Class Advantage, Commitment Penalty: The Gendered Effect of Social Class Signals in an Elite Labor Market

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Abstract

Research on the mechanisms that reproduce social class advantages in the United States focuses primarily on formal schooling and pays less attention to social class discrimination in labor markets. We conducted a résumé audit study to examine the effect of social class signals on entry into large U.S. law firms. We sent applications from fictitious students at selective but non-elite law schools to 316 law firm offices in 14 cities, randomly assigning signals of social class background and gender to otherwise identical résumés. Higher-class male applicants received significantly more callbacks than did higher-class women, lower-class women, and lower-class men. A survey experiment and interviews with lawyers at large firms suggest that, relative to lower-class applicants, higher-class candidates are seen as better fits with the elite culture and clientele of large law firms. But, although higher-class men receive a corresponding overall boost in evaluations, higher-class women do not, because they face a competing, negative stereotype that portrays them as less committed to full-time, intensive careers. This commitment penalty faced by higher-class women offsets class-based advantages these applicants may receive in evaluations. Consequently, signals of higher-class origin provide an advantage for men but not for women in this elite labor market.

Keywords

hiring, employment, social class, gender, discrimination

Social class—defined as one's relative socioeconomic rank in society—shapes educational and economic trajectories in a powerful way. Economic inequality in the United States is now at its highest since the Gilded Age, and rates of intergenerational mobility are lower than in many other Western industrialized nations (Couch and Dunn 1997; Saez 2008). Research shows that social class of origin—whether defined by parental income or education—affects children's future educational, occupational, and economic attainment as well as their mental and physical well-being (Stephens, Markus, and Fryberg 2012). Social class of origin seems to be a particularly consequential source of stratification at the very top and bottom ranks of the U.S. economic and educational hierarchies (Pew Charitable Trusts 2012, 2013; Torche 2011).

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Over the past three decades, sociologists have made theoretical and empirical headway in understanding the mechanisms that reproduce social class inequalities in the United States, especially those that provide advantages for the socioeconomically privileged (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lareau 2003; Stevens 2007). However, research on this topic focuses primarily on class inequalities in formal schooling. Scholars have shown that children from socioeconomically privileged homes benefit from higher levels of economic, social, and cultural resources that facilitate academic success and admission to four-year colleges, which have become critically important for obtaining stable jobs and stable incomes in the twenty-first century (see Alon 2009; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Mettler 2014).

While extremely influential, existing research on the reproduction of class-based privilege in the United States largely neglects a vital dimension of economic stratification: employment. Employers are gatekeepers to jobs offering varying levels of economic and symbolic resources, and employers' hiring decisions shape individuals' economic trajectories (Bills 2003). Although qualitative studies suggest that employers pay attention to applicants' social class signals when making hiring decisions (Kennelly 1999; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Rivera 2015), scholars have yet to assess in a systematic way whether and to what extent social class discrimination in employment—that is, employers' differential treatment of job seekers on the basis of social class signals—occurs in U.S. labor markets. Research on employment discrimination in the United States focuses mainly on alternative axes of inequality, such as race, gender, parental status, and sexual orientation (e.g., Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Kang et al. 2016; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009; Tilcsik 2011).

In this study, we undertake—to the best of our knowledge—the first field experimental investigation of employment discrimination on the basis of social class signals in an elite U.S. labor market. Using the résumé audit method—a technique used frequently in sociological research on labor market inequalities (Pager 2007)—we investigate discrimination based on social class signals in one high-stakes, prestigious labor market: that of new law firm associates. Because previous theorizing and research suggest that effects of social class on inequality might depend on gender (see Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1982; Epstein 1981; Lizardo 2006), we experimentally manipulate each job applicant's apparent social class background and gender.

We find evidence that gender moderates the effect of social class signals in elite hiring. Holding constant academic and professional qualifications, male applicants who appear to be from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds receive significantly more callbacks than do otherwise equivalent lower-class applicants. Notably, however, female applicants who appear to be from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds fail to reap such class-based advantages. Using a complementary survey experiment and interviews, we find that this interplay between class signals and gender can be attributed to a *commitment penalty* faced by higher-class women, whereby they are selectively perceived as less committed to full-time, demanding careers than are other applicants. The commitment penalty faced by higher-class women offsets any class advantage that they receive in evaluation. Thus, it is the interaction of social class signals and gender—rather than either in isolation—that predicts whether an applicant will thrive or struggle in this high-wage, high-stakes labor market.

SOCIAL CLASS INEQUALITIES
Class Inequalities in Education

The bulk of existing sociological research on the reproduction of social class inequalities focuses on formal schooling. Scholars have shown that children from affluent or highly educated families—backgrounds we refer to as "socioeconomically privileged"—benefit from educational advantages that begin before

preschool and persist throughout college, facilitating higher levels of educational attainment. Students from socioeconomically privileged homes are more likely than students from less privileged families to attend high-quality schools (for reviews, see Fischer et al. 1996; Sacks 2007). Within a given school, these students are more likely than students from less privileged backgrounds to be embedded in academically focused peer networks; obtain crucial support from parents, teachers, and administrators that enables them to access valued academic and extracurricular tracks; and wield cultural resources that facilitate positive impressions from teachers (Bourdieu 1984; Calarco 2011; Lareau 2003; Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin 2014; Streib 2011).

Collectively, these processes affect children's college prospects. Students from socioeconomically privileged homes are more likely to have the types of carefully cultivated academic and extracurricular experiences that appeal to admissions committees at prestigious universities (Alon 2009; Karabel 2005; Karen 2002; Stevens 2007). These advantages, combined with the luxury to enroll in the college of one's choice independent of financial concerns, result in a situation in which children from socioeconomically privileged homes are significantly more likely to attend high-quality, private four-year colleges or public flagship institutions (Mettler 2014). Once enrolled in college, they are also more likely to succeed socially and academically (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Stephens et al. 2014; Stuber 2009, 2011).

Beyond the College Gates

Yet, a missing link in research on class inequalities in the United States is the continuing role that social class plays *after* the completion of higher education, when students enter the labor market and compete for jobs. Inspired by Blau and Duncan's (1967) insight that roughly half of a person's economic position can be explained by formal schooling, an implicit assumption in much of the scholarship on class inequalities is that social origins primarily affect economic attainment indirectly—via education (Jencks, Crouse, and Mueser 1983; Sewell and Hauser 1975). More recent research, however, suggests that social class continues to shape individuals' economic trajectories above and beyond the level (or prestige) of education attained, particularly for people without college degrees as well as for those who possess advanced degrees (Torche 2011).

Employment discrimination may be one mechanism through which social class influences occupational attainment and earnings in the United States. A rich body of scholarship shows that employers discriminate on the basis of status characteristics, including race, gender, parental status, and sexual orientation, net of applicants' human capital characteristics (Correll et al. 2007; Foschi, Lai, and Sigerson 1994; Pager et al. 2009; Pedulla 2014; Tilcsik 2011). Although it has received little attention in the scholarship on employment discrimination, social class is a meaningful status characteristic that influences perceptions of competence and the distribution of valued rewards in the United States (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1966; Ridgeway and Fisk 2012). People rate individuals who appear to be from higher-class backgrounds as more competent and worthy than those from lower-class backgrounds (see Fiske et al. 2012). Illustrating how deeply ingrained such biases are, even preschool-aged children demonstrate such tendencies (see Horwitz, Shutts, and Olson 2014; Ramsey 1991).

Qualitative studies suggest that U.S. employers likewise view individuals from higher-class backgrounds as more desirable workers (Kennelly 1999; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). For example, in a study of hiring in elite professional service firms (including law firms), Rivera (2015) found that when screening résumés, firms favored applicants who displayed higher-class cultural signals, such as participation in traditionally upper-class sports and extracurricular activities. Employers believed that participation in

such activities signaled an ability to fit in with the elite culture and clientele of these firms, in which employees and clients disproportionately hail from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds. However, such studies do not measure social class discrimination directly and thus fail to separate its unique influence from the impact of other selection criteria and the influence of unobserved differences among applicants.

Outside the United States, Jackson's (2009) field experimental results suggest that employers in the United Kingdom favor job applicants who appear to be from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds when hiring for managerial and professional positions. Yet, Jackson signaled social class partly through educational credentials (e.g., having a degree from Oxford or Cambridge versus the low-ranked Staffordshire University) and found that this educational signal was the single strongest driver of interview invitations. Thus, while this study represents an important first step in understanding class-based discrimination in employment, it has not clearly established the independent effect of social class signals net of educational attainment. To the best of our knowledge, the causal effect of class-based employment discrimination in the United States has not yet been examined empirically.[1]

This omission partly stems from data limitations. Because social class is not a protected status under U.S. employment law, employers have few legal or social incentives to collect data about job applicants' class background.[2] Moreover, social class can be difficult to measure (Fiske and Markus 2012). Even within sociology, there is disagreement about how best to measure social class—whether it should be based on income, education, occupation, cultural signals, subjective affiliation, or some combination thereof (for debates, see Goldthorpe and Chan 2007; Grusky and Weeden 2001; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Wright 2001). Still, even if the discipline lacks a single measure of social class, the fact remains that class exerts a profound effect on individuals' economic trajectories and life chances, and is therefore critical to understand (DiMaggio 2012).[3] In this article, we explore how employers respond to applicants who have identical academic and professional qualifications, but display signals of higher- versus lower-social class in a high-wage, prestigious labor market.

Gender and Class

Individuals possess multiple status characteristics, which may combine in unexpected ways and together influence evaluations of merit in hiring and beyond (Collins 2000; Pedulla 2014; Wagner and Berger 1993). Two such status characteristics are social class and gender (Berger et al. 1966; McCall 2001; Ridgeway and Fisk 2012). Prior theory and research suggest that the relationship between social class and stratification may differ for women and men. However, the precise nature of this relationship in hiring is unclear.

In the realm of formal schooling, some evidence suggests that markers of elevated social class position are associated with greater benefits for women than for men in terms of educational performance and attainment, although the mechanisms underlying these effects are less clear (Alexander and Eckland 1974; DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2002; Sewell, Hauser, and Wolf 1980). Direct evidence on the interplay between social class of origin and gender in employment outcomes is much more limited, but a similar phenomenon might apply to careers as well. Gender is a powerful status characteristic that shapes perceptions of competence (Ridgeway 2006). In hiring evaluations, women are often rated less favorably than otherwise equivalent men (for a review, see Heilman 2001). Given such biases and women's historic under-representation in high-status managerial and professional careers, it could be that displaying signals of higher social class is more important for women than for men in elite labor markets; the high-status identity of being from a higher social class may compensate for the low-status identity of being female. Indeed, in their now classic studies, Kanter

(1977) and Epstein (1981) found that, although women faced disadvantages relative to their male peers in gaining access to high-status jobs, including jobs in large law firms, the women who first succeeded decades ago tended to be from higher-class backgrounds.

