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Gender, race, and job satisfaction of law graduates: Intersectional evidence from the National Survey of College Graduates

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Abstract

Studies typically find that lawyers have high job satisfaction and that women are not less satisfied than are men. But racial differences as well as gender differences by race or ethnicity in satisfaction may be masked because most lawyers identify as racially White. To examine whether job satisfaction differs by race and whether gender and race/ethnicity have an intersectional relation to job satisfaction, I use data on nearly 13,000 law graduates drawn from six waves of the National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG) conducted between 2003 and 2019. The NSCG uniquely provides a large enough sample to examine intersectionality in job satisfaction of law graduates as well as to compare satisfaction of lawyers to those employed in other occupations. Job satisfaction is strikingly low among Black women and Asian women law graduates. Asian women lawyers have satisfaction similar to White men lawyers but substantially lower satisfaction if not employed as a lawyer. Black women have substantially lower satisfaction in either employment situation. The lower satisfaction of Asian and Black women law graduates is not due to differences in personal characteristics, family status or background, job characteristics, or differences in values.

KEYWORDS

discrimination, gender, intersectionality, JD graduates, job satisfaction, law graduates, lawyers, race and ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

Although concerns over lawyers' well-being are frequently voiced,¹ survey research generally finds that lawyers are highly satisfied with their careers and that women are not less satisfied than are men.² But the high satisfaction enjoyed by lawyers overall may not extend to those whose demographic characteristics place them in the minority within the predominantly White male legal profession.³ Because job dissatisfaction is related to turnover,⁴ job dissatisfaction among lawyers from minority groups may contribute to the notable lack of diversity within the legal profession which has been described in a 2016 American Bar Association report as "one of the least diverse professions in the nation" (American Bar Association, 2016, p. 4).

Despite concerns over gender and racial bias in the legal profession, little is known about whether law graduates' job satisfaction differs by race or ethnicity, and even less is known about the possible intersection between gender and race or ethnicity with job satisfaction. In this paper, I provide unique information on whether law graduates' job satisfaction differs by race or ethnicity and by gender within race or ethnicity using data drawn from the National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG) in six survey waves between 2003 and 2019. The NSCG is a nationally representative survey of college graduates up to age 76 that includes detailed information on education, demographic, and labor market characteristics. These six survey waves include information on nearly 550,000 college graduates. Of these college graduates, nearly 13,000 earned a professional degree in law (referred to as a "JD" for brevity), and more than 9000 of these JD graduates were employed as a lawyer when they were surveyed. Of key importance for the purposes of this paper, the NSCG requests extensive information on job satisfaction with respondents reporting their overall job satisfaction as well as their satisfaction with nine separate dimensions of their job. The surveys are not specifically designed to investigate job satisfaction, so bias from nonresponse related to level of satisfaction should be minimal.

Because the NSCG is a nationally representative survey, it offers a number of advantages over the data sources used in the majority of research on lawyers' well-being. As discussed in Listokin and Noonan (2021), most studies of lawyers' well-being rely on nonrepresentative samples of volunteer respondents which may introduce methodological biases. Indeed, their study of lawyers' mental health and alcohol use based on data from the National

¹See, for example, American Bar Association (2017) and Palmer and Ouyang (2021). Monahan and Swanson (2019) and Listokin and Noonan (2021) provide recent reviews of studies of lawyers' well-being.

²Organ (2011) provides a valuable survey of the literature.

³See, for example, Bagati (2009), Chung et al. (2017), Williams et al. (2018), Zraick (2018), and Peery et al. (2020). Kay et al. (2016) review the extensive literature showing greater attrition by women from law practice and examine sources of this gender differential.

⁴A large literature documents a relation between job satisfaction and turnover across industries and occupations. For only a few representative articles, see Freeman (1978), Akerlof et al. (1988), Clark (2001), and Böckerman and Ilmakunnas (2009).



Health Interview Study yields contrary findings to the usual narrative of a profession in a mental health crisis.

In addition to detailed information on job satisfaction, the NSCG has two features that make it uniquely suitable for examining whether gender and race/ethnicity have an intersectional relationship with job satisfaction of law graduates. First, the available NSCG data provides a larger sample of law graduates than any other survey that has been used to study lawyers' satisfaction and in particular includes enough observations to reliably examine the intersection of gender with race or ethnicity. Second, because the NSCG identifies field of degree as well as occupation, it can be used to examine law graduates whether or not they are employed as a lawyer. In contrast, most other nationally representative data sets can only identify law graduates if they are employed in a legal occupation.⁵ Although there is attrition from the legal profession over time, most students enter law school with the expectation of a career in the legal profession and law schools' accreditation, reputation, and/or ranking are related to their students' bar passage rate and placement in legal positions. Information on whether law graduates remain employed as lawyers is particularly valuable if law graduates of some demographic groups are leaving the legal profession as a response to dissatisfaction, which in turn limits diversity within the profession.

My analysis of data from the NSCG reveals stark intersectional differences in job satisfaction that are masked when survey respondents are aggregated by either gender or by race/ethnicity. There are also intersectional differences in satisfaction between those employed as lawyers and those employed but not as a lawyer. Comparing women to men without accounting for intersectionality with race/ethnicity would indicate that women have lower job satisfaction than men among all law graduates and among those employed as a lawyer. Comparing law graduates by race/ethnicity without accounting for gender or for employment sector would indicate that Black and Asian law graduates are substantially less satisfied than White and Latinx men.

But the story is different once we examine law graduates by gender as well as race or ethnicity. Black men and Asian men have satisfaction that is largely similar to that of White men. But the same does not hold for their female counterparts: Job satisfaction is strikingly low among Black women and Asian women law graduates. In contrast, White women report job satisfaction that is similar to White men and Latinx women report greater job satisfaction than White men. In short, there is intersectional variation in job satisfaction that is not evident when race or ethnicity and gender are considered separately.

⁵Other national data sets including the National Health Interview Survey and Current Population Survey identify occupation but do not identify field of any degrees held. The American Community Survey reports undergraduate major for bachelor's degree holders but does not report field of advanced degrees. Two nationally representative surveys undertaken by the American Bar Association have been conducted. The National Survey of Lawyers' Career Satisfaction surveyed lawyers in 1984 and 1990. The After the JD was launched in 2000 and surveyed the class of 2000 for the first 10 years of their careers whether they are employed as lawyers.

EMPIRICAL MOTIVATION

There is a substantial literature that examines job satisfaction among workers across and within specific occupations and industries. Studies typically estimate job satisfaction equations with the general form as follows:

$$s_i = \alpha + \beta x_i + \delta c_i + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where s is a measure of job satisfaction, x is a vector of individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, marital status, presence of children), c is a vector of job specific characteristics (e.g., earnings, hours worked, work environment), and ε is a random error term.

A consistent but puzzling finding is that women are usually found to be as satisfied with their jobs as are men despite their objectively lower pay and worse working conditions (Clark, 1997). Several hypotheses have been proffered for this seeming paradox. First, men and women may have different work values, with men placing more value on tangible aspects such as higher pay and promotions and women placing more value on relationships and the type of work. An additional source of differences in values may relate to satisfaction with jobs that better enable work–family balance. For example, if men primarily choose jobs that are high paying but with long and demanding hours, and if women primarily choose jobs based on social meaning or with lower or more flexible hours, it would be unsurprising to find women to be equally or even more satisfied with their jobs compared to men. A global measure of satisfaction may thereby indicate similar overall satisfaction even if women are dissatisfied with salary and promotion but are satisfied with the type of work or with work–family balance. Second, women may have lower expectations so that their expectations are more readily met, particularly if their comparison group is other women who are similarly lower paid or professionally disadvantaged relative to men. Third, differences in labor market participation may lead to sorting of the least satisfied women out of the labor market which could result in similar satisfaction between men and women among those who remain employed.

The rationales offered to explain the absence of gender disparities in satisfaction may be relevant to race and ethnicity as well. Relative to White men, who form the majority in most professional fields, workers from minority groups may have different work values, lower expectations, or may differentially exit their employment. There is little empirical research based on national samples that examines the relation between race or ethnicity and job satisfaction. Using data on college graduates from the 2010 NSCG, Hersch and Xiao (2016) find that Black and Asian workers are less satisfied with their jobs, and Hispanic/Latino workers are equally satisfied, relative to White workers of their same gender. Bartel (1981) uses data from National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Men and finds that Black workers are more satisfied, which may indicate that

Black workers have lower expectations. In contrast, drawing on data from the General Social Survey and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, Mukerjee (2014) finds that Black workers are less satisfied with their jobs relative to their White counterparts.

