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# Job Satisfaction and Gender: Qualitative Differences at Iowa Newspapers

## **Abstract**

This study uses quantitative and qualitative survey data to examine the job satisfaction of male and female employees at Iowa newspapers. Responses to open-ended questions indicated qualitative differences in the issues men and women considered salient and in the discourses they used to talk about their work. Male respondents were more likely to use language that evoked professional efficacy and emphasized presence. Female respondents more likely to use language that related to production and emphasized position. The findings also indicate a gender discrepancy related to income and financial status; men reported higher salaries and indicated greater financial security than women. Economic environment emerged as a salient issue for both male and female employees. Overall, the findings support the use of qualitative data to explore issues related to gender and job satisfaction and suggest organizational factors play an important role in newspaper employees' attitudes and perceptions about their work.

## **Keywords**

gender, job satisfaction, newspapers, women and the media

## **Disciplines**

Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication | Journalism Studies | Social History | Women's History

## **Comments**

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JOB SATISFACTION AND GENDER:  
Qualitative differences at Iowa newspapers

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*This study uses quantitative and qualitative survey data to examine the job satisfaction of male and female employees at Iowa newspapers. Responses to open-ended questions indicated qualitative differences in the issues men and women considered salient and in the discourses they used to talk about their work. Male respondents were more likely to use language that evoked professional efficacy and emphasized presence. Female respondents more likely to use language that related to production and emphasized position. The findings also indicate a gender discrepancy related to income and financial status; men reported higher salaries and indicated greater financial security than women. Economic environment emerged as a salient issue for both male and female employees. Overall, the findings support the use of qualitative data to explore issues related to gender and job satisfaction and suggest organizational factors play an important role in newspaper employees' attitudes and perceptions about their work.*

Keywords: Gender; job satisfaction; community newspapers; women and the media

## Introduction

The makeup of media industries from bottom to top shows that women tend to be clustered in lower- to mid-level jobs and less represented in senior positions (e.g., Byerly, 2011; North, 2009a; Chambers, Steiner and Fleming, 2004; Ross, 2004; Beasley and Gibbons, 2003). In a sample of U.S. news media, research by the International Women's Media Foundation found that women made up about 41 percent of the total workforce but less than one-fourth of top managers (Byerly, 2011). In her analysis of the findings, Byerly (2013) noted the low proportions of women in technical and top management jobs compared with their high proportions in support, junior professional and middle management roles.

Previous data specific to daily newspapers in the United States showed that women made up about 18 percent of newspaper publishers, 26 percent of top editors, and 31 percent of advertising directors (Arnold, Hendrickson and Linton, 2003). According to the most recent newsroom census by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, women held about 37 percent of full-time jobs and about 35 percent of supervisory positions ("Newsroom Employment Census 2014"), proportions that have held steady for about 15 years (Klos, 2013). Women tend to be the most underrepresented in sports and editorial departments (Klos, 2013; Hardin and Whiteside, 2006), and previous studies suggest they have been more likely to indicate their intention to leave the newspaper industry (Selzer, 2002).

Researchers and others have taken an interest in these gender differences at daily newspapers in the U.S., noting that while women make up almost two-thirds of students in journalism and mass communication programs (Becker, Vlad, and Simpson, 2013), they continue to be underrepresented in metropolitan newsrooms (Sinha, 2015; Anderson, 2014; Griffin, 2014; Sullivan, 2014; Nicholson, 2007). Relatively few studies have investigated the proportions of men and women at small newspapers. Citing data from the mid-1990s, Robinson (2005) reported that women made up 14 percent of top editors/publishers and 16 percent of managing editors at U.S. newspapers with circulations of less than 50,000.

In the past 10 years, a number of scholars have looked beyond the percentages of women and men in the media workforce to analyze the role of gender in their experiences and professional identities (Byerly, 2013; Elmore, 2009; North, 2009a, 2009b; Robinson, 2005; De Bruin and Ross, 2004; Ross, 2001). These scholars have helped to fill a need identified by Byerly (2013) and North (2009a) for more feminist empirical research at the site of media production. Rather than simply report the numbers of men and women in certain positions—which, as Robinson (2005) points out, are merely descriptive and not explanatory—more recent research seeks to understand how gender shapes organizational and professional culture, creating structures and discourses that support gendered phenomena such as a "glass ceiling" (Byerly, 2011; Nicholson, 2007; Robinson, 2005) or role stereotyping (Byerly, 2013). Such an approach sheds light on *why* the proportions of women and men might be different in particular jobs, industries, or organizations, thus offering a chance for researchers to make recommendations that would improve the experiences and retention of all media professionals.