However, there are also reasons to expect that coming from a higher-class background could actually serve as a liability for women. Psychological research shows that people evaluate individuals based on two basic dimensions: competence and warmth (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008). When making hiring decisions, evaluators punish women (but not men) whom they perceive as lacking in warmth, because such women violate feminine prescriptions of niceness and communality (Rudman 1998). In this way, stereotypes associated with social class might pose a particular dilemma for higher-class women. People tend to rate individuals from higher-class backgrounds as more competent than people from lower-class backgrounds, but they also often rate them as colder (Fiske et al. 2012). Thus, while markers of higher-class backgrounds may signal greater competence or fit for both men and women (Ridgeway and Fisk 2012; Rivera 2012), they may also signal a lack of warmth that puts higher-class women at a disadvantage compared to higher-class men, a possibility that has not been tested by prior research.

Furthermore, employers may perceive higher-class women as less committed to intensive careers than men. The "ideal worker" (Acker 1990) in many types of professional organizations, including law firms, is completely devoted to work (Blair-Loy 2003). Yet, professional women, especially mothers, may be perceived as less committed to work than otherwise equivalent men (for discussions, see Correll et al. 2007; Fernandez-Mateo and King 2011).[4] Given norms of "intensive mothering" (Hays 1996) prevalent among socioeconomically privileged families (Lareau 2003), employers may view women from higher-class backgrounds as especially encumbered—and thus less dedicated and desirable—workers than higher-class men or lower-class women.

In short, prior theory and research suggest that the effects of social class signals on interpersonal evaluations, including hiring decisions, may vary by applicant gender. However, the nature and direction of this variation—whether higher-class signals help or hurt female job applicants relative to male candidates in hiring—remains to be established.

THE MARKET FOR LAW FIRM ASSOCIATES

We study discrimination on the basis of social class signals and gender in the application process for entry-level professional positions in large U.S. law firms. We chose to study this market for several reasons. First, most studies of employment discrimination focus on low-wage labor markets. Such analyses are important, but to fully understand how employers contribute to labor market inequalities, it is also necessary to understand entry to highly paid and prestigious jobs. Doing so is particularly important given that the top 10 percent of income earners have disproportionately driven economic inequality in the United States in recent decades (Atkinson, Piketty, and Saez 2011).

Second, the market for law firm associates provides a particularly fruitful context in which to study the role of social class in employment. Although social class biases exist within the U.S. population at large (Fiske et al. 2012; Ridgeway and Fisk 2012), and prior research suggests that social class is a meaningful basis of stratification in law firms, researchers have yet to quantify whether these patterns are due to discrimination or other mechanisms, such as self-selection into different types of legal employment (Dinovitzer and Garth 2007; Epstein 1981; Rivera 2015; Seron and Munger 1996; Smigel 1964).

Third, the legal profession is an intriguing setting in which to study the intersection between social class and gender. In addition to the aforementioned social class disparities, researchers have also documented persistent gender biases in law firms. Inequalities are

greatest at the upper ranks of these organizations (Gorman and Kmec 2009). Although women now comprise roughly half of all law school students and half of all newly hired associates in law firms nationwide, they still represent only 20 percent of partners in the United States (American Bar Association 2014). Much has been written about the sources of such higher-level disparities (e.g., Beckman and Phillips 2005; Epstein 1981; Gorman 2005, 2006; Gorman and Kmec 2009; Phillips 2005), but researchers have yet to analyze how gendered evaluations in law firms may vary by women's social class of origin.

Finally, the market for law firm associates is highly competitive, and the stakes for applicants are high. Entry-level positions at large law firms typically offer salaries three to six times higher than other types of legal employment, propelling recent graduates into the top 5 to 10 percent of household incomes nationally (see Rivera 2015). Because of the large salary and lifestyle differentials at stake in this labor market, and the fact that law student debt is at an all-time high, people who hold jobs in these firms can be thought of as the legal elite, or the "legal 1 percent" (Toobin 2014).

RÉSUMÉ AUDIT STUDY

We conducted a randomized résumé audit study (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Correll et al. 2007; Tilcsik 2011) in this elite labor market by sending fictitious applications to large law firms and examining how signals of social class background and gender affected the chances of receiving an invitation to a job interview (i.e., a "callback").

The audit methodology offers two crucial advantages. First, it uses a randomized experimental design, which provides more direct causal evidence than do observational data (Pager 2003, 2007). In this case, by randomly assigning signals of social class and gender to otherwise identical résumés, the audit method reveals the causal effect of these signals on employers' decisions and helps isolate the effect of discrimination from other mechanisms—such as class- or gender-based self-selection—into particular segments of the labor market. Second, audit studies generate data about the behavior of real employers who believe they are making real decisions about actual job applicants. Audits thus provide greater external validity than do laboratory studies (Correll et al. 2007; Tilcsik 2011).

Our experiment focused on summer associate positions, because large law firms hire the overwhelming majority of their new associates through summer internship programs (Ginsburg and Wolf 2004; NALP 2014; Roth 2010). Moreover, although outsiders may perceive summer associateships as a "10-week-long job interview," in reality, employers offer jobs to the vast majority of summer associates. In 2013, for example, firms surveyed by the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) offered a full-time position to 92 percent of their summer associates; at many large firms this number has inched closer to 100 percent.[5] Thus, summer associateships at large firms are coveted positions that, in most cases, virtually guarantee full-time job offers.

Application Materials

To create a realistic baseline résumé and cover letter, we consulted lawyers with extensive knowledge about the job market for summer associates. These informants, eight lawyers (five men and three women) who ranged in rank from associate to partner, had experience working at law firms included in the sampling frame of our audit study. We identified and gained access to these informants through preexisting connections and referrals.

Building on actual résumés obtained through these contacts as well as résumé templates provided by the career services centers of several law schools, we developed a résumé that described the applicant's educational history, professional experiences, and extracurricular activities. Figure 1 lists the items included in our baseline résumé. We

Law School
- JD Candidate, May 2016
- Top 1 Percent of Class (as of Spring 2014)
- Dean's Recognition Merit Scholarship
- Law Review
- Student Bar Association Committee

Undergraduate Institution
- Bachelor's Degree in Political Science, 2011
- Summa Cum Laude
- Phi Beta Kappa

Experience[a]
- Legal Intern, Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Columbia, Summer 2014
- Teacher and Corps Member, Teach for America, 2011 to 2013
- Intern, The Office of Legal Counsel at [College], Summer 2010

Figure 1. Summary of Baseline Résumé Items
[a]On the résumés, each experience was described in detail in several bullet points, identical across all conditions.

also created a cover letter that followed the standard structure and content of cover letters in this job market.

When sending out applications, we adjusted the applicant's law school and undergraduate institution according to the employer's location, because our informants indicated that firms might automatically dismiss applications from students who attend a law school far outside their geographic area and have no history of living in the region. We used selective second-tier law schools (out of four possible tiers), rather than the most elite ones, because doing so allowed us to study the factors that shape the chances a person can enter an elite job without "super-elite" educational credentials (Rivera 2015). Specifically, we used law schools ranked between 50 and 100 (out of 200 accredited law schools) on *U.S. News and World Report*'s 2014 Best Law Schools ranking.[6]

A focus on selective rather than super-elite law schools has several advantages. First, it allows us to concentrate on a broader population of job seekers than those coming from the very narrow slice of the most exclusive educational institutions, and it enhances the generalizability of our research to a wider segment of the law student population. Second, because super-elite law schools disproportionately enroll students from the top 10 percent of household incomes (Fisher 2012), attending a selective but second-tier law school is more realistic for students who come from a wider range of social class backgrounds. Finally, focusing on these schools was advantageous for the logistics of our experiment. Applicants from super-elite law schools are typically hired into summer associate positions through formal on-campus recruitment processes run by their campus career services offices, which would make a résumé audit study infeasible.

In contrast, our informants consistently noted that strong applicants from selective, second-tier law schools still had a chance to obtain a summer associate position with a top firm that did not conduct formal recruitment on their campus. Such applicants would send their application materials directly to an office's designated hiring attorney or other recruitment contact person, whose contact information is listed online in the annually updated *NALP Directory of Legal Employers* alongside information about available job postings. Average or weaker students face long odds in this situation, but students at the top of their class might be considered for a position and invited to an interview. Accordingly, all our applicants were in the top 1 percent of their class after completing one year at a selective second-tier law school, the typical time law students apply for summer associate jobs. It is important to emphasize that although these students are at the top of their class academically, employers typically consider applicants from selective second-tier law schools to be viable but not stellar candidates (Rivera 2015).

An important feature of the law schools we used—and of U.S. law schools in general—is the largely balanced gender ratio among law school students (i.e., the population of potential summer associates). As noted earlier, close to half of all U.S. law school students

are women. For example, the American Bar Association (2014) reported that female students made up approximately 48 percent of the first-year class entering law schools in 2012, and female law students participated in summer associate programs in line with their overall representation in law schools nationally. Likewise, the law schools used in our experiment had similar, largely balanced gender ratios. This helps lessen concerns about certain supply-side processes affecting our results. For example, if the supply of female students greatly exceeded the supply of male students, firms might favor our male applicants over our female applicants simply in an effort to maintain a roughly equal proportion of men and women in their summer associate class. The balanced gender ratio (both overall and in our schools) alleviates such concerns.

Experimental Design

Each law firm office in our study received one résumé to which we randomly assigned signals of relative social class background (higher or lower) and gender (male or female), while keeping all résumé items in Figure 1 constant.[7] Some audit studies use pairs of résumés, but we chose to send one résumé per employer for two main reasons. First, feedback from our informants consistently suggested that it might be exceedingly difficult to create a set of two or more baseline résumés from selective second-tier schools that are not only highly realistic but also equivalent in qualifications and, at the same time, unlikely to raise employers' suspicions. Creating two distinct yet similarly high-quality baseline résumés without increasing the risk of detection proved to be a challenge even for experienced attorneys.

Second, sending just one résumé per firm helped reduce inconvenience to employers and actual job applicants. It imposes less of a time burden on employers and is less likely to clog the application queue and slow the process for job seekers. Indeed, to minimize the burden on employers, our institutional review board strongly discouraged us from using a design with multiple résumés per law firm

office. Although sending more than one résumé per firm would have facilitated faster data collection, in this case sending one application was a more suitable approach.

Accordingly, our experiment used a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design, with each law firm office receiving one application to which we randomly assigned gender and signals of social class background. We signaled gender through the applicant's first name (James or Julia). Appearing at the very top of a résumé, first name is a prominent and clear gender signal (Correll et al. 2007). We signaled differences in social class background through a combination of five minor résumé items, summarized in Figure 2 and described in detail in the next section.

