chicago Bar*, 74 *Ind. L.J.* 735 (1999); John Heinz, Robert Nelson, Rebecca Sandefur & Edward Laumann, *Urban Lawyers: The New Social Structure of the Bar* (2005); Carroll Seron, *The Status of Legal Professionalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century: Chicago Lawyers and Urban Lawyers*, 32 *Law & Soc. Inquiry* 581 (2007).

¹³ Even here, however, the response rate in the research is sometimes surprisingly low. For example, a recent survey of lawyer satisfaction among graduates of the Yale Law School from 1970 to 1999 reported a response rate of 24 percent. Deborah Cantrell, Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Heather Lord, and April Smith, *Walking the Path of the Law: How Yale Law School Graduates Navigate Career Choices* (2007) available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1026618. Another study surveyed graduates of the Indiana University School of Law—Bloomington at 5 and 15 years post-graduation for each of the past 6 years. The response rate was 28 percent. Jeffrey Stake, Kenneth Dau-Schmidt, & Kaushik Mukhopadhyaya, *Income and Career Satisfaction in the Legal Profession: Survey Data from Indiana Law School Graduates*, 4 *J. Legal Stud.* 939 (2007) (“Our proposal to cajole respondents to return surveys in greater numbers elicited a cold reception from the Indiana University Internal Review Board, which was concerned that the letter might subject the respondents to too much pressure.” *Id.* at 940, n.3)

¹⁴ John Hagan & Fiona Kay, *Gender in Practice: A Study of Lawyers’ Lives* (1995); Kenneth Dau-Schmidt, Marc Galanter, Kaushik Mukhopadhyaya, & Kathleen Hull, *Gender and the Legal Profession: The Michigan Alumni Data Set 1967-2000*, available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1017362

¹⁵ Richard Lempert, David Chambers, & Terry Adams, *Michigan’s Minority Graduates in Practice: The River Runs Through Law School*, 25 *Law & Soc. Inquiry* 395 (2000); Kenneth Dau-Schmidt & Kaushik Mukhopadhyaya, *The Fruits of Our Labors: An Empirical Study of the Distribution of Income and Job Satisfaction Across the Legal Profession*, 49 *J. Legal Educ.* 342 (1999).

¹⁶ Kathleen Hull, *Cross-Examining the Myth of Lawyers’ Misery* 52 *Vand. L. Rev.* 971, 971 (1999). For a review of the “satisfaction debates,” see Dinovitzer & Garth, *supra* note 1.

¹⁷ David Chambers, *Accommodation and Satisfaction: Women and Men Lawyers and the Balance of Work and Family*, 14 *Law & Soc. Inquiry* 251 (1989). The response rate was 71 percent. Another study of the University of Michigan Law School graduates mailed in 1997 to members of the classes graduating between 1970-1996 found that, depending on the class, between 76 and 82 percent of all graduates were satisfied with careers. *Id.* at 445.

male graduates were either “somewhat” or “quite” satisfied with their careers five years after graduation.

A major advance in the study of lawyers’ satisfaction with their careers occurred with the publication of the initial results of the *After the JD* project.¹⁸ Sponsored by the National Association for Law Placement Foundation, and with support from the American Bar Foundation, the *After the JD* project will ultimately track the professional lives of approximately 5,000 lawyers¹⁹ during the first ten years of their careers. Data are currently available from surveys administered in 2002²⁰ to a nationally representative sample of lawyers who graduated from law school no earlier than 1998 and who were first admitted to the bar in 2000.²¹ The *After the JD* study reported that, two-to-three years after passing the bar, lawyers report substantial levels of satisfaction with their decisions to become lawyers²² and with their legal practices.²³ Consistent with the

¹⁸ Ronit Dinovitzer, Bryant Garth, Richard Sander, Joyce Sterling, & Gita Wilder, *After the JD: First Results of a National Study of Legal Careers* (2004) available at http://www.nalpfoundation.org/webmodules/articles/articlefiles/87-After_JD_2004_web.pdf) [Hereinafter, *After the JD*].

¹⁹ In addition, in order to better study issues of race and ethnicity, a minority oversample was taken, resulting in an additional 600 African American, Hispanic, and Asian respondents. *After the JD*, at 15. Approximately 55 of the total sample of respondents were also interviewed.

²⁰ Surveys were also administered in 2007, and will be administered in 2012.

²¹ Many of the targeted sample could not be located. Of those who were located, 71 percent responded. Gita Wilder, *Women in the Profession: Findings from the First Wave of the After the JD Study 5* (2007) available at http://www.nalp.org/assets/863_ajdgendermonograph2007.pdf.

²² 80% of the respondents are either “moderately” or “extremely” satisfied with their decision to become a lawyer, similar to 83% of the Chicago Lawyers sample who were “fairly” or “very” satisfied with their jobs. Heinz et al, *supra* note 12.

²³ Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction on 16 specific aspects of their jobs. The average response in all 16 categories was in the “satisfied” portion of the continuum. *After the JD*, at 47.

findings of other methodologically sophisticated studies, “there is no evidence in the *AJD* data of any pervasive unhappiness in the profession.”²⁴

III. Life Satisfaction

In recent years, a large body of research has emerged on a topic variously called “subjective well-being,” “life-satisfaction,” or “happiness.” As Daniel Kahneman and Alan Krueger have pointed out,²⁵ economists have long favored studying peoples’ *revealed* preferences for maximizing their well-being, i.e., studying how people actually choose to spend their money or their time, rather than how people say they would like to, or say they intend to, spend their money or their time. Large and by now well-known literatures²⁶ in cognitive psychology and behavioral economics, however, make clear that the rationality that people exhibit in making actual choices is “bounded”²⁷ in substantial degree. “If people display bounded rationality when it comes to maximizing utility, then their choices do not necessarily reflect their ‘true’ preferences, and an exclusive reliance on choices to infer what people desire loses some of its appeal.”²⁸ Self-reports of

²⁴ *After the JD*, at 47. But see Dinovitzer & Garth, *supra* note 1, at 1 (“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 attorneys.”)

²⁵ Daniel Kahneman & Alan Krueger, *Developments in the Measurement of Subjective Well-Being*, 20 *J. Econ. Persp.* 3, 3 (2006).

²⁶ Recent book-length treatments include Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006); Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis* (2006); *The Science of Well-Being* (Felicia Huppert, Nick Bayliss, & Barry Keverne eds., 2005); *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, & Norbert Schwarz eds., 1999); Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (2002); Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness* (2008); Ed Diener & Robert Biswas-Diener, *Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth* (2008).

²⁷ Herbert Simon (1956). *Rational Choice and the Structure of the Environment*, 63 *Psychol. Rev.* 129. For a more recent treatment, see Gerd Gigerenzer, *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* (2000) at 125 (“Models of bounded rationality address the following question: How do people make decisions in the real world, where time is short, knowledge lacking, and other resources limited?”).

²⁸ Kahneman & Krueger, *supra* note 25, at 3.

peoples' *experienced* preferences—of their perceptions of their own well-being, satisfaction, or happiness—may provide a useful complement to the study of revealed preferences as indices of whether people are getting what they want out of their lives.²⁹ Four brief examples illustrate empirical research in the “life satisfaction” tradition.

