

Gender Promotion Gaps and Career Aspirations*

Ghazala Azmat[†] Vicente Cuñat[‡] Emeric Henry[§]

November 14, 2023

Abstract

Using a representative survey of U.S. lawyers, we document a sizeable gender gap in early partnership aspirations, which explains half of the later gender promotion gap. We further document that the correlation between aspirations and effort provides a ‘mechanical’ link between aspirations and promotion. Early workplace experiences, such as harassment and demeaning comments, are linked to promotion aspirations. Moreover, early aspirations provide insight into eventual promotion outcomes that goes beyond what can be drawn only from expectations. Our study highlights that measuring aspirations and adapting the corporate culture that shapes them, is a key component for firms to improve workplace environments.

JEL Classification: J16, J44, K40, M51

Keywords: gender gaps; promotion; high-skilled professionals

*We thank our editor, associate editor and three anonymous referees for their comments, as well as seminar and conference participants for helpful discussion. The views and conclusions stated herein are ours and do not necessarily reflect the views of individuals or organizations associated with the “After the JD Study.”

[†]Sciences Po and CEPR, Department of Economics, 28 rue des Saints-Pères 75007 Paris, France. ghazala.azmat@sciencepo.fr

[‡]London School of Economics and CEPR, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE; v.cunat@lse.ac.uk

[§]Sciences Po and CEPR. Department of Economics, 28 rue des Saints-Pères 75007 Paris, France. emeric.henry@sciencepo.fr

1 Introduction

Reducing professional gender gaps is becoming increasingly relevant to firms and organizations. However, such gaps are persistent despite the efforts to decrease them. While a large share of academic and corporate attention has focused on the existence of gender wage gaps, gender differentials continue to exist in many other professional dimensions. In particular, there are sizeable gender promotion gaps that contribute to a glass ceiling in organizations. That is, a lower representation of women in top positions among high-skilled professionals. For instance, among S&P500 companies, women account for only 5% of CEOs, 21% of board members and 26% of managers.¹ In other professions, women account for 20% of law firm partners;² and 32% of university professors.³ Gender promotion gaps can have important personal consequences in terms of pay, but also in terms of status and power within the firm. Relatedly, they are also linked to the firms objectives in terms of diversity and representation, but also in terms of the ability to attract and retain skilled women.

In this paper, we highlight the importance of early career aspirations in understanding later gender promotion gaps. We study this in the context of the legal profession in the U.S., using a nationally representative sample of lawyers who are tracked during their professional careers. We document that, among those lawyers who enter private law, when asked early in their career, there is a sizeable difference between men and women in their aspirations to eventually become a partner. While approximately two-thirds of male lawyers have high career aspirations, this is the case for only one-third of female lawyers. This aspiration gap helps explain a large fraction (approximately 50%) of the gender promotion gap in the profession – a gap that is explained neither by detailed entry-level characteristics that are broadly similar for men and women. We explore these key stylized facts, as well as discuss possible interpretations of these results and their implications.

Legal companies are particularly well suited to understanding the determinants of promotion gaps for several reasons. First, like many other sectors with highly skilled professionals, it exhibits persistent gender promotion gaps. However, unlike in many other sectors, the process of promotion to partner in the legal profession is well defined and has a similar structure across firms, with the division between partners and non-partners reflecting most of the relevant hierarchy in a firm. Second, the legal profession traditionally evaluates performance using measures that are transparent and homogeneous across firms (hours billed) and effort measures (hours worked). Third, in recent years, male and female lawyers entering private

¹Catalyst, Women CEOs of the S&P500 (2017)

²A current Glance at Women in the Law, American Bar Association (2016)

³National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Data Center, Fall Staff 2015 Survey (2016)

law firms after completing law school are similar on most observable variables (for instance, performing equally well in law school, equally entering top law school programs, similarly obtaining positions in leading law firms), which raises the question of why promotion gaps persist among the younger cohorts.

Using a nationally representative cohort of lawyers who are tracked over twelve years from law school completion, we begin by documenting a significant gender gap in promotions. Twelve years after joining a law firm, women are 12% less likely to become partners than men. This is a sizeable gap when we consider that there is gender equality at the entry level into the partnership track and that the unconditional probability for men to become partners is 54%. The gender promotion gap is virtually unaffected when controlling for other pre-existing demographic, educational, and firm traits, consistent with the finding that these characteristics, when entering the law profession, are very similar between men and women for a given cohort.

The sizeable gender gap in promotion mirrors a different gap between men and women in terms of career aspirations. We document that, when asked at an early stage of their careers (approximately 6-7 years after taking the bar exam) about their aspiration to eventually make partner, while 60% of men report having high career aspirations (eight points out of ten or more) to become partners, only 32% of women report similar aspirations. Similarly, while only 13% of men have low career aspirations (three points out of ten or less), this is the case for 31% of women. These gender differences in career aspirations explain more than 50% of the gender promotion gap. We then present stylized facts showing the correlation between aspirations and effort, thus providing a ‘mechanical’ link between aspirations and promotion. We show that early career aspirations are correlated with factors that are relevant to determining eventual promotion for lawyers – for example, high-aspiring individuals work longer (regular and weekend) hours, and bill more hours to clients early in their career.

We show that, at the entry stage in the profession, male and female lawyers are highly similar in terms of performance and professional aspirations. They attend similarly ranked universities and law schools, and receive a comparable number of job offers. Approximately 1-2 years after taking the bar exam, male and female lawyers exhibit similar aspirations, with no significant differences in the desire to be powerful in the profession or to change profession. However, after around 6 years of work experience, we see striking differences between men and women in their aspiration to become a partner, suggesting that aspirations evolve differently for men and women while working.

We descriptively explore the potential of aspirations to change and, in particular, why

they may change differently for male and female lawyers. We focus on the role of early work experiences to help better understand the evolution of promotion aspirations and, in particular, experiences of workplace discrimination and the promotion expectations.⁴ We find that experiencing demeaning comments or other types of harassment is linked to lower professional aspirations. Among young lawyers, 25% of the women in our sample experience this type of discrimination at the start of their careers, compared with only 6% of men. We show that early experiences of discrimination by colleagues strongly affect one's career aspiration to become a partner. We also show that these comments, which are gender specific, are unrelated to the ex-ante characteristics of the lawyer targeted. In this sense, they can be considered as the consequence of a negative shock of being paired with discriminatory colleagues. When we explore the role played by promotion expectations, we find that career aspirations are connected to the contemporaneous self-reported probability of becoming a partner in a law firm (i.e., the expectation of becoming a partner). However, while career goals and the expectations of success are indeed linked, promotion aspirations contain additional information about the actual probability of promotion over and above their expectations. We show that aspirations explain the observable covariate-adjusted difference in the gender promotion gap approximately 1.5 times more than expectations.

In the last part of the paper, we discuss possible interpretations of the empirical results. Aspirations are commonly defined as *a hope or ambition of achieving something*.⁵ The notions of hope and ambition imply that utility is at stake, contingent on whether an aspiration is realized. In line with this idea, aspirations can be viewed as a manifestation of factors that shape individual preferences, such as culture or peer influence. In this scenario, aspirations serve as external motivators, thereby enhancing the likelihood of promotion. Alternatively, aspirations could merely serve as ex-post rationalizations of outcomes, representing individual preferences and expectations, without directly impacting effort or promotions. Another way to view aspirations is as a commitment device, endogenously determined by individuals. If an individual commits early on to a goal, aspirations may act as a 'bet' with oneself to help overcome some cognitive obstacles. In such an environment, aspirations, effort and promotion would be co-determined.

These different classes of interpretations offer insights into our stylized facts and suggest distinct empirical implications. If aspirations arise 'exogenously' determined from the environment and motivate effort, the correlations we observe between career aspirations and the

⁴Fertility choices can also play an important role in influencing aspiration and promotion gaps. In the Appendix, we show some results linking aspirations to children and promotions. A potentially stronger trade-off between family and work faced by female lawyers compared with their male counterparts can help explain why some female lawyers may strategically set lower career aspirations on average

⁵As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary.

likelihood of becoming partners would suggest a causal relationship. If, instead, aspirations are a manifestation of preferences and expectations, but have no impact on effort, a causal link cannot be established, although the measured aspirations can still serve as useful early indicators of future promotion success. Finally, if aspirations function as a form of commitment and are co-determined with effort and expectations of success, trying to look for random shocks in aspirations, and establishing a causal relationship, would be challenging. Nevertheless, all scenarios suggest that aspirations are malleable and subject to change.

