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May 2013

WORKING PAPER

Satisfaction in the Practice of Law:
Findings from a Long-Term Study of Attorneys' Careers

David L. Chambers¹

For forty years beginning in the late 1960s, the University of Michigan Law School conducted annual surveys of its alumni. The project included fifty successive graduating classes, with all but the most recent classes surveyed more than once. Over thirteen thousand alumni participated. Over the forty years, American legal education and the American legal profession underwent huge changes. When the study began, there were almost no women or minority students at Michigan and very few in the country as a whole. The vast majority of all students and lawyers were white and male. By the end, white men constituted far less than half of the students not only at Michigan but also at the huge majority of other law school in the United States.² Similarly at the beginning of the survey, the overwhelming majority of Michigan graduates and law-school graduates in general began their careers in solo practice or in very small law firms. Few firms with more than one hundred lawyers even existed. By the end, more than half of Michigan students started their careers in firms of more than two hundred, and many started in firms of over a thousand.³

This article focuses on a theme that runs through all the graduating years – the varied satisfaction of graduates with their careers. Our findings, though necessarily limited to one school's graduates, seem likely to apply to the experiences of most practitioners regardless of the

¹ Wade H. McCree, Jr., Collegiate Professor of Law Emeritus, University of Michigan Law School. Chambers is enormously grateful to Terry K. Adams, who oversaw the administration of the survey for its final twenty-six years. He is also grateful to a succession of deans at the University of Michigan Law School for supporting the project for forty years and to the Law School Admission Council for grants that permitted the merging of the forty years of data.

² See D. Chambers and T. Adams, *Who We Were and Who We are: How Michigan Law Students Have Changed Since the 1950s-Findings from 40 Years of Alumni Surveys*, Law Quadrangle, Winter 2009, at pp. 74-80. See <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2001608>

³ D. Chambers and T. Adams, *Starting Out: Changing Patterns of First Jobs for Michigan Law School Graduates*, Law Quadrangle, Fall 2009, at 23-29. See <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2001617>

school from which they graduated. Some findings may be surprising. We have found, for example, that, among Michigan's graduates five, fifteen and twenty-five years out of law school, for both men and women, overall work satisfaction is much more closely related to perceptions of the social value of their work and the quality of their relations with co-workers than it is to their satisfaction with income or with their prestige in the community. This finding helps make more explicable another of our findings – that, on the whole, women practitioners are somewhat *more* satisfied than men – since it appears that, in general, women place a higher priority than men finding employment in settings where the work (as they view it) has comparatively high social value and where they are likely to have especially good relations with coworkers.

Satisfaction is, to be sure, a subjective phenomenon. When asked how satisfied they are with their jobs, people first have to call up an quick, overall impression of their work experience; they then have to hold that impression up against either their expectations or some other standards; and finally they have to reach a judgment about the extent to which their experience matches their expectations or standards. Each of the three parts of the calculation is subjective in the sense that it is measurable only by the person answering the question. It is thus unsurprising that answers to global questions about satisfaction have been found to be significantly affected by the context in which they are asked – for example, by the preceding questions on a survey, by other near events in the respondents' lives, particularly events that are strongly positive or negative, and even by the weather on the day of the survey.⁴ Yet, despite the subjective quality of the inquiry and the hazards of context, social scientists in large numbers continue to inquire into job and career satisfaction, in large part because income and status, the usual measures of achievement used by economists, miss so much that is important to most people in their working lives. In fact, within the field of organizational behavior research, measures of worker satisfaction are the “most frequently studied” variables of all.⁵

⁴ See summary in D. Kahneman and A. Krueger, Developments in the Measurement of Subjective Well-Being, 20 J. of Economic Perspectives 3, 6-8 (Winter 2006). They describe a study by Norbert Schwarz: “Schwarz invited subjects to fill out a questionnaire on life satisfaction. Before they answered the questionnaire, however, he asked them to photocopy a sheet of paper for him. A dime was placed on the copy machine for a randomly chosen half of the sample. Reported satisfaction with life was raised substantially by the discovery of the coin.” Id at 6.

⁵ Paul E. Spector, Job Satisfaction: Application, Assessment, Causes and Consequences, at 1 (1997). A 2009 report from the Gallup Organization claims that “the topic of job satisfaction has been studied and written about in more than 10,000 articles and publications.” James Harter et al, Q12 Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between Engagement in Work and Organizational Outcomes, Gallup Organization, at 4 (2009).

Most surveys of American workers report that the great majority are either “very satisfied” or at least “somewhat satisfied” overall with their jobs. In annual or biennial surveys conducted across the last several decades by both the Gallup Organization and the General Social Survey (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, over 80 percent of workers place themselves in one of their higher two of four categories.⁶ To be sure, satisfaction varies by occupation. Of 198 occupations for which, in 2007, the GSS had sufficient information, lawyers were close to the middle with regard to satisfaction, much lower than clergy and firefighters, much higher than roofers and laborers, very close to accountants.⁷

Jerome Organ has recently reviewed the twenty-six surveys of practicing attorneys in the United States published since the mid-1980s that included questions about job satisfaction.⁸ Though in some regards the results of the studies were difficult to compare – they were of widely varying populations of lawyers and used varying wording and scales – Organ nonetheless found a striking consistency across all of them. Very few attorneys said they were “dissatisfied.” The huge majority reported themselves above the midpoint on whatever satisfaction scale was employed. In all but one of the twenty-six, 67 percent or more of respondents placed themselves above the midpoint. Indeed, in fifteen of the twenty-six, the percent above the midpoint fell within the narrow range of 76 to 82 percent.

Organ’s review included articles based on the Michigan surveys, which reported satisfaction at the higher edge of his range. Data not available to Organ on more recent years of the Michigan surveys remain completely consistent with his findings. Of 9190 graduates from the classes of 1952 through 2001 surveyed in the final ten years of the Michigan survey, 84 percent placed themselves in categories above the midpoint on a question about overall career satisfaction. But, as we will see, the 84 percent above the midpoint (and those above the

⁶ For the GSS, see Tom W. Smith, *Trends in Well-Being, 1972-2010* (2011), at 3. (“[T]here has been little change in the level of job satisfaction over time. The long-term average has been for 86% to be satisfied with their work.”); for Gallup, see Elizabeth Mendes, *U.S. Job Satisfaction Struggles to Recover to 2008 Levels* (press release, May 2011), “The vast majority of American workers remain satisfied with their jobs.”

⁷ See Tom Smith, *Job Satisfaction in the United States* 3-4 (2007).

⁸ Jerome M. Organ, *What Do We Know About the Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction of Lawyers? A Meta-Analysis of Research on Lawyer Satisfaction and Well-Being*, 8 *U. of St. Thomas L.J.* 225 (2011). (Of the twenty-six studies, ten drew upon a national sample; most of the others were samples of practitioners in particular states’ or graduates of a single law school. Some studies with more than one phase are counted more than once among the twenty-six, including two waves of the still-ongoing *After the J.D.*, a project of the National Association for Law Placement and the American Bar Foundation, following a large sample of attorneys who joined the bar in the year 2000; three articles growing out of various years of the *University of Michigan Alumni Surveys*, conducted annually between 1966 and 2006; and four surveys, conducted roughly five years apart, by the *Young Lawyers Division* of the American Bar Association. Organ identified a few Canadian studies as well.)

midpoint in other studies as well) include respondents with an extremely broad range of attitudes -- from a substantial number who were barely more positive than negative to others who were hugely enthusiastic. The principal purpose of this paper is to examine these differences in satisfaction and to identify the factors that most strongly correlate with higher satisfaction. Our hopes is to provide insights about what contributes to satisfaction not only for Michigan's graduates but for practitioners in general.

I. The University of Michigan Alumni Survey

In 1966, Richard Wellman, then a member of the Michigan Law School faculty, curious about the careers of the law school's graduates, mailed a survey to the graduating class of 1951. He picked the class of 1951 because, in his words, "fifteen years after graduation was long enough for careers to be well settled, yet not so long as to make its members unresponsive to law school inquiries."⁹ He repeated the survey of the fifteen-year classes each year thereafter, adding in 1973 a annual survey of the class that had been out five years. In 1980, David Chambers and Terry Adams took over the direction of the survey and oversaw it for twenty-six years until the project ended in 2006.

This paper, though making use of data from all years of the survey, concentrates on the project's final ten years, from 1997 through 2006, for during those years the survey was mailed each year not only to the graduates 5 and 15 years after graduation but also to those 25, 35, and 45 years out of law school, all of whom had been surveyed at least once before. The seven-page survey, in addition to questions about career satisfaction, included questions about personal backgrounds, early career plans, first jobs, job history over time, and a large range of questions about their current job.

Throughout its history, the survey was conducted by mail. In the final ten years, the project surveyed all living graduates of the classes of 1962 through 2001, more than sixteen thousand individuals. Sixty-two percent of graduates responded, with the fifteen-year graduates having the lowest rate of response (58 percent) and the 45-year graduates the highest (68 percent). The overall response rate of 62 percent is gratifying, much higher than most mailed surveys. How representative were those who did respond of all those in the classes that were surveyed? Of this we cannot be certain, but no responses were received, of course, from those

⁹ R. Wellman, Report on the Class of 1951 (mimeo, 1967).

whom we could not locate either through the law school records or on-line directories and we suspect that this group, as well as the larger group who did receive a questionnaire but declined to respond, included a disproportionate number of those not practicing law and may include a disproportionate number of those who are not very satisfied with their careers.¹⁰ We also suspect that this group was offset somewhat by another group who did not respond: the graduates who are practicing law and are quite positive about their careers but who are so busy that they never opened or never got around to completing the questionnaire.

Among studies of the satisfaction of lawyers with their work, the Michigan study is distinctive in a few ways and unique in a few others. A first distinctive quality is the large number of participants and the high rate of response. A second distinctive quality is the wide range of questions asked. The questions regarding satisfaction took up only about a quarter of one page in a seven-page survey, and the remaining questions provided a wealth of information about each respondent useful for helping understand differences in satisfaction among the graduates. A third distinctive quality – unique among studies of attorney satisfaction – is that the data file of each respondent was augmented by information coded directly from law school files about such matters as undergraduate and law school grades and Law School Admission Test scores. Finally, a fourth distinctive quality is that a large proportion of the graduates who answered the survey between 1997 and 2006 had also responded to earlier surveys when they were five or fifteen years out of law school (or both), permitting an exploration of factors accounting for changes in individual satisfaction over time.