Signals of Social Class Background

Before we describe the rationale for each item in Figure 2, a clarification is in order. Audit studies often use just one résumé item to signal a demographic characteristic, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation. In signaling social class background, however, there are several reasons to use multiple (albeit minor) differences in résumé items.

First, sociologists have long noted that social class is multidimensional (Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1899; Weber 1958). Rather than separately capturing income, wealth, education, or a set of independent lifestyle markers, social class reflects a consistent *combination* of economic, social, and cultural resources (Fiske and Markus 2012; Lareau and Weininger 2003).

Second, our conversations and résumé reviews with industry informants clearly indicated that a single résumé item signaling class could be easily overlooked. Our informants tended to form impressions of an applicant's class background by piecing together information from multiple sections of a résumé, noting that it was the *consistency* of several signals that allowed them to construct a coherent picture of a person's social class background, a perspective consistent with Jackson's (2009) research on U.K. employers.

	Higher-Class Combination[a]	Lower-Class Combination[b]
Last name	Cabot	Clark[c]
Undergraduate athletic award	University athletic award[c]	University award for outstanding athletes on financial aid
Undergraduate extracurricular activity (2008 to 2011)	Peer mentor for first-year students[c]	Peer mentor for first-generation college students
Undergraduate extracurricular activity (2007 to 2011)	Sailing team	Track and field (relay team)[c]
Personal interests	Sailing, polo, classical music	Track and field,[c] pick-up-soccer, country music

Figure 2. Combinations of Résumé Items That Together Signal Social Class Background
Note: As described in the main text in detail, we signaled social class background through a constellation of higher, lower, and neutral class signals. The purpose was to signal, through these combinations, a distinctly higher- or lower-class background.
[a]Higher-class and class-neutral items that, in combination, signal a higher-class background.
[b]Lower-class and class-neutral items that, in combination, signal a lower-class background.
[c]Largely "class-neutral" item that, rather than sending a clear class signal by itself, serves as a "control" item vis-à-vis a stronger class signal in the other condition.

Third, we conducted extensive pretests of résumés with a larger and more diverse sample, which led to the same conclusion as our conversations with informants in the legal field. Using a crowdsource-recruited sample on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014), we surveyed 610 full-time employed U.S. residents (with respondents from every U.S. state) between the ages of 25 and 65 about the extent to which they agreed with five statements regarding a fictitious job applicant's social class background (sample items: "This person is from a wealthy family" and "This person is from a working-class background"). Each respondent received the baseline résumé (summarized in Figure 1), which was randomly assigned to include up to five higher-class signals (from the left side of Figure 2); up to five lower-class signals (from the right side of Figure 2); or no class signals. The data suggested that résumés with fewer than four signals created a less clear and reliable manipulation of apparent social class background than did those with at least four signals. Accordingly, for conceptual and empirical reasons, we used multiple signals of social class background on the résumés.[8]

Our choice of items signaling social class background (Figure 2) reflects prior research on class markers. It is important to emphasize that our goal in selecting these signals was to elicit clear *perceptions* that applicants came from relatively higher- versus lower-class backgrounds, rather than to provide a snapshot of the average higher- or lower-class applicant.

The first item we used was the applicant's last name, which can serve as an important indicator of social class (Broad 1996; Clark 2014). The family name Cabot is traditionally and persistently associated with the U.S. upper class (Broad 1996), whereas the name Clark provides a suitable control signal because it does not carry a strong higher-class connotation and is, in fact, one of the 20 most common non-Hispanic last names in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Both names are of English origin, start with the same letter, and contain the same number of letters.

The second set of signals—a generic undergraduate athletic award versus one specifically for outstanding athletes on financial aid—provides a straightforward indicator of class background because, other things being equal, students on financial aid tend to come from lower-income families than do students not receiving financial aid.[9] The logic behind the third item is similar. One applicant's

résumé listed a generic activity (serving as a peer mentor for first-year college students), whereas the other applicant's résumé included serving as a peer mentor for fellow first-generation college students, which suggested the applicant was a first-generation student—widely considered a signal of working-class origins. Indeed, in psychology, a common way of experimentally manipulating social class background is using first-generation versus non-first-generation college students (Stephens et al. 2012).

The last items were cultural class signals in the form of lifestyle markers (Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1899); we included two signals indicating sports participation and one identifying musical taste. Sports are common bases of bonding and social distinction among North American managers (Erickson 1996; Turco 2010). Although sports are typically perceived as more democratic than traditional highbrow cultural forms, athletic participation is strongly segregated and stratified by social class (Kane 2003; Lehmann 2012; Shulman and Bowen 2001; Stempel 2005; Wilson 2002). We assigned applicants to one of two university sports teams—either sailing or track and field (relay)—from the beginning of freshman year, thus suggesting a background starting before college. Both sailing and track and field involve a combination of team and individual performance components, but sailing is often associated with the upper class, whereas track and field is not (Argyle 1994; Green 2010; Shulman and Bowen 2001). In addition, the very end of each résumé listed "Personal Interests," a common section in the résumés we reviewed in preparation for the experiment. In this section, we indicated a personal interest in a second sport: polo versus pick-up soccer. Both are team-based athletic activities, but only the former has a strong higher-class connotation (Argyle 1994).[10]

In this section, we also included one item pertaining to music. Musical tastes can serve as important signals of social class (Bourdieu 1984; Christin 2014; Lizardo 2006). For the higher-class applicant, we indicated an interest in classical music; this "highbrow" genre is associated with higher levels of education and income (Bryson 1996; Christin 2012, 2014; Lizardo 2006; Rentfrow and Gosling 2007; Ter Bogt et al. 2011).

It is important to note that higher-class individuals in the United States often have "omnivorous" musical tastes—that is, they are open to or are tolerant of both highbrow and lowbrow genres (for reviews, see Lizardo and Skiles 2008; Peterson 2004). However, tolerance of a genre is not the same as intensive investment in it (Peterson and Kern 1996); one may tolerate or appreciate a genre without publicly identifying it as a primary hobby on one's résumé. In addition, some research suggests that although higher-class omnivores may be tolerant of a wider array of cultural genres, they engage with traditionally highbrow forms most strongly (Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal 2008). Furthermore, omnivores do not necessarily like all genres or appreciate them equally. As Bryson (1996:884) notes, musical tolerance among the highly educated tends to follow a "specific pattern of exclusiveness," in which even omnivores reject genres whose fans have the least education. In light of this, for our lower-class applicant, we listed an interest in country music, a genre associated with lower levels of education and income and one distinctly rejected by even culturally omnivorous higher-class individuals (Bryson 1996).[11]

Prior research conducted in this market shows that listing formal extracurricular activities and informal leisure pursuits on résumés is not only typical for entry-level job applicants to these firms, but it is often required by firms and university career service centers. As a result, hiring agents in these firms often discard applications that do not list this type of information (Rivera 2015).

Overall, the applicant's first name and the combination of résumé items in Figure 2 served as signals of gender and social class background. To reiterate, our goal in designing these résumés was to generate perceptions of applicants who were clearly male or female and from relatively higher- or lower-class

backgrounds. All items in Figure 1—that is, all professional experiences and educational achievements, including the applicant's law school record, work experiences, and undergraduate academic achievements—were identical across the résumés.

As a final step, we conducted a pretest to examine whether our signals of social class and gender inadvertently signaled other differences as well. Using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (see Weinberg et al. 2014), we surveyed 400 full-time employed U.S. residents age 25 to 65. Using a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design (social class x gender), we randomly assigned each of the four résumés to 100 participants and asked them to indicate the likelihood (on a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 = very unlikely to 7 = very likely) that the résumé they read belonged to a person who was (a) white/Caucasian, (b) black/African American, (c) Latino/Hispanic, or (d) Asian/Asian American. We also asked participants to rate the likelihood that the person was (a) a parent, (b) gay/lesbian, or (c) an immigrant to the United States. We found no statistically significant differences in the mean probability ratings for any of these categories across the conditions. In all conditions, participants viewed the hypothetical applicant as most likely to be white/Caucasian and unlikely to be a parent, an immigrant, or gay/lesbian. At the same time, respondents perceived résumés in the higher-class conditions as more likely to belong to a person from a wealthy family ($p < .05$) and résumés in the lower-class conditions as more likely to belong to a person from a working-class background ($p < .05$).

Sample of Employers

We drew our sample of employers for the audit study from the web-based *NALP Directory of Legal Employers* (http://www.nalpdirectory .com, hereafter *NALP Directory*), maintained by the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing law schools and students with comprehensive data about law firms and

legal employment. NALP annually surveys law firms to gather information about their organization, demographic composition, and job opportunities, and then publishes this information online in the publically available *NALP Directory*, typically in the form of office-specific (rather than firm-level) information. For each office, the directory lists a recruitment contact to whom students can e-mail application materials.

We attempted to sample the entire universe of NALP-listed law firm offices that were accepting applications for summer associate positions, had either a corporate or a litigation practice (the most common and generalized areas of legal practice in large law firms) or both, and were located in one of the 14 U.S. cities with the highest number of NALP-listed law firm offices. We found 530 such offices. Ultimately, we were able to sample 316 offices, or 60 percent of this universe. We had to exclude 214 offices for two reasons. First, some employers required an online application that could not be submitted without a digital copy of an official law school transcript, which prevented us from sending applications to these firms. Second, in some cases, two or more offices of a firm shared a single hiring attorney or recruitment contact person. Sending more than one application to such firms would have revealed our experiment. In these cases, we randomly included in the sample one of the multiple offices that shared an identical contact. The offices excluded for these reasons did not significantly differ from those in the final sample in full-time associate starting salary ($152,707 for sampled offices versus $152,425 for excluded offices; $p = .81$), weekly summer associate compensation ($2,920 versus $2,910; $p = .73$), proportion of female partners (20.0 versus 21.0 percent; $p = .24$), proportion of female associates (46.8 versus 46.2 percent; $p = .65$), or the likelihood of having a female hiring attorney (26.9 versus 25.2 percent; $p = .67$). In addition, the sampled and excluded offices were equally likely to belong to a firm on the *2014 Vault Law 100* (a prestige ranking of law firms based on a survey of

more than 17,000 associates at law firms) (67.7 versus 67.3 percent; $p = .92$) and the *2014 Am Law 100* (a ranking of firms based on gross revenue by the magazine *The American Lawyer*) (66.1 versus 66.4 percent; $p = .96$).