First, and best-known, is an early study which looked at the subjective well-being of two groups of people, one consisting of people who had won a major lottery, and the other of people who through tragic accidents had become paraplegic.³⁰ As one would expect, when interviewed soon after these events, the lottery winners were euphoric and the people who had become paraplegic were despondent. When questioned again only one year later, however, the life satisfaction of both groups was close to being back to the level it had been before the lottery was won or the accident happened.³¹ People appear to adapt to the circumstances of their lives—even extraordinarily good or bad circumstances—to a much greater extent, and much more quickly, than many would have thought possible.

Second, the linear correlation between income and self-reported life satisfaction is surprisingly modest.³² In the United States, there are substantial increases in reported life satisfaction on the General Social Survey as a function of annual income up to the

²⁹ For a discussion of the applicability of the life satisfaction literature to legal practice, see Peter Huang & Rick Swedloff, *Authentic Happiness and Meaning at Law Firms*, 58 *Syracuse L. Rev.* 341 (2008).

³⁰ Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, & Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?*, 36 *J. Personality & Soc. Psychol.* 917 (1978).

³¹ But see Ed Diener, Richard Lucas, & Christie Scollon, *Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-Being*, 61 *Am. Psychologist* 126 (2006) (“Our findings... indicate that different types of well-being may change at different rates and even in different directions.” *Id.* at 312). See also John Bronsteen, Christopher Buccafusco, & Jonathan Masur, *Hedonic Adaptation and the Settlement of Civil Suits* (2008) available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1098271

³² Ed Diener & Robert Biswas-Diener, *Will Money Increase Subjective Well-Being? A Literature Review and Guide to Needed Research*, 57 *Soc. Indicators Res.* 119 (2002).

\$50,000-89,999 bracket, and virtually no increase in reported life satisfaction as income exceeds this bracket.³³ This finding appears to hold for nations as well as for individuals.³⁴ For example, despite tremendous gains in real per capita income in China between 1994 and 2005, there has been no reported increase in life satisfaction.³⁵

Third, there may be a substantial genetic component to subjective well-being.³⁶ For example, identical twins reared apart show the same degree of concordance on self-reported life satisfaction as on traits such as height for which a genetic basis is well-established.³⁷

Finally, while a person's genetic "temperament" may play a role in determining his or her "set-point" for subjective well-being, there is a large cultural component to experienced life satisfaction as well. For example, the average life satisfaction of people in Japan is approximately 6 on a 10-point scale, while the average life satisfaction of people in Denmark is approximately 8.³⁸

³³ Daniel Kahneman, Alan Krueger, David Schkade, Norbert Schwartz, & Arthur Stone, Would You be Happier if You Were Richer? A Focusing Illusion, 312 *Science* 1908, 1909 (2006).

³⁴ Ed Diener & Martin Seligman, Beyond Money: Toward an Economy of Well-being, 5 *Psychol Sci. in Pub. Interest* 1 (2004); Richard Easterlin, Will Raising the Incomes of All Increase the Happiness of All?, 27 *J. Econ. Behav. & Org.* 35 (1995); cf Betsey Stevenson & Justin Wolfers, Economic Growth and Subjective Well-Being: Reassessing the Easterlin Paradox, available at http://search.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1121237

³⁵ Kahneman and Krueger, *supra* note 25, at 46.

³⁶ David Lykken, *Happiness: The Nature and Nurture of Joy and Contentment* (2000); Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (2008).

³⁷ David Lykken & Auke Tellegen, Happiness is a Stochastic Phenomenon, 7 *Psychol. Sci.* 186 (1999).

³⁸ R. Veenhoven, Happiness in Nations: Subjective Appreciation of Life in 56 Nations 1946-1992 (1993). See also Ed Diener, Shigehiro Oishi, & Richard Lucas, Personality, Culture, and Subjective Well-Being: Emotional and Cognitive Evaluations of Life, 54 *Ann. Rev Psychol.* 403 (2003).

With this brief background to situate the current study within the established body of research on lawyers' career satisfaction, and the more recent empirical literature on life satisfaction, we turn to describing the study and its findings.

IV. Method

A. Survey Participants

The University of Virginia School of Law Class of 1990 was chosen to be surveyed because students in this class had previously been studied by one of the authors and extensive information on members of this class had been gathered on these students between their entrance to law school in 1987 and their graduation in 1990.³⁹

The study was administered by the University of Virginia's Center for Survey Research during the fall of 2007. Mail, web, and telephone options for completing the

³⁹ Jason Satterfield, John Monahan, & Martin Seligman, Explanatory Style Predicts Superior Law School Performance, 15 *Behav. Sci. & L.* 1 (1997). Satterfield et al studied the "explanatory style" of students in the Class of 1990. Explanatory style, or "the habitual way an individual explains the causes of events" to him or herself, id at 95, had been found to be useful in predicting success in areas as diverse as undergraduate academic grades, political elections, athletic contexts, and many types of jobs. A "pessimistic" explanatory style—a tendency to believe the cause of negative events to be stable, far reaching, and internal—had been related to depression, passivity, and poor performance. An "optimistic" explanatory style—a tendency to believe the cause of negative events to be unstable, highly specific, and external—had been associated with motivation, resiliency, and good performance. The goal of the study was to determine whether this finding could be replicated among law students.

The overall participation rate in this study was 97 percent (i.e., 374 of 387 students who entered the University of Virginia School of Law in 1987). All students volunteering to participate in the research completed the Attributional Style Questionnaire, a self-report measure of explanatory style. Peterson, Simmel, von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky, & Seligman, *The Attributional Style Questionnaire*, 6 *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 287 (1982). Over the course of three years of law school, performance data, including course grades, professor ratings of classroom performance, and law review membership, were collected. The conclusions of the research were contrary to the researchers' initial hypothesis and to many previous studies with undergraduates: in law school, "optimists" performed worse than pessimists.

It is possible that in some domains pessimism...may be a strength. Seligman... speculated that pessimism might be advantageous in professions which require more caution and reality appreciation than initiative or creativity. Perhaps pessimism is associated with traits such as realism or conservatism—in short, the prudence which may loom large in a good legal mind. Of course, we must remember that in our data, the "pessimistic" profile was linked to achievement in law and might not hold for achievement in the practice of law. Id. at 103.

survey were provided to the respondents.⁴⁰ All survey responses were confidential.⁴¹ The survey instrument was mailed to the current addresses of 100% of the 360 living graduates of the Law School class of 1990.⁴²

B. Survey Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of four sections.⁴³ Section 1 addressed the respondent's first employment after law school (excluding judicial clerkships). Nine questions asked about the type (e.g., private firm, federal government), size, duration, and location of the respondent's first employment, and about the number of different employers the respondent had had prior to his or her current employer.