Our paper contributes to a growing literature that studies the underrepresentation of women in senior high-skilled positions, frequently referred to as the glass ceiling (e.g., Bertrand and Hallock, 2001; Adams and Funk, 2011; Bertrand, 2013; Blau and Kahn, 2017; Bertrand et al., 2019). While there is growing literature on gender gaps in wages and the dynamics of the gender wage gap among the high-skilled (Manning and Swaffield, 2008; Bertrand, Goldin and Katz, 2010; Azmat and Ferrer, 2017), there has been relatively less focus on promotions (see Altonji and Blank, 1999, and Bertrand, 2011, for reviews of the literature). Although the two are highly linked, promotions entail a broader set of implications beyond pay. While studies have shown that women are promoted less than men (Cobb-Clark, 2001; Blau and DeVaro, 2007; Benson, Li and Shue, 2021), recent studies (Bosquet, Combes and Garcia-Penalosa, 2018; and Hospido, Laeven and Lamo, 2020) find that a gender gap in promotion is no longer significant when accounting for gender differences in applying for promotions. Our study documents a gender gap in promotion that is largely explained by differences in career aspirations, suggesting a mechanism for differential promotion seeking.

In the context of the legal profession, when analyzing the performance of young lawyers early in their career, Azmat and Ferrer (2017) show that male lawyers perform better in terms of hours billed and the generation of new client revenue, which, in turn, explains a sizeable part of the gender wage gap. In this paper, we focus on a different labor market outcome: promotion to law-firm partner. We document a promotion gap and show how it mirrors a previously undocumented career aspirations gap. We highlight the relevance of aspirations to making partner and explore various interpretation of these results depending on how aspirations are modeled. An important goal of our paper is to show how career aspirations are linked to “inputs”, such as hours worked, and performance, such as hours billed, which are important determinants of later career outcomes. We also show that aspirations are malleable, such that they can also be affected by early workplace experiences.

Another important explanation for gender differences in promotions is often attributed to gender-based discrimination. Goldin and Rouse (2000), for instance, show that women are more likely to be selected in gender-blind contests. Even within the workplace, due

to firm culture, men might benefit from socialization in ways that women cannot. It is argued that the “old boys’ club” persists in the workplace and generates lower promotion rates for women who are, de facto, excluded (Cullen and Perez-Truglia, 2019). Similarly, harassment is a firm culture-related issue predominantly affecting women, especially in male-dominated environments (Folke et al., 2020), which are likely to discourage women from seeking leadership positions and prompt women to exit male-dominated sectors (Folke and Rickne, 2022). Luo and Zhang, (2021) also show that gender discrimination can be shaped by changes in social norms. In our paper, we explore in detail the importance of gender-based discrimination on promotion. Focusing on early work experiences, we find that experiencing sexual harassment or derogatory comments by virtue of one’s gender has a crucial impact on shaping career aspirations and, subsequently, promotion.

Our paper also relates to the theoretical literature on aspiration formation (Ray, 1998; Ray, 2006; Dalton, Ghosal, Mani, 2016; Genicot and Ray, 2017) and adaptation (Simon, 1957; Selten, 1998; Karandikar et al., 1998), which highlights, mostly in the context of poverty traps, the importance of aspiration gaps. Several studies have empirically examined the effect of educational interventions on the educational aspirations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Heckman et al., 2013; Guyon and Huillery, 2021; and Rizzica, 2019). In our study, we elicit aspirations in a very different context of high-achieving young professionals, focusing on gender differences in aspirations. Similar to the existing literature on poverty and education, our results suggest that early interventions in the workplace (either driven by firm policies or public programs) could have a major and long-lasting impact in narrowing gender gaps in promotions.

Our study focuses on a cohort of similar individuals simultaneously starting homogeneous jobs. Moreover, both the definition of promotion and the procedures to achieve a promotion are well defined within the profession. We observe detailed information on initial conditions (e.g., educational background, proxies for ability, and aspirations) and lawyers’ on-the-job performance, and we follow each individual in their new position for ten years, including if they decide to leave private law or the legal profession completely. While the findings are highly relevant for other high-skilled professions and sectors, the structure allows us to overcome issues that arise when more broadly examining a population of individuals who may be affected by composition effects and by the lack of comparability of promotions across roles and industries.

Our paper highlights the key role played by the aspirations gap, suggesting two important facts from the point of view of the corporation. First, aspirations are a good way to aggregate information about individual preferences, expectations and goals. This suggests

that firms should pay attention to the evolution of the aspirations of their employees as predictive of future promotion outcomes. Changes in aspirations should also be used for the early evaluation of firm policies that aim at long-term outcomes. Second, aspirations can be influenced and shaped. In particular, the corporate culture that determines for example how acceptable small discriminatory comments are, can be key for aspirations and retention and is something that the firm can shape (either through training or enforcement). More broadly, understanding what aspirations capture, and how they are formed, is key to understanding the “glass ceiling”. Arguably, our results are externally valid for other high-skilled professions, as well as for understanding other promotion gaps. Policies that shape aspirations can, potentially, have a persistent influence on promotion gaps, for instance, by the adoption of family-friendly policies aimed at better equalizing the demands associated with parenthood across gender or through the design of policies and schemes that target firm culture.

2 Institutional Setting and Data Description

The legal profession is among the highest-paid professions in the U.S., along with physicians and CEOs (National Cross-Industry wage estimates, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), and it constitutes a substantial share of U.S. GDP. Legal expenses account for more than 200 billion dollars, which represented 1.5% of U.S. GDP (Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2008).

There was a dramatic expansion of the legal profession in the 1980s that attracted a large number of women. Women now comprise 50% of law graduates, compared with only 22% in 1980. On entry into the labor market, women constitute approximately 45% of large law firms’ associates. Associate lawyers are employees of the firm with the prospect of becoming a partner; they enter the firm on the partnership track. Law firm partners are joint owners and business directors of the legal operation. As such, partners share the risks and the decision-making of the firm and expect to have, on average, higher earnings than salaried lawyers. Partners also have higher levels of responsibility and are expected to manage the firm and bring business to it. The process of making partner is highly prestigious and often very competitive. In many firms, the associate-to-partner ratio is approximately 2:1. Bound by the “up-or-out policy”, associates who do not make partner are often required to resign from the firm. The up or out policy, mechanically links promotion gaps to retention gaps.

As in many high-skilled professions, there is a growing concern about gender earnings and promotion gaps in the legal profession. The gender earnings gap among lawyers persists

at approximately 33% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), with little progress observed over the past two decades. In terms of promotion, across cohorts, currently only 20% of partners are female. However, although these gaps are smaller when we restrict attention to those who graduated in an era with gender equality in law school graduation (as in our data), we continue to observe important and persistent gaps. Within our sample, men have an approximately 14% greater likelihood than women of making partner twelve years after graduation.

Our analysis is conducted using data from *After the JD*, a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of lawyers in the U.S. The *After the JD* study is a project of the American Bar Foundation and other legal associations. Lawyers in the sample are representative of all lawyers first admitted to the bar in the year 2000 and are subsequently followed at five-year intervals. The survey was first conducted in 2002, and the same lawyers were interviewed again in 2007 and then in 2012.⁶ The data include information on relevant job characteristics, employment history, education, family background and family status. Importantly, the survey also includes objective measures of performance and hours of work (both regular and additional), as well as detailed information on workplace experiences, career goals and perceptions, and satisfaction.⁷

At entry in the law profession, participants are primarily employed in private practice (54%), as well as in government jobs and nonprofit organizations (25%), private industries other than law firms (18%), and academic institutions (3%). We primarily focus on those who enter into private law since these are the lawyers who will follow the “partnership track”. We can, however, explore mobility across firms and sectors (within or out of the legal profession), as well as movement out of the labor market (into unemployment or inactivity).

We restrict our analysis to individuals who are observed billing at least one hour over the sample period. In Table 1, we report the pre-labor-market and early-labor-market descriptive statistics among the lawyers, using responses to the 2002 survey, separately by men and women. Overall, we find that men and women have observably similar individual characteristics, educational achievement, and early work-related characteristics and experiences. Female lawyers tend to be slightly younger and are less likely to be married. They also have considerably fewer children. With respect to educational achievement (undergraduate college, rank of law school, one’s own rank within law school year, amount of student debt), there is no significant difference. Similarly, with respect to measures linked to initial pro-

⁶The response rate in 2002 was approximately 70 percent. Among those responding in 2002, around 85 percent also responded in 2007, and in 2012, there was a response rate of approximately 80 percent. The response rate is similar across male and female lawyers.