The 316 sampled offices belonged to 147 different law firms. The three cities with the highest number of offices were New York City ($n = 63$), Washington, DC ($n = 56$), and Los Angeles ($n = 33$). The other 11 cities were Atlanta ($n = 13$), Boston ($n = 13$), Chicago ($n = 27$), Dallas ($n = 18$), Houston ($n = 24$), Miami ($n = 7$), Philadelphia ($n = 8$), Phoenix ($n = 11$), San Diego ($n = 7$), San Francisco ($n = 23$), and Seattle ($n = 13$). Within each city, we randomly assigned each of the four treatment conditions to one fourth of the sampled offices.[12]

We e-mailed applications to the designated recruitment contact person in all sampled offices within a 10-day period in August 2014. We then recorded whether each application led to an invitation for an in-person or telephone interview. To receive employer responses, we set up e-mail accounts to match the applicants' names as well as 56 voicemail boxes (four for each of the 14 cities), with female and male voice recordings and the appropriate dial code for each location. When we received an interview invitation, we informed the employer by e-mail that the applicant was no longer interested in the position (see Correll et al. 2007).

Upon completing the experiment, we collected basic information about the sampled offices using the *NALP Directory* as well as the previously described *2014 Vault Law 100* and *2014 Am Law 100* lists. Table 1, which reports basic descriptive statistics for the sample, shows that these are indeed elite employers offering jobs with high economic rewards. Two-thirds of the sampled offices belonged to firms on the *2014 Vault Law 100* list of most prestigious law firms. Similarly, two-thirds were offices of firms included in the *2014 Am Law 100* list of largest firms by revenue. The sampled offices offered an average annual starting salary (excluding

relocation expenses and annual bonuses) of $152,707 for full-time associates and paid their summer associates a weekly salary of nearly $3,000 (i.e., approximately $30,000 for a typical 10-week internship). With regard to gender diversity in these organizations, Table 1 paints a mixed picture. Consistent with national statistics, in an average office, women made up nearly half of all associates but only 20 percent of partners. Similarly, the majority of hiring attorneys in charge of associate and summer associate recruitment were men. Most offices listed contact information for a designated diversity chair or other diversity contact in their NALP profile.

As expected given the random assignment, the four treatment groups had no statistically significant differences in the average characteristics listed in Table 1. Likewise, these characteristics were uncorrelated with assignment to each treatment group. This indicates that random assignment was effective in establishing comparable treatment groups for the experiment.

Audit Study Results

Table 2 displays the main results of the experiment. Overall, the 316 applications generated 22 interview invitations, a callback rate of 6.96 percent, which is both (1) very similar to the callback rate in other résumé audits focusing on white-collar jobs (e.g., Correll et al. 2007; Tilcsik 2011), and (2) consistent with the callback rate we would expect for applicants to large law firms who are at the top of their class but do not attend super-elite law schools (Rivera 2015). The callbacks, however, were far from equally distributed among the treatment conditions. The higher-class male applicant had a callback rate of 16.25 percent, more than four times as high as the average callback rate for the other three applicants, who collectively generated just nine interview invitations from 235 applications, a callback rate of 3.83 percent. This fourfold difference is significant not only statistically ($p < .001$) but also substantively, and its magnitude is especially

Table 1. Basic Descriptive Statistics for Sampled Law Firm Offices

Variable	Percentage	Mean (SD)
Firm included on the 2014 *Vault Law 100* list	67.7	
Firm included on the 2014 *Am Law 100* list	66.1	
Office size: under 25 attorneys	16.1	
Office size: 26 to 100 attorneys	42.4	
Office size: more than 100 attorneys	41.5	
Hiring attorney is female	26.9	
Two hiring attorneys; one female	10.4	
Diversity chair/contact listed in *NALP Directory*	86.1	
Entry-level associate salary (per year)[a]		152,707 (12,917)
Summer associate salary (per week)		2,920 (312)
Proportion of female partners		.20 (.09)
Proportion of female associates		.47 (.12)

Note: N = 316 observations on all variables, except for entry-level associate salary (*n* = 298) and summer associate salary (*n* = 270); the *NALP Directory* did not provide information in all cases for these variables.
[a]Excludes possible annual performance bonuses as well as signing and relocation bonuses, which may be paid to first-year associates.

Table 2. Proportions of Applicants Receiving Interview Invitations by Gender and Social Class

	Interview Invitations / Applications	Percent Invited to Interview
Higher-class man	13/80	16.25
Higher-class woman	3/79	3.80
Lower-class man	1/78	1.28
Lower-class woman	5/79	6.33

striking when considering the fact that applicants' entire law school records and all academic and professional experiences were identical.

The regression models in Table 3 further examine the interaction between gender and social class signals. The first model displays estimated probit regression coefficients for the effect of applicant gender and social class signals, as well as their interaction, on the likelihood of receiving an interview invitation. The interaction term allows us to test whether higher-class signals increase the odds of a callback for men but not for women. The coefficient on this interaction is significant and positive and indicates that higher-class signals increased the chances of receiving a callback, but only in the case of male applicants. Indeed, although higher-class signals were associated with a small (and statistically insignificant) decrease in callbacks for women, they caused a nearly 15-percentage-point increase in callbacks for men.

Models 2 and 3 use alternative estimation techniques to address the concern that callbacks represent a relatively rare event in our data. Penalized maximum likelihood (PML) logistic regression (Firth 1993) produces unbiased estimates even in the case of small samples and very few events (Leitgöb 2013). Another method for dealing with rare binary events is exact logistic regression (King and Ryan 2002). Models 2 and 3 present estimates based on these methods, and the interaction effect remains significant across these estimation techniques. Likewise, the coefficient on the interaction was positive and significant in Model 4, a linear probability model. Across

Table 3. The Effect of Social Class Signals, Gender, and Their Interaction on the Likelihood of Receiving an Interview Invitation

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	Probit	Penalized Maximum Likelihood	Exact Logistic Regression	Linear Probability Model	Heckman[a]
Male applicant	−.704	−1.339	−1.640	−.050	−.189*
	(.404)	(.935)	(14)	(.040)	(.096)
Higher-class signals	−.247	−.478	−.534	−.025	−.117
	(.334)	(.703)	(16)	(.040)	(.098)
Male applicant × higher-class signals	1.494**	2.814*	3.035*	.175**	.461***
	(.508)	(1.124)	(13)	(.056)	(.130)
Constant	−1.528***	−2.606***		.063*	.288*
	(.212)	(.442)		(.028)	(.133)
Log pseudolikelihood	−72.25				
Penalized log likelihood		−69.59			
Wald Chi-Square (d.f.)	11.62 (3)	11.82 (3)			18.35 (3)
Model score			15.76		
Percent correctly predicted				93.0	

Note: N = 316 observations. Standard errors (or, in the case of Model 3, sufficient statistics) are in parentheses. In the probit and linear probability models, robust standard errors are clustered by city. Clustering by firm led to substantively identical conclusions.
[a]Second-stage (outcome) equation is reported; first-stage (selection) equation is described in the text but omitted from the table.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

all these models, the predicted callback rate for higher-class men was roughly four times as high as the average callback rate for the other three applicants.

For robustness, we also ran a two-stage Heckman selection model. The first-stage equation estimated the probability that a sampled law firm office would explicitly respond to our application (either with a rejection or an interview invitation) as a function of office size, inclusion on the *Vault Law 100* list or the *Am Law 100* list, and the presence of a formally designated diversity chair or contact. Larger offices were more likely to respond ($p < .05$); firms on the *Vault Law 100* list were less likely to respond ($p < .05$). The second-stage equation (Model 5) is analogous to Model 4 but corrects for offices that did not explicitly respond, treating them as censored observations. Our results remained robust under this specification: Model 5 indicates that higher-class signals led to a roughly four-fold increase in the callback rate for men but

were not associated with a significant increase in callbacks for women.

Next, given research suggesting that both the presence of diversity staff (Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006) and the sex composition of firms (Gorman 2005) influence personnel decisions, Models 6, 7, and 8 in Table 4 restrict the sample to different circumstances under which one might expect less discrimination on the basis of gender or social class signals: offices that list a diversity chair or diversity contact in the *NALP Directory* (Model 6), offices in which women make up a relatively high proportion (at least 40 percent) of associates (Model 7), and offices with an above-average proportion of female partners (Model 8). We estimated these models with PML logistic regression, given this method's desirable estimation properties in small samples. In all these models, the coefficient on the interaction between gender and social class signals remained significant, and the predicted callback rate for higher-class

men was at least 3.5 times as high as the average callback rate for the other applicants. This result was also robust to inclusion of city dummies (Model 9) and a series of other control variables (Models 10 and 11) in the unrestricted sample. Model 11, which includes the full set of controls, estimates the callback rate for higher-class men to be more than three times as high as the average callback rate for the other applicants. This model also indicates that, although having higher-class signals gives men a boost of more than 10 percentage points in callbacks, these signals do not benefit women.

SURVEY EXPERIMENT

The audit method allows us to make causal inferences about the effect of social class indicators and gender on employer decisions, but one limitation of this method is that it provides little direct insight into the mechanisms underlying observed differences in callbacks. For example, one may argue that employers simply see a higher-class social background as a job-relevant criterion and consciously screen applicants on this basis; to these employers, higher-class markers might signal better client interaction skills. However, this interpretation does not account for the class-gender interaction we find. Even if employers interpret social class background as a job-relevant criterion, this would not explain why signals of higher-class origin provide an advantage for men but not for women.

What, then, accounts for our results? Given that the way in which gatekeepers interpret multiple status characteristics is intimately intertwined with the cultural meanings associated with each characteristic (Rivera 2010), the interaction between gender and class markers might reflect different stereotypical perceptions of women and men from different social classes.

To explore these perceptions and their potential role as a mechanism behind our results, we conducted a survey experiment with a sample of U.S. lawyers.[13] Like the résumé audit study, the survey experiment used a 2 x 2 factorial design, presenting each participant with one randomly assigned vignette (i.e., one of the résumés used in the audit study). However, participants evaluated the résumés on several dimensions, rather than just making a single binary callback decision (see Benard and Correll 2010; Correll et al. 2007).

Our sample consisted of 210 practicing lawyers in the United States (52.4 percent male; mean age = 47.8 years). We recruited participants through a professional survey firm, which identified and screened participants and paid them for their time.[14] Respondents were from 38 states and the District of Columbia; the states with the highest number of participants were California (14.3 percent), New York (10.5 percent), and Illinois (8.1 percent). Most participants (86.2 percent) identified as white, 4.3 percent identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.8 percent as multiracial, 3.3 percent as black, and 2.4 percent as Hispanic. Roughly 46 percent of respondents (*n* = 97) worked at a law firm at the time of the survey; others held general counsel or other in-house roles at business corporations (*n* = 44), practiced law as a solo practitioner (*n* = 41), or worked for the government or in the judiciary (*n* = 28). Respondents who worked at a law firm included partners (*n* = 30), associates (*n* = 36), senior associates (*n* = 10), and various attorneys (*n* = 21), including senior and managing attorneys, staff attorneys, and "of counsel" attorneys. In total, 58.1 percent of all participants had full-time experience working at a law firm. As we note below, our results remain similar when adjusting for respondents' law firm experience and demographic characteristics.