Studies specifically examining lawyers do not find that women are less satisfied than men.⁶ There is limited data that allows examining lawyers' job satisfaction by race or ethnicity and even less data that would allow examining the intersection of race or ethnicity with gender. The bulk of our knowledge of lawyers' job satisfaction draws on graduates of specific law schools,⁷ admitted to the bar in a specific year,⁸ lawyers practicing in specific locations,⁹ older data at a time when few women or minorities were lawyers,¹⁰ or lawyers of a single race or ethnicity.¹¹ The demographic composition and sample sizes of these data sets result in too few observations to provide adequate statistical power to examine and compare lawyers' satisfaction by detailed race or ethnicity, and in particular lack adequate power to further examine the intersection of detailed race or ethnicity with gender.

Available evidence on race or ethnicity differences in lawyers' job satisfaction largely does not show that Black or Hispanic/Latino lawyers are less satisfied than their White counterparts.¹² There is less information about job satisfaction of Asians relative to non-Asians. Dau-Schmidt et al. (2006) show that relative to non-Hispanic White graduates, Asian alumni of Indiana University School of Law 5 years (classes of 1995–1999) and 15 years (classes of 1985–1989) after graduation have lower job satisfaction; this study also shows that Hispanic alumni were more satisfied than non-Hispanic Whites 15 years post-graduation. The Portrait Project Survey of Asian American lawyers shows generally high levels of career satisfaction, although women express lower levels of satisfaction than do men (Chung et al., 2017).

⁶Hersch and Meyers (2019) provides a summary of 13 empirical studies examining gender differences in lawyers' job satisfaction in which 10 found no difference, two found mixed evidence, and one found that women lawyers had lower satisfaction. Using data from the 2015 NSCG, Hersch and Meyers provide evidence that dissatisfied women lawyers sort out of the legal profession at higher rates than their male counterparts, resulting in similar satisfaction by gender among those who remain in the legal profession.

⁷See, for example, Chambers (1989, 2014) (University of Michigan), Dau-Schmidt and Mukhopadhaya (1999) (University of Michigan), Dau-Schmidt et al. (2006) (Indiana University—Bloomington), Stake et al. (2007) (Indiana University—Bloomington), and Monahan and Swanson (2009, 2019) (University of Virginia). Note that in discussing the literature I use the race or ethnicity terminology in the cited study (e.g., Hispanic).

⁸See, for example, Dinovitzer and Garth (2007), using data from *After the JD* (AJD), which is a national survey of lawyers admitted to the bar in 2000.

⁹See, for example, Heinz et al. (2005) (Chicago), Hagan and Kay (2007) (Toronto), Kay et al. (2016) (Ontario), Collins et al. (2017) (North Carolina), and Markovic and Plickert (2019) (Texas).

¹⁰See, for example, Laband and Lentz (1998) using data from the National Survey of Lawyers' Career Satisfaction conducted in 1984 and 1990.

¹¹Chung et al. (2017) (Asian American lawyers) and Wilkins and Fong (2017) (Black alumni of Harvard Law School).

¹²See, for example, Dau-Schmidt and Mukhopadhaya (1999), Lempert et al. (2000), Dinovitzer et al. (2004), Dau-Schmidt et al. (2006), Stake et al. (2007), Payne-Pikus et al. (2010), and Markovic and Plickert (2019).

Turning to studies that examine race or ethnicity as well as gender, Collins et al. (2017) consider four groups comprised of White males, White females, non-White males, and non-White females, but their sample size prohibits examining whether job satisfaction differs by race or ethnicity within non-White groups. Their fairly muted evidence of lower satisfaction for non-White females relative to White males may arise from not distinguishing between women of different races or ethnicity, which as shown in the current paper is critical. Using data from University of Michigan Law School 5- and 15-year alumni surveys, Dau-Schmidt and Mukhopadhyaya (1999) stratify the sample by gender as well as separately into four groups of non-Black, Black, non-Hispanic, and Hispanic, but do not consider the intersection of gender with race or ethnicity, and do not separately consider Asians (which in any case would be few in the years of the survey).

As in the general empirical literature, studies of lawyers' satisfaction include as regressors an array of individual and work characteristics. Because most surveys examining lawyers' satisfaction are fielded specifically on law graduates or lawyers, surveys often include information that may be especially salient for lawyers, such as social class background, work values, and student debt. In addition, in a series of studies, the American Bar Association Women of Color Research Initiative has identified factors that may be especially salient for women lawyers of color relative to White women lawyers and relative to men lawyers.¹³ These factors are discussed in the following text.

First, because law is considered an elite profession, job satisfaction may be related to social class. Dinovitzer and Garth (2007) posit that those from less-elite backgrounds may have lower career aspirations and thereby be more satisfied despite lower career achievement. Using data from the first wave of the AJD, they operationalize social class by the US News & World Report ranking of the lawyer's law school grouped into six categories, fathers' occupation prestige score, fathers' education, and whether any immediate family members are lawyers. Dinovitzer and Garth find that elite law graduates are less satisfied with their career choice and more likely to expect to leave their employer in 2 years relative to graduates of nonelite law schools.

Second, job satisfaction may relate to social or work values. Law is a highly paid and prestigious profession, but it also exerts a strong influence on social justice. The range of opportunities available to those with a law degree makes law attractive to people with a broad array of values, and a summary measure of job satisfaction may not capture different aspects of satisfaction. Studies have not found that differences in values between men and women lawyers explain the similarity of job satisfaction (Hull, 1999; Mueller & Wallace, 1996).

¹³Links to studies are available at https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/women/initiatives_awards/women_of_color_research_initiative/.

But previous research has not considered the possibility of an intersectional relationship between gender and race or ethnicity with values.

In an examination of personal characteristics that may differ by race or ethnicity, Stake et al. (2007) report lawyers' comparison of themselves to other lawyers on a series of personal characteristics including aggression, compulsion about work, concern about making money, self-confidence, skill at making deals, concern about impact on society, compassion, and liberal values. They found no statistically significant differences between non-Black, non-Hispanic and Black or Hispanic respondents in average ratings of these characteristics, but small samples prohibited examining the intersection of race or ethnicity with gender.

Third, student debt may deter law graduates from pursuing low paid public interest jobs. Law graduates with large debt may be less satisfied if they feel forced to take higher paying but less satisfying jobs. Using data from the first wave of the AJD, Dinovitzer and Garth (2007) find that debt is generally unrelated to job satisfaction. Similarly, using data from a survey of lawyers in Ontario, Canada, Kay et al. (2016) do not find that debt affects the decision to leave private practice. However, it is worth examining whether debt relates to job satisfaction when gender and race or ethnicity are considered in the analysis.

In addition to empirical studies, qualitative studies documenting lawyers' individual experiences report that women are given fewer and less valuable professional opportunities than are men (Bagati, 2009; Williams et al., 2018). Similar barriers to advancement have been voiced by Asian lawyers (e.g., Chen, 2021; Chung et al., 2017). Turning to factors that may be specific to the intersection of gender and race or ethnicity, women lawyers of color are more likely than White women lawyers to be primary breadwinners or have other extended family responsibilities and report that they need to continue in their jobs despite worse treatment and opportunities than their male counterparts (Peery et al., 2020). This differential in financial obligations may contribute to lower job satisfaction of women lawyers of color relative to White women lawyers.

DATA AND VARIABLE DEFINITIONS

I use data from six waves of the National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG) conducted between 2003 and 2019.¹⁴ These surveys are conducted by the US Bureau of the Census for the National Science Foundation and are part of an ongoing National Science Foundation data collection program known as SESTAT (Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System). The surveys include

¹⁴See <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvygrads/>. The survey years are 2003, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019.

individuals with a bachelor's or higher degree under 76 years old.¹⁵ The number of observations in these six surveys waves is 549,398. Of these respondents, 12,848 report their highest degree is a JD.¹⁶ Among those with a JD, 11,140 were employed at the survey date, with 8027 of those with a JD employed as a lawyer or judge.¹⁷ The response rate to these surveys is high relative to that achieved in most studies of lawyers.¹⁸ In contrast to surveys of lawyers that draw on nonrepresentative populations, the NSCG provides sampling weights that account for sample design and also correct for nonresponse bias.¹⁹

The key outcome of interest is job satisfaction. The NSCG asks respondents who are employed at the survey date to rate their satisfaction on a 4-point scale (very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, or very satisfied) with nine aspects of their principal job: salary, benefits, job security, job location, opportunities for advancement, intellectual challenge, level of responsibility, degree of independence, and contribution to society. After rating their satisfaction with these specific aspects, respondents rate their overall satisfaction with their job. For each of the satisfaction questions, the responses are highly concentrated at the upper end (i.e., somewhat satisfied and very satisfied). I create an indicator variable equal to 1 if the respondent answers very satisfied to that measure of job satisfaction.²⁰

Race and ethnicity are identified in the NSCG by a question that asks whether the respondent is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, followed by a

¹⁵The NSCG provides sampling weights so that weighted results are representative of the entire college-educated population. These weights account for oversampling of groups of special interest to the SESTAT program and for nonresponse. These sampling weights are used in the reported descriptive statistics and regression results. The target population changed in 2019 to exclude residents of US outlying areas, although earlier waves include 343 of these respondents. For consistency with 2019 and future waves of data collection, I exclude these respondents throughout the current analysis.