A cultural approach to studying gender goes "beyond the body count" (De Bruin and Ross, 2004, p. vii) to examine how gender helps define professional ideologies and norms while shaping behavioral expectations placed on women and men. Such an approach answers the call of feminist linguistic theorists Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992) for researchers to "think practically and look locally" in order to understand the fluid, mutually constitutive relationship between gender and environment. Thus, rather than treat gender as a

universal variable brought into newsrooms around the country, these studies treat gender within a particular “community of practice,” defined as a historically situated group of people who have come together to engage in a mutual endeavor (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992, 464).

This article extends this line of research by exploring gender differences in job satisfaction within the relatively less-studied context of community newspapers. According to the National Newspaper Association, there are about 7,000 non-daily newspapers in the U.S., compared with 1,400 dailies (“Community Newspaper Facts and Figures,” 2014). Community newspapers—defined by McGhee (2011) as daily and non-daily newspapers with a circulation of less than 30,000—have a weekly combined circulation of 65.5 million (“Community Newspaper Facts and Figures,” 2014). These publications are reported to be in better financial condition than metropolitan newspapers because they do not face as much competition for advertising and readers (McGhee, 2011) due to their hyperlocal content.

The work environment of community newspapers is very different from that of metropolitan dailies. It is common for employees to perform tasks outside of their job descriptions or to hold more than one position on the newspaper. In contrast to larger news organizations, there is far less physical and organizational separation between the editorial, advertising, and circulation departments at community newspapers. The owners and publishers of these small organizations are more accessible to their staffs and are also more likely to be involved in day-to-day operations.

In the Midwestern state of Iowa, where the majority of newspapers are weekly publications with circulations of less than 5,000, women currently make up about 30 percent of newspaper publishers, 39 percent of top editors and 42 percent of advertising directors—higher proportions than have been found nationally.<sup>1</sup> The Iowa Newspaper Association lists 261 weekly newspapers and 34 daily newspapers in the state, which has a population of about 3.1 million. This study uses survey data to assess whether men and women working at Iowa newspapers differ in their levels of job satisfaction and, if so, what those findings might suggest to employers interested in recruiting and retaining a diverse roster of employees.

### **Job Satisfaction of Media Professionals**

In measuring the job satisfaction of journalists, a number of researchers have used Frederick Herzberg’s two-factor model of job satisfaction (Reinardy, 2009, 2007; Keith, 2005; Tharp, 1991; Kelly, 1989; Barrett, 1984; Shaver, 1978). Herzberg (1959) theorized that job satisfaction was determined by two sets of factors working independently of each other: 1) intrinsic factors, or motivators, which he said influenced feelings of satisfaction stemming directly from the job’s *content*, and 2) extrinsic factors, or hygienes, which he said influenced feelings of dissatisfaction arising from the job’s *context*. Thus, he theorized, an employee could be simultaneously satisfied and dissatisfied based on internal and external aspects of the job. Reinardy (2007) argued that Herzberg’s model has proven useful for studying the attitudes of news workers because it provides a framework for understanding job satisfaction in positions that combine special rewards (i.e., witnessing important events firsthand) with special challenges (i.e., unusual hours).

A recurring theme in studies of journalists’ job satisfaction is the potential conflict between professional values and organizational changes or constraints that can make it difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Data provided to the author by the Iowa Newspaper Association.

to adhere to ideal norms and practices (Beam, 2006; Keith, 2005; Daniels and Hollifield, 2002; Pollard, 1995). For example, Pollard (1995) found that professionalism was closely related to journalists' intrinsic satisfaction, but that organizational structures had the potential to interfere with the rewards of their jobs. As he put it, journalists might be more satisfied with their work than employees in other occupations, but for shorter periods; their satisfaction drops once something happens organizationally that impedes their perceived ability to do their work well. Demonstrating the importance of professional competence, a survey of city editors at newspapers around the nation found that job satisfaction was influenced by how the editors evaluated their own performance, while job dissatisfaction was influenced by how they evaluated their reporters' performance (St. Cyr, 2008).

Researchers have identified multiple variables important to the job satisfaction of journalists, such as organizational support (Reinardy, 2009a; McQuarrie, 1999; Bramlett-Soloman, 1992; DeFleur, 1992; Tharp, 1991; Barrett, 1984); social support (Reinardy, 2009a); perceptions of job quality and job security (Reinardy, 2012); prestige (Bramlett-Soloman, 1992; DeFleur, 1992); and autonomy (Bramlett-Soloman, 1992, Barrett, 1984). Reinardy (2012) has found a positive relationship between journalists' job satisfaction and their intention to remain in newspapers.

One extrinsic variable that has been found to be influential is size of the organization, with employees at large media organizations more satisfied than those at smaller organizations (St. Cyr, 2008; Reinardy, 2007; Keith, 2005a; Demers, 1994, 1995). Tharp (1991) found that newspapers with the fewest employees reported the highest turnover, although overall employee mobility among community newspapers was in line with other small businesses and the media industry in general. While employees were generally satisfied with the intrinsic aspects of their work, they also cited a heavy workload and low salaries as major disadvantages to working at a small newspaper (Tharp, 1991). About one-fourth of respondents to Tharp's survey appeared to be highly mobile professionals, using small newspapers as a training ground before moving on to higher-circulation publications. However, employees were more likely to cite understaffing as a concern than turnover.