⁴⁰ The survey was guided by the Dillman Tailored Design Method. Don Dillman, *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (2000). This included an advance letter, an incentive in the first packet—a Law School refrigerator magnet—reminder postcards, and a second packet mailed to non-respondents, which provided a phone number should the respondent desire to complete the survey telephonically. A letter from the Dean of the Law School explaining the importance of the research was also included in the first survey packet. The web protocol for the online version of the survey included an email announcement with an embedded link and several follow-up reminder emails.

⁴¹ Respondents were told in a cover letter “All of your responses to the survey will be kept strictly confidential and participation is completely voluntary. The Center for Survey Research (CSR) is an independent professional organization contracted to conduct this study. Each questionnaire is tagged with an identification number by the CSR staff, and only the staff of CSR will be able to link the identification number with your name. The identification number will be used only to associate your responses on this questionnaire with the information obtained while you were at the Law School and to follow up members of the Class who don't respond.” In addition, the survey form itself stated “The responses you provide will be reported only in aggregated form. Your name will not appear on any document that reports results from the study; and we will not report results in categories small enough to allow any participant's identity to be inferred. *No one from the Law School or from the Law School Foundation will have access to your identity. None of the data will be used for fundraising purposes.* Your return of a completed survey, either on paper or via the web or telephone, will be taken as consent to participate in the study under the confidentiality terms described.” The study was classified as exempt by the Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences of the University of Virginia on May 31, 2007.

⁴² Of the 374 students who consented to participate in the original study in 1987, 5 dropped out of law school before 1990, and 6 did not graduate with the rest of the class in 1990, most because they joined a joint JD/MBA program that delayed their law school graduation. These persons were not surveyed. Three graduates of the class of 1990 are deceased. Of the remaining 360 graduates of the class, current addresses were available from the Law School Foundation for all but six. All six were subsequently located by Kent Olson, Director of Reference at the University of Virginia Law Library.

⁴³ The survey instrument is available by email from John Monahan, jmonahan@virginia.edu.

The second section of the instrument consisted of nine questions that addressed the respondent's current employment. Questions asked about whether the respondent was employed full-time, part-time, or was not employed, and (if employed) about the type, size, duration, and location of the respondent's current employment, about the nature of the position the respondent held in this employment setting, and about the type of law that was the primary focus of the respondent's practice. Questions also asked about the number of hours the respondent worked in the prior week and about his or her annual salary, including bonus (if applicable).

The third section of the instrument contained 22 items that addressed the satisfaction that the respondent experienced in a number of different domains, including satisfaction with his or her decision to become a lawyer,⁴⁴ and with his or her legal education.⁴⁵ The two primary outcome variables were satisfaction in one's current job and satisfaction with life more generally. Three dimensions of current job satisfaction⁴⁶ were measured: "job setting satisfaction," which concerned approval with the operation of the workplace;⁴⁷ "work substance satisfaction," reflecting the intrinsic interest of the

⁴⁴ The question, taken from the *After the JD* study, read: "How satisfied are you with your decision to become a lawyer?," with a response scale ranging from (1) "Extremely satisfied" to (5) "extremely dissatisfied."

⁴⁵ The two questions that addressed satisfaction with respondent's legal education were: "The University of Virginia School of law prepared me well for my legal career," which was adapted from the *After the JD* study, and "The prestige associated with being a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law benefitted my career," which was adapted from Richard Lempert, David Chambers, & Terry Adams, Michigan's Minority Graduates in Practice: The River Runs Through Law School, 25 *Law & Soc. Inquiry* 395 (2000).

⁴⁶ The items on satisfaction with respondent's current job were taken from the *After the JD* study, at 47. Respondents were asked, "How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your current position?" A 7-point response scale was provided, on which (1) was "Highly dissatisfied" and (7) was "Highly satisfied."

⁴⁷ The seven items included in the job setting satisfaction dimension were: "Recognition you receive for your work," "Relationships with colleagues," "Control you have over the amount of work you do," "Control you have over how you do your work," "Job security," "Level of responsibility you have," and

work;⁴⁸ and “power track satisfaction,” which consolidated ratings of contentment with compensation levels and opportunities for advancement.⁴⁹ In addition, a single new item on satisfaction with the “balance between professional life and personal or family life” was included.⁵⁰ Life satisfaction was measured by administering the widely-used Satisfaction with Life Scale.⁵¹

The fourth section of the instrument addressed background information on the respondent. Eight questions were asked, including parental education, marital status and number of children, the employment status of respondent’s spouse/partner (if married/partnered), a rating of the respondent’s health,⁵² and an estimate of annual

“Performance evaluation process.” These items formed a coherent scale, with alpha = .85. Dinovitzer & Garth, *supra* note 1.

⁴⁸ The four items included in the work substance satisfaction domain were: “Substantive area of your work,” “Tasks you perform,” “Intellectual challenge of your work,” and “Opportunities for building skills.” These items formed a coherent scale, with alpha = .88. Dinovitzer & Garth, *supra* note 1.

⁴⁹ The two items included in the power track satisfaction domain were: “Opportunities for advancement,” and “Compensation including salary, benefits and bonus (if applicable).” These items formed a coherent scale, with alpha = .62. Dinovitzer & Garth, *supra* note 1. The *After the JD* study attempted to measure one other dimension of job satisfaction, “Social value satisfaction.” However, the alpha score for this scale was only .58, indicating a low degree of coherence. Therefore, questions making up this dimension were not asked in the current study.

⁵⁰ See New York State Bar Association, Final Report, Special Committee on Balanced Lives in the Law (March 7, 2008), available at http://www.nysba.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Special_Committee_on_Balanced_Lives_in_the_Law_Home&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=10947

⁵¹ Ed Diener, R. Emmons, R. Larson, and S. Griffin, The Satisfaction with Life Scale, 49 *J. Personality Assessment* 71 (1985). See also William Pavot & Ed Diener (1993), Review of the Satisfaction with Life Scale, 5 *Psychol. Assessment* 164 (1993). The scale consists of 5 items: “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal,” “The conditions of my life are excellent,” “I am satisfied with my life,” “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life,” and “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.” Items are rated on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree, and summed. Diener proposed that the summed scores be categorized as follows: 30-35, very highly satisfied; 25-29, highly satisfied; 20-24, average satisfaction; 15-19, slightly dissatisfied; 10-14, dissatisfied; and 5-9 extremely dissatisfied. See Diener, Understanding Scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale, available at <http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~ediener/SWLS.htm> (last visited June 18, 2008).

⁵² The question, from the General Social Survey, was “Would you say your own health, in general, is excellent, good, fair, or poor?” The response scale varied from (1) Excellent to (4) Poor.

household income. A ninth and final question was open-ended and invited the respondent to offer “any comments, reflections, or advice you have to share with law students regarding a career in law or regarding life more generally.”

V. Results

Of the 360 living graduates of the University of Virginia School of Law Class of 1990, completed surveys⁵³ were returned by 260; 155 of these respondents (60%) were men and 105 (40%) were women. The response rate was 72.2%.⁵⁴

A. Background

At the time of completing the survey, the graduates of the class of 1990 were a mean of 42.8 years old (SD = 3.3 years). For 18.4% (n=48) of the respondents, neither parent had graduated from college; for 23.8% (n=62) of the respondents, one parent had graduated from college; and for 57.9% (n=151) of the respondents, both parents had graduated from college.