¹⁶Specifically, respondents indicate for up to five degrees whether each degree was a bachelor's, master's, professional degree, or doctorate, and the field of study for each degree selected from a list of 140 fields. The survey includes as examples of professional degrees "JD, LLB, MD, DDS, DVM." (Note that MBA is categorized as a master's degree.) I classify those with a professional degree in the field "law/prelaw/legal studies" as having a JD. Most of the other professional degrees are medical degrees. The reported sample sizes for the JD sample exclude seven observations who are residents of US outlying areas.

¹⁷Occupation is reported in the NSCG by selection from a list of 132 occupations. Lawyers and judges are not separately identified. For brevity, I use the term "lawyer" to refer to lawyers and judges.

¹⁸For example, the weighted response rate for the 2019 NSCG is 68%. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvygrads/#sd>. For comparison, the response rate to the survey of Indiana law graduates is 33% (Dau-Schmidt et al., 2006). The response rate to the first wave of the AJD is 71% (Dinovitzer et al., 2004). Response rates in surveys of lawyers are reviewed in Organ (2011), Chambers (2014), and Kay et al. (2016).

¹⁹Listokin and Noonan (2021) provide a valuable discussion and critique of the methodological pitfalls of the existing surveys designed to study lawyers, among which is the inability to use sampling weights to adjust for nonresponse.

²⁰In addition to estimating equations with job satisfaction treated as a dichotomous variable, I estimate ordered probit regressions using the entire 4-point scale (reported in Table A2). See Chambers (2014) for a detailed discussion of how job satisfaction is coded and can be interpreted in data sets that have been used to study lawyers' satisfaction. Surveys of lawyers differ in the scale used to report job satisfaction, with 4-point, 5-point, and 7-point scales all used. See Organ (2011), Chambers (2014), and Hersch and Meyers (2019) for a review of scales used in different surveys.

question requesting race in five categories of Asian, Black, White, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaska Native. Respondents can indicate more than one racial category. To create mutually exclusive categories, all those who report Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (hereafter, Latinx for brevity) form one group regardless of reported race. I then create mutually exclusive non-Latinx race categories for those reporting only one race of Asian, Black, or White. Non-Latinx individuals of any other race (specifically Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaska Native) and those reporting more than one race are grouped in an “other race” category.²¹

Characteristics that have been shown to be related to job satisfaction generally as well as to lawyers’ job satisfaction include personal and family characteristics, individual-specific employment characteristics, and employer characteristics. Other characteristics that have been identified as relevant to lawyers include work values, social class or background, and student debt. The specific variables used in the analyses are described below.

Personal and family demographics

Personal and family characteristics available in the NSCG include age, marital status, presence and age of children, health status (indicated by functional limitations with seeing, hearing, walking, and/or lifting), and whether the individual is an immigrant to the United States. To examine the relation of primary breadwinner status with satisfaction, in some specifications I account for family and earner status by including indicator variables that combine marital status (married or in a marriage-like relationship, referred to hereafter as partnered),

²¹Of the sample of law graduates, only 2.3% are in the “other race” category, and the racial and ethnic characteristics vary substantially among those in this category making comparisons of this group to the other demographic groups tenuous. Statistics for these observations are sometimes but not always separately reported in the figures and tables, but these observations are included in statistics for the full sample and in the regression analyses. A referee recommended dividing the sample by race (instead of separating Latinx into a group before stratifying by race) to better group individuals with similar experiences. For example, the referee recommended assigning those who report Asian and Latinx as Asian, those reporting Black and Latinx as Black, and placing those reporting more than one race in a multiracial category. But there are several new complications that would arise from adopting the referee’s recommendation. The racial and ethnic categories used in the NSCG are those mandated by OMB for federal purposes since 1997. I use the standard race/ethnicity division used in all reports based on government data, allowing comparison to statistics based on other federal government surveys. Furthermore, about half of the respondents who report Latinx and one of their races as either Asian or Black report two or more races. Adopting the referee’s recommendation would mean placing these respondents in the multiracial category and ignoring their self-identification as Latinx. (And alternatively assigning them to one of their reported races seems arbitrary.) It is worth noting that among those who are Latinx, 92% report White as one of their races. Research into how to assign single race or Latinx/Hispanic groups from the 127 possible race and ethnicity combinations is ongoing. A useful overview of the issues is provided by the IPUMS tutorial, Introduction to the New Single-Race Identifier, RACHSING, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsQ9IgxjLko>.

partner's employment status for those who are partnered, and presence of dependent children.

Individual-specific employment characteristics

Individual-specific employment characteristics include occupation, base annual salary (standardized to 2019\$), hours worked per week, years of potential experience (defined as years since JD was earned), tenure with employer, and supervisor status. Based on occupation and employment status, JD graduates are placed into one of three groups: employed as a lawyer, employed but not as a lawyer, or not employed.²² Indicators of professional engagement and networking activities include attendance at any professional society meetings or conferences in the past 12 months as well as the number of professional societies the respondent belongs to.

Employer characteristics

Information on the employer available in the NSCG includes type of employer (self-employed, private for-profit, private not-for-profit, government, other), firm size (reported in eight categories, from 10 or fewer employees to 25,000 or more employees), and region of the United States.²³

Social class indicators

To examine the role of social class, I construct measures that correspond to those used by Dinovitzer and Garth (2007), using data on parents' education to control for family background and information available in the NSCG on the Carnegie classification of the individual's undergraduate institution and law school to group into selectivity or status categories. Specifically, as measures of family background, I create indicators for first-generation college graduates, whether each parent had a BA or higher degree, and whether each parent had a PhD or professional degree. As indicators of undergraduate institutional status, I map Carnegie categories to Barron's selectivity categories, which yields four groups stratified into top private research, selective liberal arts, top public research, and broad access institutions, with an additional group for those institutions for which a Carnegie classification is not available (i.e., not a US

²²Those not employed include those unemployed (2.1% of the full JD sample) and retired (7.5% of the full JD sample).

²³No other locational information such as SMSA or city size is available.

institution or missing), or because the institution is classified as specialized.²⁴ To group law schools, I compare Carnegie classification of the JD institution to the US News & World Report ranking of law schools. This comparison yields four groups: top private, top public, other university-based, and independent.

Student debt

In 2013, the NSCG added questions about the amount borrowed and still owed for any undergraduate or graduate degrees completed before the survey reference date. The options were presented in ranges of \$10,000, from zero to more than \$90,000. I assign the midpoint to each bounded category and assign \$95,000 to the open-ended top category, with an indicator for those responses at the top-coded category. Because the debt at the time it is incurred is a nominal value, I do not transform the amount to constant dollars.

Work values

The NSCG includes unique information on work values measured by the subjective importance of nine job factors. These importance measures are reported as the response to the question: “When thinking about a job, how important is each of the following factors to you?” The nine factors are identical to the job satisfaction factors of salary, benefits, job security, job location, opportunities for advancement, intellectual challenge, level of responsibilities, degree of independence, and contribution to society. Respondents select one of four options for each job characteristic: very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or not important at all. I create indicator variables equal to 1 for factors indicated as very important.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF JD GRADUATES

Because job satisfaction is linked to turnover, this section examines whether there are differences among demographic groups in employment status that may be related to differences in job satisfaction. In Table 1, Panel A reports by gender and race or ethnicity the share among all law graduates who are employed either as a lawyer, employed but not as a lawyer, or not employed. Employment is high among those with law degrees, with 87% of the sample employed.²⁵ Latinx women have

²⁴See Hersch (2019) for a detailed description of the procedure to stratify institutions into categories and a list of the institutions in the top three categories.

²⁵For comparison, the employment rate in the full NSCG sample is 79%.