⁷We provide a detailed dictionary of variables in Online Appendix B.

fessional aspiration, we do not find significant gender differences (whether they considered other careers during law school, the goal to become powerful in the profession, the desire to practice law after school, and the desire to stay a lawyer). Moreover, with respect to firm characteristics (size of firm, type of organization, proportion of women in the firm), and the types of tasks (and their degree of responsibility), there is no significant difference. However, one striking difference emerges: women receive significantly more demeaning comments than their male counterparts—an important difference that we will explore, in detail, later in the paper.⁸

3 Gender Promotion and Aspiration Gaps

3.1 Gender Promotion Gap

We begin our analysis by documenting a sizeable gender promotion gap among lawyers 12 years after law school completion (i.e., 12 years after joining the law profession), which is enough time to measure the standard partnership track in most firms.⁹

From column (1) of Table 2, we see that the unconditional gender promotion gap is on the order of 12.2 percentage points. This is relative to a baseline probability to make partner of 54% for a male associate lawyer, indicating that women who have been working in law firms have a substantially lower chance than men of making partner. Within a cohort of lawyers on a partnership track, in which around 45% are women, this implies that among those who eventually make partner, 38% will be female, and 62% male.

While our focus is on individuals within the same profession and sector, carrying similar educational requirements, there may still be heterogeneity within the profession, such that the gap in promotions could potentially be due to ex-ante differences in the characteristics of men and women. These differences could be, for instance, the quality of the undergraduate university or law school or differences in sorting across firms. In columns (2) to (5) of Table 2, we control for individual characteristics, pre-labor-market educational characteristics, and entry-level firm characteristics (Table A1 presents the full set of coefficients).

⁸To check for differences in attrition across waves, in Table A7 we present the descriptive statistics for the (larger) sample in earlier waves, showing that men and women are also broadly comparable on characteristics at the end of law school, and similar to the later sample shown in Table 1

⁹Partnership decisions at law firms are typically made around 10 years after doing the bar exam, “The Legal Industry Report,” Leopard Solutions, 2020

In column (2), when controlling for age and race, we find that the gender promotion gap remains on the order of 12%. When controlling for educational background (university and law school rank, ones’ own class rank in law school, the number of job offers, the amount of debt at law school completion) in column (3); marital status, the presence (and age) of children in column (4); and job characteristics (size of firm, type of organization, proportion of women at the firm, the types of tasks) in column (5), the promotion gap continues to hold.¹⁰ In terms of magnitude, the gap actually increases to 13.2% after controlling for job characteristics, suggesting that female lawyers are matched to firms and tasks with a higher probability of promotion.

In column (6), we report the gender gap using an entropy matching reweighting procedure (Hainmueller 2012). We reweight observations to minimize the first-, second- and third-order moment differences across men and women for all the observable variables in column (5). The results are very similar to those in column (5). The matching estimator is more robust to nonlinear interactions and indicates that the ex ante observable characteristics across men and women are also largely balanced in higher-order moments. If anything, the point estimate of the gender promotion gap actually grows to 14.5% (although, it is not statistically different from the other point estimates). Throughout the rest of the paper, we use a linear specification including the same broad set of controls as in column (5) in all regressions.

3.2 Gender (Promotion) Aspirations Gap

Next, we document another striking gap between male and female lawyers: a gap in the lawyers’ partnership “aspirations,” earlier in their career. In Figure 1, we plot lawyers’ career aspirations by gender. When asked to rate their aspirations to eventually become a partner in their firm in 2007, on a scale from 1 to 10, we see that 60% of male lawyers answered 8 or higher, compared to only 32% of female lawyers. Similarly, while 13% of men have low aspirations (3 or less), 31% of women report low aspirations. On this metric, women have on average 50% lower aspirations to be promoted than men; a figure comparable to the actual, eventual promotion gap in 2012.

These graphical results are confirmed in Table 3, which echoes the analysis for the promotion gap from Table 2. In column (1), we show that the average baseline gender difference in aspirations is 1.7 points (where the average is 7.3). When controlling for age and race (in

¹⁰With respect to individual and firm characteristics, we control for entry-level characteristics (in 2002), rather than current characteristics, since decisions reflected in the current characteristics could be endogenous to the outcome. We discuss some of these decisions, like fertility, later in the paper.

column (2)), we find that the gender gap remains unchanged. Controlling for educational background in column (3); marital status, the presence (and age) of children in column (4); and job characteristics in column (5), the gap falls only slightly to 1.6 points. Table A2 presents the full set of coefficients.

While the first survey doesn't include that specific question on promotion aspirations, it does include several questions closely related to the professional aspirations of lawyers upon finishing law school. For instance, lawyers are asked about the extent to which they had the goal to become powerful in the profession, as well as their desire to practice law and their desire to stay in the profession. Table 1 indicates that, shortly after taking the bar exam (approximately 1-2 years after), there are no noticeable gender differences in professional aspirations. As with education or initial firm choices, there are no significant differences in the desire by men and women to be powerful in the profession or to change profession, suggesting that gender gaps in aspirations evolve after some exposure to the profession.

3.3 Linking the Gender Aspirations and Promotion Gaps

Do gender differences in lawyers' career aspirations contribute to differences in eventual promotion? In Figure 2, we present the correlation between early promotion aspirations and actual eventual promotion. We bin career aspirations into three categories (low for aspirations between 1 and 3, medium for aspirations between 4 and 7 and high for aspirations between 8 and 10).¹¹ When we link aspirations to later partnership outcome, there is a strong, monotonic, correlation. Among those who have high promotion aspirations, there is a 36% higher likelihood of promotion than among those with low promotion aspiration.

As a next step, we will look more closely at this relationship. Specifically, whether the inclusion of aspirations in the regression of promotion can explain part of the large gender promotion gap. In column (2) of Table 4, we include career aspirations as a continuous variable and in column (3) as a categorical variable in three aspiration bins (low, medium, and high) as a determinant of promotion. We show that the inclusion of career aspirations reduces the point estimate of the gender promotion gap by 55%. Differences in early aspirations explain a sizeable fraction of the gender promotion gap, reducing it by more than half to 6.5%, which is not significantly different from zero. As aspirations increase, the likelihood of promotion also increases linearly (from column (3)). Relative to the lowest aspiration group, those in the middle (highest) aspiration group have a 16% (36%) greater likelihood of promotion.

¹¹This figure is reproduced in the Online Appendix Figure A1 using the 10 categories rather than 3 bins.

By examining promotions, we capture whether the lawyer was eventually promoted at any firm and not necessarily the firm where she worked when reporting her aspirations. In columns (4) to (6) of Table 4, we therefore consider promotions at the same firm or a better (larger) firm as the dependent variable. Men and women might differ in how they revise their expectations, and in particular, high aspiration individuals might be more willing to seek a promotion at a worse firm if obtaining a promotion at their current workplace is unlikely.¹² We show that the promotion gap continues to be sizeable and highly correlated with the aspirations gap. However, the gender promotion gap is smaller, on the order of 8.5% (column (4)), suggesting that men are more likely than women to move to a “worse” firm to be promoted. When controlling for aspirations as a continuous variable in column (5) or as a categorical variable in column (6), the gap falls to 2%, confirming again that the promotion gap is well explained by the aspirations gap.

In Table A3 of the online appendix, we study whether women and men with similar aspiration levels have the same probability of promotion. Column (1), where we interact aspirations with gender using as dependent variable the probability of eventual promotion, shows that there is a significant difference between genders with regard to aspirations: women with medium aspirations have a lower chance of promotion than men with similar levels of aspirations. However, this effect is driven by the fact, as unveiled in Table 4, that men are more likely than women to move to a “worse” firm to be promoted. As a result, when we consider, in column (2), promotions at the same firm or a better firm as the dependent variable, we find that men and women, for a given level of aspirations, have the same chances of promotion.

3.4 Promotion (Effort) Determinants and Aspirations

We examine next the links between aspirations and important labor market “inputs” or performance outcomes in early or mid-career that are relevant to determining eventual promotion and are related to the lawyer’s effort. Factors such as the number of hours worked, the number of hours billed, and the likelihood of changing firms early in one’s career are likely to be important determinants of receiving a promotion. We can consider these inputs as part of the effort exerted to achieve a promotion.

In Figure 3, we graphically show that professional aspirations are closely linked to early inputs (hours billed, hours worked, remaining at the same firm). We group aspirations

¹²See Bidwell and Mollick (2015) for an empirical study on the pay and promotion impact of internal and external moves among high skilled individuals.

into three bins (low, medium, and high), and show that aspirations are monotonically and strongly positively correlated with the hours worked and hours billed, and negatively correlated with the probability of changing firms.