To be sure, the Michigan survey is also distinctive in a further way that is not a virtue. No single school's graduates can stand as representative of all. While many of the factors associated with Michigan graduates' satisfaction (such as the effects of stress in the workplace or numbers of years out of law school) are likely to have a bearing on the satisfaction of nearly all schools' graduates, generalizations based on the Michigan data need to be made with caution. Another aspect of the Michigan survey is that, having ended in 2006, it missed the opportunity to explore the effects on satisfaction of the severe economic downturn that began shortly thereafter.

¹⁰ Using the few pieces of information we have about all graduates whether they responded or not, we know, for example, that response was lower among those with the lowest grades in law school, particularly those in the lowest 20 percent of their classes. However, as we will later see, law school grades does not correlate significantly with career satisfaction after other relevant factors are taken into account.

II. An Initial Overview of the Career Satisfaction of the Michigan Graduates.

For 26 consecutive years, from 1981 through 2006, the survey asked graduates “How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your career,” requesting them to circle a number between 1 and 7 regarding their satisfaction with 8 aspects of their career -- the balance of their work and their private or family life, the intellectual challenge of their work, their problem-solving for clients, their control over the work they do, their income, the value of their work to society, their relationships with co-workers, and their prestige in the community. The list ended with a question about their satisfaction “overall.”

Three of the seven categories (categories 5, 6 and 7) indicate positive levels of satisfaction. In the last ten years of the survey, 84 percent of all graduates placed themselves into one of these three categories. Not all of the 84 percent were particularly enthusiastic about their work. Category 5 in particular seems to have been used by respondents to indicate that they were only slightly more positive than negative. We suspect, given the opportunities available to most Michigan graduates, that a level of satisfaction with which most themselves would have been pleased would probably include only categories 6 and 7. Indeed, those who recorded themselves as 5s included a large number of respondents who, in answering other questions on the survey, revealed a great deal of ambivalence about their work.¹¹ For example, in the last ten years of the survey, among graduates surveyed five years out of law school, fully half of those in category 5 reported themselves as so-so or negative about whether they would attend law school again if starting afresh and more than half said they thought it was unlikely that they would be working for the same employer in five years. (As to both attending law school again and remaining with their current employers, those in the high categories 6 and 7 gave much more upbeat responses.)

Thus, from this point forward we refer to those who circled a 6 or 7 as being “quite positive” and will generally report on two figures only – the mean satisfaction scores of groups and the proportions of groups who score themselves as a 6 or 7. Indeed, since the overall mean and the proportion of 6s and 7s correlate very highly (unsurprisingly), we will often report only the proportion of 6s and 7s, the “quite positive,” because that figure conveys more graphically the satisfaction of the group than a mean number, such as 5.61, which, by itself, conveys very little.

¹¹ See D. Chambers, *Overstating the Satisfaction of Lawyers*, __ J. of Law & Soc. Inquiry __ (2014) (in press).

Table 1 provides an initial view of the satisfaction in their careers of the law school's graduates during the final ten years of the project. As the table reveals, 62 percent of the graduates recorded themselves as a 6 or 7 or "quite positive" with their careers overall. Taken as a whole, the aspect of their careers with which graduates were most satisfied were their problem-solving for clients or groups. The aspect with which they were least satisfied was the balance of their work and family lives and the value of their work to society.

Table 1
Satisfaction with aspects of career and with career overall,
mean satisfaction on a scale of 7
and percent who were "quite positive" (circling a 6 or 7 on the scale of 7),
classes of 1952 through 2001 surveyed in 1997-2006

	n=	mean	% "quite satisfied"
Satisfaction with balance of work and family/private life	9190	4.89	43%
Satisfaction with control over their work	9126	5.53	59%
Satisfaction with value of their work to society	9057	5.05	44%
Satisfaction with relations with co-workers and superiors	8910	5.73	68%
Satisfaction with income	9124	5.35	54%
Satisfaction with problem solving for clients or groups	8986	6.11	80%
Satisfaction with intellectual challenge of work	9120	5.72	65%
Satisfaction with prestige in community	8995	5.48	56%
Satisfaction with career overall	9190	5.61	62%

The satisfaction figures reported in table 1 are dominated by those working in private law firms, because they constituted 60 percent of all respondents. As Table 2 reports, when those in private firms are examined separately from those working in some other sectors, striking differences appear among groups with their satisfactions with some of the aspects of their careers and their careers overall.

Table 2
Satisfaction with aspects of career and with career overall,
mean satisfaction on a scale of 7
and percent who were “quite positive” (circling a 6 or 7 on the scale of 7),
classes of 1952 through 2001 surveyed in 1997-2006

	Percent who were “quite positive” (6 or 7 on scale of 7)			
	law firm	Govt, public interest, etc. ¹²	Corp- orate counsel, business	Every- one else
	n=5537	n=1660	n=1570	n=423
Satisfaction with balance of work and family/private life**	37%	57%	46%	55%
Satisfaction with control over their work**	56%	66%	61%	69%
Satisfaction with value of their work to society**	36%	75%	35%	60%
Satisfaction with relations with co-workers and superiors*	70%	68%	68%	70%
Satisfaction with income**	58%	36%	58%	48%
Satisfaction with problem solving for clients or groups**	80%	75%	82%	79%
Satisfaction with intellectual challenge of work**	64%	71%	64%	66%
Satisfaction with prestige in community	57%	57%	53%	55%
Satisfaction with career overall**	59%	71%	63%	71%

**p<.01 *p<.05

Regarding overall career satisfaction, fewer of the graduates working in private law firms or as corporate counsel or businesspersons were quite positive than were those working in government, public interest organizations, legal services, public defenders, and education. They were also less satisfied overall than “everyone else,” a group that is composed of persons neither practicing law nor working in business, but rather working in unions or nonprofit organizations or in any of the wide range of other occupations in which law-school graduates end up in (including, for example, painters, poets, and physicians). Still, more of those working in law firms or in business were much more likely than other groups to be quite positive about their

¹² Also included in this group are those in legal services, public defender offices, and teaching or other work in the field of education.

incomes and somewhat more likely to be quite positive about their problem solving for clients or groups. By contrast, those working in government, public interest organizations, public defenders and education tended to be less than quite positive about their incomes (understandably since they earned a lot less), but were much more satisfied than other groups with the social value of their work, and, in comparison with those in firms and business, much more satisfied with the balance of their work and family or private lives.

III. What Accounts for Differences in Career Satisfaction Among Practicing Lawyers.

From this point forward, we will be focusing on overall career satisfaction and what appears to help explain why some graduates are more satisfied than others. For two reasons, our analysis is limited to those who were practicing law at the time they responded to the survey. Left out are the nonpractitioners – the law professors, the judges, the managers of nonprofits, the businesspersons, and the poets -- because the primary concern of the study was to understand the experience of practicing law in the United States and because some of the variables used in the analysis derived from a section of the survey that only practitioners were asked to complete. In addition, the inquiry is limited once again to the respondents in the final ten years of the survey, in part because a large common core of questions was employed in all those years of surveys.

Table 1 shows the distribution by years of out of law school of the response to the question about satisfaction “overall,” which asked at the end of the list of questions about satisfaction with the various aspects of their careers.

Table 3

Overall career satisfaction of practitioners of law,
by years out of law school,
Classes of 1952-2001 surveyed between 1997 and 2006

	n=	very dissat- isfied						very satisfied	overall mean**
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Graduates of 1992-2001, surveyed 5 years out	1759	0.4%	3%	8%	15%	30%	34%	10%	5.15
Graduates of 1982-1991, surveyed 15 years out	1398	0.7%	2%	3%	9%	28%	43%	13%	5.46
Graduates of 1972-1981, surveyed 25 years out	1520	0.2%	1.5%	5%	9%	27%	42%	16%	5.50
Graduates of 1962-1971, surveyed 35 years out	1216	0.4%	0.7%	2%	6%	20%	47%	25%	5.82
Graduates of 1952-1961, surveyed 45 years out	807	0.1%	0.4%	0.4%	3%	15%	44%	38%	6.13
total	6700	0.4%	1.7%	4%	9%	25%	41%	18%	5.53

**p<.01

As the table’s bottom row indicates, the great majority of Michigan graduates were at least mildly satisfied with their careers overall, 84 percent putting themselves into categories 5, 6 or 7. In addition, the distribution of satisfaction across the seven categories was similar

regardless of their number of years out of law school: in each of the five graduation groups, more put themselves into category 6 than into any other single category, the category seeming to indicate they were more than mildly satisfied with their careers but short of totally satisfied. Similarly, for each of the five groups, as one moves to the left descending the scale of satisfaction, the numbers tail off rapidly. There was, nonetheless, an important difference among the groups: with the exception of the 15 and 25 year graduates, who, as groups, expressed roughly equal satisfaction, the longer the Michigan graduates had been out of law school the more satisfied they were overall with their careers. The overall mean of 5.15 for the 5-year graduates is nearly a full point lower than the mean of 6.13 for the 45-year respondents, a quite substantial (and significant) difference given a scale that ranged only from 1.00 to 7.00¹³

As we will later see, even after controlling for other variables, those who were 35 and 45 years out of law school remained significantly more satisfied with their careers overall than those out less long. In this section we explore the other factors that correlate with differences in satisfaction among the graduates and that may contribute to those difference. We will try to be cautious about claiming causal relationships but from place to place we will hazard tentative conclusions about cause. The exploration is divided into two sections. In the first part we explore the relationship between overall satisfaction and the eight aspects of satisfaction discussed in the preceding section. We then look at the relationship between overall satisfaction and the other information available from the survey (including, among many others, years since graduation at the time of the survey).

¹³ The smaller number of 45-year practitioners is not due to retirement – we included the satisfaction with their careers of the retirees who were practicing law at the time of their retirement. The smaller number is due rather to the fact that a substantial number of the 45 year graduates had died by the time of the survey and to the fact that the classes of which they were members (1952-1961) were smaller at the point of graduation than the later classes.

A. The eight aspects of satisfaction and their relationship to overall satisfaction

Among the eight aspects of satisfaction on which we have reported, which seem to contribute most to the respondents' overall career satisfaction? Is it, for example, as important to high overall satisfaction to be highly satisfied with the intellectual challenge of one's work as it is to be highly satisfied with one's relationships with co-workers?

Using regression analysis, with the eight aspects as controls, we explored which ones best account for differences among the graduates in their overall satisfaction, looking separately at the graduates 5, 15, 25, 35 and 45 years after graduation. See table 4 below. For each of the groups by years out of law school, all eight aspects of satisfaction contribute significantly to predicting overall satisfaction and together accounted for about three-fourths of the variance in satisfaction.