TABLE 1 Employment status of JDs by gender and race or ethnicity

Panel A: All JDs					
	Employed as lawyer	Employed, not as lawyer	Not employed	Lawyer share if employed	<i>N</i>
White men	69.3	18.8	11.9	78.6	5256
White women	61.5	24.4	14.2	71.6	3221
Black men	60.3	28.8	11.0	67.7	498
Black women	60.5	25.8	13.7	70.1	622
Asian men	69.6	17.2	13.2	80.2	613
Asian women	54.3	31.4	14.3	63.3	711
Latinx men	66.7	24.9	8.4	72.8	765
Latinx women	48.5	32.4	19.2	60.0	659
Other race men	69.2	23.0	7.8	75.1	256
Other race women	75.7	14.9	9.3	83.6	247
All	65.4	21.9	12.8	74.9	
<i>N</i>	8027	3113	1708	11,140	12,848

Panel B: Time since JD					
Potential experience	Employed as lawyer			Labor force participation rate	
	< 10 years	≥ 10 years	Difference	< 10 years	≥ 10 years
White men	74.4	68.0	6.4	97.9	87.6
White women	75.2	55.6	19.6	96.6	83.7
Black men	62.0	60.0	2.0	98.5	94.9
Black women	58.8	61.8	-3.0	93.1	91.5
Asian men	72.6	67.8	4.8	94.3	91.3
Asian women	72.3	45.8	26.5	94.5	85.1
Latinx men	75.9	61.8	14.1	99.0	90.4
Latinx women	64.5	40.4	24.1	93.8	81.3
Other race men	56.2	77.4	-21.2	97.5	92.2
Other race women	82.0	67.3	14.7	98.4	83.4
All	73.4	62.6	10.8	96.9	86.6
<i>N</i>	3543	9305		3543	9305

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. Table values are percentages. Potential experience is defined as years since JD was earned.

the lowest employment rate, with 81% employed, and Latinx men and other race men have the highest at 92%. Within the full JD sample, 65% are employed as a lawyer, 22% are employed but not as a lawyer, and 13% are not employed.

Turning to those who are employed, there is considerable variation by demographic group in the share who are employed as a lawyer. For example, among those who are employed, 79% of White men and 80% of Asian men are employed as a lawyer. In contrast, 60% of employed Latinx women and 63% of employed Asian women are employed as a lawyer.

To provide information on whether there is differential attrition from the legal profession by demographic group, Panel B in Table 1 reports by gender and race or ethnicity the share employed as a lawyer among those with less or more than 10 years of potential experience, as well as the difference in the share employed as a lawyer. For comparison to the overall share of JDs that are employed, the corresponding labor force participation rates are also reported in this panel. Overall, the share employed as a lawyer is 11 percentage points lower among those with at least 10 years of potential experience, consistent with the lower labor force participation rate of this group. What is notable is the substantial drop among White women, Asian women, and Latinx women in the share of lawyers among those with at least 10 years of potential experience, ranging from 20 to 27 percentage points lower compared to those with less than 10 years of potential experience. In contrast, this differential is under 7 percentage points for White men, Black men, and Asian men. Whether there are differences in job satisfaction among demographic groups that may contribute to law graduates' employment status is explored in the remainder of this paper.

JOB SATISFACTION

To illustrate the importance of considering intersectionality in understanding job satisfaction of lawyers, this section starts by presenting job satisfaction statistics for comparison to the previous literature that does not consider the intersection of gender with race or ethnicity. Because previous studies differ in whether the sample is comprised of law graduates or comprised of lawyers, it is also useful to compare statistics for those employed as a lawyer to those with a law degree but not employed as a lawyer. In Table 2, Column 1 reports overall job satisfaction by gender and by race or ethnicity for the full employed JD sample. Columns 2 and 3 stratify the JD graduate sample into those who are employed as a lawyer and those employed but not as a lawyer.

Beginning with gender differences in satisfaction, in the full JD sample, 53% of men and 48% of women report that they are very satisfied. This gender difference is statistically significant at the 5% level, in contrast to the usual finding of no gender difference in lawyers' satisfaction.²⁶ Lawyers have higher job satisfaction than those of their same gender who are not employed as a lawyer.

²⁶As discussed in the introduction, differences relative to other studies may be due to differences in sampling methodology.

TABLE 2 Percent overall very satisfied by gender or race/ethnicity

	(1) All JDs	(2) Lawyers	(3) JD, not lawyer	(4) p^a
All	50.9	52.0**	47.5	0.000
By gender				
Men	52.7	53.8	49.0	0.000
Women	48.2	49.2	45.8	0.034
p^b				
Men = Women	0.008	0.000	0.071	
By race/ethnicity				
White	53.1	53.7	51.2	0.058
Black	36.4	42.0**	23.9	0.000
Asian	38.3	43.7**	25.2	0.000
Latinx	48.5	49.8	46.0	0.231
Other race	33.0	33.5	30.8	0.589
p^c				
White = Black	0.000	0.000	0.000	
White = Asian	0.000	0.000	0.000	
White = Latinx	0.026	0.291	0.656	
White = Other race	0.000	0.000	0.000	
Black = Asian	1.000	1.000	1.000	
Black = Latinx	0.000	0.021	0.000	
Black = Other race	1.000	0.131	1.000	
Asian = Latinx	0.000	0.097	0.000	
Asian = Other race	0.557	0.020	1.000	
Latinx = Other race	0.000	0.000	0.034	
<i>N</i>	11,140	8027	3113	

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights.

^aThe p -values for tests of equality of percentages within rows between lawyers (Column 2) and JDs, not lawyers (Column 3) are indicated in Column 4.

^bThe p -values for tests of equality of percentages by gender within the same column indicated in the row below the percentages.

^cThe p -values for tests of equality of percentages between pairs of race or ethnic groups are reported for all JDs (Column 1), lawyers (Column 2), and JDs, not lawyers (Column 3) and use the Bonferroni comparison test to account for multiple comparisons.

Differences in satisfaction between men and women for all JDs and those employed as lawyers are statistically significant at the 1% level and at the 7% level among those not employed as lawyers.

Turning to race and ethnicity without considering gender, there are substantial differences by race or ethnicity among all JDs and between those who are employed as a lawyer and those employed in a nonlawyer occupation. About 50% of both White and Latinx JDs report that they are very satisfied, in contrast to about one third of those who are Black, Asian, or other races. The satisfaction of lawyers relative to those employed in other occupations is higher among those who are White ($p = 0.06$) and is not significantly different for those who are Latinx or other race. In contrast, the share of Black and Asian lawyers that report that they are very satisfied is nearly double the share among their counterparts who are employed in other occupations.²⁷

Table 2 also reports p -values for tests of equality of the percentage very satisfied between pairs of demographic groups. White JDs have significantly higher satisfaction than all other racial groups and Latinx JDs have significantly higher satisfaction than the other non-White demographic groups. For the most part, the pattern is similar when the JDs are stratified by occupation, although there are some exceptions when stratified by occupation in terms of statistical significance as indicated in Table 2.

Table 3 presents job satisfaction statistics by gender and race or ethnicity for the full JD sample as well as stratified by employment as a lawyer.²⁸ The satisfaction values for the full JD sample corresponding to Column 1 are presented graphically in Figure 1 with 95% confidence intervals indicated.

Starting with the full JD sample, there are striking differences between demographic groups once intersectionality is taken into account that are masked by considering separately gender and race or ethnicity. White men and Latinx women are the most satisfied with their jobs, with close to 55% of each group reporting that they are very satisfied. Black women and Asian women are by far the least satisfied, with only a quarter of Black women and less than a third of Asian women very satisfied with their jobs.

Between these extremes, not all differences between groups are statistically significant. There are no statistically significant differences in satisfaction between White men, White women, Black men, and Latinx women; between White women, Black men, Asian men, and Latinx women; between Black men, Asian men, and Latinx men and women; between Black women and Asian women; and between Asian men and Latinx men and women.

Where this similarity breaks down is among Black women and Asian women relative to men of their own race and relative to White and Latinx women. Comparing within race, the satisfaction gap between Black men and Black women is 25 percentage points and the gap between Asian men and Asian women is 15 percentage points. Comparing by gender, White women report

²⁷Differences in percentages between demographic groups are tested using the Bonferroni method which adjusts the p -values to account for multiple comparisons.

²⁸Table A1 shows the magnitudes and statistical significance of the differences in percentages between gender and race or ethnic groups for all JDs using the Bonferroni method to account for multiple comparisons.