This graphical evidence is confirmed in Table 5. In column (1), we show that individuals with high aspirations work significantly more hours. The effect is large—those in the highest-aspiration group work 300 more hours per year than those in the lowest-aspiration group.¹³ The effect is also monotonic, with those reporting mid-level aspirations working 100 hours more than low-aspiration individuals. Similarly, individuals with higher aspirations are significantly more likely to bill more hours, as shown in column (2), an effect of similar magnitude. There is also a large effect, visible in column (3), on the hours worked over weekends, especially among those with the highest aspirations. Finally, higher aspirations make it less likely that individuals will leave their current firm. Column (5) shows that all these “inputs” contribute to receiving a promotion. We show that an increase in hours billed per week by 1 (an increase of 2% relative to the mean) increases on average the probability of promotion by 5%. The other measures of hours worked have less power in explaining partnership; however, there is a strong correlation between hours billed and worked. Early moves from a firm reduce the chances of ending up a partner by 17%.

Overall, we show that higher early career aspirations are indeed correlated with early “inputs” that determine promotion. High-aspiring individuals work longer (regular and weekend) hours, bill more hours, and are less likely to switch firms in their early or mid-career. All of these factors are directly related to the likelihood of later promotion.

4 Early Professional Experiences and Expectations

In this section, we investigate the relationship between promotion aspirations and workplace experiences to gain a deeper understanding of how aspirations are formed. The environment, personal experiences, and expectations of success, may play a role in shaping goals. Moreover, the descriptive analysis presented in Panel B of Table 1 shows that men and women have similar aspirations at the start of their careers, suggesting that the gender gap in aspirations develop during the first years of professional experience. We start by focusing on negative experiences in the workplace and examine how facing harassment or demeaning comments may contribute to the documented gap in promotion aspirations later in the lawyer’s careers. We then, more broadly, explore the link between promotion aspirations and the expectation

¹³This represents six hours more per week, for an average workweek of 50 hours.

to be promoted. While promotion expectations summarize promotion-relevant experiences and factors, we show, nevertheless, that aspirations can predict promotions, beyond what can be inferred from self-reported expectations. This implies that the measurement of promotion aspirations is important on its own, and can be used, for example, for an early assessment of the evolution of gender promotion gaps (e.g., after a new corporate policy is introduced).

4.1 Early Professional Workplace Experiences

While there exist various forms of discrimination, here we focus on discrimination most closely related to the interactions with colleagues and the corporate culture of the firm. Specifically, we focus on early workplace experiences in 2002, five years before lawyers report their professional aspirations. Early in their careers, lawyers are asked about whether they have experienced demeaning comments or harassment in the workplace by virtue of their demographics. By 2002, 25% of women reported having such experiences, compared with only 6% of men. In principle, this form of experience could be partially driven by employee's characteristics. However, in Table A4 Column (1), we show that these experiences are not strongly correlated with other characteristics of the lawyer that we observe, with the exception of gender and race. Important characteristics, such as university rank, grades or the number of job offers, do not appear closely linked to experiencing demeaning comments or harassment.

In Table 6, we explore the effects of demeaning comments and harassment. In Column (1), we show that facing harassment or demeaning comments has a negative impact on career aspirations. Encountering such negative experiences lowers career aspirations by approximately 7.6%. When we interact the variable reflecting negative experiences with gender in Column (2), the coefficient is not statistically significant. However, the joint effect of comments and the interaction of comments with gender is larger and still significant, with a coefficient of 8.8% and a p-value of 0.06. Since a large majority of the comments are reported by female lawyers, in Column (3), we restrict the sample to female only showing a bigger and similarly significant effect, reducing aspirations by 10.8%. While we cannot make formal claims of causality, these experiences of harassment can reasonably be considered random adverse shocks, as they are uncorrelated with a comprehensive set of ex ante characteristics of the lawyers (as shown in Table A4).

Overall, the results suggest that aspirations can be affected by early workplace experiences in the form of harassment or demeaning comments by colleagues. These early experiences are linked to a reduction in promotion aspirations and are a key driver of gender gaps in

aspirations, and, potentially, subsequent promotion gaps.

4.2 Promotion Expectations and Aspirations

We now focus on the potential role played by ones' expectations of promotion. We show that while career aspirations and expectations are actually linked, they do not reflect the same information. This is an important result. Even if it was the case that aspirations were fully an endogenous response to the environment, they would still be useful to predict future outcomes beyond self-reported expectations. For example, one could conjecture that the gender gap in aspirations may be largely a rationalization of different fertility paths across men and women and a differential impact of fertility across men and women.¹⁴ Even under this view, in which aspirations are a pure consequence of other factors, with no direct impact on promotions, our results show that the analysis of aspirations is still an interesting one; as they are a good summary statistic of the promotion implications of the factors that determine promotions.

As well as being asked about their aspirations, lawyers are asked about how they rate their chances of making partner within their firm. The top-left panel of Figure 4 illustrates the strong correlation between aspirations and expectations in our data. The expectations question asks lawyers to report a probability from 0 to 100% in a continuous way. For parts of the analysis, we recode the answers in 10% bins from 1 to 10. We further define low (30% or below), medium (40% to 70%), and high (80% and above) expectations. Figure 4 shows that the average reported expectation is approximately 72% for those with high promotion aspirations, compared with 23% for those with low promotion aspirations.

In Table 7, we measure how much of the gender promotion gap is explained by gender differences in expectations, measured contemporaneously with aspirations. We perform the equivalent exercise to the one performed in Table 4, showing that gender differences in expectations explain an important part of the gender promotion gap. The gap falls from

¹⁴In the Appendix, we explore the role played by children and how family and work trade-offs may differ for female and male lawyers. First, in Table A5, we show a positive selection of those lawyers with a higher ex-ante probability of promotion into having children and both women and men exhibit an equally positive selection of having children. Second, in Table A6 we show the differential link of fertility to promotion aspirations across men and women. While the aspirations of female lawyers do not affect their choice to have children, for male lawyers, aspirations are strongly (positively) correlated with having children. This suggests that, given their level of aspirations, if men and women have a similar desire for children, the trade-off between children and career aspirations is more negative for women – consistent with a differential professional cost of fertility across men and women – although it does not explain a significant part of the gap in promotion aspirations.

13% to 9% (column (3)). However, when examining aspirations separately (column (2)) or doing so jointly with expectations (column (4)), we see that aspirations explain the gender promotion gap over and above the effect of the expectations gap. In column (4), when controlling for both expectations and aspirations, the gap falls to 5.9%, suggesting that expectations provide little additional information to explain the promotion gap beyond that explained by differences in aspirations (where the gap is reduced to 6.5% and not statistically significant). Overall, aspirations retain explanatory power even when saturating the model by including expectations and a wide array of observable characteristics.

To formally quantify how much of the observable covariate-adjusted difference in the gender promotion gap is due to aspirations relative to expectations and other covariates, we apply a decomposition proposed by Gelbach (2016) that provides an order-invariant accounting of the effect of each set of control variables. We calculate the contribution to explaining the gender promotion gap of three groups: the role of aspirations, the role of expectations, and the contribution from all other covariates (the specification in column (4)). The total change in the coefficient between the baseline and the full specification is statistically significant for the gender promotion gap (6.2%). In percentage terms, we find that relative to the other groups, the gender difference induced by differences in career aspirations is the most relevant, explaining more than 70% of the coefficient change. Overall, these results highlight that tracking individual aspirations can be valuable in predicting future outcomes. While career goals and the expectations of success are indeed linked, promotion aspirations contain additional information about the actual probability of promotion over and above their expectations.

5 Possible Interpretations of the Results

To better understand the relationship between career aspirations and promotion, this section examines potential mechanisms of aspiration formation that could provide different interpretations for our main results, and suggest distinguishing empirical implications. We introduce three main types of explanations. The first explanation views aspirations as determined by external factors, such as culture or peers, in an environment where these aspirations serve to motivate effort. The second suggests that aspirations are an ex-post rationalization of an outcome, without a direct impact from aspirations to effort. Lastly, the third explanation views aspirations as a personal commitment device to achieve certain objectives, indicating that aspirations, effort, and the likelihood of promotion are co-determined.

The aim of this part of the paper is to highlight that these three classes of explanations have the potential to shed distinct light on our stylized facts and can suggest distinguishing empirical implications. The first type suggests that the correlations presented in the previous section reflect a causal relationship between career aspirations and the likelihood to make partner. The second suggests that, although no causal link exists, aspirations can be still used as useful early indicators of future successes in promotion. Finally, the third class of explanation shows that aspirations, effort, and expectations of success are co-determined and thus trying to look for random shocks in aspirations is challenging.