Table 4

Relationship of aspects of work satisfaction to overall career satisfaction,
OLS regression on overall work satisfaction,
practitioners in classes of 1952-2001, surveyed 1997-2006

	5 years out (n=1685)	15 years out (n=1315)	25 years out (n=1410)	35 years out (n=1103)	45 years out (n=609)
	beta [^]	beta [^]	beta [^]	beta [^]	beta [^]
Satisfaction with:					
value of their work to society	.26	.18	.21	.20	.09
relations with co-workers	.24	.29	.23	.20	.20
control over work	.19	.17	.14	.16	.11
balance of work and family	.16	.11	.12	.09	.06
intellectual challenge	.16	.16	.17	.12	.21
problem solving for clients	.14	.12	.12	.15	.16
income	.11	.15	.18	.18	.16
prestige in community	.08	.14	.13	.17	.20
Total explained variance (adj)	74.8%	77.1%	74.4%	76.9%	73.8%

[^]These are standardized betas that permit comparison
in strength with among the various controls variables

Several aspects of the results are striking. First, for the 5-year, 15-year, 25-year and 35-year graduates, the two aspects more strongly correlate with overall satisfaction than any of the others: their satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with co-workers and superiors at their place of work and their satisfaction with the value of their work to society. The strong

relationship between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with relationship with co-workers may come as little surprise. The strong relationship of overall satisfaction with the social value of work, is probably unexpected. We will discuss both aspects of satisfaction in the coming paragraphs. As to other aspects of satisfaction, some, such as satisfaction with control over work and satisfaction with the balance of work and family seemed were comparatively more important to overall satisfaction to those 5 and 15 years out of law school than it was to those out longer while satisfaction with income and with prestige in the workplace were comparatively more important to the satisfaction of those out longer.

1. Satisfaction with relationships with co-workers

Satisfaction with co-worker relationships was more strongly linked with overall satisfaction than any other aspect of satisfaction in nearly all the settings in which practitioners worked -- in small private law firms, medium sized private law firms, large and very large law private firms, corporate counsel, and legal services/public interest.

The question asked on the survey – how satisfied are you with “relationship with superiors, co-workers at place of work” – obviously touches upon a central aspect of most attorneys’ work experience. Those who have good relationships with others at their place of work might also have additional qualities or experiences that contribute to overall satisfaction. Within the Michigan data, for example, practitioners who had had mentors or who regarded themselves as comparatively less skeptical of the motives of others or comparatively self-confident in comparison with others were, in general, more satisfied than others with their careers overall and more likely than others to be highly satisfied with their relationship with co-workers.

2. Satisfaction with the value of work to society

The strong relationship between satisfaction with the value of their work and overall satisfaction for those 5, 15, 25 and 35 years out of law school is intriguing, especially since those the relationship was as strong as strong or stronger for those in private law firms as it is for those in other settings. Those working in law firms had widely varying views about the value of their work to society. The respondents who were comparatively dissatisfied with the social value of their work were more likely to be comparatively dissatisfied with their careers overall than were

those who were comparatively discontented with other aspects of their work such as their incomes or the intellectual challenge of their work.

The relationship of between satisfaction with the social value of work and overall satisfaction was quite robust – strong for practitioners in general and private firm practitioners in particular among those 5 and 15 and 25 and 35 years out of law school and the strength of the relationship is reinforced by the responses to two other questions on the survey that approached career and job satisfaction in somewhat different manners. The classes 5, 15 and 25 years out of law school were asked whether they expected to be with the same firm or employer in five years.¹⁴ In regressions on this variable, using the eight aspects of satisfaction as predictors, satisfaction with the social value of work was, for the firm practitioners five years out of law school, more strongly correlated with expecting to remain with the same firm than any other aspect of satisfaction. For those 15 and 25 years out, satisfaction with relationships with co-workers bore the strongest relationship with expecting to be in the same firm, with satisfaction with the social value of work either the second or third strongest.

A second satisfaction-related question, asked of all graduates, was the the extent to which they agreed with the proposition: “If I were a recent college graduate today, knowing what I now know about law school and law practice, I would choose to go to law school again.” In regressions on the responses to this question, at 5 and 15 and 25 and 35 years out of law school, satisfaction with the value of their work to society was, for private firm practitioners, related more strongly than any other aspect of satisfaction to their expectation that they would attend law school again.

Put simply, a large proportion of the Michigan graduates in private law firms who were doing well materially were not highly satisfied in their work unless they also believed that they were serving the good of society, or at least believed that they were not causing harm -- that, for many lawyers early in their careers as well as in the prime of their careers, it seems to have been relatively painful to work in settings where they found dissonance between their conduct and their values.¹⁵ Conversely, as reported earlier, the group most satisfied with the social value of

¹⁴ The question asked was “Look ahead five years. Do you expect to be working five years from now in the same setting (same government agency, same firm, etc.) in which you are currently working?” Respondents were asked to choose among four answers: “yes,” “probably yes,” “probably not,” and “no.” We treated the variable as a continuous variable.

¹⁵ See N. Levit and D. Linder, *The Happy Lawyer: Making a Good Life in the Law*, at 46-47 (discussing research that suggests that true happiness requires living “authentically.”)

their work – those working in government, legal services or public defenders, and law teachers – were also the groups who reported the highest satisfaction with their careers overall.¹⁶

What accounts for this strong association between the respondent's satisfaction with the social value of their work and their overall career satisfaction? The writings of Amy Wrzesniewski may provide some illumination. Her insight is that most people regard their jobs in one of three ways – as just a job, as part of a career, or as a calling – and that her research suggests that those who are most satisfied in their work tend to be those who regard their work as a calling.¹⁷ Within Michigan data, a high proportion of the graduates who were working in government, in legal services for the poor, in public defenders offices and in public interest organizations, and in law teaching, the settings with the highest overall career satisfaction, probably regarded their work as a calling.

It is nonetheless puzzling that so few of the Michigan graduates in private firms or corporate counsels' offices – about 30 percent -- were quite positive about the social value of their work. Why is the percentage so low? In the tradition of the British and American bar, lawyers have long asserted that providing sound legal counsel and ardent advocacy for clients is a public service of great social value, regardless whether the clients is an individual or a large corporation and regardless whether the attorney personally regards the client in high esteem.¹⁸ Yet, within the Michigan data, the satisfaction that practitioners expressed with the social value of their work varied even more in relation to the particular sorts of client they served than it did by the particular settings where they worked. Among those five, fifteen and twenty-five years out of law school, those who spent most of their time representing low and middle-income or criminal defendants, whether in a private law firm or in a legal services or public defender office, were substantially more satisfied with the value of their work to society than those who spent most of their time representing wealthy individuals or businesses of any size.¹⁹ It is ironic and

¹⁶ See table 2 supra.

¹⁷ See A. Wrzesniewski, Jobs, Careers, and Callings: Peoples' Relations to Their Work, 31 *J. Research Personality* 21 (1997). For a discussion of the application of Wrzesniewski's research to attorneys, see P. Huang and R. Swedloff, Authentic Happiness & Meaning at Law Firms, 58 *Syracuse L. Rev.* 335, 343-44 (2008).

¹⁸ See ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, which in prescribing ardent advocacy on behalf of clients draw no distinctions based on the moral worthiness of the client. See, e.g., Preamble, paragraph 2.

¹⁹ Among the five-year graduates, 20 percent of those who spent half or more of their time representing small business, 14 percent of those who spent half or more of their time representing medium or large businesses and 25 percent of those who spent half or more of their time representing wealthy individuals were quite positive about the social value of their work, in comparison with 53 percent of those who spent more than half of their time

distressing that the Michigan graduates, who in general had wide choice in the jobs they took (and thus in the sorts of the clients they served), chose in such large numbers to work in settings where they saw their own work as having such comparatively low value to society.

IV. What Accounts for Differences in Satisfaction Among Practitioners

The survey questionnaire elicited hundreds of pieces of information about the backgrounds and careers of the Michigan graduates. Their law school files provided additional information. Within this large amount of data, what helped best to explain the differences among graduates in their career satisfaction?

Our inquiry had four steps. Appendix Table 1 reports in an additive way on each step.²⁰ In the first step, we measured the contribution to overall satisfaction of socio-economic and familial background information, including the respondents' age and years out of law school at the time of the survey, sex, race, the occupations of the respondents' mother and father at the time the respondent started law school, the respondent's marital status, and whether the respondent had children, as well as a few pieces of information relating to the respondents' education, such as their qualifications for law school (LSAT score, undergraduate grades) and grades in law school. (For the contribution of these "background" factors, see column A.

The second step in the analysis added a group of variables relating to the respondents' personality characteristics, drawing on a set of questions that asked respondents to compare themselves, on a scale of 1 to 7, to other attorneys their age with regard to a variety of personal traits including their aggressiveness, honesty, concern about making a lot of money, compassion, self-confidence, and skepticism of the motives of others.

The remaining steps of the analysis added in the large numbers of variables that related to the respondents' career history and current work. The third step added objective information about work setting, status and earnings, and the final step added various pieces of more qualitative information about work, including having had a helpful mentor since law school; the amount of stress experienced in the current job; the respondents' views of the ethics of the other

representing non-wealthy individual and 83 percent of those who spent more than half their time representing criminal defendants.

²⁰ At each step of the analysis we removed variables that showed no relation to satisfaction either before or after controls.

attorneys with whom they dealt; and the extent of the discrimination or adverse treatment they'd experienced based on sex or race from other attorneys either inside the organization where they were working or from outside.

At the end of these four steps, we can account for about 31.5 percent of the variance in the overall satisfaction of the graduates. The great bulk of what we can account for the variance comes not from the “hard” information in the survey – that is, not from information such as sex, race, age, work setting or earnings – but from the “soft” information respondents provided about their views and experiences in the second and fourth steps, such as their views about their personalities and the degree of stress they experience at work. Explaining 31.5 percent of the variance is not a trivial achievement. Still, it leaves much of the difference in the overall satisfaction of the graduates unaccounted for. We are certain, of course, that we omitted from the questionnaire many questions that might have helped explain more, but we also suspect that a substantial part of what is left unexplained is due to “background noise” – to the effects on their answers regarding satisfaction of the transitory situations of the respondents at the time they filled in the survey – their mood at the moment, the weather, other events occurring within the preceding day or hour, and so forth.²¹

The three lists that follow set forth, in rank order of their strength, the variables that, after controls, proved most strongly related to overall career satisfaction for practitioners (in all settings) five years out of law school, fifteen and twenty-five out of law school, and thirty-five and forty-five years out of law school. Appendix Tables 2 sets forth details of the regression analyses lying behind the three lists.

²¹ See D. Kahneman and A. Krueger, *supra* n.4, at 6-7.