TABLE 3 Percent overall very satisfied by gender and race or ethnicity

	(1) All JDs	(2) Lawyers	(3) JD, not lawyer
White men	54.2	55.0*	51.0
White women	51.4	51.3	51.5
Black men	49.6	58.1**	32.0
Black women	25.1	28.7**	16.4
Asian men	46.2	46.7	44.1
Asian women	31.5	40.4**	16.3
Latinx men	43.0	42.3	45.0
Latinx women	54.9	60.3**	46.8
Other race men	33.2	32.8	34.7
Other race women	32.7	34.1	25.9
All	50.9	52.0**	47.5
N	11,140	8027	3113

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. Table A1 shows the magnitudes and statistical significance of the differences in percentages between demographic groups for all JDs (Column 1). Significant differences in percentages between lawyers (Column 2) and JDs, not lawyers (Column 3) are indicated by asterisks associated with the group with higher value.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

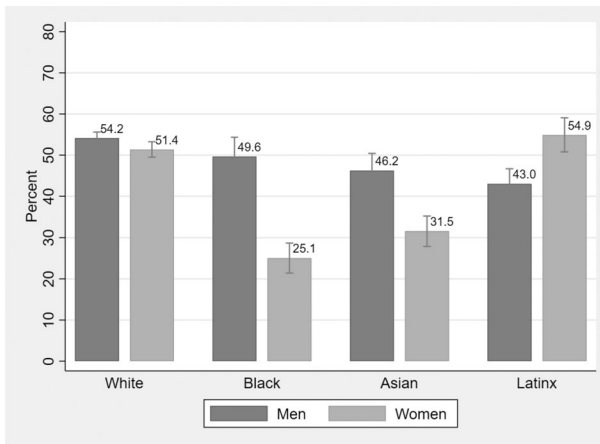


FIGURE 1 Percent overall very satisfied by gender and race or ethnicity. Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. Sample is comprised of employed JDs. Statistics for those in the other race category are omitted for brevity. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

satisfaction that is 20 percentage points higher than Asian women and 26 percentage points higher than Black women. Because Latinx women are more satisfied than White women, the disparity between Latinx women and Black or Asian women is even larger, with Latinx women 23 percentage points more likely to report they are very satisfied than Asian women and 30 percentage points more likely than Black women.

Figure 2 shows average satisfaction with the nine individual satisfaction factors by gender and race or ethnicity. For the most part, the individual satisfaction measures follow the gender and race or ethnicity pattern for overall satisfaction. Within their own gender and race or ethnic group, relative to their overall satisfaction, JDs are generally more satisfied with job security, location, intellectual challenge, level of responsibility, degree of independence, and contribution to society. They are far less satisfied with salary and opportunities for advancement.

Despite reporting overall satisfaction that is similar to that of White men, Black men are substantially less satisfied with salary and opportunities for advancement, with a gap of 17 percentage points for each of these characteristics relative to White men. Similar to the stark disparity in overall satisfaction, Black women and Asian women report strikingly lower satisfaction with salary, intellectual challenge, and level of responsibility relative to White men and relative to men of their own race. Asian women are also starkly less satisfied with job security and opportunities for advancement. In contrast to Black women and Asian women, Latinx women report high satisfaction on several dimensions of their jobs, exceeding that of White men on seven of the nine factors.

Turning to a comparison of lawyers to those employed in other occupations, reported in Columns 2 and 3 of Table 3, the share who are very satisfied is higher for those employed as a lawyer for most demographic groups, although the differences are relatively small among White men, White women, Asian men, Latinx men, and other race men and women. The share of Black men, Black women, Asian women, and Latinx women who are very satisfied is considerably higher among lawyers than nonlawyers.

The comparison of satisfaction among lawyers to nonlawyers raises a perplexing question. Black women and Asian women have the lowest overall satisfaction among all JDs, but their satisfaction is substantially lower if they are not employed as a lawyer. Yet as shown in Table 1, their share employed as a lawyer drops off markedly in a comparison of those with less or more than 10 years of potential experience. This raises a question of why Black women and Asian women are leaving employment as lawyers for employment in which they have even lower satisfaction.

To summarize, White men, White women, and Asian men show a general similarity in their overall satisfaction as well as with specific aspects, which is consistent with the usual finding in the literature of little gender or race difference in lawyers' satisfaction. But among all law graduates, there are clear differences in job satisfaction by gender and race or ethnicity, with White men, White women, and Latinx women the most satisfied, Black men, Asian men, and



FIGURE 2 Percent very satisfied with job characteristics by gender and race or ethnicity. Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. Sample is comprised of employed JDs. Statistics for those in the other race category are omitted for brevity. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Latinx men somewhat less satisfied, and Black women and Asian women strikingly less satisfied. There are also substantial differences in satisfaction based on employment status as a lawyer among Black men, Black women, Asian women, and Latinx women. The starkly lower satisfaction of Black women and Asian women highlights the importance of taking gender into account when examining racial differences in job satisfaction. How individual and work characteristics relate to job satisfaction and whether characteristics that vary between demographic groups can account for differences in average satisfaction by demographic group is explored in the regression analyses in the following sections.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Descriptive statistics for the employed sample of law graduates by gender and race or ethnicity are provided in Table 4. This section highlights notable differences by demographic group in characteristics that may have bearing on job satisfaction and are examined in the regressions.



Reflecting women's later entry into the legal profession, men are older on average than women of their same race or ethnicity. The age gap ranges from 4 to 9 years, with the gender gap largest for Blacks and Asians. Family status may be related to job satisfaction in a way that differs by gender and race or ethnicity. As discussed earlier, breadwinner status may lead lawyers to work at jobs with low satisfaction but high pay. In contrast, lawyers may have high satisfaction with lower-paying jobs that allow for work–family balance. There are notable differences in family characteristics that follow the patterns observed in the economy as a whole. Men are far more likely than women of their same race or ethnicity to be in a partnered relationship, and those that have kids are far more likely to have a partner who is not employed. Black women, followed by White women and Black men, are more likely than other demographic groups to be a not-partnered parent, with nearly 10% of Black women lawyers in this category followed by around 5% each of White women and Black men. For both Asian and Latinx JDs, women are about 11 percentage points more likely to be immigrants than are men. The pattern is reversed for Blacks, with Black men 9 percentage points more likely to be immigrants than Black women.

Some characteristics, such as years of potential experience, are directly related to men's older average age. Within each demographic group, tenure is about one third to two thirds of potential experience, indicating that mobility between employers or employment situations is common among lawyers. Average hours worked per week ranges from a low of 41 among Latinx women to a high of 45 among White men. White men have by far the highest base annual salary at \$187,300, which is related to their greater years of potential experience, tenure, and hours worked per week. Perhaps surprising is that the average salary of Asian women is next highest, at \$148,100, despite having the lowest tenure and second lowest years of potential experience. Also surprising is that Black women and Latinx women have the two lowest average salaries, yet Latinx women report the highest satisfaction and Black women the lowest.

There is wide variation by demographic group in the type of employer. The most common employer type for White and Latinx men is self-employment closely followed by private employer with about 80% of these men employed in these two categories. For Black men, 51% are government employees and only 16% are self-employed. Asian women have the largest share of employment with a private employer at 56%, closely followed by Asian men at 54%. Notably, 15% of Asian women work for a not-for-profit, followed by White women and Latinx men at around 10%. About one third of White and Latinx men are employed in firms with 10 or fewer employees, reflecting their large share of self-employment.

In terms of social class indicators, the parents of White and Asian JDs have the highest educational background and the parents of Black JDs have the lowest educational background, with the parents of Latinx JDs in the middle. There are strikingly large differences in the status of undergraduate institutions,