Participants were told they would evaluate a résumé that belonged to an actual law school student who had applied to a summer associate position at a large law firm based in Washington, DC. In an online survey, each participant evaluated one randomly assigned résumé from the set we used for the audit experiment in Washington, DC. After reviewing the résumé, participants rated the applicant on several dimensions.

Table 4. Penalized Maximum Likelihood Estimation of the Effect of Social Class Signals, Gender, and Their Interaction on the Likelihood of Receiving an Interview Invitation

	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Sample Restriction:	Firms with Diversity Chair/Contact	> 40% Female Associates	> 20% Female Partners	None	None	None[a]
Male applicant	−1.006	−1.132	−1.068	−1.511	−1.526	−1.652
	(.959)	(.960)	(.998)	(.946)	(.960)	(1.027)
Higher-class signals	−.588	−.251	−.496	−.646	−.686	−.551
	(.807)	(.736)	(.855)	(.727)	(.745)	(.760)
Male applicant × higher-class signals	2.852*	2.318*	2.613*	2.991**	3.197**	3.016*
	(1.194)	(1.157)	(1.245)	(1.149)	(1.215)	(1.332)
Proportion of female partners					−1.605	−1.326
					(3.742)	(3.987)
Proportion of female associates					1.913	3.423
					(2.578)	(2.834)
Hiring attorney is female					−.339	−.389
					(.580)	(.622)
Two hiring attorneys; one female					.290	.278
					(.719)	(.736)
Firm on *Vault Law* 100 list					−.393	.067
					(1.061)	(1.153)
Firm on *Am Law* 100 list					1.203	1.242
					(1.110)	(1.206)
Office size: under 25 attorneys					−1.248	−1.004
					(1.053)	(1.157)
Office size: 26 to 100 attorneys					.271	.012
					(.573)	(.589)
Firm has diversity chair/contact					−.367	−1.140
					(.802)	(.886)
Entry-level associate salary						.000
						(.000)
Summer associate salary						−.001
						(.001)
Constant	−2.708***	−2.582***	−2.449***	−3.272*	−4.274	−4.373
	(.487)	(.489)	(.557)	(1.501)	(2.584)	(8.321)
City dummies	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Penalized log likelihood	−60.80	−57.35	−45.10	−58.75	−53.39	−32.04
Wald Chi-Square (d.f.)	13.43 (3)	7.92 (3)	8.75 (3)	25.30 (16)	25.68 (25)	21.10 (27)
Observations	272	251	190	316	316	268

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Analogous probit models, exact logistic regressions, linear probability models, and Heckman selection models led to substantively identical conclusions.
[a]We imposed no sample restrictions on this model, but the lack of *NALP* data on entry-level and summer associate salaries for some offices reduced the number of observations to 268.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

First, participants rated the focal applicant on two basic dimensions of social judgment: competence and warmth (Benard and Correll 2010; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2006; Fiske et al. 2002). To measure competence, we asked participants to indicate on seven-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely) the extent to which they believed the applicant was competent, confident, capable, efficient, intelligent, and skillful (Fiske et al. 2002). We averaged these six items into a composite measure of *competence* ($\alpha = .93$). Likewise, participants rated the extent to which they viewed the applicant as friendly, well-intentioned, trustworthy, warm, good-natured, and sincere (Fiske et al. 2002). We averaged these items to create a composite measure of *warmth* ($\alpha = .93$).

Second, given that conformity to gendered expectations may affect interpersonal evaluations (see Heilman 2001), we asked participants to assess how masculine and how feminine the applicant seemed to them, using one item for *masculinity* and one item for *femininity* (see Wilkins, Chan, and Kaiser 2011).

Third, participants evaluated how committed applicants would be to their work and career in law. We used five items for this purpose, asking participants to rate the applicant's willingness (1) to put in the long hours that a job at a large law firm demands, (2) to work hard and long hours, and (3) to sacrifice family and leisure time for work. We also asked participants to rate the applicant's (4) work ethic and (5) commitment to building a long-term career at a law firm.[15] We averaged these items to form a composite measure of *commitment* ($\alpha = .91$).

Fourth, participants rated applicants on their level of *fit*, or compatibility, with the culture and clientele of a large law firm (see Rivera 2012). We asked participants to indicate the extent to which applicants (1) would fit with the culture of a large law firm, (2) would be able to work well with experienced lawyers and partners at a large law firm, (3) were ready to represent corporate clients, (4) were able to conduct themselves professionally in front of clients, (5) would be perceived by clients as trustworthy and professional, (6) would get along with corporate clients and executives, and (7) had the necessary oral and written skills to communicate effectively with clients ($\alpha = .90$).[16]

Finally, participants were told that only a portion of applicants could be interviewed for summer associate positions. We then asked them to indicate the extent to which they would recommend that the applicant be interviewed (1 = would definitely not recommend, 7 = would definitely recommend) and the reason for their recommendation as an open-ended response.

As a manipulation check, we also asked participants to indicate their perception of the candidate's class background, race, parental status, and sexual orientation, using the same items we used for our pretest before the audit study. As intended, participants perceived résumés in the higher-class conditions as more likely to belong to a person from a wealthy family, and résumés in the lower-class conditions as more likely to belong to a person from a working-class background. There were no significant differences in the perception of race, parental status, or sexual orientation between the conditions. As in our pretests, all four applicants were seen as unlikely to be a parent, a member of a racial minority group, or gay or lesbian.

Survey Experiment Results

Table 5 displays mean values of the measures for each applicant and mean differences between the higher-class male applicant and each of the other applicants. Consistent with the audit results, the top row of Table 5 shows that participants gave a significantly stronger ($p < .05$) interview recommendation to the higher-class man (mean = 6.06) than to the higher-class woman (mean = 5.65), the lower-class woman (mean = 5.60), and the lower-class man (mean = 5.55). In addition, Table 6 displays OLS models predicting interview recommendations as a function of applicant and respondent characteristics for three different samples: all respondents (Model 12),

Table 5. Means and Mean Differences of Applicant Ratings by Applicant Class and Gender

	Means				Mean Differences		
	Higher-Class Man (HM)	Higher-Class Woman (HW)	Lower-Class Woman (LW)	Lower-Class Man (LM)	HM – HW	HM – LW	HM – LM
Recommend interview							
Mean/Mean difference	6.06	5.65	5.60	5.55	.41*	.47*	.52*
SD/SE	.89	1.06	1.11	1.12	.19	.20	.20
Competence							
Mean/Mean difference	5.70	5.52	5.52	5.58	.18	.18	.13
SD/SE	.88	.91	1.18	1.00	.18	.21	.19
Warmth							
Mean/Mean difference	4.78	5.15	5.01	4.89	-.36	-.23	-.11
SD/SE	1.10	.88	1.07	.89	.20	.22	.20
Masculinity							
Mean/Mean difference	5.23	3.42	3.19	5.25	1.81***	2.04***	-.03
SD/SE	.90	1.56	1.51	1.02	.26	.25	.19
Femininity							
Mean/Mean difference	3.02	4.53	4.50	2.95	-1.51***	-1.48***	.08
SD/SE	1.59	1.10	1.31	1.39	.27	.29	.29
Commitment							
Mean/Mean difference	5.20	4.80	5.32	5.13	.40*	-.12	.07
SD/SE	.97	1.07	1.13	1.04	.20	.21	.20
Fit							
Mean/Mean difference	5.48	5.28	4.87	5.01	.20	.61***	.47**
SD/SE	.71	.94	.99	.88	.17	.17	.16

Note: N = 210 observations (n = 48 for HM, n = 55 for HW, n = 52 for LW, and n = 55 for LM).
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests).

Table 6. OLS Models Predicting the Strength of Interview Recommendations in the Survey Experiment

	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14
		Respondents Who Have Ever Worked at a Law Firm	Respondents Currently at a Law Firm
Sample Restriction:	None		
Applicant Characteristics			
Male applicant	−.176	−.561*	−.532
	(.228)	(.269)	(.297)
Higher-class signals	−.027	−.280	−.236
	(.225)	(.305)	(.329)
Male applicant × higher-class signals	.627*	.983*	1.113*
	(.318)	(.401)	(.443)
Survey Respondent Characteristics			
Respondent age	.008	−.004	−.002
	(.008)	(.009)	(.010)
Male respondent	.095	.177	.189
	(.173)	(.216)	(.229)
Respondent has worked at law firm	.191		
	(.289)		
Race dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current position dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current organization dummies	Yes	Yes	No
Constant	6.064***	6.947***	4.875***
	(1.215)	(1.372)	(1.046)
R-squared	.20	.27	.29
Observations	210	122	97

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

only respondents with full-time experience at a law firm (Model 13), and only respondents currently at a law firm (Model 14). As in the audit study, there was a significant interaction between applicant gender and social class signals in all these models.

The other measures in Table 5 provide insight into potential mechanisms underlying this effect. First, participants did not see the higher-class male candidate as significantly more competent or warm than any other candidate. This suggests that these two basic dimensions of social judgment (Fiske et al. 2006) do not drive the differences in interview recommendations. Second, within-gender differences in perceived masculinity and femininity were not statistically significant. Thus, class-based differences in perceived

masculinity and femininity do not appear to explain the differential patterns in recommendations for interview invitations. Overall, we find little evidence that differences in basic dimensions of person perception—competence, warmth, masculinity, and femininity—lie behind the differences in overall evaluative outcomes.

In contrast, on dimensions specifically relevant to working at a large law firm—commitment and fit—the data indicate clearer divergence across conditions. As Table 5 shows, participants saw the higher-class man as significantly more committed than the higher-class woman to working and building a career at a law firm. Indeed, they also saw the higher-class woman as significantly less committed than the lower-class woman (*t* =

2.47, $p < .05$). In addition, participants rated the higher-class man above the two lower-class applicants on fit, suggesting that he was perceived as more compatible with the culture and clients of a large law firm. Finally, the higher-class man did not differ significantly from the higher-class woman in ratings of fit, and he did not differ significantly from either lower-class applicant in ratings of commitment.

Overall, relative to the higher-class man, the higher-class woman was seen as less committed to a demanding career in law, and lower-class candidates were perceived as less compatible with the culture and clients of large law firms. These results remained substantively unchanged when we adjusted for respondents' law firm experience (i.e., whether they currently work or previously worked at a law firm) and demographic characteristics (age, gender, and race) to calculate adjusted (least-squares) means of commitment, fit, and interview recommendation for each condition. On commitment, the higher-class man (adjusted mean = 5.20, SE = .15) scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the higher-class woman (adjusted mean = 4.80, SE = .14). On fit, the higher-class man (adjusted mean = 5.47, SE = .13) was rated significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the lower-class man (adjusted mean = 5.02, SE = .12) and the lower-class woman (adjusted mean = 4.89, SE = .12). The size of these differences in the means between conditions also remained substantively unchanged when we restricted the sample to respondents with law firm experience. In addition, to test for potential gender homophily in evaluations (Gorman 2005), we ran an OLS model in which we interacted respondent gender with each experimental condition to predict interview recommendations, but we could not reject the null hypothesis that male and female respondents gave similar ratings.