Table 6
 Information in dataset that is most strongly related to overall career satisfaction
 of graduates practicing law at time of survey, listed in order of strength,
 surveys conducted 1997-2006
 (see Appendix Table 2 for details)

Practitioners five years out of law school

Degree of stress at work (negative relation to satisfaction)
 Self-confidence (self-appraisal in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)
 Aggressive (in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)*
 Currently is an associate in a private law firm (negative)
 Extent of agreement with proposition that other lawyers he/she deals with
 outside own office are highly ethical in their conduct (positive)
 Currently works in setting planned on for long term at end of law school (positive)
 Had a mentor since law school (positive)
 Is male (negative)
 Currently works in legal services, public defender, public interest org. (positive)

Practitioners fifteen and twenty-five years out of law school

Degree of stress at work (negative)
 Self-confidence (self-appraisal in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)
 Income (natural log) (positive)
 Is male (negative)
 Aggressive (in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)*
 Compulsive about work (in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)
 Extent of agreement with proposition that other lawyers he/she deals with
 outside own office are highly ethical in their conduct (positive)*
 Skeptical of the motives of others (in comparison with other attorneys) (negative)
 For those in private firms only: effectiveness at attracting new clients (in comparison
 with other attorneys) (positive)

Practitioners thirty-five and forty-five years out of law school

Income (natural log) (positive)
 Self-confidence (self-appraisal in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)
 Degree of stress at work (negative)
 Aggressive (in comparison with other attorneys) (positive)*
 Extent of agreement with proposition that other lawyers he/she deals with
 outside own office are highly ethical in their conduct (positive)
 Is male (negative)
 Has had a mentor since law school (positive)
 For those in private firms only: effectiveness at attracting new clients (in comparison
 with other attorneys) (positive)

*“Aggressive” fits into the list at this point only if “self-confident” is excluded from the analysis. The reasons for excluding self-confidence from the analysis are explained infra at pages xx-xy.

Perhaps most striking about the three lists is that, despite the large numbers of variables include in the analyses, five of the nine variables on the list for the practitioners five years out are also on the lists for both the graduates fifteen and twenty-five years out and the graduates thirty-five and forty-five years out: the degree of stress experienced at work, their appraisal of their self-confidence and their aggressiveness in comparison with other lawyers, their views about the ethics of the outside attorneys with whom they dealt; and their sex. Three other variables appeared on two of the lists: income (for those practitioners fifteen and twenty-five years out and those thirty-five and forty-five years out); having had a mentor since law school (for those five years out and those thirty-five and forty-five years out); and for private practitioners only, the self-appraisal of their effectiveness in attracting new clients (for those fifteen and twenty-five years out and those thirty-five and forty-five years out).

Many variables were equally interesting because they did *not* show up as significantly related to satisfaction. Law school grades, race, marital status, and having children proved unrelated to satisfaction, after other factors are considered. So too did settings of first job, having had a judicial clerkship, types of clients served and specialties in practice.

Here is a more detailed discussion of nine of the variables that related most strongly to overall satisfaction.

1. Years out of law school

The lists above of the variables most associated with career satisfaction do not include years out of law school since the lists themselves are arranged by years out of law. As already reported, however, the graduates five years out of law school were substantially less satisfied overall than the graduates 15 and 25 years out, who were in turn substantially less satisfied than the graduates 35 and 45 years out. At the extremes, 83 percent of the 45-year graduates, but only 46 percent of the five-year graduates, reported themselves quite positive overall. When all classes are analyzed together, years out continued to relate strongly to overall satisfaction, with the 35 and 45 year graduates significantly more satisfied than all the more recent groups of graduates, even after taking other factors into account. See Appendix Table 1.

Why is career satisfaction so much higher among those out of law school the longest? Research by others has found that older workers in general²² and older lawyers in particular²³ tend to be more satisfied with their work than younger workers and lawyers. Among the reasons suggested for increased satisfaction are that, over time, workers tend to attain positions of greater status and authority and self-select into work settings that particularly suit them. For some, aging also helps expectations fall more closely into line with achievements.

A quite different possible reason for older graduates' higher satisfaction needs to be considered at least briefly.²⁴ On the basis of the data we've provided so far, it is possible that the Michigan graduates from the 1950s and 1960s have always been happier with their careers than later graduates, even in the years immediately after law school – that is, that their higher satisfaction was related not to aging but to some special characteristics of the cohort of which they are a part. This explanation, while possible, seems unlikely to explain much of the higher satisfaction of the 35 and 45 year graduates, in part because of the consistent findings of the research of others that job satisfaction increases with age and in part because years after graduation remains strongly related to satisfaction within the Michigan data, even after taking into account other factors that might have explained away the significance of years since graduation. In addition, among graduates who responded to both a five and a fifteen year survey and among graduates who responded to both a fifteen and a twenty-five years survey, larger numbers circled a higher level of overall satisfaction on the later survey than they had on the earlier survey.

There is nonetheless one way in which the careers of the 35 and 45 year graduates differed substantially from those of the more recent graduates that might suggest a cohort effect

²² See John Heinz, Kathleen Hull, and Ava Harter, *Lawyers and Their Discontents: Findings from a Survey of the Chicago Bar*, 74 *Ind. L. J.* 735, 737-38 (1998) (surveying the research on the relation of aging to satisfaction). It is also the case that, in surveys not about work but about life as a whole, people's sense of well-being improves in later life. In a recent phone survey of 340,847 Americans between the ages of 18 and 85, peoples' assessment of their overall well-being (including their achievements and current circumstances) reached a low point around age fifty and steadily improved after that, despite physical decline. A. Stone et al., *A Snapshot of the Age Distribution of Psychological Well-Being in the United States*, *PNAS Early Edition*, June 2010. www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1003744107. The researchers consider and reject the possibility of a cohort effect and conclude that satisfaction genuinely improves with age.

²³ See Heinz, Hull, and Harter, *supra* n.18 at 743, reporting results of authors' study of Chicago lawyers in the mid-1990s.

²⁴ We had also thought it possible that those who had been less than fully satisfied in their careers would have been more likely to have retired and thus not included in the table, but those retired persons who did answer the satisfaction questions were, in general, as satisfied overall as those who were still working in comparable settings.

of some sort. In comparison with the more recent graduates, a much higher proportion of the 35 and 45 year graduates began their careers in small law firms.²⁵ Indeed, a great many of the older graduates remained in such settings for all or nearly all of their careers. In that sense the oldest graduates, as a group, entered a world of law practice that was fundamentally different than that entered by the most recent graduates, different in ways that we may not capture in our questions and that may have affected throughout their careers the way they look at their careers.

2. Stress

No single piece of information gathered in the survey correlated more strongly with overall career satisfaction, both before and after taking into account other factors, than the response to the following question: “How much stress do you experience in your work today?” The question was asked on a scale of one to seven, with 1 indicating “none at all” and 7 indicating “a great deal.” We need to be cautious, of course, about the causal relationship between stress and satisfaction. It is quite plausible that high stress contributes to lower satisfaction. It is also possible, however, that persons who become dissatisfied with their jobs for whatever reason will feel internal stress from simply remaining in the job. We believe, after looking at the results of our inquiry that in the main it is sensible to treat stress as a contributor to dissatisfaction, not simply as a result of it.

²⁵ There has been a steady decline, among those entering private law firm practice as a first job, of taking a job in a private law firm of 10 or fewer lawyers. Among those surveyed in 1997-2006, 60 percent of the 45 year graduates, 40 percent of the 35 year graduates, 24 percent of the 25 year graduates, 16 percent of the 15 year graduates and 7 percent of the 5 year graduates began in a firm of ten or fewer.

The strong relationship between stress and overall satisfaction for the Michigan practitioners is displayed in Table 7.

Table 7
 Percentage of full-time working practitioners reporting themselves
 Quite positive about their careers overall (6 or 7 on scale of 7),
 by level of stress in current work,
 Classes surveyed in years 1997-2006

	5 year classes of 1992-2001		15 and 25 year classes of 1972-1991		35 and 45 year classes of 1952-1971	
	n=	% Q. posi- tive about career	n=	% Q. posi- tive about career	n=	% Q. posi- tive about career
Stress level 1 or 2 (very low)	75	73%	810	77%	164	90%
Stress level 3	121	61%	557	59%	188	80%
Stress level 4	236	53%	399	52%	237	78%
Stress level 5	575	46%	519	46%	372	70%
Stress level 6 or 7 (very high)	643	35%	393	38%	309	69%
Total	1650	45%	2678	58%	1270	76%

In addition, for practitioners who responded to a survey at both five and fifteen years out of law school and fifteen or at both fifteen and twenty-five years out of law school, change in satisfaction either up or down between surveys was more strongly associated with change in reported stress than with change in any other factor.

The strength of the relationship between stress at work and career satisfaction is perhaps expectable, since most people regard stress in negative terms -- not just as pressure to perform, but as pressure too great to handle comfortably.²⁶ Medical researchers have long recognized that stress experienced negatively contributes to heart disease, migraines, and depression.²⁷ For the Michigan graduates, the relationship between stress and satisfaction is very strong but also complex.

²⁶ As stated by one reviewer of literature on stress in the workplace, "Job stress is generally defined in the literature as an employee's feelings of job-hardness, tension, anxiety, frustration, worry, emotional exhaustion, and distress". Wichramasinghe.

²⁷ See summary in S. Fortney, *Soul for Sale: An Empirical Study of Associate Satisfaction, Law Firm Culture, and the Effects of Billable Hours Requirements*, 69 UMKC L. Rev 239, 269-71(2000-01).

As a starting point, most Michigan practitioners regardless of work setting reported substantial levels of stress in their current job. Among full-time practitioners, seventy-four percent of those five years out and forty percent of the practitioners fifteen or more years out circled a 5, 6 or 7 on the scale of 7. What accounts for the stress? A recent summary of research on stress in the workplace identified four principal factors.²⁸ The most important was facing “increased demands but having little control or decision-making latitude [regarding] work activities.” The other three were “long hours,” “the feeling that you are being treated unfairly,” and “not having acknowledgement or reward for a job well done.” About two of these – control over work and long hours – the survey offers direct evidence of a strong link with stress among the Michigan practitioners. About the other two, the evidence is indirect.²⁹

As to control over work, the reader will recall that satisfaction with the control over the work they did was one of the eight aspects of overall satisfaction included in the survey.³⁰ Of the eight, satisfaction with control over work correlated more strongly with stress for practitioners five years out of law school and for practitioners fifteen and twenty-five years out of law school than any of the other aspects. The less satisfied they were with their control over work the more stress they reported.