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics, all employed JDs

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Asian men	Asian women	Latinx men	Latinx women
Personal and family								
Age	49.8 (13.0)	44.9 (11.7)	50.3 (11.3)	41.0 (11.0)	47.4 (14.3)	40.0 (8.2)	46.3 (13.1)	41.8 (10.6)
Partnered	80.7	73.0	75.8	50.4	52.9	77.7	78.3	63.1
Number of kids <19 years	0.8 (1.2)	0.8 (1.1)	1.0 (1.2)	0.6 (0.8)	0.6 (1.0)	0.6 (0.9)	0.6 (1.0)	0.7 (0.9)
Kids, not partnered	1.8	4.7	4.9	9.7	0.7	2.2	0.7	2.8
No kids, not partnered	17.5	22.3	19.3	39.9	46.5	20.1	21.0	34.0
Kids, partner employed	27.6	34.3	36.6	31.6	17.3	37.7	25.1	38.0
No kids, partner employed	25.9	26.1	14.5	14.2	19.1	37.4	27.5	22.7
Kids, partner not employed	11.8	4.3	12.2	2.4	11.9	1.0	8.8	0.6
No kids, partner not employed	15.4	8.2	12.4	2.2	4.6	1.6	16.9	1.9
Severe physical limitation	1.8	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.7	3.4	1.3
Immigrant	2.3	4.5	17.7	8.4	47.4	57.9	13.1	24.5
Individual employment								
Lawyer or judge	78.6	71.6	67.7	70.1	80.2	63.3	72.8	60.0
Base annual salary (2019\$, in 1000s)	187.3 (223.5)	120.2 (132.3)	124.2 (117.8)	100.2 (80.1)	132.5 (149.1)	148.1 (119.9)	117.0 (142.2)	111.4 (106.9)
Hours	45.3 (13.2)	42.5 (13.9)	46.3 (10.0)	41.7 (11.1)	43.8 (9.9)	44.8 (11.9)	43.3 (12.0)	41.4 (15.1)
Potential experience	22.3 (13.2)	16.6 (10.9)	21.0 (9.4)	12.6 (9.4)	18.7 (14.1)	13.7 (8.2)	18.0 (13.8)	15.2 (9.6)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Asian men	Asian women	Latinx men	Latinx women
Tenure	12.4 (12.4)	7.5 (8.0)	8.0 (7.7)	4.9 (5.9)	9.7 (10.4)	4.8 (5.0)	11.0 (13.8)	6.1 (7.0)
Supervisor	59.9	44.6	45.7	47.4	46.0	52.0	46.7	58.8
Professional meetings	65.0	58.9	50.5	66.8	48.5	50.1	59.4	62.1
Professional memberships	2.0 (1.7)	1.8 (1.8)	1.6 (1.8)	1.9 (1.6)	1.5 (1.4)	2.0 (3.8)	1.7 (2.4)	1.8 (1.7)
Employer characteristics								
Self-employed	42.4	27.6	16.1	26.5	23.4	21.4	39.7	26.9
Private employer	39.4	42.4	32.6	48.2	53.9	56.4	38.8	44.5
Private for-profit	34.4	31.8	27.4	41.4	49.2	41.5	28.4	37.3
Not-for-profit	5.0	10.6	5.2	6.8	4.8	14.9	10.4	7.2
Government	18.2	30.0	51.2	25.2	22.7	22.2	21.5	28.6
Federal	4.8	10.0	16.6	5.3	12.2	13.3	8.9	2.4
Not federal	13.4	20.0	34.7	19.9	10.4	8.9	12.6	26.2
Number of employees								
≤10	34.5	26.4	16.2	17.1	25.0	12.9	38.7	27.0
11–24	8.7	6.9	1.8	2.0	20.7	4.5	9.3	19.6
25–99	9.2	11.3	3.4	8.1	6.4	7.0	7.9	9.2
100–499	13.3	14.0	10.1	18.0	6.3	24.4	7.8	10.5
500–999	6.1	5.5	4.9	6.4	9.5	12.4	5.4	3.3
1000–4999	12.0	10.4	16.4	7.4	5.3	10.9	7.6	14.0
5000–24,999	5.4	9.6	4.8	7.5	7.5	6.7	9.1	5.9

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Asian men	Asian women	Latinx men	Latinx women
≥25,000	10.8	16.0	42.3	33.6	19.5	21.3	14.0	10.5
Social class indicators								
First generation	32.2	27.6	56.3	59.7	33.4	18.8	44.8	43.3
Father BA or higher	58.1	64.5	34.1	21.2	64.5	77.4	43.4	48.7
Mother BA or higher	45.7	52.7	35.1	36.7	32.8	59.7	42.6	35.3
Father professional degree or PhD	22.4	22.0	12.0	6.6	31.7	32.8	18.6	16.9
Mother professional degree or PhD	3.9	6.5	2.5	5.2	5.1	14.4	10.0	4.1
BA top private	19.5	15.1	16.7	14.1	40.1	21.1	12.8	13.7
BA top liberal arts	11.3	11.7	6.9	5.8	7.2	12.6	3.9	3.4
BA top public	28.3	30.7	16.3	18.6	26.9	34.3	24.5	24.4
BA broad access	35.7	38.8	55.4	40.7	10.4	9.7	40.5	33.3
BA not categorized	5.3	3.9	4.7	20.8	15.3	22.3	18.2	25.2
JD top private	19.4	18.4	24.0	18.5	32.7	25.4	13.3	15.2
JD top public	25.6	21.5	12.3	11.1	12.4	13.9	16.3	25.9
JD other university based	38.7	43.0	37.6	31.7	31.8	28.8	46.1	28.1
JD independent	16.3	17.0	26.1	38.6	23.1	31.8	24.3	30.9
Student debt								
BA loan (1000s)	8.7	13.5	19.1	26.6	22.1	14.3	13.1	11.3
	(16.6)	(20.4)	(28.1)	(26.0)	(34.1)	(25.3)	(22.9)	(22.5)
Grad. loan (1000s)	36.1	50.0	55.1	72.1	39.8	50.5	43.1	43.1
	(37.2)	(37.6)	(34.8)	(31.8)	(42.1)	(38.6)	(40.7)	(38.3)
Graduate debt > \$90,000	17.9	28.7	26.6	59.3	30.5	36.1	25.8	22.9



TABLE 4 (Continued)

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Asian men	Asian women	Latinx men	Latinx women
Satisfaction								
Overall satisfaction	54.2	51.4	49.6	25.1	46.2	31.5	43.0	54.9
Salary	37.8	31.5	21.3	11.3	36.5	25.2	28.2	35.1
Benefits	42.2	40.9	40.6	30.3	46.9	30.6	35.2	53.7
Security	55.3	49.9	55.5	55.2	57.1	35.2	47.0	59.2
Location	65.5	65.7	54.7	53.6	56.8	56.3	60.2	79.9
Advancement	38.0	28.8	21.0	18.0	37.0	21.6	27.8	44.1
Challenge	61.8	60.6	50.0	35.7	52.4	40.6	54.9	66.3
Responsibility	64.7	62.8	62.5	38.2	61.7	49.1	60.1	71.3
Independence	72.6	70.8	61.4	57.4	65.9	47.2	69.4	67.6
Contribution to society	51.0	53.7	60.5	52.8	51.0	42.5	59.1	63.9
Importance values								
Salary	67.0	64.1	60.9	85.6	56.3	74.3	66.9	67.6
Benefits	58.1	63.7	79.2	80.6	53.7	64.8	60.0	74.8
Security	58.8	62.9	68.7	89.6	70.4	72.1	66.5	72.9
Location	58.2	60.8	60.5	56.2	53.3	75.5	52.1	69.8
Advancement	46.6	41.0	62.6	51.8	50.4	52.8	55.3	51.2
Challenge	67.0	72.9	74.4	59.0	66.8	67.3	67.5	80.5
Responsibility	54.8	56.7	64.3	57.6	55.0	55.9	55.5	68.0
Independence	67.4	70.6	67.3	78.9	61.8	60.9	71.0	75.5
Contribution to society	47.1	58.9	67.5	56.4	56.2	56.8	58.1	72.9

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Location	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Asian men	Asian women	Latinx men	Latinx women
Northeast	23.6	25.5	9.7	27.5	17.6	21.2	11.0	15.0
Midwest	19.7	19.0	21.1	12.2	6.7	12.0	7.0	6.4
West	24.9	25.2	12.5	14.6	50.8	30.0	42.7	40.3
South	31.8	30.2	56.8	45.6	24.9	36.8	39.3	38.3
<i>N</i>	4566	2740	439	545	546	622	695	557

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. Statistics for those in the other race category are omitted for brevity. Standard errors are reported in parentheses for continuous variables. All statistics that do not report standard errors are percentages.

with Asian JDs far more likely than the other demographic groups to be a graduate of an elite undergraduate institution as well as somewhat more likely to have earned their JD from a top private JD university.

Student debt differs by race, with Black women holding by far the highest debt load for both their undergraduate and graduate degrees. The amount borrowed for their graduate degree ranges from a low of \$35,000 for White men to a high of \$72,000 for Black women.

JOB SATISFACTION ESTIMATES CONTROLLING FOR INDIVIDUAL AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS, ALL JDS

To examine whether the unadjusted satisfaction gaps between demographic groups are related to average differences by group in individual or work characteristics among all JDs, Table 5 reports estimates from three job satisfaction equations in which additional variables are added sequentially. The dependent variable is an indicator for those reporting very satisfied for overall job satisfaction.²⁹ The regressions control for each gender and race or ethnicity combination with White men as the omitted category. Region and survey year are included in all regressions.

In Table 5, Column 1 controls for individual and family characteristics (age, marital and parental status, physical limitations, and immigrant status). Column 2 adds characteristics associated with different work settings or occupations (firm size, occupation as a lawyer, employer type, hours worked, base annual salary). Column 3 adds information on family background and social class indicators (type of undergraduate and law school institution, parents' education).