Next, we explored whether the different perceptions of commitment and fit indeed served as a mechanism for the differences in interview recommendations. To do so, we used structural equation modeling to examine whether the commitment and fit ratings

mediated the higher-class male advantage in interview recommendations. We fit a structural equation model in which signals of social class background could affect interview recommendations both directly and indirectly (i.e., by influencing the latent variables of fit and commitment), and then conducted group analyses to test whether the relationships in this model differed by the applicant's gender.

As a first step, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and found that both the seven-item fit scale (CFI = .994, RMSEA = .075, SRMR = .015) and the five-item commitment scale (CFI = .990, RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .022) showed good psychometric properties. In addition, we found no evidence to suggest that the factor loadings for fit or for commitment varied by the sex of the evaluated candidate (Chen 2007). We then fit the above-described structural equation model examining the relationships between a candidate's social class signals and the strength of interview recommendations. The relative chi-square (or normed chi-square) index was 2.90, indicating acceptable model fit (Schumacker and Lomax 2004; Wheaton et al. 1977). Figure 3 separately displays results of this model for male and female candidates.

Several important patterns were common across male and female job applicants. First, for both male and female candidates, the coefficient on the direct link between social class signals and the strength of the interview recommendation was not statistically significant. The size of the coefficient on this direct link also did not differ significantly between male and female applicants ($z = .87$). Second, in both cases we found a significant positive relationship between perceived fit and interview recommendations, and between perceived commitment and interview recommendations. That is, unsurprisingly, candidates who were seen as better fits with the culture and clientele of a law firm and more committed to a career at a law firm received stronger recommendations for an interview. Third, across gender categories, displaying higher-class markers was positively related to perceived applicant fit, so higher-class signals had an indirect positive effect on interview

recommendations through their effect on fit. This indirect effect through fit was statistically significant for both male ($b = .38$, SE = .13, $p < .01$) and female ($b = .20$, SE = .10, $p < .05$) candidates, and the size of this indirect effect did not vary significantly between men and women ($z = 1.26$).

At the same time, we found some crucial differences by applicant gender. Higher-class signals were not significantly related to perceived commitment in the male condition, but they were associated with lower perceived commitment in the female condition. Thus, by lowering perceived commitment, the presence of higher-class signals had a negative indirect effect on interview recommendations for female candidates ($b = -.17$, SE = .08, $p < .05$), but class signals had no effect on interview recommendations through perceived commitment for male applicants ($b = .00$, SE = .05). The gender difference in this indirect (mediated) effect was statistically significant ($z = 2.11$, $p < .05$).

For male candidates, higher-class signals had no effect on interview recommendations through perceived commitment, but they had a positive effect through higher perceived fit. Thus, in the male condition, the total indirect effect of higher-class signals on interview recommendations—through fit and commitment—was positive ($b = .37$, SE = .14, $p < .01$). For female applicants, higher-class signals had a positive effect on interview recommendations through higher perceived fit, but they also had a simultaneous negative effect on interview recommendations by lowering perceived commitment. This commitment penalty for higher-class women, in turn, offset the higher-class advantage that resulted from greater perceived fit. Thus, in the female condition, the total indirect effect of higher-class signals on interview recommendations—through fit and commitment—was indistinguishable from zero ($b_{indirect} = .03$, SE = .14) and significantly smaller ($z = 2.10$, $p < .05$) than the total indirect effect of higher-class signals in the male condition. Consequently, higher-class signals had a positive overall effect on interview recommendations only in the case of male applicants.

In summary, our survey experiment suggests that the observed higher-class advantages are due at least partially to perceptions of enhanced fit. Unlike higher-class men, however, higher-class women do not receive a corresponding net boost in evaluations, because perceptions of lower commitment to full-time, intensive work result in a class-based commitment penalty for these women.

As a final step, we examined survey participants' responses to the open-ended question asking why they recommended, or did not recommend, that the job applicant be interviewed. Most responses provided broad, generic reasons (e.g., "Education is solid, plus he has some good experiences"). Roughly a quarter of the responses, however, included more specific justifications. We coded these responses by inductively identifying different categories of reasons for and against interviewing applicants (e.g., academic performance, extracurricular experience, work experience, work ethic, and fit). We then organized the resulting codes by experimental condition, which revealed the most commonly cited strengths and weaknesses for each combination of gender and social class signals, which we summarize in Figure 4, along with illustrative quotations.

Consistent with our quantitative findings, respondents saw few specific weaknesses in higher-class men, most often expressing their uncertainty about these candidates' personality—a concern that, rather than necessarily undermining an applicant's chances, might actually make it important to have an in-person interview. Although respondents praised both higher-class men and women for their fit, they questioned higher-class women's commitment. Conversely, while they praised the work ethic of both lower-class men and women, they questioned their fit. Indeed, some even steered lower-class applicants to less prestigious sectors within the legal profession, including government and public sector work, types of employment that historically have been more diverse than law firms in terms of class, gender, and race (Heinz et al. 2005).

Male Applicants
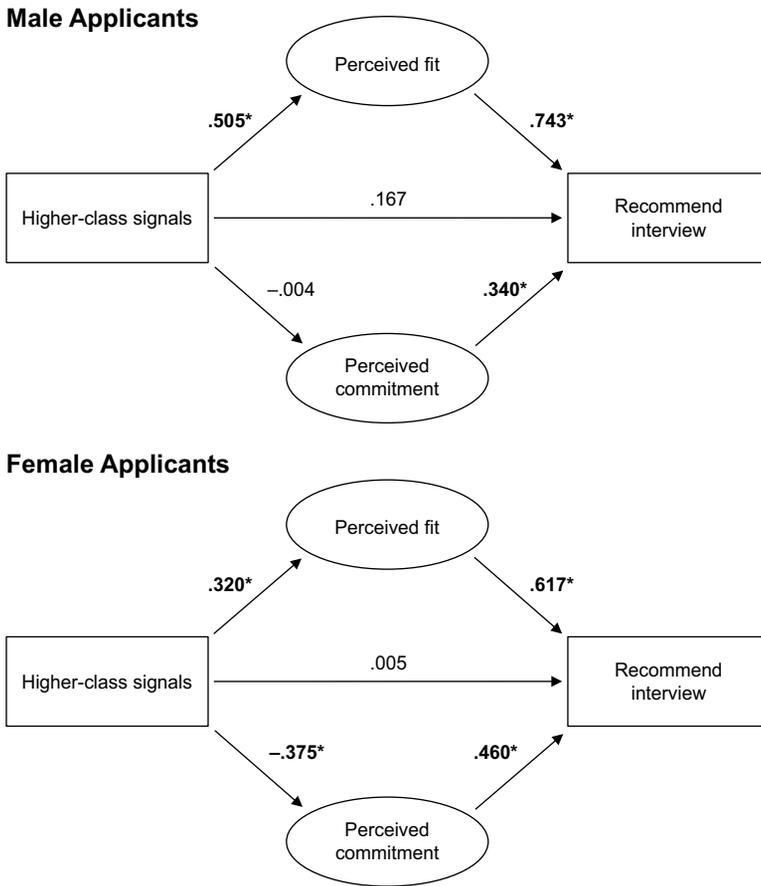
Female Applicants

Figure 3. Structural Equation Models of Social Class Signals and Interview Recommendations for Male and Female Applicants in the Survey Experiment
Note: Directly observed (manifest) variables are depicted as rectangles; latent factors are depicted as ovals. As described in the text, the latent variable for perceived fit is based on a seven-item scale, and the latent variable for perceived commitment is based on a five-item scale. Path coefficients are unstandardized. Chi-square = 475.4 (d.f. = 164); relative chi-square = 2.90.
*$p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

INTERVIEWS

To gain additional insights into the mechanisms driving our audit results, we interviewed 20 attorneys who had direct experience with hiring at large law firms in our audit study sample. We recruited participants through multi-sited referral chains, a method appropriate for studying elites (Hirsch 1995; Ostrander 1993). Interviews were semistructured and typically lasted approximately 20 to 35 minutes. We conducted all interviews via telephone and transcribed them word-for-word when participants consented.

For additional details about our interview sample, see Appendix Table A1. We replaced all respondents' names with pseudonyms to protect their identities.

During interviews, we presented participants with one of the four résumés used in the audit study. We distributed the résumés randomly but evenly, so that the same number of participants reviewed each applicant. We first asked attorneys to talk through the assigned résumé aloud, discussing their overall impressions of the candidate. We then followed up with targeted probes aimed at tapping six of the main dimensions included in our survey

		Social Class Signals	
		Higher	**Lower**
Gender	**Male**	**Strength:** *Academic performance and extracurricular experiences* "This applicant would be a very strong candidate at my firm. Although his law school and college are not the highest, his very high rank in class suggests that he is capable of high-level work. My firm has a maritime orientation and sailing will also serve him well interpersonally here." **Weakness:** *Uncertainty about personality* "While the credentials look good, especially the fact that he's in 1% of his class, the résumé is relatively boring. I may recommend an interview based on credentials but unless he has more personality in the interview, I am unsure whether I would recommend him for hire."	**Strength:** *Work ethic* "Dedication, works hard in job and school." "Appears to have a dedicated interest in practicing law and is hard-working and experienced." **Weakness:** *Unfit for large law firm* "Appears more suited for government agency than complex corporate world." "Seems very well qualified, but most experience is in the public sector—may have difficulty acclimating to the culture of private practice."
	Female	**Strength:** *Academic performance and professional experiences* "Excellent academic credentials and some real-world work experience." "Her experience at the USAO, where I happened to work. Means she's used to a fast pace and lots of responsibility. So does the Teach for America job." **Weakness:** *Lack of motivation/perseverance* "The interest in sailing and polo give me pause, as they imply that this applicant comes from a wealthy background and therefore may have been protected from the necessity to overcome obstacles." "Not sure whether applicant would stay a long time."	**Strength:** *Work ethic* "Summa and PBK while a varsity athlete; top of class and law review. Less-than-privileged background yields a great work ethic." "Strong résumé in my opinion. Top 1% of class and law review indicates willingness to grind and work hard." **Weakness:** *Unfit for large law firm* "Interests seem to be more towards public service, criminal law, etc." "Seems intelligent—might be a good fit. Has a lot of public service interests though."