Regarding “long hours,” 70 percent of the Michigan graduates five years out of law school, regardless of their setting of practice, reported working an average of fifty or more hours a week and 24 percent reported working sixty or more hours. Even among the graduates 15 and 25 years out, 60 percent reported working fifty or more hours in an average week and 16 percent averaged sixty or more hours. In regressions to identify the factors most associated with stress for practitioners by various years out of law school, hours worked is persistently the strongest predictor of stress. Average hours worked per week, coupled only with satisfaction with control

²⁸ See American Institute of Stress, Stress in the Workplace, http://www.stress.org/Stress_in_the_Workplace.htm.

²⁹ We did not ask the graduates directly whether they felt unfairly treated or whether they received adequate praise for work well done, but three questions that we did ask that indirectly approach the same concerns were significantly related to stress for practitioners. Among practitioners 5 out of law school, having never had a mentor was associated with higher stress. Str05b. Similarly, among women, 5, 15, and 25 years out of law school, having experienced substantial adverse treatment from other attorneys based on their sex was significantly associated with stress. Str05b. And for all graduates, there was a strong negative relationship between stress and the respondents’ satisfaction with their relationship with their current co-workers.

³⁰ See table 2, supra.

over work and years out of law school at the time of the survey, explains 28 percent of the variance in reported stress.³¹

Accordingly, the high degree of stress reported by the graduates five years out of law school who worked as associates in private firms – 80 percent said they were under considerable stress³² -- can be explained to a substantial extent by the very long hours they worked (a mean of 53.6 hours a week) and their low satisfaction with their control over their work (only 29 percent said they were quite positive about their control over work).

Yet despite the strong negative relationship between stress and overall satisfaction, the two are by no means invariably linked. As Table 7 above reveals, over a third of the 5, 15, and 25 year graduates and nearly seventy percent of the 35 and 45 year graduates who reported very high levels of stress (stress at levels 6 or 7) nonetheless regarded themselves as quite positive about their careers overall.³³ One reason why high stress and lower satisfaction are not invariably linked seems to be illustrated by the contrast between two groups of five-year practitioners who each reported high stress at work. Among the five-year practitioners, those working in very large law firms and those working in legal services and public interest settings reported the highest levels of stress among all work settings, yet, as groups, the very large firm lawyers were the least satisfied with their careers overall among all settings, while the legal services/public interest lawyers were the most satisfied. Since the aspect of satisfaction that most strongly distinguished the very large firm lawyers from the legal services/public interest lawyers was satisfaction with the value of their work to society,³⁴ the fact that those working in legal services and public interest were so highly satisfied overall despite high stress may suggest that for those who regard their work as serving the public good or regard their work as a calling, stress does not serve as a barrier to high satisfaction.

³¹ On the other hand, across many work settings, there were many individuals who worked very long hours but did not report experiencing their job as quite stressful; these individuals tend to be much more satisfied with their careers than those who work equally long hours but feel stressed, suggesting that for some practitioners working long hours is an indication not of oppression but of being engrossed in their work. Str05a.

³² Putting themselves into categories 5, 6, or 7 on the scale of 7.

³³ The graduates who were quite positive about their careers despite high stress tended to be those who also characterized themselves as comparatively compulsive about work: among those who reported high stress, a much higher proportion of those who saw themselves as above average in compulsivity about work were quite positive about their careers than among those who saw themselves as below average in compulsivity.

³⁴ See Table 3 above, revealing that for the 15 and 25 year graduates, 24 percent of those in very large firms and 86 percent of those in legal services/public interest were quite positive about the value of their work to society.

3. Self-confidence in comparison with others.

The survey asked a series of questions about respondents personality and character traits. Using a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating much less than others and 7 indicating much more, graduates were asked how aggressive they were in comparison with other attorneys their own age, how skeptical of the motives of others, how compulsive about work, how concerned about the impact of their work on society, how honest, how concerned about making lots of money, how compassionate, and how self-confident. In general (unsurprisingly), Michigan graduates saw themselves as having comparatively more of traits usually seen as desirable for attorneys (such as honesty and aggressiveness) and comparatively less of more dubious traits (such as concern about making lots of money). As to self-confidence in particular, most Michigan graduates regarded themselves as somewhat or much more self-confident than other attorneys their age – 63 percent of the five-year graduates, 63 percent of the combined 15 and 25 year graduates, and 72 percent of the combined 35 and 45 year graduates put themselves in categories 5, 6, or 7 on the 7-point scale of comparative self-confidence.

Table 8 reports on the strong relationship between self-confidence and satisfaction.

Table 8
 Percentage of full-time working practitioners reporting themselves
 quite positive about their careers overall (6 or 7 on scale of 7),
 by their view of their self-confidence in comparison with other attorneys,
 Classes surveyed in years 1997-2006

	5 year classes of 1992-2001		15 and 25 year classes of 1972-1991		35 and 45 year classes of 1952-1971	
	n=	% Q. posi- tive about career	n=	% Q. posi- tive about career	n=	% Q. posi- tive about career
Less self-confident than others (category 1, 2, or 3)	239	23%	342	36%	114	65%
About as self-confident as others (category 4)	388	35%	637	44%	228	58%
Somewhat more self-confident than others (category 5)	465	45%	709	57%	276	71%
Much more self-confident than others (categories 6 and 7)	567	61%	967	74%	623	86%
Total	1649	45%	2655	57%	1241	76%

Among the five year practitioners and the fifteen and twenty-five year practitioners, a nearly linear relationship existed between their view of their self-confidence and their degree of satisfaction with their careers. The relationship is more uneven for the graduates thirty-five and forty-five years out of law school, but still yielded a significant positive relationship.

In many regressions on overall satisfaction, several of the personality traits were significantly associated with overall satisfaction, but the respondents' assessment of their self-confidence was invariably more strongly associated than the others. In every regression on overall satisfaction -- not just for practitioners by years out of law school, but also in separate analyses of law-firm practitioners, corporate counsel, and public interest/government lawyers and separate analyses of women and men -- comparative self-confidence was always strongly and positively related to overall satisfaction.

Yet, despite the strong relationship between self-confidence and satisfaction, the nature of the causal relationship between them is obviously problematic. Does self-confidence help lead to achievements that in turn produce satisfaction or does satisfaction with work come first and self-confidence flow from it? Or is self-confidence both a cause and a consequence of satisfaction, each feeding the other.³⁵ All three possibilities are plausible, but if self-confidence turns out to be largely a *result* of satisfaction, it does not deserve this prime spot in a report on the factors that seem to contribute to satisfaction.

One suggestion that, at least for substantial numbers of Michigan graduates, the sense of self-confidence came first and contributed to satisfaction, is that, among all variables in the dataset plausibly related to self-confidence, the one that correlates the most strongly with their assessment of their self-confidence is their assessment of how aggressive they are in comparison to other lawyers. The more aggressive, the more self-confident. However respondents defined aggressiveness, they seem likely to be referring to a character trait that was relatively fixed by adulthood and thus preceded their careers and their satisfaction in their careers.

On the other hand, while the huge majority of graduates reported a level of self-confidence at fifteen years that was within one level of that which they had reported at five years (which suggests that a sense of self-confidence is a relatively stable and long-enduring characteristic),³⁶ it is nonetheless the case that changes in reported self-confidence between the fifth and fifteen year correlated positively and significantly with changes in overall satisfaction over the same period (which suggests that, for some people, a new level of work satisfaction came first and changed self-confidence followed it).³⁷

In addition, whether or not self-confidence precedes and contributes to satisfaction, there is a second possible difficulty with the relationship between self-confidence and satisfaction:

³⁵ Further complicating our inquiry is that our respondents might well have had either of two forms of self-confidence in mind when they answered the question. Since the question asked for a comparison to “other lawyers,” they may have answered solely with regard to their comparative self-assurance in handling legal matters. It is possible, however, that they may have been thinking more broadly about a general background level of self-confidence – about how much of a can-do attitude they have toward life. The two forms of self-confidence, the occupational and the global, surely interact, but they are not the same and the particular sort of self-confidence to which the respondent was advertent at the time of answering the question might affect the relation of that person’s self-confidence to his career satisfaction.

³⁶ Of the 1615 graduates who responded to the question about self-confidence on both a five and a fifteen year survey, 79 percent remained at 15 years within one level of their response at five, 11 percent went up by two or more levels and 10 percent went down two or more levels.

³⁷ In a regression on change in satisfaction between the fifth and fifteenth year, change in stress was by far the change more strongly related to change in satisfaction (standardized beta $-.17$), but change in self-confidence was also significant (standardized beta $+.07$, $p < .01$).

peoples' self-confidence may affect how they think about questions regarding satisfaction. Very self-confident people might be more inclined to give extreme answers to questions about their jobs than somewhat less self-confident people, even though a closer grained set of questions might have reveal that the two felt about their jobs in essentially the same way.³⁸

In the end, we were unable to sort out satisfactorily the direction of the causal relationship between self-confidence and satisfaction, though we suspect that, for many graduates, causation runs in both directions. Out of caution, we analyzed overall satisfaction for all classes leaving self-confidence out of the equation. When done, as reported in Appendix Table 1, a significant loss of explained variance occurs, but the strength of only a few of the forty control variables were significantly changed.³⁹ By far the largest impact was on the explanatory power of the respondent's assessment of their aggressiveness in comparison with other lawyers, which increases dramatically.

4. Aggressiveness in comparison with others

Forty-one percent of the Michigan graduates considered themselves more "aggressive" or much more aggressive than most other attorneys their age. Another 32 percent considered themselves about average. In general, men regarded themselves as more aggressive than women regarded themselves, and African-Americans and Hispanics regarded themselves as more aggressive than whites or Asian-Americans regarded themselves. Exactly how the responding graduates interpreted what it meant to be aggressive we cannot be certain – whether they meant to indicate simply a style of presenting themselves or strong determination in pursuing goals or both – cannot be known, but, however interpreted, the more aggressive they regarded themselves the more satisfied they were overall with their careers.

³⁸ Within our data, for example, when we compare the most self-confident people (those who gave themselves a 6 or a 7 on comparative self-confidence) with those who saw themselves as average in self-confidence (those who gave themselves a 4), the much more self-confident were substantially more likely to circle extremely high scores with regard to characteristics about which one probably wouldn't hypothesize that self-confident people had a special edge. For example, among the fifteen and twenty-five year practitioners, the most self-confident were about twice as likely as the average self-confident to say that they were much more honest than most attorneys their age. Of 1698 15 and 25 year practitioners who gave themselves a 6 or 7 with regard to comparative self-confidence, 43 percent gave themselves a 7 with regard to comparative honesty, in comparison with 22 percent of the 1172 who said they were average with regard to self-confidence. ($p < .01$).

³⁹ Compare Appendix Table 1, column B1, with Appendix Table 1, column B2.