Data on respondents’ marital status, whether respondents’ spouse/partner was employed outside the home, and the number of respondents’ children are presented in Table 1, disaggregated by the gender of the respondent. The great majority of both men (87.1%) and women (79.3%) were currently married or partnered, and had at least one child (82.2% of the men, and 79.0% of the women). Spouses or partners of the respondents were employed full-time outside the home for 24.4% of the men and for

⁵³ 178 surveys were completed by mail, 81 were completed on the web, and one was completed by telephone.

⁵⁴ Only 6 respondents were African-American. No records were available from 1987-1990 on members of other minority groups. Class members who responded to the survey did not differ significantly from nonresponders on any measured variable except on minority racial status; African Americans comprised 5.7% of the entering class of 1990, but only 2.3% of the 2007 survey respondents. Given the small numbers, data in this study cannot reliably be disaggregated by race.

76.7% of the women. There are no statistically significant gender differences in marital status or in the number of children. However, the gender difference in whether a respondent's spouse/partner is employed outside the home is highly significant (chi-square= 62.8, df=2, $p < 0.0001$), with women much more likely to have a spouse working outside the home.

The median total pre-tax household income for 2006 was \$250,000.⁵⁵ One quarter of the respondents had a total pre-tax household income of less than \$150,000 and one quarter had a total pre-tax household income of more than \$450,000. Ten percent of the sample had a household income of \$75,000 or less, and 10 percent had a household income of \$750,000 or more. Fifteen respondents reported an annual household income of a million dollars or more. There was no significant gender difference in reported household income.

Respondents' ratings of their health status revealed that 57.6% (n=148) reported being in excellent health, 37.7% (n=97) in good health, 3.9% (n=10) in fair health, and 0.8% (n=2) in poor health. There was no significant gender difference in reported health status.

B. First employment

All but four (1.5%) of the respondents had been employed at some point since their graduation from law school in 1990. The type of organization where respondents were first employed is presented in Table 2. A large private law firm was defined as a firm that employed 100 or more lawyers, and a small private law firm was defined as a firm that employed fewer than 100 lawyers. Illustrations of the "other" category include

⁵⁵ Income was measured in intervals (e.g., \$100,000-\$200,000), with the mid-point in the interval (\$150,000, in this example) used as the value in the analyses. Studies indicate that using intervals increases the response rate for sensitive variables such as income.

legal services, public defender, public interest organizations, and academia. There it can be seen that large private law firms were the first employers for the majority of both men (56.5%) and women (59.2%). There is no significant gender difference in the type of organization where respondents were first employed.⁵⁶

Only 14.6% of the respondents (17.3% of men and 10.2% of women, a difference that is not statistically significant) still held the jobs that they first took after graduating from law school in 1990. That is, 85.4% of the respondents had had two or more post-law school jobs (not counting a judicial clerkship). Changing jobs was much more likely in some settings than in others. For example, there were 37 men and 20 women whose first employment after law school had been in large private law firms in New York City or Washington, DC; only 4 (11%) of the men, and none of the women, were still at the same jobs 17 years later.

Respondents with one or more post-law school jobs prior to their current job—both men and women—remained with their first employer for a median of three years. Women had a median of one position prior to obtaining their current one. Men had a median of two prior positions. There is no significant gender difference in either the length of first employment or the number of positions held prior to the current one.

C. Current employment

At the time of the survey in 2007, 84.3% of the respondents (98.7% of the men and 61.1% of the women) were employed full-time, 9.2% were employed part-time, (0%

⁵⁶ The only geographic locations where ten or more respondents were first employed were Washington, DC (58 respondents; 22.8%), New York City (20 respondents; 7.8%), Richmond (14 respondents; 5.5%), and Atlanta (10 respondents; 3.9%). Locations where between five and nine respondents were first employed consisted of Baltimore (9 respondents; 3.5%), Charlottesville, VA (8 respondents; 3.1%), San Francisco (7 respondents; 2.8%), Dallas, Houston, and San Diego (each with 6 respondents; 2.4%), and Chicago and Philadelphia (each with 5 respondents; 2.0%).

of the men and 24.2% of the women) and 6.4% were not employed outside the home (1.3% of the men and 14.7% of the women). The gender difference in current employment status is highly significant (chi-square= 63.3, df=2, $p < 0.0001$).

The great majority (81.3%) of respondents not working full-time gave “in order to care for children” as the reason. All but one of these respondents were women. The percentage of men currently working full-time did not correlate significantly ($r = -.08$) with the number of children they had. The full-time employment rates for men with 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 or more children were 96, 100, 98, and 100%, respectively. However, the percentage of women currently working full-time was highly correlated ($r = -.52$; $p = .001$) with the number of children they had. The full-time employment rates for women with 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 or more children were 95, 70, 66, 22, and 0%, respectively. The dramatically different association between parenthood and full-time employment among women compared to men is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Respondents had been working with their current employer for a median of 7 years. One quarter of the respondents had been working for their current employer for 3 years or less, and one quarter had been working with their current employer for 12 years or more. The type of organization in which respondents are currently employed is presented in Table 3. As with first employment, the “other” category consists of legal services, public defender, public interest organizations, and academia. There it can be seen that large private law firms are still the respondents’ most frequent employers. Note, however, the substantial decrease in large private law firms as employers from first employment (57.6%, Table 2) to current employment (27.6%, Table 3), and the substantial increases in business/financial/industry as employers from first employment

(1.5%, Table 2) to current employment (24.1%, Table 3), as well as in the “other” employment category, from first employment (5.5%, Table 2) to current employment (15.5%, Table 3). This change in the type of organization where the respondents work, from first employment to current employment, portrayed in Figure 2, is highly statistically significant (chi-square= 46.8, df=9, $p<0.0001$). The largest decrease in employment category from first employment to current employment is for large private law firms, and the largest increase in employment category from first employment to current employment is for the business/financial category. There are no significant gender differences in the type of organization where respondents are currently employed.

When asked if they are practicing law in their current job, 75.4% (n=178) responded yes and 24.5% (n=58) answered no. There is no significant gender difference in whether a respondent is currently practicing law. Of those respondents who are currently practicing law, the primary areas in which they practice are civil litigation (18%), corporate (16%), real estate (6%), employment (6%), criminal (5%), intellectual property (5%), and environmental (5%). A large group of respondents (34%) primarily practice other forms of law (e.g., campaign finance, immigration, sports, utilities), each form constituting less than 5% of the sample. There is no significant gender difference in primary area of legal practice.⁵⁷ Of respondents not currently practicing law, their jobs included academics and academic administrators, business owners and CEOs, international bankers, and investment bankers.