Externally determined aspirations.

A common way to consider aspirations in the literature has been as a kink (or a threshold) in utility that is determined by the individual's environment (see, for example, Genicot and Ray, 2017). Under this view, if the realized outcome crosses the threshold, the individual obtains an additional payoff, which increases in the extent to which the goal has been surpassed. From this perspective, factors such as culture, peers, and social norms determine aspirations. Given that aspirations are utility-relevant, if they are achievable, individuals will exert effort to accomplish them. That is, whenever an aspiration is determined within a social environment where the goal is within reach, the individual will exert effort to make that aspiration more likely to happen.

Within our context, under this view, lawyers' aspiration to become partner could be shaped by dominant norms, or more specifically, the corporate culture of the firm. Gender gaps in aspirations may emerge because of differences in the social norms for male and female lawyers within the firm. These social norms could pre-date joining a law firm or could be part of the corporate culture. In Section 4.1 we provide suggestive evidence that male and female lawyers have similar aspirations when they join the firm and that specific experiences within the firm are correlated with the gender aspiration gap.

The implications of these differences in treatment of male and female lawyers would suggest that part of the gender aspiration gap is determined during the early years of employment history as a lawyer. Note that under this interpretation, given that aspirations are exogenously determined, the correlation between aspirations and outcomes would reflect a causal relationship.

Aspirations, as a rationalization of an outcome.

Another possibility is that aspirations reflect the rationalization of an outcome. Aspirations would be high if the outcome is likely to be successful or set low to justify potential

failures. Within this context, aspirations would be a manifestation of the fundamental preferences of the lawyer, as well as the expectations of the lawyer about promotion, but they would have no direct impact on effort or outcomes.

Under this view, our empirical analysis would not reflect a causal link between aspirations and outcomes. However, our analysis would instead indicate that aspirations can be used as useful early indicators of future successes in promotion. In Section 4.2, we show that aspirations are correlated with expectations, but are also a better predictor of promotion than expectations.

Aspirations, as a commitment device.

An alternative way to view aspirations is to treat them as endogenously determined. In the spirit of goal-setting or sophisticated behavioral agents, one could think of aspirations as a bet with oneself that helps to overcome some cognitive obstacle. In this sense, it is natural to think that the aspirations for promotion and the effort to obtain it are co-determined and that they are both a function of preferences and cost of effort.

Relative to the first view, in which aspirations are exogenously determined, there are several differences in how one should interpret the results when considered in this way. Under this view, aspirations, effort and all other outcomes are all co-determined. In our setting, male and female lawyers might set different aspirations if they differ in the initial distribution of the disutility of labor. For example, if early workplace experiences of discrimination (that are more prevalent for women than men) increase the disutility of exerting effort toward achieving promotion, they would induce those discriminated against to exert less effort and this will lead to a lower inclination to strategically set high aspirations. This implies that factors that affect effort directly, may also affect it indirectly through the setting of aspirations, with potential amplification effects. For example, if a lawyer undergoes a negative professional experience, it will affect their disutility of effort directly, but also indirectly, through an adjustment of aspirations.

The implications of considering aspirations in this way is that the correlations that we report between aspiration and promotion outcomes should be seen as endogenous relationships. Importantly, note that under this view, it is, in general, not possible to have the kind of exogenous variation in aspirations that would allow to measure their direct causal effect. For example, a controlled experiment that intended to change aspirations would have to do so by altering the disutility of effort or the discount rates of the lawyers — factors that also affect the outcome variables directly.

6 Conclusions

We highlight the importance of early career aspirations in explaining gender promotion gaps. We document that, among those lawyers who enter private law, when asked early in their career, there is a sizeable difference between men and women in their aspirations to eventually become a partner. This aspirational gap is correlated with their actions to become partner (hours billed, hours worked, probability to stay in the firm) and eventually explains an important fraction of the gender promotion gap in the legal profession (approximately 55%). We analyze the results in light of different approaches to representing and interpreting aspirations. We additionally show that facing sexual harassment or demeaning comments early in the career can affect the setting of aspirations. Finally, we show that promotion aspirations predict promotions over and beyond the predictive power of self-reported expectations.

Overall, our results highlight that studying aspirational gaps is crucial to understanding the gender “glass ceiling”. The study is equally important in bringing together the traditional demand- and supply-side drivers of gender career gaps. While aspirations are, strictly speaking, preferences, we show that they are sensitive to the workplace environment. Aspirations may also be important determinants of the effort to be promoted. This amplification mechanism implies that small changes in how firms deal with their employees early in their careers can have large and long-lasting effects on their performance and promotion chances. Moreover, measuring the impact of different policies on aspirations can serve as a good predictor of the efficacy of such policies. We show that early (negative) workplace experiences can influence aspirations. This issue poses a challenge for the internal policies of firms that attempt to eliminate gender discrimination and improve the aspirations of young professional women. Facing harassment and demeaning comments are typically not reported or difficult to verify. In which case, policies aimed at changing the corporate culture should be used to help overcome professional gender gaps.

From the perspective of external validity, we propose possible explanations that are broadly applicable to study differences in aspirations and achievements of various groups. While our empirical focus is on gender gaps in the legal sector, our results can help shed light on gender gaps in other high-skilled environments, as well as on other sociodemographic differences.

REFERENCES

- Adams, R. B. and P. Funk.** 2011. "Beyond the Glass Ceiling: Does Gender Matter?" *Management Science*, 58(2):219-235.
- Altonji, J. G. and R. M. Blank.** 1999. "Race and Gender in the Labor Market" in Orley Ashenfelter and David Card (eds), *Handbook of Labor Economics*, Volume 3C. Handbooks in Economics, vol. 5, Amsterdam: North-Holland, 3143-3259.
- Azmat, G. and R. Ferrer.** 2017. "Gender Gaps in Performance: Evidence from Young Lawyers" *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 125(5), pp. 1306-1355.
- Benson, A., D. Li, and K. Shue.** 2021. "'Potential' and the Gender Promotion Gap" *Working Paper* 106(1):88-144.
- Bertrand, M., and , K. F. Hallock.** 2001. "The Gender Gap in Top Corporate Jobs" *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 55(1), 3-21.
- Bertrand, M, Goldin, C., and L. F. Katz.** 2010 "Dynamics of the Gender Gap for Young Professionals in the Financial and Corporate Sectors" *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, vol. 2, 228-55.
- Bertrand, M.** 2011. "New Perspectives on Gender" In O. Ashenfelter and D. Card (eds.), *Handbook of Labor Economics*, vol. 4B: 1545-1592. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Bertrand, M.** 2013. "Career, Family, and the Well-Being of College Educated Women" *American Economic Review*, Vol. 103(3), pp. 244-250.
- Bertrand, M., Black, S. E., Jensen, S., and A. Lleras-Muney.** 2019. "Breaking the glass ceiling? The effect of board quotas on female labor market outcomes in Norway" *Review of Economic Studies*, Volume 86, Issue 1, Pages 191-239.
- Bidwell, M. and E. Mollick.** (2015). "Shifts and Ladders: Comparing the Role of Internal and External Mobility in Managerial Careers." *Organization Science*, 26(6):1629-1645..
- Blau, F., and J. DeVaro.** 2007. "New Evidence on Gender Differences in Promotion Rates: An Empirical Analysis of a Sample of New Hires" *Journal of Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, Volume 46 (3), Pages 511-550.
- Blau, F., and L. M. Kahn.** 2017. "The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explana-

tions” *Journal of economic literature*, 55(3): 789-865.

Bosquet, C., Combes, P.P. and C. Garcia-Penalosa. 2018. “Gender and promotions: evidence from academic economists in France” *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, forthcoming.

Cobb-Clark, D. A. 2001. “Getting Ahead: The Determinants of and Payoffs to Internal Promotion for Young U.S. Men and Women” *In Worker Well-Being in a Changing Labor Market, Research in Labor Economics*, edited by Solomon W. Polachek, pp. 339-72. New York: JAI Elsevier Science.

Cullen, Z. B. and Perez-Truglia, R. 2019. “The Old Boys’ Club: Schmoozing and the Gender Gap” (No. w26530). *National Bureau of Economic Research*.

Dalton, P.S., Ghosal, S. and A. Mani. 2016. “Poverty and Aspirations Failure” *The Economic Journal*, Volume 126, Issue 590, Pages 165-188.

Folke, O. and Rickne, J. 2022. “Sexual Harassment and Gender Inequality in the Labor Market” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics.*, 137(4), 2163-2212.

Folke, O., Rickne, J., Tanaka, S., and Tateishi, Y. 2020. “Sexual Harassment of Women Leaders” *Daedalus*, 149(1), 180-197.