When aggressiveness is included in the analysis of overall satisfaction along with self-confidence, it is significantly related to overall satisfaction in most analyses, but its contribution to explained variance is modest.⁴⁰ When self-confidence is excluded from the analysis, aggressiveness replaces self-confidence as one of the strongest factors predicting overall satisfaction for the five-year classes, for the combined fifteen and twenty-five year classes and for the combined thirty-five and forty-five year classes,⁴¹ though its individual contribution to the overall explained variance is considerably less than self-confidence had been.

Why comparatively aggressive attorneys are more satisfied with their careers is difficult to say. Respondents' views of their aggressiveness and their views of their self-confidence are very strongly correlated. Aggressiveness also correlates positively with compulsiveness about work and concern about making a lot of money. These traits, taken together, may be common characteristics of hard-driving and ambitious individuals and such individuals may well be comparatively successful and comparatively well satisfied in the work they do.

5. The ethical standards of other lawyers dealt with

The survey asked graduates the extent to which they agreed on a scale of 1 to 7 with the following statement: "The lawyers with whom I deal (other than those in my own office) are highly ethical in their conduct." Regardless of their numbers of years out of law school, only about a third of the Michigan graduates strongly agreed with the statement (categories 1 or 2). Sad to say, about 40 percent were either neutral or disagreed (categories 4-7), which speaks poorly for the ethical environment in which a substantial proportion of Michigan graduates experienced themselves as practicing. Disproportionately likely to report lower views of the ethics of the lawyers with whom they dealt were practitioners working in legal services organizations or in solo private practice as well as those whose clients were principally individuals of low or moderate income and those who practiced criminal law as prosecutors or defenders.

⁴⁰ See appendix table 1, column B1.

⁴¹ Appendix table 1, column B2.

The question about other lawyers' ethics was included in the survey for twenty-six years, all the years that questions about satisfaction were asked. Each year, a strong correlation appeared between the response to the ethics question and overall career satisfaction.⁴² Moreover in every analysis of satisfaction overall, whether for all graduates together or for the 5, 15, 25, 35, and 45 years graduates separately or private law firm practitioners, corporate counsel and government separately, or for women and men separately, the "other lawyers' ethics" variable always displayed a strong and significant relationship to overall satisfaction, one that persisted after other variables were taken into account.⁴³ The more strongly respondents agreed that the other lawyers they dealt with were highly ethical, the more satisfied they tended to report themselves with their careers.

What accounts for this persistent relationship? To be sure, it is no surprise that lawyers' contentment with their work might be affected by the ethical standards of the lawyers with whom they deal. But is it the case that other lawyers' ethics standing alone accounts for the strong relationship or is the ethics of other lawyers a surrogate or a reflection of something else? There is, for example, some suggestion within the data that perceptions about the ethical standards of other lawyers were associated with aspects of the respondents' own personality or worldviews. Those who had comparatively low views of the ethics of the lawyers outside their office tended to characterize themselves as comparatively suspicious of the motives of others⁴⁴ and to be less satisfied than others with the quality of the relationships they had with their superiors and co-workers inside the places where they currently worked.⁴⁵ Perhaps the question about other lawyers ethics is associated with a comparatively high level of cynicism or pessimism or unsociability that is in turn associated with comparative dissatisfaction.

6. Sex

After controls for other factors, women practitioners law five years out of law school, fifteen and twenty-five years out of law school, and thirty-five and forty-five years out of law school

⁴² Sat33

⁴³ See Appendix Tables 1E.

⁴⁴ id

⁴⁵ id

were significantly more satisfied than men practitioners with their careers overall.⁴⁶ *Before* controls, women were slightly more satisfied than men, but the differences were not significant: among the practitioners surveyed when five years of law school, 45 percent of the women and 42 percent of the men were quite positive about their careers overall (a 6 or 7 on the scale of 7); among those surveyed at fifteen and twenty-five years out, 61 percent of the women and 57 percent of men were quite positive; and among those in the classes 35 and 45 years out, 78 percent of the women and 76 percent of the men were quite positive.

Putting aside for the moment the reasons why women might have been more satisfied after controlling for other factors, the mere fact that, at all these stages after graduation, women were fully as satisfied as men overall will probably surprise many readers, since the findings of other surveys of women and men in the profession have been mixed and since there have been many journalistic accounts of difficulties women face within the profession.⁴⁷ And, indeed, in broad terms, the professional experiences of Michigan's women graduates have indeed differed from men's in ways that might lead one to expect lower satisfaction. By the most common measures of success in our culture – income and status – the women fifteen and more years out of law school had achieved less than the men: they earned less than men and much less frequently than men held the status of partner in private law firms.⁴⁸ Moreover, unlike the men in the survey, a large proportion of Michigan's women had taken time out of the labor force or worked part-time in order to care for children and a large proportion reported having experienced adverse treatment based on their sex.

After analysis, a central and overarching hypothesis to explain why women reported as high career satisfaction as men seems to be this: for both women and men, the aspects of career satisfaction that contributed most in explaining overall career satisfaction were their satisfaction with their relationships with co-workers and their satisfaction with the social value of their work,

⁴⁶ An earlier study based on the Project's data that compared the satisfaction of Michigan's women and men graduates also found women more satisfied than men, see D. Chambers, *Accommodation and Satisfaction: Women and Men Lawyers and the Balance of Work and Family*, 14 *Law and Social Inquiry* 251(1989) (reporting on the classes of 1976-1979). A much more recent study based on the Michigan data found no differences in satisfaction by sex. See K. Dau-Schmidt, et al., *Men and Women of the Bar: The Impact of Gender on Legal Careers*, 16 *Michigan J. of Gender & Law* 49, 124-25 (2009). (5 and 15 year graduates from the 1970s to the mid-1990s.)

⁴⁷ See summary of research on women lawyer's satisfaction, in Dau-Schmidt, et al, *Men and Women of the Bar: The Impact of Gender on Legal Careers*, 16 *Michigan J. of Gender & Law* 49, 117-18 (2009).

⁴⁸ Even if we take a broader view of prestige and include (in addition to law-firm partners) judges, federal employees, public officials, law professors and business executives, a higher proportion of men than women held such positions.

but women in general seemed to place a higher premium than men in actually putting themselves into settings in which they found co-workers with whom they formed satisfying working relationships and in which they performed work they considered of value to society.

The differing decisions that women and men made about where to work can be illustrated best within the Michigan data by considering the women and men who responded to questions about satisfaction at more than one point in time and comparing how their work satisfaction changed over time. Over four hundred women and nearly a thousand men in the classes of 1982 through 1991 who were practicing law five years after graduation responded to questions about satisfaction at both five and fifteen years after law school.

At five years out of law school, women and men were in much the same position: about three-fourths of the the women and men worked in private law firms that had more than fifty attorneys. Taking all practitioners together, the women averaged slightly shorter work weeks than the men, but reported higher levels of stress and slightly (though not significantly) lower earnings. As a group, the women were as satisfied overall with their careers as the men, and no significant differences appeared between women and men in their satisfaction with the balance of their work and family life, their satisfaction with relationships with co-workers, their satisfaction with the value of their work to society, or their satisfaction with their incomes.

When the same women and men were resurveyed ten years later, much had changed. Most women and men had left the jobs where they had worked at five years out, but in making shifts men were more likely than women to move from one private law firm to another, while women were more likely than men to leave law-firm practice altogether, choosing to practice in non-firm settings (such as government), or to work in a nonpractice setting (such as law teaching), or, in a small proportion of cases, to leave the work force altogether to care for children. Even the women who remained in law-firm practice were different from private-firm men by the fifteen year point: while the great majority of each were now partners, a much larger minority of the women (27 percent of the women, 10 percent of men) were associates or working on a contract or some other basis. (A considerable majority of the women working in firms who were not partners were working part-time to care for children.) As to income, full-time working women, who had earned, on average, 95 percent as much as men ten years before, now averaged only 73 percent as much as men.

After all these shifts in work setting, status and income, what had happened to women's and men's career satisfaction between the fifth and fifteen years? Fortunately, overall career satisfaction had improved markedly for both groups, but the women, despite lower earnings and adjustments made to care for children, had become, by a small but significant margin, more satisfied overall than the men with their careers.⁴⁹ They had succeeded to a greater extent than men in reducing the stress they experienced at work. They had become significantly more satisfied than men with their relationship with co-workers, with the value of their work to society, and with the balance of work and family. Even the working women with children were significantly more satisfied than men with children with the balance of work and family and with their careers overall. In addition, despite their lower earnings, working women were as satisfied as men with their earned incomes, perhaps because women reported caring significantly less than men reported caring about making a lot of money⁵⁰ and perhaps because women tended to have spouses who earned as much as or more than they did while men tended to have spouses who earned much less they did or did not work in the labor force at all.

To be sure, many women worked at both five and fifteen years out in high-pressure settings and earned high incomes and many men who had worked in high-pressure settings at five years had shifted, by the fifteenth year, to work in settings where they experienced low stress, earned less income than most of their classmates and felt high career satisfaction. But the overall pattern of the data suggests women in much greater numbers than men were willing to earn somewhat less and forego the prestige of firm partnership in order to obtain a more satisfying professional life in other ways.

On the information we've provided so far, however, it is possible to suggest an alternative, less positive, interpretation of the Michigan data, which is that early in their careers the women and men had essentially the same sorts of high-powered career goals (reflected in the very high proportions of both who began their career in large private firms), but that many women, encountering discrimination within their employment settings and pressure to perform primary child-rearing roles within their families, adjusted their expectations downward, and the

⁴⁹ A mean overall satisfaction of 5.69 for women and 5.46 for men. $P < .01$. 65% of women and 57% of men were quite positive about their careers overall (6 or 7 on the scale of 7).

⁵⁰ The survey asked respondents to compare themselves, on a scale of 1 to 7, to other lawyers their age regarding how concerned they were "about making a lot of money." 59 percent of men but only 38 percent of women said they cared as much or more as most other lawyers their age about making a lot of money (circling 4, 5, 6 or 7 on the scale of 7). $P < .01$.

comparatively high satisfaction they expressed at fifteen years was the warped result of having fully accommodated themselves to their lower expectations.⁵¹ For some Michigan women that is probably what happened, but, for three reasons, we are disinclined to accept this explanation for the bulk of the Michigan women: first, when surveyed at five-years out, women who began their careers in law firms were less likely than men to recall having finished law school with a long-term plan to work in a law firm; second, women's satisfaction as a whole after fifteen years not merely equaled their satisfaction at five years but far exceeded it; and third, and perhaps most important, the women in the Michigan survey, though earning less than men and less frequently being law-firm partners, had typically achieved a great deal, often in nonfirm settings, and genuinely had a lot to be pleased about.