Figure 4. Commonly Cited Strengths and Weaknesses of Job Applicants in the Survey Experiment, by Experimental Condition

experiment: the applicant's level of competence, commitment, fit, polish, warmth, and work ethic. Next, we described our general audit findings to participants—that signals of higher social class helped male but not female applicants—and observed their spontaneous reactions. Finally, we asked participants to reflect on their experiences regarding social class and gender in their workplaces. We coded transcripts for criteria and mechanisms

of candidate evaluation and quantified the frequency of codes using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.

Overall, the evaluations of all four applicants were quite positive. Nearly all interviewees mentioned that, despite the applicants having attended a second-tier law school, the candidates' high grades combined with membership in law review assuaged concerns about their ability to perform the work required by the job in a competent manner.

However, there were subtle differences in how respondents perceived applicants' personal and interpersonal qualities. Consistent with the findings of our survey experiment, they perceived the higher-class candidates as a better fit with their firm's culture and clientele. Gene remarked that the higher-class female "would fit in very well. . . . Polo, sailing, classical music . . . she has outdoor interests and outside interests that help her talk to people. . . . Those types of experiences really serve people well." Similarly, Mark said of the higher-class man: "If you look at the interests, it's classic cultural capital. It would help with being around people who [*he pauses*] work hard." Conversely, respondents expressed greater skepticism about the lower-class candidates, specifically their client appeal. Betsy believed the lower-class woman would be "immature on the phone" and would not convey to clients that "these are my ideas and they're worth listening to." Likewise, Ivan said of the lower-class man, "there may be a concern about skills in interacting with clients and partners and being polished."

The majority of attorneys we interviewed attributed greater fit or polish to higher-class candidates, but three lawyers in our sample did not. These individuals, who worked at firms they spontaneously described as having "outcast," "street smart," or "working-class" cultures, believed that coming from a privileged background could be a liability in winning the favor of partners in their firms who themselves came from more modest backgrounds. As such, the value of higher-class signals in hiring may vary not only by applicants' gender but also by a firm's culture and

its members' typical class background (see Rivera 2012).

Yet by far the most striking difference was how our respondents described the commitment level of the higher-class woman versus other applicants. Almost all believed she, unlike other candidates, might be an attrition risk. John expressed concerns about her commitment to legal practice:

> Does this person really want to be a lawyer? Did this person go to law school as a default or because they couldn't think of anything else to do? People who go to law school as a default or don't really think about the law as in terms of *practicing* are the most vulnerable to leaving the profession. And particularly in a firm environment—it's a difficult environment—you have to really want to do it, even if you're gonna last just a couple years.

More commonly, respondents worried that the higher-class woman might leave paid employment entirely. Viewing her through stereotypes of marriage and family, they described her as potentially "looking for a husband" or "biding time" until she would leave the law to "become a stay-at-home mom." Respondents had a very different reaction to the lower-class woman, whose commitment they did not question. They believed she was "hungry," and, unlike the higher-class female, would "work hard for the money" over many years because she had "law school debt to pay" and would have "mouths to feed."

In fact, when we told participants about the main finding from our audit study, the most common reaction was to spontaneously mention a bias against higher-class women, which many (but not all) had personally observed in their firms.[17] Some, like Betsy, described this bias in terms of general societal expectations of affluent men and women:

> An upper-class man is always going to be working. He's always gonna stay in the workforce, and chances are he's well

connected, and that might be a good person to have at your firm. But an extremely upper-class woman, she might have all of the sort of like entitled asshole issues the guy does, plus you add in the fact that she might not take the job that seriously. . . . There's not the same societal pressure on women to work and to have some sort of high-earning job.

Others described how the intensive, all-consuming nature of work in law firms exacerbated such class-based stereotypes of women's labor force participation. Bob, for example, mentioned how women from privileged social backgrounds, who were not reliant on a law firm for income, might be less committed to the grueling lifestyle of large law firms:

> This is the question we always ask ourselves, really. Why would you do this job if you didn't have to, right? Like if you had another option, if you could do anything, if you could live the lifestyle that this job provides but you didn't actually have to put in the work involved, I'm not sure that *I* would do it. And so I think people look at women from affluent backgrounds or classes—if they come from money or if they're marrying into money—because they already live in that strata [*sic*] and ask that question.

Outside resources, combined with expectations of intensive mothering among privileged women (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003), contributed to a perception among some decision-makers that hiring a higher-class woman was not always worth the risk. Joy described a negative perception of higher-class women she observed while working on her firm's hiring committee: "There's . . . a sense that these women don't really need this job. 'Cause they have enough money or they are married to somebody rich and they should be, you know, they're going to end up being a helicopter mom. They're eventually going to leave law." Adam expressed a similar sentiment:

> [With] a female associate from a privileged background, there is an unspoken concern—which is not good—that they may go off track. And leave the firm. Or pursue other interests. Or perhaps a family focus or what have you. . . . With unhealthy 100-hour weeks, you can see why that concern is prevalent. Those types of expectations, people assume that women will bow out of them. . . . If you come from a more privileged background, that optionality is of a greater concern. . . . I don't think it's active. It's unspoken, but I think it's very prevalent. Let's say you're building a team at a law firm, and you're not supposed to be thinking along those lines, but I think there is an ever-present thought at the associate level that you're concerned, "Are they going to be sticking around?"

It is important to note that levels of attrition across both genders in law firms are high; most associates will leave their first jobs within two to four years of being hired. Even though higher-class men also have outside resources and have high levels of attrition (Dinovitzer and Garth 2007), they were not perceived as flight risks. Likewise, lower-class women seemed immune to such attributions because respondents believed they had law school debt and, in Kurt's words, "had no other options" but to keep working.

Moreover, although participants frequently viewed the higher-class woman through stereotypes of motherhood, which portray mothers as less reliable and committed to work (Correll et al. 2007), and explicitly described "family" as one reason the applicant might leave the firm, recall that our pretest of the résumés and the manipulation checks for our survey experiment revealed that evaluators did not believe any of the applicants—including the higher-class woman—were actually parents. This suggests that, for women, coming from a higher-class background may trigger negative stereotypes associated with motherhood irrespective of actual parental status. In effect, these elite employers may be engaging in a form of anticipatory sorting (Fernandez-Mateo and King 2011) in which they discriminate against higher-class—but not lower-class—women for their potential to

become mothers rather than their actual motherhood status.

DISCUSSION

Via a résumé audit conducted with the largest law firms in the United States, we find that men who display markers of higher social class are significantly more likely than other candidates to be invited to interview for top law firm jobs, which offer salaries three to six times higher than other types of employment available to recent law school graduates and catapult students to the very top of the nation's income distribution and "the legal 1 percent." The effects of social class signals, however, vary markedly by gender. At least for students outside top-tier schools, higher-class signals advantage men but not women in entering the legal elite. It appears that even though law firms have become more open demographically over the past 50 years (Heinz et al. 2005), the higher-class male advantage in employment (Smigel 1964) endures, at least for applicants outside the most elite law schools.

Our survey experiment and interviews provide some insight into the sources of this advantage. Evaluators in our survey experiment saw higher-class applicants as significantly better fits than lower-class candidates with the elite culture and clientele of large law firms, even though law school records, professional experiences, and undergraduate academic achievements were identical across all applicants. This is in line with prior qualitative research (Rivera 2012). However, although higher-class men received a corresponding advantage in overall evaluations, higher-class women did not. Relative to higher-class men and even lower-class women, higher-class women were seen as less committed to work and hence less likely to conform to the model of the "ideal worker" (Acker 1990) typically expected in intense, all or nothing occupations.

These findings are consistent with the notion that the stratifying power of demographic characteristics in the workplace is related to the relative match between the cultural meanings people attribute to a given characteristic and the perceptions of desirable workers in a particular context (Turco 2010). In law firms, especially during the associate years, work is extremely time-intensive, attrition is high, and employers tend to seek new hires they believe will display total devotion to work. Consistent with gendered schemas of work devotion (Blair-Loy 2003) and norms of intensive mothering among socioeconomically privileged families (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003), evaluators perceived women who displayed higher-class signals as less committed to work than either higher-class men or lower-class women. Qualitative findings from our survey experiment and interviews suggest that employers may view higher-class (but not lower-class) women through negative stereotypes of intensive motherhood (Correll et al. 2007), regardless of their actual parental status. In this respect, employers seem to be engaging in a form of anticipatory discrimination, in which they penalize higher-class women, not for their actual family arrangements or external commitments, as prior researchers have demonstrated (Blair-Loy 2003; Munsch, Ridgeway, and Williams 2014), but for their potential ones.

Implications

Our findings contribute to a robust literature on demographic inequalities within the sociology of law by highlighting the persistent role that social class signals play in accessing the profession's most lucrative and prestigious segments. Our study goes beyond previous research on social class in legal careers by providing direct evidence that employers discriminate based on social class signals when making hiring decisions; this is net of any self-selection into (or out of) these careers. Given the large salary differentials between these jobs and other types of legal employment, and the fact that these jobs serve as stepping stones to other elite positions, such as judicial and political roles, these findings have implications not only for the distribution of economic resources within the profession but also for differential access to

broader symbolic and political power in society.

We conducted our study within the legal profession, but its implications inform broader sociological understandings of how employers hire. Sociologists typically conceptualize employer hiring as stemming from estimates of applicants' educational and professional qualifications, social capital, sex, and race (Pager and Shepherd 2008). A burgeoning body of literature, however, shows that discrimination is not limited to sex and race, but also occurs on the basis of other status characteristics (Berger et al. 1977; Ridgeway 2006), including sexual orientation and parental status (Correll et al. 2007; Tilcsik 2011).

Our study empirically demonstrates that social class signals constitute a powerful basis of candidate evaluation and employment discrimination. Although qualitative studies have shown that elite gatekeepers are biased toward admitting other elites (Ho 2009; Rivera 2015; Stevens 2007), quantitative hiring research typically assumes that social class of origin, when relevant at all, affects employment outcomes indirectly via education or qualifications (see Farkas 1996). Moreover, field experimental research in the United Kingdom has highlighted the role of social class signals in hiring (Jackson 2009), but it has not conclusively established the independent effect of such signals net of educational credentials. Our study is the first to demonstrate that elite employers directly discriminate based on applicants' social class signals, holding constant the effect of academic and professional qualifications and the influence of other evaluative mechanisms and processes.