In the regressions with only individual and family characteristics reported in Table 5, Column 1, first note that inclusion of these characteristics eliminates the statistically significant satisfaction differential between White men and Asian men and Latinx men observed in the unadjusted satisfaction values. As in the unadjusted values, there is no statistically significant disparity in satisfaction between White men and White women, Black men, and Latinx women. But the substantially lower satisfaction of Black women and Asian women relative to White men (as well as to the other demographic groups) remain in the regression estimates. Inclusion of individual demographic and family characteristics reduces the unadjusted differences in satisfaction relative to those reported in Table 3 by about one third but do not eliminate the statistically significant

²⁹Estimation is based on a linear probability model (LPM); probit produces very similar marginal effects and ordered probit estimates show that the same pattern of job satisfaction with respect to demographic groups hold over the full range of the satisfaction distribution. The coefficients on demographic groups from probit and ordered probit specifications are reported in Table A2. In general, the linear probability model yields nearly identical results to probit or logit estimation when the samples are large and the probability range is between 0.2 and 0.8, as in the case examined here, and is commonly used in econometric analyses.

TABLE 5 Job satisfaction regressions, all employed JDs

Dependent variable: Overall very satisfied			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
White women	0.012 (0.022)	0.032 (0.022)	0.032 (0.022)
Black men	-0.041 (0.060)	-0.028 (0.055)	-0.026 (0.054)
Black women	-0.219** (0.047)	-0.195** (0.046)	-0.183** (0.045)
Asian men	-0.036 (0.054)	-0.019 (0.061)	-0.033 (0.054)
Asian women	-0.137** (0.053)	-0.143* (0.058)	-0.145* (0.056)
Latinx men	-0.089 (0.053)	-0.076 (0.053)	-0.069 (0.052)
Latinx women	0.074 (0.056)	0.081 (0.061)	0.084 (0.059)
Other race men	-0.197** (0.072)	-0.161* (0.076)	-0.149 (0.077)
Other race women	-0.146 (0.086)	-0.110 (0.079)	-0.097 (0.077)
Age	-0.021** (0.006)	-0.024* (0.010)	-0.025* (0.010)
Age squared/100	0.027** (0.006)	0.026* (0.010)	0.028** (0.010)
Partnered	0.086** (0.023)	0.066** (0.023)	0.069** (0.022)
Number of kids under 19	0.016 (0.010)	0.017 (0.010)	0.018 (0.009)
Severe physical limitation	-0.194** (0.066)	-0.177** (0.064)	-0.163** (0.063)
Immigrant	-0.039 (0.038)	-0.019 (0.038)	-0.010 (0.039)
Lawyer		-0.001 (0.023)	-0.003 (0.022)
Ln (real salary)		0.035** (0.007)	0.034** (0.007)

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Dependent variable: Overall very satisfied			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Hours/10		0.002 (0.008)	0.003 (0.008)
Potential experience		0.002 (0.005)	0.002 (0.005)
Potential experience squared/100		0.006 (0.010)	0.004 (0.010)
Tenure		-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
Tenure squared/100		0.007 (0.008)	0.009 (0.008)
Supervisor		0.022 (0.020)	0.021 (0.019)
Professional meetings		0.017 (0.022)	0.019 (0.021)
Professional memberships		0.023** (0.006)	0.023** (0.006)
Self-employed		0.080** (0.027)	0.085** (0.026)
Not-for-profit		0.083* (0.041)	0.081* (0.040)
Federal government		0.074 (0.052)	0.069 (0.051)
Government, not federal		0.111** (0.028)	0.119** (0.027)
11 to 24 employees		0.013 (0.040)	0.009 (0.039)
25 to 99 employees		-0.015 (0.034)	-0.012 (0.034)
100 to 499 employees		-0.065 (0.034)	-0.057 (0.033)
500 to 999 employees		0.047 (0.041)	0.046 (0.040)

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Dependent variable: Overall very satisfied			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
1000 to 4999 employees		0.011 (0.036)	0.015 (0.036)
5000 to 24,999 employees		-0.048 (0.044)	-0.047 (0.043)
25,000 or more employees		0.021 (0.040)	0.033 (0.039)
First-generation college			-0.096* (0.043)
Father BA or higher			-0.035 (0.037)
Mother BA or higher			-0.084** (0.025)
Father professional degree or PhD			0.042 (0.023)
Mother professional degree or PhD			0.008 (0.045)
BA top private			-0.021 (0.027)
BA top liberal arts			-0.030 (0.029)
BA top public			0.009 (0.023)
BA not categorized			-0.027 (0.036)
JD top private			0.078** (0.030)
JD top public			0.025 (0.028)
JD other university based			0.023 (0.025)
Midwest	0.040 (0.027)	0.033 (0.027)	0.031 (0.027)
West	0.048 (0.026)	0.048 (0.026)	0.049 (0.025)

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Dependent variable: Overall very satisfied			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
South	0.064** (0.025)	0.051* (0.024)	0.052* (0.024)
Year 2010	-0.040 (0.029)	-0.018 (0.029)	-0.017 (0.028)
Year 2013	-0.103** (0.024)	-0.088** (0.024)	-0.086** (0.024)
Year 2015	-0.055* (0.027)	-0.039 (0.028)	-0.036 (0.028)
Year 2017	-0.050 (0.026)	-0.034 (0.026)	-0.032 (0.026)
Year 2019	-0.036 (0.027)	-0.021 (0.027)	-0.019 (0.027)
Constant	0.798** (0.135)	0.391 (0.221)	0.478* (0.223)
<i>N</i>	11,140	11,140	11,140
<i>R</i> ²	0.053	0.085	0.093

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. Reference categories are as follows: race and gender or ethnicity: White men; firm size: 10 or fewer employees; employer type: private for-profit; undergraduate institution type: broad access; JD institution type: independent law schools; location: northeast; survey year: 2003. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

disparity in job satisfaction between White men and Black and Asian women. Notably, the inclusion of work setting variables in Column 2 and of family background and social class indicators in Column 3 do little to reduce the substantial and statistically significant disparity in satisfaction between White men and Black and Asian women.

To summarize, even with extensive controls for individual characteristics, work setting, and family background, Black women report satisfaction about 20 percentage points lower and Asian women about 14 percentage points lower than White men. In addition, the same disparities between Black women and the other demographic groups that are statistically significant in the unadjusted statistics shown in Table 3 remain statistically significant in the regression-adjusted estimates (significance tests not shown in the table). The regression-adjusted gaps between Asian women and White men, White women, and Latinx

women observed in the unadjusted statistics remain statistically significant, but other disparities—between Asian women and Black, Asian, and Latinx men—are no longer statistically significant after detailed characteristics are taken into account in the regressions.

Turning to the other variables in the regressions, the estimates show that satisfaction initially declines with age but rebounds around the early- to mid-40s, suggesting that JDs may move over time into preferred employment situations. Job satisfaction is higher among those with partners, who have higher salaries, are members of more professional associations, and reside in the south relative to the northeast. Relative to those employed by a private for-profit firm, those who are self-employed, employed by a not-for-profit, or employed by state or local government have job satisfaction that is higher by about 8–12 percentage points. Satisfaction is lower by about 16–19 percentage points for those with severe physical limitations, who are first-generation college graduates, or have a mother with a BA or higher. Relative to JD graduates of top private universities, graduates of law schools that are part of broad access universities or that are independent have lower satisfaction.

The characteristics that do not show a statistically significant relation with job satisfaction are also of interest. These characteristics include hours worked, employment as a lawyer, job tenure, supervisor status, firm size, and status of undergraduate institution. There is also no relation between immigrant status and satisfaction.

Breadwinner status, debt, and values³⁰

As discussed earlier, breadwinner status may result in some JDs remaining employed in higher paying jobs even if their job satisfaction is low. Replacing marital status and presence of children with indicator variables that combine marital status, partner's employment status for those who are partnered, and presence of dependent children show that relative to those who are partnered, with kids, and with a not-employed partner, those who are not partnered are less satisfied, whether or not they have kids, as are those who do not have kids and whose partner is employed. However, inclusion of detailed family and breadwinner status does not result in substantial changes in the magnitudes or statistical significance in the relationship between satisfaction and demographic group.

Satisfaction may be lower among those who incur large student debt if debt restricts mobility to more satisfying but possibly lower paying jobs. Estimates including undergraduate and graduate debt show that satisfaction is lower

³⁰The results summarized below are based on the specification in Table 5, Column 3 and are available on request.