7. Income

On the evidence reported so far, one might assume that there was little correlation – or even a negative correlation -- between income and satisfaction among the Michigan graduates. After all, at 5 years after law school and again at 15 and 25 years after law school, those working in government and those working in legal services or other public interest work were significantly more satisfied overall with their careers than those in private firms⁵² even though they earned on average less than half as much as the private-firm lawyers.⁵³ Similarly, among those in private firms, those working in solo practice or small firms of 10 or fewer were fully as satisfied overall with their careers as those working in the largest firms, even though they too earned on about half as much as the very large firm lawyers.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Studies of life satisfaction in other contexts have found that immediately after a significant setback, peoples' satisfaction declines and then even if there has not been a return to better objective circumstances, their reports of their life satisfaction tends to return to their prior level. See Kahneman and Krueger, *supra* n.4, reporting on a study finding that "average life satisfaction drops after the onset of a moderate disability, but fully recovers to the predisability level after two years." *Id.* at 14.

⁵² See tables 2, *supra*.

⁵³ Among the fifteen year graduates, for example, the mean earned income for those in firms was \$270,358, while the mean for those in government was \$111,648 and the mean for those in legal services or public interest work was \$81,968. For those in corporate counsel's offices, the mean was \$220,062. The disparities were nearly as pronounced among the graduates five years out of law school and even more pronounced among the graduates twenty-five years out of law school.

⁵⁴ The mean for those in firms of over 200 was \$387,344, while the mean for those in solo practice was \$130,144 and the mean for those in firms of 2 to 10 was \$200,827.

When the effects of income on satisfaction are examined within particular work sectors, however, the story is more complex. Consistent with initial impressions, income is unrelated to overall career satisfaction among those working in government or in legal services/public interest work, before and after taking other factors into account. As to those working as corporate counsel, income correlates positively with overall satisfaction, but the relationship disappears once other factors are taken into account. As to those in private law firms, however, while income is mildly though not significantly related to satisfaction for those five years out, it is powerfully related to satisfaction for those fifteen, twenty-five, thirty-five and forty-five years out, before and after taking other factors into account. Indeed, for the thirty-five and forty-five year graduates in law firms, earned income (in log form) was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction among all the variables in the analysis – somewhat stronger than the degree of reported stress and much stronger than any other factor.⁵⁵ Income was nearly as powerful a predictor of satisfaction for the fifteen and twenty-five year graduates in private firms.⁵⁶ Table 10 below displays overall satisfaction by income ranges for those working in private practice in the 15 through 45 year classes.

Table 10
 Percentage of full-time law-firm practitioners quite positive (6 or 7 on 7-point scale),
 with their careers overall, by earned income (adjusted by CPI-U into 2009 dollars).
 Graduates 15 and 25 years out and 35 and 45 years out, surveyed 1997-2006

	Private firm practitioners 15 and 25 years out of law school		Private firm practitioners 35 and 45 years out of law school	
	n=	Percent quite positive overall **	n=	Percent quite positive overall **
Income from practice:				
Less than \$100,000	344	38%	171	58%
\$100,000-\$199,999	913	48%	306	76%
\$200,000-299,999	845	56%	198	80%
\$300,000-499,999	763	61%	172	83%
\$500,000 or more	418	74%	166	89%
Total	3283	56%	1013	77%

**p.01

⁵⁵ See appendix table 3.

⁵⁶ Id.

The inference to draw from the strong relationship between income and satisfaction for the law-firm lawyers coupled with the other information about satisfaction seems fairly straightforward: law-firm lawyers, despite their generally high earnings, are no more satisfied with their careers than those working in settings where earnings are lower, but among those who do work in firms, earnings significantly contribute to satisfaction. That making high incomes was strongly related to satisfaction for law-firm practitioners is consistent with their responses to another question on the survey that asked respondents to compare themselves to other lawyers their age with regard to their concern about “making a lot of money.” Those practicing in mid-sized, large and very large firms characterized themselves as more concerned about making a lot of money than lawyers practicing in other settings characterized themselves.

8. Having a mentor

Unsurprisingly, among practitioners five years out of law schools, having had a “helpful” mentor since law school correlated strongly and positively with overall satisfaction.⁵⁷ But it was also the case, even after taking other factors into account, that having had a mentor strongly related with satisfaction for those 35 and 45 years out of law school, and, though not as strongly significantly related to satisfaction for the attorneys 15 and 25 years out of law school. Having had a mentor significantly related to overall satisfaction among those working in law firms, in corporate counsel offices and in government, and for both women and men.

That such a strong relationship existed between being mentored and overall career satisfaction among those 35 and 45 years out of law school, a relationship that persisted in significance even after controls for other variables, suggests either that mentors exerted long-enduring effects on the graduates’ careers or that those who have had mentors are also likely to have other qualities or capacities that the survey did not directly measure and that contribute to overall satisfaction. The latter explanation almost certainly accounts for some of the significance of having had a mentor. About 60 percent of the graduates surveyed in the final ten years of the survey reported having had a mentor since law school. Those who reported mentors regarded themselves as more compassionate, more compulsive about work, more self-confident and less

⁵⁷ See appendix table 2.

skeptical of the motives of others than those without mentors regarded themselves. Those with mentors were also more likely to regard the outside lawyers they dealt with as highly ethical and more likely than those who did not have mentors to be highly satisfied with their relationships with current co-workers. Having a mentor may not only be valuable in itself but may also be associated with a range of qualities such as outgoingness, ambition, energy, and optimism that in turn contribute to satisfaction with work and career.

9. Effectiveness at Attracting Clients

The survey asked the graduates 15, 25, 35, and 45 years out (but not those 5 years out) to compare themselves to other lawyers their age with regard to their effectiveness in attracting new clients. The question was principally applicable to practitioners in private law firms and was left blank by many of those working in other settings.

When law-firm lawyers were analyzed separately, their appraisal of their comparative effectiveness in attracting clients proved strongly related to their overall career satisfaction – quite strongly related for the 15 and 25 year graduates and even more strongly related for the 35 and 45 year graduates.⁵⁸ Among the 15 and 25 year graduates in private practice, 69 percent of those who considered themselves above average in attracting new clients (5, 6, or 7 on scale of 7) were quite positive about their careers in comparison with only 37 percent of those who considered themselves below average (1, 2 or 3). Among the 35 and 45 year graduates, 85 percent of those who considered themselves above average but only 56 percent of those who considered themselves below average were quite positive.

Unsurprisingly, for these law-firm practitioners, effectiveness at attracting clients was also significantly related to earned income, yet even after taking income into account, law-firm practitioners' sense of their effectiveness at attracting clients proved independently related to their career satisfaction. The finding underscores the centrality of business generating – rainmaking – in private law firms of all sizes today

⁵⁸ See Appendix Table 4.

V. Concluding comments: Generalizing from the Michigan findings

This has been a study of the career satisfaction of one school's graduates. To what extent is it likely that the graduates of other schools would report the same levels of satisfaction and to what extent would the same factors explain differences in satisfaction? The safest answer would be that it's impossible to know. A more adventurous answer would be this: that to the extent that the graduates of another school had career opportunities and economic prospects roughly similar to those of the Michigan graduates, then it seems likely that the levels of satisfaction and the factors relating to the satisfaction of such graduates would be much the same as those reported here – that the women graduates would be as satisfied with their careers as men, that comparatively self-confident and aggressive graduates would express higher satisfaction than the less self-assured and less aggressive, and so forth. There are probably at least twenty or thirty other law schools in the United States that are roughly similar to Michigan in these regards.

The problem, of course, is that there are nearly 200 accredited law schools in the United States and that the graduates of most of these schools do not have the same range of opportunities or the same economic prospects that Michigan graduates do. A very few schools' graduates have more elite opportunities than Michigan's but for the graduates of well more than half of American law schools, the range of opportunities is narrower and the economic prospects less promising: few of the graduates of these schools ever work in large or very large law firms or as corporate counsel in large corporations or as federal government attorneys or as professors in law school and differences in opportunities might affect their satisfaction in several ways. The obvious way is in the overall mean satisfaction of the school's graduates. While most graduates of schools with a narrower range of opportunities might be spared the stresses that come from working in the largest firms, to the extent that high satisfaction in work comes from the quality of the fit between a worker's capacities, personality and aspirations on the one hand and particular job settings on the other, then one would expect that, in general, the narrower the range of settings that are available to choose among, the more poor fits there will be and thus the lower the general level of satisfaction. Similarly, the narrower the range of opportunities, the less likely that an individual will be able to move from an unsatisfying setting to a more satisfying setting in the way that so many Michigan graduates seem to have been able to do.

Yet even if these forecasts about the relation between opportunity and general satisfaction proved accurate regarding satisfaction in general, one might still expect that the factors affecting

individual level satisfaction ought to be much the same for graduates of all schools to the extent that particular graduates were in fact working in one of the settings for which there is information for the Michigan graduates. Drawing on our central findings, we suspect, for example, that graduates long out of law school would in general express higher satisfaction than those out less long; that high stress would, in general, depress satisfaction with work; that higher self-confidence and aggressiveness would, in general, correlate with higher satisfaction; that those who report that the other lawyers with whom they deal are highly ethical would, in general, be more satisfied than those who report dealing primarily with less savory lawyers; that private law firm practitioners who see themselves as comparatively skilled business attractors would, in general, be more satisfied than those who don't; and so forth. At the same time, we are more cautious about the general applicability of the Michigan findings that women and minority lawyers were as satisfied as their white male classmates, because women and minority graduates of schools where students in general have a much narrower range of opportunities than Michigan graduates may face distinctly greater obstacles than Michigan's women and minority graduates.

We also need to be cautious even in predicting that the experience of graduates of other law schools working in the same sorts of large firms where most recent Michigan graduates start their careers would view their experiences in much the same way. Consider the findings reported in a recent article by Ronit Dinovitzer and Bryant Garth.⁵⁹ Dinovitzer and Garth, two of the principals in the After the J.D. Project, analyzed the findings from their study of lawyers who began practice in the year 2000 and found that, four years after graduation, those working in large firms who had graduated from a group of law schools where comparatively few graduates worked in such firms were on the whole more satisfied with their large-firm jobs than those working in the same sorts of firms who had graduated from "elite" law . They speculated that the graduates of the less "elite" schools were more grateful for their opportunities and less likely to have illusions about how hard the work was going to be.