Likewise, a rich body of literature documents gender biases in professional careers (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Williams 2010), but ours is the first to reveal a potent interaction between gender and signals of social class origin in hiring for high-status jobs. Furthermore, prior research demonstrates that employers penalize mothers and other employees who seek flexible work arrangements (e.g., Blair-Loy and Wharton 2004; Correll at al. 2007; Munsch et al. 2014), but

we show that evaluations of women's work devotion vary by women's perceived social class of origin. The higher-class female applicant in our study was not perceived as a mother and did not provide any evidence of actively seeking flexible work arrangements. Yet, employers largely evaluated her through the stigma of potential (intensive) motherhood. Future research should investigate this type of anticipatory discrimination and such pre-motherhood penalties in further depth.[18]

Finally, and most broadly, we illuminate labor market discrimination as a mechanism that produces and maintains social class advantages beyond the realm of formal schooling. In particular, our research calls attention to the importance of understanding the interplay between social class and gender in studies of workplace inequalities and social stratification (McCall 2001; Williams 2010). Most studies of hiring inequalities examine the effect of one status characteristic in isolation from others. However, individuals possess multiple status characteristics, which may overlap or conflict with one another, and can influence interpersonal evaluations in unexpected or counterintuitive ways (Pedulla 2014; for a review, see Wagner and Berger 1993). Indeed, we show that the very same state of a status characteristic—being perceived as higher-class—is associated with high expectations and favorable labor market outcomes for one group (men), but is devalued and associated with lower expectations and unfavorable outcomes for another group (women). This, it appears, is due largely to different cultural meanings evaluators attribute to subgroups of employees *within* a given demographic group (i.e., higher-class applicants). Overall, our findings suggest that understanding how different constellations of status characteristics shape labor market outcomes is critical for understanding economic inequalities.

Boundary Conditions

The boundary conditions of our study point to fruitful avenues for future research. We studied class discrimination in one prestigious,

high-wage labor market. It is important to note that the extent of discrimination based on social class signals—as well as its interaction with gender—may vary in other employment settings. This labor market is highly selective. Given that discrimination tends to increase as the ratio of applicants to jobs increases (Fernandez 2014), discrimination based on social class signals and the gender interactions we find may be tempered in less competitive labor markets. Moreover, one may find different effects in hiring for blue-collar or nonprofessional jobs. Employers hiring for blue-collar jobs may place more emphasis on signals of diligence, reliability, and honesty, which may be associated with working-class rather than higher-class origins (Lamont 2000). One also may see different class or gender effects in stereotypically feminine roles or occupations.

Variation *within* the law firm market is also possible. Our applicants applied to firms directly rather than through on-campus recruiting. In the latter, law firms designate lists of schools with which they have established relationships and assign a specific number of interviews and offer slots to students at each school. Firms typically do not designate interview or offer quotas for students from selective but non-elite schools. Instead, firms make interview and job offers on an ad hoc basis and apply a higher evaluative standard for applicants from such schools (Rivera 2015). Given the aforementioned relationship between selectivity and discrimination, the extent of class discrimination or the commitment penalty we find may be greater in our sample than for law students who apply via on-campus recruiting.

Furthermore, discrimination is more likely to occur when applicant quality is difficult to discern or ambiguous (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000). Consequently, class discrimination may be greater for applicants such as ours, who have the highest grades but at less elite schools, than for applicants from elite schools, because employers may face more uncertainty about their quality. Thus, we may see less class discrimination or less of a

class-gender interaction among graduates of elite law schools. More cynically, employers may have less of a need to engage in class discrimination at these schools given the strong association between upper-class origins and attendance at top law schools, where over half of students come from families in the top 10 percent of household incomes (Fisher 2012).

Finally, our study captures discrimination by employers only at the point of application. Individuals from lower-class backgrounds might self-select out of these jobs, seeking employment in organizations with a stronger social mission or more diverse employee population. However, the converse could also be true. Given the high cost of law school tuition, individuals from less privileged backgrounds may apply to these jobs at higher rates due to greater amounts of student debt and the extremely large salaries offered by these firms. We know of no empirical studies systematically examining rates of application to large law firms by student social class. With respect to gender, women participate in summer associate programs in line with their representation in law schools nationally (American Bar Association 2014). Therefore, we have little reason to believe that women select out of the types of jobs studied here or, conversely, that employers need to apply harsher standards to female applicants at the point of summer associate hiring to match the demographic composition of law schools. It is possible that, among people who are hired, higher-class women leave large law firms at higher rates than do other groups of workers. If this was the case, one could argue that employers are behaving rationally by penalizing these women in evaluation. We know of no systematic studies of the relationship between social class of origin, gender, and attrition in large law firms. However, high levels of attrition in these organizations are not unique to women and are common across all demographic groups (Dinovitzer and Garth 2007).[19] Furthermore, despite the popularity of "opting out" narratives among professional women, affluent and highly educated

women are actually *more* likely than working-class women to remain in the labor force (Damaske 2011). Nevertheless, future research should examine how gender and social class combine to shape career outcomes after the point of hire.

Conclusion

Despite myths of a classless society, social class of origin plays an enduring role in shaping individuals' life chances and economic trajectories. This article advances the study of social class signals in the United States beyond the realm of formal schooling to employment. Through a randomized field experiment, we provide the first empirical demonstration that elite U.S. employers indeed discriminate—albeit unevenly between the sexes—by applicants' social class signals. When hiring for top jobs, employers consider not only applicants' human and social capital, gender, and race, but also class markers found on their résumés. However, the meanings employers attribute to social class signals vary based on applicants' gender. Although men benefit from signals of a higher social class background, higher-class women's class advantages are negated by a commitment penalty. Together, the interaction of social class signals and gender can powerfully affect the distribution of labor market opportunities at the top of the U.S. economic ladder.

APPENDIX

Table A1. Characteristics of Interview Respondents from Large Law Firms

ID	Sex	Race	Pseudonym
1	Male	White	Adam
2	Female	Asian/Asian American (East Asian)	Amy
3	Female	White	Betsy
4	Male	White	Bob
5	Female	White	Cassidy
6	Female	White	Catherine
7	Male	White	Dan
8	Female	Asian/Asian American (East Asian)	Edith
9	Female	White	Fiona
10	Male	White	Gene
11	Male	White	Ivan
12	Male	White	John
13	Female	White	Joy
14	Male	White	Kurt
15	Male	White	Luke
16	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Mark
17	Female	White	Melissa
18	Male	White	Stuart
19	Female	White	Susan
20	Male	Asian/Asian American (South Asian)	Thiru

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Notes

1. Studies of racial bias in hiring for low-wage jobs sometimes point to aspects of racial bias that intersect with class, but little research focuses explicitly on social class signals as a source of employment discrimination, particularly in prestigious, high-wage labor markets.

2. However, an employer could open itself up to discrimination lawsuits if discrimination on the basis of class resulted in a disparate impact on protected classes, such as race, sex, nationality, religion, disability status, and (in some states and for some jobs) sexual orientation.

3. To clarify, our purpose here is not to resolve debates about how best to measure social class, but rather to test whether employers discriminate on the basis of social class signals.

4. Williams (2010) and Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl (2013) discuss variations in work commitment between higher- and lower-status *occupations*, but extant research has not examined how signals of social class origin that *individuals* display affect perceptions of their career commitment.

5. Most large law firms make their offer rates (i.e., the percent of summer associates who receive full-time offers) public. As a result, firms are under social pressure from law students to keep these percentages high to maintain an image of being a desirable place to work (see Rivera 2015).

6. If no law school fit our ranking criteria in the city where a law firm office was located, we used the geographically closest law school to the office that did fit our criteria. For undergraduate institutions, we used private, nonreligious, four-year universities ranked 50 to 100 according to *U.S. News and World Report*'s 2014 Best National Universities list. On the West Coast, however, no undergraduate institutions fit these criteria. Thus, for simplicity and consistency, we used (as an undergraduate institution) a single western university located a similar distance from Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Francisco, and Seattle when applying to jobs in these cities. Because ethical guidelines require that we protect the anonymity of these institutions, we do not report the names of law schools and undergraduate institutions used in the experiment.

7. We use the terms "higher-class" and "lower-class" as shorthand for fictitious applicants whose résumés contained signals of relatively higher-class or lower-class social origins, respectively.

8. Ideally, of course, there would be a large enough number of relevant employers in a given year to conduct a résumé audit study that varies not only the presence but also the number and different combinations of various class signals. In reality, however, the number of large law firms with comparable summer associate positions is relatively limited (NALP 2014), making such an audit study impossible.

9. Merit-based financial awards are typically described as "scholarships" as opposed to "financial aid."

10. When selecting sports, we considered numerous alternatives. For example, golf, fencing, tennis, and scuba diving are often associated with the upper class, but they are difficult to match with an otherwise comparable individual sport that could serve as a control. An additional source of complexity was the need for pairs of athletic activities that are not unusual for either men or women. For instance, many sports that could send a relatively lower-class signal are contact sports traditionally pursued by men, such as boxing or wrestling, and would be problematic to use for female applicants as it could conflate class with gender typicality. In contrast, women's track and field has been a part of the NCAA program for decades, and even a quick perusal of university websites reveals that women's participation in intercollegiate or club sailing and polo is common (e.g., even the Harvard Polo Club, the oldest intercollegiate polo program, has a women's team). Similarly, pick-up soccer leagues for women and for mixed-gender teams abound in urban centers around the United States.

11. To clarify, our purpose is not to resolve the omnivore/univore debate in the sociology of culture, but rather to clearly signal applicant social class to employers and test whether employers discriminate based on applicants' perceived social class background.

12. If there were remainders after dividing a city's sample by four, we randomly assigned each remaining office to one of the four conditions.

13. We conducted a similar experiment with a more diverse sample of 400 full-time employed adults through Amazon Mechanical Turk and had similar findings. Results are available upon request.

14. The exact amount of compensation varied slightly depending on how soon a person agreed to participate; the average cost of the survey (including participant compensation and overhead) was approximately $70 per respondent, reflecting in part the relatively high level of compensation necessary to induce participation from busy professionals who normally bill for their services by the hour.

15. To create these items, we relied partly on the work values scale of Gursoy, Chi, and Karadag (2013).

16. We also explored the possibility that items (1) and (2), which focus on fit with the firm's culture,

reflect a different underlying construct than items (3) through (7), which focus on fit with the firm's clientele (Rivera 2012). However, these items loaded on a single factor with an alpha value of .90, indicating good reliability, and the average value of items (1) and (2) is correlated with the average of items (3) through (7) at $r = .74$ ($p < .0001$), suggesting that respondents saw these aspects of fit as closely related. Moreover, as we will note, a confirmatory factor analysis of the seven-item fit scale showed good psychometric properties.

17. The next most common response was surprise, followed by a discussion of gender homophily. As noted earlier, evaluations made by men and women in our survey experiment were similar.

18. Thébaud and Taylor (2015) find similar penalties for female graduate students in STEM fields.

19. Women who do leave are more likely than men to cite work-life issues as a motivating factor, but they are also more likely than men to cite discrimination and unsupportive cultures as reasons for their departures (Rezvani 2014).

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