⁵⁷ As with first employment, Washington, DC (44 respondents; 18.7%) and New York City (14 respondents; 6.0%) are the geographic locations where the most respondents are employed. The only location where ten or more respondents are currently employed is Charlottesville, VA (10 respondents; 4.3%). Locations where between five and nine respondents are currently employed consisted of Richmond (9 respondents; 3.8%), Atlanta and Denver (each with 8 respondents; 3.1%), San Francisco (7 respondents; 2.8%), Dallas, Houston, and San Diego (each with 6 respondents; 3.0%), Chicago and Dallas (each with 6 respondents; 2.6%), Baltimore, Dallas, and San Francisco (each with 5 respondents; 2.1%).

Respondents were asked how many hours they had worked in the week prior to completing the survey. The mean number of hours worked for all respondents working full time⁵⁸ varied by job setting, as indicated in Table 4. There is no significant gender difference in hours worked. However, the difference in hours worked by job setting is statistically significant ($F=4.31$, $df=4$, $p<.002$): respondents who worked for federal, state, or local government worked fewer hours per week than respondents in other employment settings. The percentage of respondents who reported working 60 hours or more in the prior week also varied by job setting: 25% of both men and women working in large private law firms reported working 60 or more hours in the prior week, while between 0 and 10% of both men and women in all other job settings reported working 60 or more hours in the prior week.

The mean annual pre-tax salary⁵⁹ for respondents working full-time, by employment setting and gender, is presented in Table 5. There, it can be seen that salaries vary drastically from one work setting to another, and between genders. Table 6 reports the results of a multiple regression analysis predicting annual salary among full-time employed respondents. The positive predictors of salary are law school GPA, hours worked in the prior week, working in a large private law firm, working in the business/financial sector, and being male.

D. Job Satisfaction

Respondents' satisfaction with the decision to become a lawyer is presented in Table 7. Overall, 81.2% of all respondents—80.4% of the men and 82.5% of the

⁵⁸ Respondents who said they were on vacation the previous week ($n=5$) were eliminated from this analysis. Of the respondents working part-time (all of whom were women), the median number of hours worked per week was 20.

⁵⁹ Including estimated bonus, if applicable.

women—are either “extremely” or “moderately” satisfied with that decision. Only 11.9%—11.5% of the men and 12.4% of the women—are either “extremely” or “moderately” dissatisfied to have become a lawyer. There is no significant gender difference in satisfaction with the decision to become a lawyer.

Respondents’ satisfaction with how well prepared they were by their legal education is presented in Table 8. The mean score on the item, “The University of Virginia School of Law prepared me well for my legal career,” is 5.8 on a 7-point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree, 4 being neither agree nor disagree and 7 being strongly agree. The mean score for men is 5.8 and for women is 5.6, a difference that is not statistically significant. Collapsing across the three “agree” and the three “disagree” categories, 7.1% of the respondents disagree with the statement that the University of Virginia School of Law prepared them well, 8.2% neither agree nor disagree with it, and 84.8% agree. Again collapsing across the agree and disagree categories, 4.6% of the male respondents and 10.5 % of the female respondents disagree with the statement that the University of Virginia prepared them well, 7.2% of the male respondents and 9.5% of the female respondents neither agree nor disagree with it, and 88.2% of the male respondents and 80.0% of the female respondents agree that the University of Virginia School of Law prepared them well for their legal careers.

Table 9 presents the satisfaction that respondents feel with how the reputation of the school from which they graduated affected their careers. The mean score on the item, “The prestige associated with being a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law benefitted my career,” is 6.2 on a 7-point scale with 1 being strongly disagree, 4 being neither agree nor disagree and 7 being strongly agree. The mean score for men is

6.1 and for women is 6.3, a difference that was not statistically significant. Collapsing across the three “agree” categories and the three “disagree” categories, 4.0% of the respondents disagree with the statement that the prestige associated with being a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law benefitted their careers, 3.1% neither agree nor disagree with it, and 93.2% agree with it. Again collapsing across the agree and disagree categories, 3.3% of the male respondents and 4.9 % of the female respondents disagree with the statement that the prestige associated with being a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law benefitted their careers, 5.3% of the male respondents and 0% of the female respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement, and 91.4% of the male respondents and 95.3% of the female respondents agree that the prestige associated with being a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law benefitted their careers.

As described earlier, three dimensions of current job satisfaction were measured. The items for each dimension were taken from the *After the JD* study: “job setting satisfaction,” which concerned approval with the operation of the workplace; “work substance satisfaction,” reflecting the intrinsic interest of the work; and “power track satisfaction,” which consolidated ratings of contentment with compensation levels and opportunities for advancement. In addition, a single new item on satisfaction with the “balance between professional life and personal or family life” was included. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 (“Highly dissatisfied”) to 7 (“Highly satisfied”). Table 10 presents the mean scores on the job satisfaction items. Each of the items were rated substantially above the scale mid-point of 4 (“Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”), in the satisfied direction. The only item close to the mid-point (with a mean score of 4.7)

was satisfaction with the “performance evaluation process,” which replicates a finding of the *After the JD* study. There are no significant gender differences on any job satisfaction item. Figures 3, 4, and 5 present these job satisfaction items, by gender, aggregated into three of the dimensions identified in the *After the JD* study. The mean overall score on the Job Setting dimension of job satisfaction (Figure 3) is 5.6 (men=5.6; women=5.7), on the Work Substance dimension (Figure 4) is 5.7 (men=5.7; women=5.9), and on the Power Track dimension (Figure 5) is 5.2 (men=5.3; women=5.0). There are no significant gender differences on any dimension of job satisfaction.

E. Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction was measured by the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale, each item being scored on a 7-point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree, 4 being neither agree nor disagree and 7 being strongly agree. The mean overall score is 5.3 (men = 5.2; women = 5.4, a difference that is not statistically significant). Table 11 displays these life satisfaction scores by categories, using the category labels and cut-off scores provided by Diener.⁶⁰ Collapsing the three highest categories into “satisfied,” and the three lowest into “dissatisfied,” 85.5% of the respondents—82.8% of the men and 89.5% of the women—are satisfied with their lives and 14.5% of the respondents—17.2% of the men and 10.5% of the women—are dissatisfied.

F. Bivariate correlations

Table 12 presents the bivariate correlations between key predictor variables and the “job setting domain” of employment satisfaction identified in the *After the JD study*. Only respondents who are employed full-time are included in this analysis. The only predictor that correlates significantly with job setting satisfaction is being currently

⁶⁰ Available at <http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~ediener/>.

employed in a large private law firm, which correlates negatively. Respondents' ratings of their health bore a marginally significant positive correlation with job satisfaction.

Table 12 also presents the bivariate correlations between key predictor variables and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. All respondents are included in this analysis, regardless of their current employment status. Respondents' ratings of their health, and being in a marital or partnered relationship bore significant positive relationships with current life satisfaction. Respondents' cumulative GPA while in law school and the number of hours worked during the prior week bore significant negative relationships to current life satisfaction. To a marginally significant degree, the number of children a respondent had at home correlated positively with life satisfaction, and being employed in a large private law firm correlated negatively with life satisfaction. The analysis was repeated limiting the sample to respondents employed full-time, with largely comparable results.