In closing, we note again that the Michigan surveys ended in 2006. Thus we can say nothing about the effects on work satisfaction of the severe economic downturn that is still going on. The only guidance the Michigan data provides comes from prior, less profound recessions that occurred during the years when the Michigan surveys were conducted. For example, one

⁵⁹ Ronit Dinovitzer and Bryant Garth, *Lawyer Satisfaction in the Process of Structuring Careers*, *Law and Society Review* (2010).

prior serious downturn that affected attorneys began in 1990. The recession officially lasted only eight months – from July 1990 until March 1991 – but lawyers in the United States in general experienced effects for several years. Many large law firms laid off large numbers of first and second year associates. More broadly, initial employment for law school graduates in the United States as a whole declined from 92.2 percent in 1987 to 83.4 percent in 1993.⁶⁰ Within the Michigan data, those working in settings other than private law firms continued to report essentially the same generally-high levels of satisfaction that they had in prior years, but for those in private law firms, a several-year long downward trend in satisfaction among both the five and fifteen year graduates reached its lowest point with the classes surveyed in the years 1992 and 1993, when, among private-firm lawyers, only 30 percent of five year graduates and only 44 percent of the fifteen-year graduates reported being quite positive about their careers.⁶¹ Satisfaction improved over the years that followed. We fear that, for private firm lawyers, the trough in satisfaction will reach lower and last longer for those who were five or fifteen years out of law school at the time we completed our surveys in 2006.

⁶⁰ See “Comparing Hiring Odds Now and in the 1990s Recession,” *The Legal Dollar*, December 28, 2009.

⁶¹ Sat44. By comparison, among those in private firms, 40 percent of the five-year graduates and 55 percent of the fifteen year graduates were quite positive overall when surveyed during the final ten years of the project (1997-2006). *Id.*

Appendix Table 1

Regression on Overall Career Satisfaction of Practitioners
all classes 1952-2001, surveyed 1997-2006

	A	B1	B2	C	D
	Background characteristics	Same as A plus personality, attitudes, views	Same as B1 but omitting "self-confident"	Same as B1 plus work settings, status and earnings	Same as B1 plus conditions and experiences at work
	n=5202	n=5061	N=5061	n=5042	n=4996
	Standardized beta	Standardized beta		Standardized beta	Standardized beta
Years out of law school (omitted group, 45 yr class)					
Graduates 5 years out	-.376**	-.332**	-.320**	-.234**	-.142**
Graduates 15 years out	-.271**	-.220**	-.227**	-.262**	-.264**
Graduates 25 years out	-.253**	-.204**	-.212**	-.261**	-.282**
Graduates 35 years out	-.097**	-.083**	-.079**	-.122**	-.075**
Is male?	-.028*	-.048**	-.029*	-.051**	-.130**
Race/ethnicity (omitted group, whites)					
African-American	+.007	-.011	-.003	-.015	+.016
Hispanic	+.010	-.001	+.007	-.006	+.008
Asian-American	+.024	+.022	+.029*	+.017	+.012
Other non-Hispanic nonwhite	+.025	+.018	+.016	+.014	+.018
Married/cohabiting now	+.035*	+.032*	+.039**	+.027	+.015
Has children	+.063**	+.037*	+.049**	+.034*	+.022
Law school GPA- standardized by class	+.061**	+.036**	+.049**	+.019	+.008
Political views (liberal to conservative)		+.045**	+.048**	+.067**	+.044**
Aggressive (in comparison to other lawyers)		+.060**	+.199**	+.050**	+.056**
Skeptical of the motives of others (comparative)		-.126**	-.142**	-.127**	-.083**
Compulsive about work (comparative)		+.060**	+.048**	+.053**	+.105**
Honest (comparative)		-.082**	-.008	-.079**	-.058**
Concerned about making a lot of money (compar.)		-.049**	-.048**	-.047**	-.045**
Self-confident (comparative)		+.289**	omitted	+.271**	+.217**
Currently working part-time				+.032*	-.008
# of jobs since law school (exclude jud clerkships)				-.064**	-.047**
Work setting (omitted group, 201+ attorney firm):					
Solo practitioner				+.066**	+.037*
2 to 10 attorney firm				+.092**	+.069**
11 to 50 attorney firm				+.050**	+.033*
51 to 200 attorney firm				+.021	+.009
corporate counsel				+.053	+.003
government attorney				+.095**	+.067**
legal service/public defender/public interest				+.096**	+.082**
practice in other setting				+.033*	+.021
Status at work (omitted group, partner in firm)					
Associate in firm				-.126**	-.129**
Other status (not associate) in firm				-.002	-.007
Nonfirm supervising attorney				+.028	+.043
Nonfirm staff attorney				-.008	-.001
Income (natural log of cpi-adjusted income)				+.163**	+.167**
How much stress in your work? (1-7)					-.276**
Had a mentor since law school					+.094**
Agree: other lawyers dealt with highly ethical (1-7)					-.129**
Extent of race discrimination by attorneys					-.063**
Extent of sex discrimination by attorneys					-.103**
Total explained variance (adjusted)	7.8%	17.7%	(12.5%)	21.4%	31.5%

*p<.01 **p<.05

Appendix Table 2

Regression on overall career satisfaction, by years out of law school, surveys conducted 1997-2006

	Practitioners 5 years out of law school	Practitioners 15 and 25 years out of law school ⁶²	Practitioners 35 and 45 years out of law school ⁶³
	n=1422	n=2366	n=1151
	Standardized beta	Standardized beta	Standardized beta
Is male?	-.126**	-.140**	-.104**
Race/ethnicity (omitted group, whites)			
African-American	-.037	+.040	--
Hispanic	-.037	+.032	--
Asian-American	+.004	+.0120	--
Other non-Hispanic nonwhite	+.008	+.032	--
Married/cohabiting now	+.037	-.009	-.015
Has children	+.047	+.002	-.004
Law school gpa- standardized by class	+.032	-.014	+.031
Political views (liberal to conservative)	+.055*	+.029	+.037
Aggressive (in comparison to other lawyers) ⁶⁴	+.104**	+.021	+.063
Skeptical of the motives of others (comparative)	-.088**	-.106**	-.056*
Compulsive about work (comparative)	+.103**	+.123**	+.088**
Self-confident (comparative)	+.206**	+.243**	+.191**
Honest (comparative)	-.027	-.067**	-.057
Concerned about making a lot of money (compara.)	+.010	-.051*	-.088**
Currently working part-time	-.023	+.002	-.074**
# of jobs since law school (exclude jud clerkships)	-.044	-.035	-.097**
Currently works in setting planned on for long term at end of law school	+.136**	--	--
Work setting (omitted group, works in 201+ attorney firm):			
Sole practitioner	+.024	+.035	+.031
2 to 10 attorney firm	+.099**	+.059*	+.048
11 to 50 attorney firm	+.070**	+.010	+.026
51 to 200 attorney firm	+.015	-.001	+.017
corporate counsel	+.017	-.008	-.007
government attorney	+.053	+.066	+.031
legal service/public defender/public interest firm	+.124*	+.041	--
practice in other setting	+.000	+.021	--
Status at work (omitted group, partner in firm)			
Associate in firm	-.151**	-.050**	--
Other status (not associate) in firm	-.002	-.011	--
Nonfirm supervising attorney	+.011	+.046	--
Nonfirm staff attorney	+.004	-.045	--
Income (natural log of cpi-adjusted income)	+.061*	+.174**	+.257**
Had a mentor since law school	+.135**	+.059**	+.104**
How much stress in your work? (1-7)	-.233**	-.306**	-.162**
Agree: other lawyers I deal with are highly ethical (1-7)	+.143**	+.122**	+.130**
Extent of race discrimination by attorneys	-.012	-.103**	-.033
Extent of sex discrimination by attorneys	-.109**	-.099**	-.094**
Total explained variance (adjusted)	28.5%	29.4%	21.5%

**p<.01 *p<.05

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⁶² Also included as a control in the regression was a dummy variable for 15-year graduates. Its beta was -.008 and insignificant.⁶³ Also included as a control in the regression was a dummy variable for 35-year graduates. Its beta was -.152. p<.01⁶⁴ If self-confidence is excluded from the analysis, the beta for "aggressive" rises for 5 year practitioners to +.209, for 15 and 25 year practitioners to +.132, and for 35 and 45 year practitioners to +.140.

Appendix Table 3
Regression on Overall Career Satisfaction of Private Law Firm Practitioners
Classes of 1952-2001, surveyed 1997-2006

	5-year classes of 1992-2001	15- and 25- year classes of 1972-1991	35 and 45 year classes of 1952-1971 ⁶⁵
	n=1117	n=1640	n=1008
	Standardized Beta	Standardized beta	Standardized beta
Is male?	-.131**	-.101**	-.113**
Race/ethnicity (omitted group, whites)			
African-American	-.021	+.040	--
Hispanic	-.048	+.047*	--
Asian-American	+.001	+.033	--
Other non-Hispanic nonwhite	+.006	+.018	--
Married/cohabiting now	+.024	+.016	-.021
Has children	+.056	-.030	-.005
Law school gpa- standardized by class	+.023	+.007	+.051**
Number of jobs since law school	-.074**	-.027	-.111**
Not working fulltime	-.046	+.026	-.037
Work setting (omitted group, works in 201+ attorney firms):			
10 or fewer attorney firm	+.093*	+.045	+.056
11 to 50 attorney firm	+.060*	-.014	+.042
51 to 200 attorney firm	-.009	-.008	+.017
Status at work (omitted group, partner/owner in firm)			
Associate in firm	-.070*	-.031	--
Other status (not associate) in firm	+.011	-.006	--
Work in setting planned on at end of law school	+.106**	--	--
Income (natural log of cpi-adjusted income)	+.027	+.163**	+.222**
Had a mentor since law school	+.121**	+.069**	+.081**
Agree: other lawyers I deal with are highly ethical (1-7)	+.141**	+.101**	+.121**
Extent of race discrimination by inside and outside attorneys	-.047	-.097**	--
Extent of gender discrimination by inside and outside attorneys	-.081*	-.087**	-.108**
How much stress in your work? (1-7)	-.264**	-.330**	-.191**
Political views (liberal to conservative)	+.060*	-.003	+.020
Aggressive (in comparison to other lawyers)	+.086**	-.033	+.020
Skeptical of the motives of others (comparative)	-.085**	-.096**	-.076*
Compulsive about work (comparative)	+.142**	+.112**	+.063*
Self-confident (comparative)	+.174**	+.222**	+.085*
Effective as writer	+.011	-.081**	-.023
Skillful at arranging deals or agreements	+.076*	-.020	+.042
Effective in attracting new clients	--	+.150**	+.157**
Total explained variance (adjusted)	28.4%	34.2%	24.1%

**p<.01 *p<.05

file:sat16h4

⁶⁵ In the 35/45 year regression, being a 35 year grad was included as a control. Beta -.133 (p<.01). In the 15/25 year regression, being a 15 year grad was included as a control but was not significant.