Gelbach, J. B. 2016: “When Do Covariates Matter? And Which Ones, and How Much?” *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34, 509–543.

Genicot, G. and D. Ray. 2017. “Aspirations and Inequality.” *Econometrica*, 85, 489-519.

Goldin, C. and C. Rouse 2000. “Orchestrating Impartiality: the Impact of ‘Blind’ Auditions on Female Musicians ” *American Economic Review* Vol. 40, pp. 715-42.

Goldin, C. 2014. “A grand gender convergence: Its last chapter.” *American Economic Review*, 104(4), 1091-1119.

Guyon, N. and Huillery, E. 2021. “Biased Aspirations and Social Inequality at School: Evidence from French Teenagers.” , *The Economic Journal* Volume 131, Issue 634, Pages 745–796.

Hainmueller, J. 2012. “Entropy balancing for causal effects: A multivariate reweighting method to produce balanced samples in observational studies.” , *Political Analysis*, 20(1),

pp.25-46.

Heckman, J.J., R. Pinto, and P. Savelyev. 2013. “Understanding the mechanisms through which an influential early childhood program boosted adult outcomes” , *American Economic Review* 103 (6), 2052-86.

Hospido, L., Laeven, L., and A. Lamo. 2020. “The Gender Promotion Gap: Evidence from Central Banking” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, forthcoming.

Karandikar, R., Mookherjee, D., Ray, D., and F. Vega-Redondo 1998. “Evolving Aspirations and Cooperation” *Journal of Economic Theory*, 80, 292-331.

Lant, T. K. 1992 “Aspiration Level Adaptation: An Empirical Exploration ” *Management Science*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (May), 623-644

Luo. H. and L. Zhang 2021 “Gender Inequality and the Direction of Ideas: Evidence from MeToo ” *Harvard Business School Working Paper*, No. 21-107, March.

Manning, A., and J. Swaffield. 2008. “The Gender Gap in Early-Career Wage Growth” *Economic Journal*, vol. 118(530), 983-1024.

Ray, D. 1998. “Development economics” *Princeton University Press*.

Ray, D. 2006. “Aspirations, Poverty and Economic Change.” in *Understanding Poverty - 1st Edition*, A. Banerjee (Editor), R. Benabou , D. Mookherjee (eds) , 409-420 *Understanding Poverty 1st Edition* by Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee (Editor), Roland Benabou (Editor), Dilip Mookherjee (Editor)

Roberts, T.A. and Nolen-Hoeksema, S. 1989. “Sex differences in reactions to evaluative feedback.” *Sex Roles*, 21(11-12), pp.725-747.

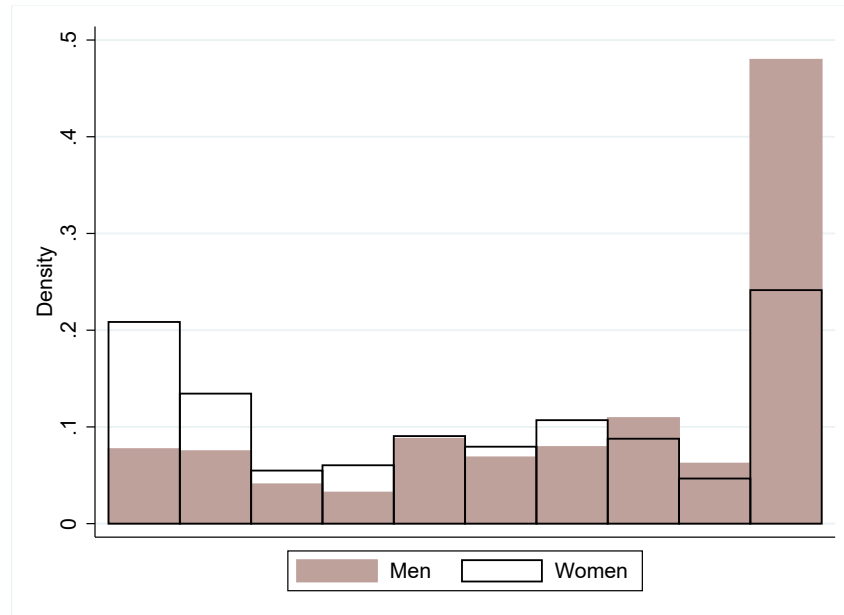
Rizzica, L. 2019. “Raising Aspirations and Higher Education: Evidence from the UK’s Widening Participation Policy” *Journal of Labor Economics*.

Selten, R. 1998. “Aspiration Adaptation Theory ” *Journal of Mathematical Psychology* 42.

Simon, H. A. 1957. “Models of Man; Social and Rational ” *John Willey and Sons*.

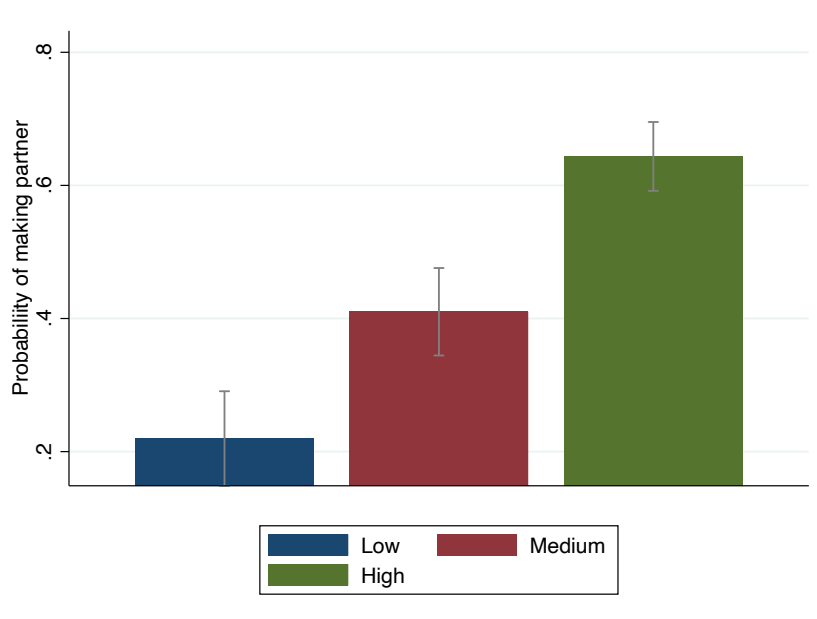
7 Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Career (Partnership) Aspirations (by gender)



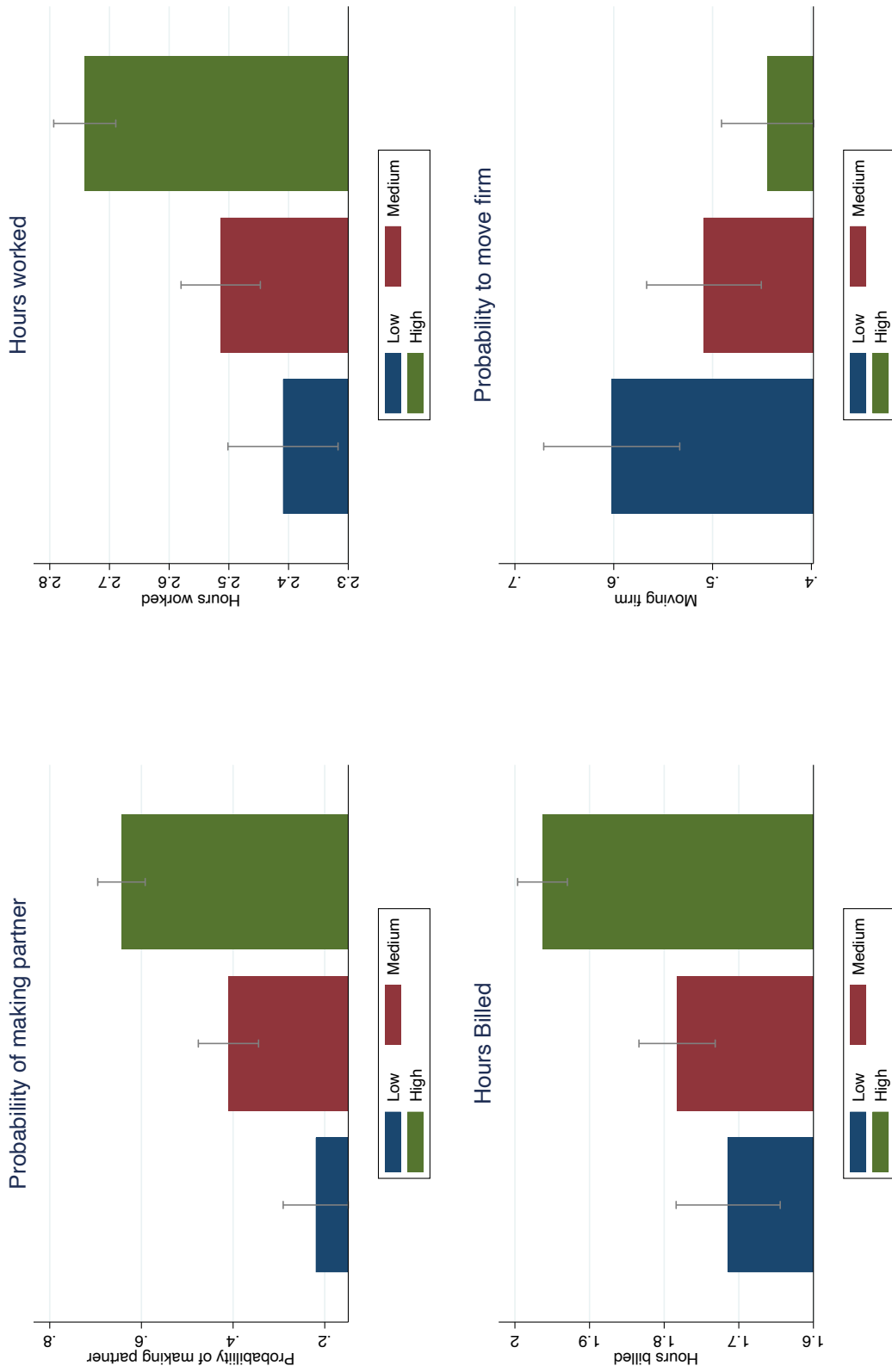
Note: The figure plots, by gender, the responses to the question: “How strongly do you aspire to attain an equity partner position within your firm?” measured in 2007. This is measured on a 10-point Likert scale (from 1 (Not at all) to 10 (Very high)). We restrict the data to individuals who are observed billing at least one hour in our data. The figure compares the responses for men and women.