Finally, Table 12 presents the bivariate correlations between key predictor variables and the single item, "balance between professional life and personal or family life," rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 ("Highly dissatisfied") to 7 ("Highly satisfied"). Only respondents who are employed full-time are included in this analysis. Respondents' cumulative GPA while in law school, their being in a marital or partnered relationship, the number of children they had at home, being a practicing lawyer, the number of hours they worked during the prior week, working in a large private law firm, and their annual salary, all bore a significant negative relationship to satisfaction with work/life balance. Only working for federal, state, or local government correlated positively with work/life balance.

G. Multiple regression models

Table 13 presents the final multiple regression model predicting the job setting domain of employment satisfaction. Only respondents who are employed full-time are included in this analysis. The only two significant multivariate predictors of current job setting satisfaction are working in a large private law firm, which bore a negative relationship to job setting satisfaction, and salary, which bore a positive relationship.

Table 13 also presents the final multiple regression model predicting life satisfaction. All respondents are included in this analysis, regardless of their current employment status. The significant positive multivariate predictors of life satisfaction were respondents' health rating, whether they were married or cohabitating, and whether they were a practicing lawyer. The significant negative multivariate predictors of life satisfaction were hours worked in the prior week, working in a large private law firm, and working in business or financial organizations. The analysis was repeated limiting the sample to respondents employed full-time, with largely comparable results. Figure 6 displays the findings for one of these predictors of life satisfaction, organizational setting.

Finally, Table 13 presents the final multiple regression model predicting "balance between professional life and personal or family life," rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 ("Highly dissatisfied") to 7 ("Highly satisfied"). Only respondents who are employed full-time are included in this analysis. Being male was the only significant positive multivariate predictor of satisfaction with work/life balance. Being a practicing lawyer, the number of hours worked during the prior week, and working in a large private law firm were significant negative multivariate predictors of satisfaction with work/life balance.

VI. Discussion

This study has three advantages over much other research on the satisfaction of lawyers. First, it was longitudinal, following the same subjects from entry into law school, through graduation from law school three years later, and again 17 years into their professional lives. Second, it was conducted on a highly representative sample, having located 100% of the living graduates of one law school class and having achieved a response rate of 72.2% from this population. Finally, it employed empirically validated measures of both career satisfaction and of life satisfaction, the latter for the first time.

It should be acknowledged that the study also had significant limitations. Only one class at only one law school was surveyed; surveying different classes at the same law school, or the same class at different law schools, might have produced different results. In particular, a cohort effect may be present that may limit the generalizability of the findings reported here to people currently beginning their legal careers: the practice of law in 2008 may be different than the practice of law in 1990. For example, the number of billable hours required of associates hired by private law firms in 2008 may be significantly higher than the number of billable hours required of associates hired by private law firms in 1990, and this fact may have implications for both the career and the life satisfaction of people currently beginning their legal careers—implications which are not reflected in the data found here. Finally, because this study was limited to one class at one law school, the sample size is not large enough to statistically test for many effects (e.g., the effect of race on career and life satisfaction) that are of interest.

We highlight five of what we take to be the principal findings of this research. In each case, we give three brief but representative quotes from the comments that our

respondents gave to the final open-ended question on the survey, inviting “any comments, reflections, or advice you have to share with law students regarding a career in law or regarding life more generally.”

A. Law graduates take many diverse career paths:

- 17 years after graduation, no single setting accounts for the employment of more than one-quarter of the lawyers studied here
- Most (85%) graduates have changed jobs at least once, and half have changed jobs at least twice
- One-quarter of the law graduates who are currently working full-time are no longer practicing as lawyers

“Starting off at a large firm is a great way to develop as a lawyer. If you are willing to trade-off some salary after getting a few years, there are some wonderful in-house opportunities in the non-profit sector. Many will provide some of the most sophisticated, challenging and satisfying law jobs around.”

“I hope law school grads understand that the skills and knowledge they gain in law school can be applied to a lot more than the practice of law. I have combined my experience as an engineer, as a lawyer, and as a businessman to arrive at a satisfying career outside of a traditional legal career.”

“I would tell current students to not be afraid to try unusual places or ways in which to practice law. I would have never pictured myself as a solo practitioner in a poor

area of rural Virginia, but overall I am extremely satisfied with life and practice here ... I can raise my show dogs, go to the office in shorts, and still face exciting challenges and intellectual stimulation in my practice.”

B. Gender differences in the personal and professional lives of lawyers are pervasive⁶¹:

- women graduates are much more likely than men to have a spouse or partner who is employed full-time outside the home (77% v 24%)⁶²
- women graduates are much less likely than men to be employed full-time themselves (61% v 99%)
- This gender difference in law graduates’ full-time employment is largely accounted for by having children at home
- Even given the above, two-thirds of the women with two children at home are working full-time
- Women earn significantly less than men, even controlling for employment setting, hours worked, and many other factors⁶³

⁶¹ See generally Kathleen Hull & Robert Nelson, Assimilation, Choice, or Constraint? Testing Theories of Gender Differences in the Careers of Lawyers, 79 *Social Forces* 229 (2000); John Hagan & Fiona Kay, Even Lawyers Get the Blues: Gender, Depression, and Job Satisfaction in Legal Practice, 41 *Law & Soc’y Rev.* 51 (2007); Elizabeth Gorman, Work Uncertainty and the Promotion of Professional Women: The Case of Law Firm Partnership, 85 *Social Forces* 865 (2006); Christine Percheski, Opting Out? Cohort Differences in Professional Women’s Employment Rates from 1960 to 2005, 73 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 497 (2008).

⁶² That lawyers who are women are much more likely than lawyers who are men to have a spouse or partner who is employed fulltime outside the home has been reported among alumni of the University of Michigan, Dau-Schmidt et al, *supra* note 14, at 17, Table D1(5), and Indiana University. Kenneth Dau-Schmidt, Jeffrey Stake, Kaushik Mukhopadhaya, & Timothy Haley, “The Pride of Indiana”: An Empirical Study of the Law School Experience and Careers of Indiana University—Bloomington Alumni, 81 *Ind. L. J.* 1427 (2006) at 1451.

⁶³ Unexplained gender differences in lawyers’ salaries have been found in many other studies. See, e.g., Robert Wood, Mary Corcoran, & Paul Courant, Pay Differences among the Highly Paid: The Male-Female

“After years of practicing law in private firms, I believe it is incredibly difficult to have a career and raise a family. Many women my age agree. The idea that we could 'have it all' sounded great, but it doesn't really work out that way.”

“Law firms are still very difficult places for women lawyers. Most of the partners are men who have wives who stay at home and it creates a very difficult place to practice law in a sophisticated way while balancing that with family responsibilities. I find that most of my male partners do not see their children during the week; for me, that is not an option that I would ever exercise.”

“To be successful, you have to accept that your career will consume a much greater percent of your life than most ‘jobs.’ You have to have a good support system; forget the idea that you can do it all superbly (e.g., my husband does all the cooking and is proud of my success). The more valuable you are, the more flexibility you will have to negotiate a work schedule that works for you.”