TABLE 6 Job satisfaction regressions, lawyers

Dependent variable: Overall very satisfied			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
White women	0.006 (0.025)	0.027 (0.025)	0.021 (0.025)
Black men	0.043 (0.068)	0.053 (0.062)	0.046 (0.058)
Black women	-0.179** (0.057)	-0.135* (0.054)	-0.119* (0.052)
Asian men	-0.047 (0.064)	-0.018 (0.071)	-0.034 (0.063)
Asian women	-0.061 (0.064)	-0.027 (0.061)	-0.029 (0.061)
Latinx men	-0.115 (0.063)	-0.081 (0.060)	-0.076 (0.060)
Latinx women	0.117* (0.056)	0.137* (0.055)	0.133* (0.054)
Other race men	-0.223* (0.091)	-0.146 (0.101)	-0.134 (0.103)
Other race women	-0.133 (0.099)	-0.075 (0.095)	-0.056 (0.091)
<i>N</i>	8027	8027	8027
<i>R</i> ²	0.056	0.098	0.108

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. These regressions also include the variables in the regressions reported in the corresponding columns of Table 5 for the full JD sample (with the exception of the indicator for lawyer). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

among those with more graduate debt, whether measured as the nominal debt amount or by an indicator for more than \$90,000 debt. However, inclusion of these debt measures does not result in substantial changes in the relationship between satisfaction and demographic group.

Although previous research has not found that women's satisfaction differs from men's because of gender differences in values, values that may vary by the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity may play a role in explaining job satisfaction. If values are important in explaining demographic differences in satisfaction, inclusion of values should mute the observed lower satisfaction of Black women and Asian women. Estimates that include indicator variables that correspond to importance of the nine job aspects show that

TABLE 7 Job satisfaction regressions, employed, not as lawyer

Dependent variable: Overall very satisfied			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
White women	0.051 (0.044)	0.067 (0.042)	0.068 (0.040)
Black men	-0.190* (0.076)	-0.132 (0.072)	-0.095 (0.067)
Black women	-0.249** (0.063)	-0.230** (0.067)	-0.203** (0.068)
Asian men	-0.041 (0.078)	-0.020 (0.082)	-0.024 (0.083)
Asian women	-0.272** (0.083)	-0.295** (0.088)	-0.305** (0.087)
Latinx men	-0.014 (0.080)	-0.028 (0.082)	-0.017 (0.081)
Latinx women	0.033 (0.109)	0.039 (0.109)	0.037 (0.097)
Other race men	-0.099 (0.091)	-0.075 (0.088)	-0.066 (0.095)
Other race women	-0.168 (0.129)	-0.192 (0.128)	-0.195 (0.108)
<i>N</i>	3113	3113	3113
<i>R</i> ²	0.076	0.126	0.146

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. These regressions also include the variables in the regressions reported in the corresponding columns of Table 5 for the full JD sample (with the exception of the indicator for lawyer). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

satisfaction is higher among those who consider job security, challenge, independence, and contribution to society to be important. But inclusion of these measures of values does not result in substantial changes in the magnitudes or statistical significance of the relationship between satisfaction and demographic group.

To summarize, the main takeaway from the regressions reported in Table 5 is that Black and Asian women JDs have substantially lower satisfaction than those in the other demographic groups and this gap is not explained by individual, work characteristics, family status, student debt, or values. The next section examines satisfaction of those employed as a lawyer versus a nonlawyer occupation.

JOB SATISFACTION ESTIMATES, LAWYERS AND NONLAWYERS

Tables 6 and 7 report the coefficients on demographic group for lawyers (Table 6) and JDs who are employed but not as a lawyer (Table 7).³¹ These regressions also include the variables in the regressions reported in the corresponding columns of Table 5 for the full JD sample (with the exception of the indicator for lawyer). For the most part, the estimates are similar to the estimates reported for the full sample of law graduates in Table 5. There is no significant difference between White men and Black, Asian, or Latinx men, or White women in either sector, and Latinx women lawyers have higher satisfaction than White men.

The most important difference between lawyers and nonlawyers is with respect to satisfaction of Black women and Asian women. Black women have substantially lower satisfaction relative to White men in both sectors. The satisfaction gap is lower among lawyers than in nonlawyer occupations and is reduced in both sectors by controlling for work characteristics. But even with extensive controls, Black women have satisfaction 12 percentage points lower than White men when employed as a lawyer and 20 percentage points lower if employed not as a lawyer. In contrast, Asian women do not show lower satisfaction than White men if employed as a lawyer but show starkly lower satisfaction of about 30 percentage points if employed in a nonlawyer occupation.

CONCLUSION

Although alarms are frequently voiced over rampant mental health problems and burnout among lawyers, most studies show that lawyers are highly satisfied with their profession. But corresponding concerns over the lack of diversity in the legal profession raise the question of whether job satisfaction differs by gender and race or ethnicity. This paper provides unique empirical evidence to address intersectional job satisfaction and explores sources of differences by demographic group in satisfaction.

Using data from six waves of the National Survey of College Graduates over 2003–2019, I find that Black women and Asian women law graduates have strikingly low job satisfaction relative to White and Latinx women and relative to all men. This substantial disparity in satisfaction persists and is only slightly reduced in regressions controlling for highly detailed individual and workplace characteristics.

³¹A linear probability model is also used for the Tables 6 and 7 regressions because the sample sizes are sufficiently large and the probabilities of the outcome range between 0.2 and 0.8. Once again, probit or logit estimation yield nearly identical estimates.

Because the regressions control for a vast array of characteristics hypothesized to relate to job satisfaction, including characteristics rarely examined in studies of lawyers' satisfaction such as breadwinner status, student debt, and values, it is unlikely that individual heterogeneity is the source of the large disparity in job satisfaction. For unobserved individual heterogeneity to be an important source of the satisfaction disparity, the omitted characteristics would need to be specific to Black women and Asian women law graduates, to have a stronger influence on satisfaction than observed characteristics, have a low correlation with the observed characteristics included in the regressions, and would have to be positively associated with job satisfaction. It is hard to identify individual characteristics that would qualify. Furthermore, because turnover is related to job satisfaction, the lower job satisfaction of Black women and Asian women law graduates even in regressions that control for earnings suggests that nondiscrimination in pay may not be sufficient for firms to maintain a diverse workforce.

The more likely explanation for low satisfaction among Black women and Asian women law graduates is that these law graduates face institutional barriers. Black women and Asian women report substantially lower satisfaction with many specific job characteristics, but have especially low satisfaction with salary, opportunities for advancement, and challenge. Initiatives directed at improving opportunities for Black women and Asian women law graduates may prove fruitful in creating a more diverse profession.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Differences in percent overall very satisfied by gender and race or ethnicity, all JDs

	White men	White women	Black men	Black women	Asian men	Asian women	Latinx men
White women	-2.8						
Black men	-4.5	-1.7					
Black women	-29.1**	-26.3**	-24.6**				
Asian men	-7.9*	-5.2	-3.4	21.2**			
Asian women	-22.6**	-19.8**	-18.1**	6.5	-14.7**		
Latinx men	-11.2**	-8.4**	-6.6	18.0**	-3.2	11.5**	
Latinx women	0.8	3.5	5.3	29.9**	8.7	23.4**	11.9**

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. Sample is comprised of respondents with highest degree JD. All values are calculated using the NSCG sample weights. The magnitude of the difference between the row variable mean minus the column variable mean is reported. Differences in percentages between demographic groups are tested using the Bonferroni comparison test.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE A2 Job satisfaction regressions, all employed JDs, probit and ordered probit specifications

	(1) LPM	(2) Probit	(3) Ordered probit
White women	0.032 (0.022)	0.032 (0.021)	0.056 (0.054)
Black men	-0.026 (0.054)	-0.026 (0.053)	-0.155 (0.141)
Black women	-0.183** (0.045)	-0.189** (0.052)	-0.336** (0.110)
Asian men	-0.033 (0.054)	-0.032 (0.054)	-0.188 (0.167)
Asian women	-0.145* (0.056)	-0.146* (0.059)	-0.241* (0.113)
Latinx men	-0.069 (0.052)	-0.066 (0.052)	-0.099 (0.108)
Latinx women	0.084 (0.059)	0.081 (0.058)	0.199 (0.136)

(Continues)

TABLE A 2 (Continued)

	(1) LPM	(2) Probit	(3) Ordered probit
Other race men	-0.149 (0.077)	-0.145 (0.079)	-0.268 (0.152)
Other race women	-0.097 (0.077)	-0.102 (0.084)	-0.060 (0.139)
<i>N</i>	11,140	11,140	11,140
<i>R</i> ²	0.093		

Note: Author's calculations from the 2003–2019 National Survey of College Graduates. These regressions also include all of the variables in the regressions reported in Column 3 of Table 5. Omitted category is White men. Column 1 repeats Table 5, Column 3 for ease of comparison. Column 2 reports marginal effects from probit estimation. Column 3 reports ordered probit estimates. The dependent variable in Columns 1 and 2 is an indicator equal to one if overall very satisfied. The dependent variable in Column 3 is job satisfaction which takes on four values (very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.