Figure 2: Career Aspirations and Actual Promotion



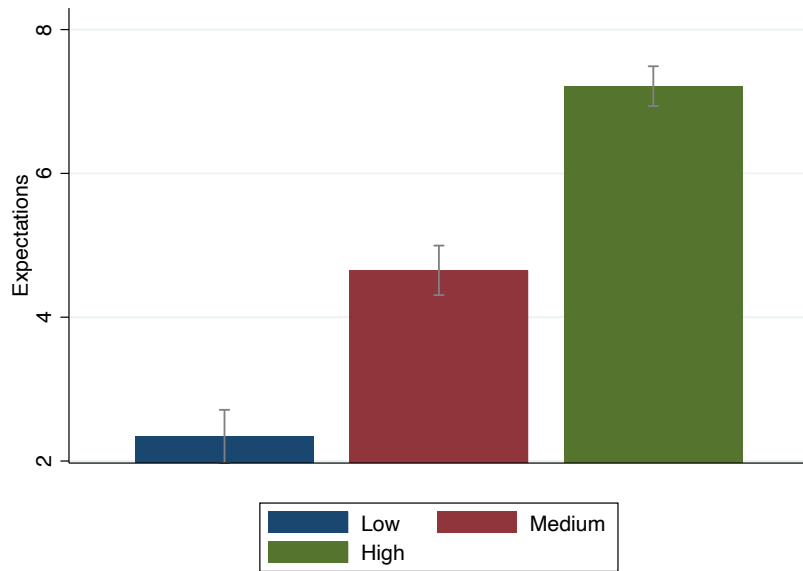
Note: The figure plots, by career aspiration groups (low (1), medium(2), high (3)), measured in 2007, the proportion of individuals who are promoted to partner in 2012.

Figure 3: Aspirations and Effort



Note: The figure plots, by career aspiration groups (low (1), medium(2), high (3)), the following: in the top-left panel, we plot the proportion of individuals who are promoted to partner in 2012. In the top right, we plot the number of annual hours worked (expressed in thousands of hours), measured in 2007. In the bottom left, we plot the number of annual hours billed (expressed in thousands of hours), measured in 2007. In the bottom right, we plot the probability of changing firms within the first five years, measured in 2007. We restrict the data to individuals who are observed billing at least one hour over the sample period.

Figure 4: Aspirations and Expectations



Note: The figure plots, by career aspiration groups (low (1), medium(2), high(3)), the expectations of being promoted to partner (“How would you rate your chances, as a percentage ranging from 0 to 100, of attaining each of the following positions in your firm?”. We bin the responses into deciles), measured in 2007. We restrict the data to individuals who are observed billing at least one hour over the sample period.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Panel A: Socio-economic characteristics						
	Women		Men		Difference	
	mean	sd	mean	sd	b	t
Age	30.11	4.52	31.07	4.50	0.96	(2.17)
White	0.82	0.38	0.88	0.33	0.06	(1.58)
Married	0.57	0.50	0.65	0.48	0.08	(1.58)
No. Children	0.26	0.64	0.55	0.94	0.29	(3.84)
Child under 4 yrs	0.08	0.28	0.20	0.40	0.12	(3.71)
Observations	303		376		679	

Panel B: Pre workplace variables						
	Women		Men		Difference	
	mean	sd	mean	sd	b	t
Rank UG Uni.	12.86	3.71	12.50	3.49	-0.37	(-1.03)
Rank Law School	4.95	0.99	4.90	0.98	-0.05	(-0.52)
Rank in LS Class	2.22	0.98	2.36	1.09	0.15	(1.46)
Job Offers	2.78	2.36	2.73	2.67	-0.05	(-0.21)
Debt after LS	4.69	2.25	4.83	2.28	0.14	(0.62)
Decision Lawyer	3.88	1.02	4.01	0.92	0.13	(1.30)
Stay Lawyer	3.57	1.37	3.66	1.37	0.09	(0.69)
Practice Law	1.14	0.34	1.14	0.35	0.01	(0.24)
Other Career	0.81	0.39	0.83	0.38	0.02	(0.50)
Goal Power	2.99	1.26	3.00	1.20	0.01	(0.05)
Observations	303		376		679	

Panel C: Workplace variables						
	Women		Men		Difference	
	mean	sd	mean	sd	b	t
Size Firm	278.30	527.45	239.62	336.46	-38.68	(-0.84)
Private Firm	0.96	0.20	0.95	0.22	-0.01	(-0.38)
Av High Resp. Tasks	2.37	0.86	2.50	0.85	0.12	(1.47)
Av Low Resp. Tasks	1.95	0.63	1.99	0.56	0.04	(0.66)
Share Women firm	33.56	17.13	27.86	19.67	-5.69	(-3.19)
Comments	0.24	0.43	0.06	0.25	-0.18	(-4.94)
Observations	303		376		679	

Note: We restrict the data to individuals who are observed billing at least one hour over the sample period. *White* takes value one if the lawyer is Caucasian and zero if the lawyer is a member of a minority group (Black, Hispanic, Native American and Asian). *Married* takes value one if the lawyer is married in 2002, remarried after a divorce or in a domestic partnership and zero if single, divorced or separated, widowed, or other. *No. Children* and *Child under 4 yrs* refers to the lawyer's number of children and if they have a child under age 4 in 2002, respectively. *Rank undergrad uni* and *Rank law school* are bracketed rankings based on the 1996 and 2003 U.S. News reports for undergraduate and law school studies, respectively. Both variables are redefined such that the higher the value is, the more prestigious the educational institution. *Rank in class* is the lawyer's rank among the own cohort in law school. *Job offer* represents the number of job offers received after graduating and before taking the current position. *Debt after LS* is the amount of debt accumulated by the lawyer as of 2002. *Decision Lawyer* is

how satisfied the lawyer is with their decision to become a lawyer in 2002. *Stay Lawyer* measure how much longer the lawyer plans to stay with your current employer (measured in 2002). *Practice Law* asks lawyer when they entered law school, if they intended to practice law (measured in 2002). *Other Career* is whether lawyer considered other careers instead of or in addition to law (measured in 2002). *Goal Power* is the importance of the goal when entering law school of becoming influential in a powerful profession. *Size of Firm* is the number of individuals employed in the organization in 2002. *Private Firm* takes value one if the lawyer works in a private law firm and zero if the lawyer works for another organization in 2002. *Av High Resp Tasks* is the average score on high-responsibility tasks in 2002. *Av Low Resp Tasks* is the average score on high-responsibility tasks in 2002. *Share of women firm* is the proportion of women in the firm in 2002. *Comments* refers to whether, in the last two years (as measured in 2002), the lawyer experienced demeaning comments or other types of harassment by virtue of his or her race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.