C. Working conditions at large private law firms are a problem—perhaps the problem—for many lawyers:

- Most law graduates studied here (58%) start off in large firms

Earnings Gap in Lawyers' Salaries, 11 J. Lab. Econ. 417 (1993); Charlotte Chiu & Kevin Leicht, When Does Feminization Increase Equality? The Case of Lawyers, 33 Law & Soc’y Rev. 557 (1999); Richard Lempert, David Chambers, & Terry Adams, Michigan’s Minority Graduates in Practice: The River Runs Through Law School, 25 Law & Soc. Inquiry 395, 479 (2000); Stake et al, supra note 13 at 960.

- Half of the graduates who start off in large firms leave to go to a different type of employer
- The half that remain in large firms have lower job and life satisfaction than other lawyers⁶⁴
- And yet, “only” 20% of the graduates who remain in large firms are dissatisfied with their lives⁶⁵

“Life in a private law firm is very demanding. Unless you love it, there is a soul-sucking quality. I would not encourage my own children to go into law unless they love it.”

“UVA law degree, education, training: good. Slavish compulsion to follow the crowd and work in as big a law firm as possible: bad.”

“I’ve found the practice of law—even practice at a large firm—to be far more satisfying and intellectually stimulating than I imagined it would be when I graduated.”

D. Overall, lawyers’ career satisfaction is high:

- 81% are satisfied with the decision to become a lawyer

⁶⁴ The lack of career satisfaction among lawyers working in large private firms often has been reported. See Dau Schmidt et al “The Pride of Indiana,” supra note 61 at 1460; Dinovitzer and Garth, supra note 1 at 9.

⁶⁵ Defined as a score of slightly dissatisfied (15-19), dissatisfied (10-14), or extremely dissatisfied (5-9) on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. See Table 11.

- 85% are satisfied with how well UVa prepared them
- 93% are satisfied with how UVa benefitted their careers⁶⁶
- 81% score 5 or higher on a 7-point scale of satisfaction with their job setting
- While men score significantly higher than women in the “balance” between their work and personal or family lives, there is no significant overall gender difference in job satisfaction⁶⁷

“Among people who have chosen a career as an attorney, I am one of the luckiest people alive. The firm I found is fantastic. I am paid extremely well, have significant control over what work I do, and I work very reasonable hours.”

“An old Greek definition of happiness is ‘vital powers exercised along lines of excellence in a life that affords them scope.’ This describes the joy I get from the practice of law as a partner in a 21st century law firm.”

“A career in law can be very rewarding and fulfilling. However, law firms need to make it a priority to improve the quality of life of their associates and partners.”

⁶⁶ The item, “The prestige associated with being a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law benefitted my career,” was adapted from a survey of graduates of the University of Michigan Law School, changing only the name of the law school. The percent of respondents endorsing the item was very similar across the two schools: 85% of University of Michigan graduates endorsed it. Richard Lempert et al, supra note 15.

⁶⁷ The lack of gender difference in lawyers’ career satisfaction has been reported elsewhere. See Kathleen Hull, The Paradox of the Contented Female Lawyer, 33 Law & Soc’y Rev. 687(1999); David Chambers, Accommodation and Satisfaction: Women and Men Lawyers and the Balance of Work and Family, 14 Law & Soc. Inquiry 251 (1989); Dau-Schmidt et al, Gender and the Legal Profession, supra note 14 at 67, Table E15(15).

E. Overall, lawyers' life satisfaction is high:

- 86% are at least “satisfied” with their lives
- 68% are “highly” or “very highly satisfied” with their lives
- There is no significant gender difference in life satisfaction

“Law is extremely rewarding. The intellectual challenge is a reward in itself. My practice is a window into human nature. It is unseemly at times, but by comparison with other people, my life is wonderful.”

“Private practice is not for everyone, and government practice provides a great opportunity for better work/life balance. I don't make as much money as my private-practice peers, but I have a great quality of life with my family.”

“I am a partner at mid-sized firm in a mid-sized town. I control my own practice. I have four kids and I put them to sleep almost every night. I coach a soccer team and a baseball team. It's a great life.”

Table 1. Marital Status, Spouse/Partner Employment, and Parental Status

	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Marital status						
Never married/ partnered	25	9.5	14	9.2	11	10.6
Married/ partnered	219	83.9	135	87.1	84	79.3
Divorced/ separated	12	4.6	3	2.0	9	8.9
Widowed	1	0.4	1	0.7	0	0
Spouse/partner employed outside the home						
Full-time	99	44.8	33	24.4	66	76.7
Part-time	35	15.8	24	17.8	11	12.8
Not employed	87	39.4	78	57.8	9	10.5
Number of children						
0	49	19.1	27	17.8	22	21.0
1	33	12.8	23	15.1	10	9.5
2	101	39.3	59	38.8	42	40.0
3	54	21.0	28	18.4	26	24.8
4 or more	20	7.8	15	9.9	5	4.8

Table 2. Type of Organization Where First Employed After Law School

Type of Organization	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Large private law firm	148	57.6	87	56.5	61	59.2
Small private law firm	59	23.9	38	24.7	21	20.4
Government	32	12.5	20	13.0	12	11.7
Business/financial	4	1.6	3	2.0	1	1.0
Other	14	5.5	6	3.9	8	7.8

Table 3. Type of Organization Where Currently Employed

Type of Organization	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Large private law firm	64	27.6	46	30.7	18	22.0
Small private law firm	41	17.7	21	14.0	20	24.4
Government	35	15.1	25	16.7	10	12.2
Business/financial	56	24.1	38	25.3	18	22.0
Other	36	15.5	20	13.3	16	19.5

Table 4. Mean Hours Worked Last Week for Respondents Working Full-Time, by Type of Organization

Type of Organization	Total	Men	Women
Large private law firm	53.4	52.8	55.7
Small private law firm	47.0	47.8	45.5
Government	44.4	45.2	42.2
Business/financial	48.7	48.4	49.2
Other	48.7	51.1	44.6

Table 5. Mean Annual Salary for Respondents Working Full-Time, by Type of Organization

Type of Organization	Total	Men	Women	Women as % of Men
Large private law firm	523,000	536,000	473,000	88.2
Small private law firm	276,000	286,000	257,000	89.9
Government	129,000	138,000	103,000	74.6
Business/financial	335,000	374,000	217,000	58.0
Other	208,000	268,000	119,000	44.4

Table 6. Multiple Regression Model Predicting Salary Among Full-Time Employed Lawyers

	Beta	t	
Male	0.1246	2.26	*
		-	
Law school admission index	-0.0810	1.11	
Law school GPA	0.1213	1.99	*
Health rating	0.0721	1.53	
Married/partnered	0.0106	0.19	
Children	0.0480	0.34	
Practicing lawyer	0.0402	0.64	
Hours worked	0.1842	2.96	**
Larger private law firm (100 lawyers)	0.4577	4.68	***
Small private law firm (0-99 lawyers)	0.0814	0.84	
		-	
Government lawyer	-0.1069	1.59	
Business	0.2164	2.27	*
<hr/>			
N=261			
R-square=0.39			