Table 2: Gender Promotion Gap

	Promoted to Partner					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female	-0.122*** (0.038)	-0.120*** (0.039)	-0.124*** (0.039)	-0.124*** (0.039)	-0.132*** (0.040)	-0.145*** (0.038)
Constant	0.541*** (0.026)	0.812*** (0.141)	1.297*** (0.216)	1.286*** (0.219)	0.772 (0.511)	0.564*** (0.027)
Individual controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Firm controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Reweighting	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	679	679	679	679	679	679
Adjusted R^2	0.013	0.022	0.042	0.038	0.044	0.020

Note: * denotes significance at the 10% level, ** denotes significance at the 5% level, and *** denotes significance at the 1% level. In all columns, the dependent variable takes value 1 if the individual made partner by 2012 and 0 otherwise. Individual controls include *Female*, *Age* and race dummies (*White (omitted category)*, *Black*, *Hispanic*, *Indian*, *Asian*, *Others*). Education controls include *Rank UG Uni.*, *Rank Law School*, *Rank in LS Class*, *Job Offers*, *Debt after LS* and dummies for missings. Family controls include *Married*, *Children*, and *Child under 4 yrs*. Firm controls include *Share of women firm*, separate dummies for *Types of organization* (solo practice, private law firm, federal government, state or local government, legal services or public defender, public interest organization, educational institution, professional service firm, other Fortune 1000 industry/service, other business/industry, labor union, trade association, others), separate dummies for *Size of firm* (size of the organization, in bins, 0-5, 6-10, 11-25, 25-50, 51-100, 101-150, 151-200, 201-250, 251-500, 501-1000, and 1000+), separate dummies for *Types of tasks* (for each of the following, lawyers are asked about their involvement on a scale from 1 (None) to 5 (All): keeping the client updated, being involved in formulating strategy, traveling to make court appearances or to meet clients, or holding face-to-face meetings with clients, *Tenure at firm*, and dummies for missings. For further definitions of the variables, see Table 1. See Table A1 for the main set of coefficients.

Table 3: Gender Aspirations Gap

	Career Aspirations				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Female	-1.699*** (0.245)	-1.642*** (0.248)	-1.614*** (0.249)	-1.524*** (0.251)	-1.586*** (0.254)
Constant	7.366*** (0.164)	7.402*** (0.905)	10.202*** (1.387)	10.521*** (1.403)	5.548* (3.218)
Individual controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education controls	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Firm controls	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	679	679	679	679	679
Adjusted R^2	0.065	0.067	0.084	0.088	0.120

Note: * denotes significance at the 10% level, ** denotes significance at the 5% level, and *** denotes significance at the 1% level. *Career Asp.* refer to how strongly the lawyer aspires to obtain partnership, measured in 2007. The variable takes values from 1 to 10, where 1 represents not at all and 10 represents very high. This table reproduces columns (1) to (5) of Table 2 using career aspirations as the dependent variable. For definitions of the variables, see Table 2. See Table A2 for the main set of coefficients.

Table 4: Gender Promotion Gap and Aspirations

	Promoted to Partner			Promoted in Same or Better Firm		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female	-0.132*** (0.040)	-0.065 (0.040)	-0.065 (0.040)	-0.085** (0.038)	-0.023 (0.038)	-0.024 (0.038)
Career Asp.		0.043*** (0.006)			0.039*** (0.006)	
Mid Aspirations			0.161*** (0.055)			0.149*** (0.052)
High Aspirations			0.361*** (0.053)			0.327*** (0.050)
Constant	1.425*** (0.427)	0.983** (0.416)	1.046** (0.415)	0.443 (0.400)	0.043 (0.391)	0.099 (0.390)
Observations	679	679	679	679	679	679
Adjusted R^2	0.044	0.112	0.114	0.035	0.098	0.100

Note: * denotes significance at the 10% level, ** denotes significance at the 5% level, and *** denotes significance at the 1% level. In columns (1)-(3), the dependent variable takes value 1 if the individual made partner by 2012 and 0 otherwise. In column (4) to (6) the dependent variable takes value 1 if the individual made partner by 2012 at the firm where he or she was employed in 2007 or at a firm that is larger, and 0 otherwise. *Career Asp.* refer to how strongly the lawyer aspires to attain partnership within his or her firm, measured in 2007. The variable takes values from 1 to 10, where 1 represents not at all and 10 represents very high. *Mid aspirations* takes aspiration values from 3 to 7, and *High aspirations* takes aspiration values of 8 or more. The omitted category is *Low aspirations*, which takes aspiration values of less than 3. All columns include *Individual, Education, Family* and *Firm* controls. For definitions of the variables, see Table 2.

Table 5: Aspirations and Effort

	Hours Worked (1)	Hours Billed (2)	Hours Weekend (3)	Move Firm (4)	Promoted Partner (5)
Mid Aspirations	0.186*** (0.064)	0.090* (0.047)	0.397 (0.399)	0.007 (0.056)	
High Aspirations	0.347*** (0.062)	0.239*** (0.045)	0.683* (0.393)	-0.104* (0.054)	
Hours Worked					0.003 (0.002)
Hours Billed					0.184*** (0.055)
Hours Weekend					-0.000 (0.007)
Move Firm					-0.174*** (0.043)
Constant	3.234*** (0.481)	1.914*** (0.367)	4.939 (3.065)	0.113 (0.420)	0.518 (0.449)
Observations	677	641	636	679	600
Adjusted R^2	0.132	0.188	0.031	0.092	0.084

Note: * denotes significance at the 10% level, ** denotes significance at the 5% level, and *** denotes significance at the 1% level. *Hours worked* is the annual is the number of hours worked (expressed in thousands of hours), measured in 2007. *Hours Billed* is the annual number of hours billed (expressed in thousands of hours), measured in 2007. *Hours worked weekends* is the annual number of hours worked on weekends (expressed in thousands of hours), measured in 2007. *Move firm* is a dummy variable taking value 1 if the individual moved firm before 2007. *Promoted Partner* is a dummy variable taking value 1 if the individual made partner by 2012. All columns include *Individual, Education, Family* and *Firm* controls. All columns include *Individual, Education, Family* and *Firm* controls. For definitions of variables, see Tables 2 and 4.

Table 6: Facing Harassment or Demeaning Comments

	Career Aspirations		
	(1)	(2)	Female Lawyers Only (3)
Comments	-0.762** (0.388)	-0.509 (0.681)	-1.084** (0.538)
Female	-1.626*** (0.280)	-1.579*** (0.299)	
FemalexComments		-0.371 (0.820)	
Constant	4.983 (3.178)	5.033 (3.182)	9.661* (5.647)
Observations	570	570	251
Adjusted R^2	0.147	0.145	0.099

Note: * denotes significance at the 10% level, ** denotes significance at the 5% level, and *** denotes significance at the 1% level. *Comments* refer to whether the lawyer experienced demeaning comments or other types of harassment in the last two years (as measured in 2002) by virtue of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. All columns include *Individual*, *Education*, *Family* and *Firm* controls. For definitions of the variables, see Tables 2 and 4.

Table 7: Aspirations and Expectations

	Promoted to Partner			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-0.132*** (0.040)	-0.065 (0.040)	-0.090** (0.039)	-0.059 (0.040)
Mid Aspirations		0.161*** (0.055)		0.102* (0.057)
High Aspirations		0.361*** (0.053)		0.236*** (0.060)
Mid Expectations			0.173*** (0.049)	0.119** (0.052)
High Expectations			0.344*** (0.048)	0.232*** (0.054)
Constant	0.820 (0.520)	0.691 (0.503)	0.716 (0.501)	0.667 (0.497)
Observations	679	679	679	679
Adjusted R^2	0.044	0.114	0.115	0.136

Note: * denotes significance at the 10% level, ** denotes significance at the 5% level, and *** denotes significance at the 1% level. In all columns, the dependent variable takes value 1 if the individual made partner by 2012. *Expectations* refer to the lawyers' perceived probability of obtaining partnership (they are asked how they rate their chances, as a percentage ranging from 0 to 100, of attaining partnership at their firm. We bin the responses into 10 bins), measured in 2007. *Mid expectations* takes expectations values from 3 to 7, and *High expectations* takes expectations values of 8 or more. The omitted category is *Low expectations*, which takes expectations values of less than 3. All columns include *Individual*, *Education*, *Family* and *Firm* controls. For definitions of the variables, see Tables 2 and 4.