Table 7. Satisfaction with the Decision to Become a Lawyer

	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Extremely satisfied	106	43.3	62	41.9	44	45.4
Moderately satisfied	93	38.0	57	38.5	36	37.1
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	17	6.9	12	8.1	5	5.2
Moderately dissatisfied	21	8.6	12	8.1	9	9.3
Extremely dissatisfied	8	3.3	5	3.4	3	3.1

Table 8. The University of Virginia School of Law Prepared Me Well

	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Strongly disagree	2	0.8	0	0	2	1.9
2.	4	1.6	2	1.3	2	1.9
3.	12	4.7	5	3.3	7	6.7
4. Neither agree nor disagree	21	8.2	11	7.2	10	9.5
5.	61	23.7	36	23.7	25	23.8
6.	57	22.2	41	27.0	16	15.2
7. Strongly agree	100	38.9	57	37.5	43	41.0

Table 9. The Prestige of the University of Virginia School of Law Benefitted My Career

	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Strongly disagree	5	2.0	2	1.3	3	2.9
2.	2	0.8	1	0.7	1	1.0
3.	3	1.2	2	1.3	1	1.0
4. Neither agree nor disagree	8	3.1	8	5.3	0	0
5.	29	11.3	18	11.8	11	10.5
6.	75	29.2	54	35.5	21	20.0
7. Strongly agree	135	52.5	67	44.1	68	64.8

Table 10. Mean Scores on Job Satisfaction Items

Dimension/item	Total	Men	Women
Job setting dimension			
Level of responsibility	6.0	6.0	6.0
Recognition of your work	5.4	5.5	5.3
Control over amount of work	5.5	5.4	5.5
Control over how you work	6.1	6.1	6.1
Relationships with colleagues	5.9	5.9	6.0
Job security	5.7	5.6	5.7
Performance evaluation	4.7	4.7	4.8
Work substance dimension			
Substantive area of work	5.9	5.8	5.9
Tasks you perform	5.6	5.5	5.6
Intellectual challenge	5.8	5.8	5.7
Opportunities to build skills	5.6	5.6	5.6
Powertrack dimension			
Compensation	5.3	5.5	5.0
Opportunities for advancement	5.1	5.2	5.0
Work-life			
Work-life balance	5.3	5.2	5.3

Table 11. Life Satisfaction

	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very highly satisfied (30-35)	95	37.1	50	33.1	45	42.9
Highly satisfied (25-29)	78	30.5	47	31.1	31	29.5
Average satisfaction (20-24)	46	18.0	28	18.5	18	17.1
Slightly dissatisfied (15-19)	20	7.8	16	10.6	4	3.8
Dissatisfied (10-14)	13	5.1	8	5.3	5	4.8
Extremely dissatisfied (5-9)	4	1.6	2	1.3	2	1.9

Table 12. Bivariate Correlations with Life Satisfaction, Job Setting Satisfaction, and Balance Between Work and Personal Life

Variable	Job setting satisfaction	Life satisfaction		Balance work/personal life
	Full-time employed	Total sample	Full-time employed	Full-time employed (N=209)
Male (n)	-0.0340 (209)	- (256)	- (207)	0.0293 (209)
Law school admission index (n)	-0.0894 (207)	- (254)	- (205)	-0.0428 (207)
Attributional style pessimism (n)	0.0179 (208)	- (255)	- (206)	-0.0007 (208)
Cumulative law school GPA (n)	-0.0590 (198)	- (239)	- (196)	-0.1454 (198)
Health rating (n)	0.1149 (207)	~ (255)	*** (206)	0.0062 (207)
Married/cohabiting (n)	0.0888 (209)	*** (256)	*** (207)	-0.1419 (209)
Number of children at home (0, 1, 2 or more) (n)	-0.0140 (205)	~ (252)	~ (203)	-0.1933 (205)
Practicing lawyer (n)	-0.0118 (209)	0.0311 (256)	0.1082 (207)	-0.2975 (209)
Hours worked per week (n)	-0.0937 (204)	- (228)	- (202)	-0.4828 (204)
Large private firm: 100 or more lawyers (n)	-0.1454 (209)	* (256)	~ (207)	-0.3931 (209)
Smaller private firm: fewer than 100 lawyers (n)	0.0977 (209)	0.0765 (256)	0.0723 (207)	0.0229 (209)
Federal, state, or local government law (n)	-0.0312 (209)	0.0244 (256)	0.0420 (207)	0.1958 (209)

Business (n)	0.0592 (209)	0.0488 (256)	0.0349 (207)	0.0599 (209)	
Salary (n)	0.0551 (205)	0.0045 (234)	0.0198 (204)	-0.2928 (205)	***

Statistical significance: ~ p<0.10; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 13. Multiple Regression Models¹ of Life Satisfaction, Job Setting Satisfaction, and Balance Between Work and Personal Life

Variable	Job setting satisfaction	Life satisfaction		Balance work/personal life
	Full-time employed (N=209)	Total sample (N=261) ¹	Full-time employed (N=209)	Full-time employed (N=209)
Male ²	-0.0501	-	0.0023	0.1192 *
Law school admission index	-0.0965	-	0.0431	-0.0361
Attributional style pessimism	0.0522	-	0.0174	0.0502
Cumulative law school GPA	-0.0273	-	0.0890	-0.0999
Health rating	0.0886	0.2021 ***	0.1770 **	-0.0135
Married/cohabiting	0.1475	0.2653 ***	0.2213 **	-0.0423
Number of children at home (0, 1, 2 or more)	-0.0719	-	0.0068	-0.0922
Practicing lawyer	0.0536	0.1950 *	0.2227 **	-0.1698 *
Hours worked per week	-0.1338	-	0.1029	-0.4086 ***
Large private firm: 100 or more lawyers ³	-0.2386 *	0.3010 **	0.3687 **	-0.2869 **
Smaller private firm: fewer than 100 lawyers ³	0.0014	-	0.1674	-0.0552
Federal, state, or local government law ³	-0.0678	-	0.1290	-0.0122
Business ³	-0.0195	0.1657 *	0.1998 ~	-0.0951
Salary	0.1876 *	0.1313 ~	0.1110	0.0291
R-square	0.0959	0.1989	0.1632	0.3865

Statistical significance: ~ p<0.10; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

¹ Model parameters estimated using multiple imputation of missing data. Coefficients displayed are standardized Betas.

² Gender was not significant in these models as a main effect. However, a separate, gender-stratified analysis revealed that the models had a somewhat better explanatory fit to the data for women (R-squares from 0.33 to 0.37) than for men (R-squares from 0.11 to 0.20) across outcomes. Also, some parameters were statistically significant for women but not men. For example, among women employed full time, job setting satisfaction was negatively affected by having children at home (beta= - 0.28; $p < 0.05$) and positively affected by being married or living with a partner (beta = 0.33; $p < 0.05$). In contrast, among men working full time, being married and having children at home were not associated with job setting satisfaction.

³ Organizational setting categories were compared to an omitted reference group which included working for a public interest organization, in legal services or as a public defender.