In sum, previous research on the job satisfaction of newspaper employees emphasizes the need to account for both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Employees might be satisfied with the work itself, but not with the context in which they do it. Likewise, they might be satisfied with both their work and their employer, but they might find the job crowds out other aspects of their lives. In addition, researchers interested in the job satisfaction of newspaper employees might look for tension between professional and organizational values as well as issues related to salary and organizational size.

### **Gender and the Workplace**

Given the differences in men's and women's retention and representation at newspapers, one might expect to find clear quantitative differences in their levels of job satisfaction. However, survey research has been less than conclusive on this issue, finding few statistically significant differences between women and men working in journalism in terms of their overall approach to their jobs (Hanitzsch and Hanusch, 2012) or levels of job satisfaction (Keith, 2005; Burks and Stone, 1993; Bramlett-Soloman, 1992; Kelly, 1989). Reinardy (2009b) found that female journalists on daily newspapers in the U.S. reported lower organizational support, lower professional efficacy, higher role overload, and higher job demands than men—but were no less

satisfied overall and, counter to other research, no more likely to report problems with work-family conflict. Burks and Stone (1993) found no statistically significant differences in the overall job satisfaction of male and female broadcast news managers, but they did find that women were more uncertain about their career goals and experienced more conflict between their jobs and their responsibilities at home.

Statistics sometimes mask qualitative differences in the perceptions and experiences of women and men, a point made by Young and Beale (2013) in their analysis of women in Canadian newsrooms. Indeed, gender has emerged as a significant factor in qualitative studies of women in communication that give careful attention to context and allow for more expansive responses (e.g., Nilsson, 2010; North, 2009a, 2009b; Elmore, 2007; Everbach and Flournoy, 2007; Hardin and Shain, 2006; Everbach, 2006; Ross, 2004). Such studies have identified several recurring themes in the reasons women give for leaving newspapers. Some women cited a male-dominated culture (Elmore, 2007; Everbach and Flournoy, 2007; Hardin and Shain, 2005; Ross, 2001), some were not given opportunities to advance or were not paid an adequate salary (Willard, 2007; Everbach and Flournoy, 2007; Smucker, Whisenant, and Pedersen, 2003; Walsh-Childers et al., 1996), and many said they struggled to balance their jobs with their family roles and responsibilities (Elmore, 2009; Everbach and Flournoy, 2007; Ross, 2004; Walsh-Childers et al., 1996).

Feminist theory regarding gender and the workplace has emphasized the influence of both socialization and discourse in understanding differences in men's and women's experiences (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004; Van Zoonen, 1994). Countering essentialist notions of gender, which ascribe different characteristics to men and women on the basis of biology, socialization refers to the different expectations placed upon women and men and the different traits for which they are rewarded, which might be at odds with professional norms (Hardin and Shain, 2006; Chambers et al., 2004; Aldoory and Toth, 2002; Ross, 2001). Discourse refers to the systems of thought that organize how people talk and communicate through language that constructs categories, such as gender, based on shared, implicit meanings (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005).

The work of Louise North (2009a, 2009b) demonstrates how these two strains of feminist theory work together to map the intersections between gender and newsroom environment. Using in-depth interviews with Australian journalists, North (2009a) argues that a historically masculine culture in print media has been naturalized and institutionalized as "journalism," creating a professional environment that alienates those who do not conform to hegemonic gender patterns. The result is an organizational culture that confers insider and outsider status based on gendered assumptions and on the extent to which male and female employees internalize dominant norms for behavior.

In addition, North (2009b) found that male and female journalists used different discourses to discuss how the job had changed them amid neoliberal policies and rising corporate concentration in the industry. The men she interviewed emphasized their access to power and increased confidence as positive attributes of their personal experiences. The women, while also speaking of their rising confidence, used a more relational perspective. Thus, while one female editor said she might be perceived as arrogant, she also thought the job had made her more humble; another woman said she had become more assertive but also more compassionate. When discussing gender explicitly, women described a culture of discrimination and policies that individualized the career impact associated with motherhood, while men spoke of women as a privileged class in ways that reinforced the female interviewees' experiences of discrimination.



Robinson (2005), too, has advocated a cultural approach to studying gender within media organizations, examining how language and symbolic interactionism function to construct norms and values for media workers. She argues that “journalism as a social system reifies ‘maleness’ ” (p. 13) by naturalizing workplace practices and priorities, such as excessively long workdays, which are historically grounded in male-coded social roles. This might lead to implicit biases that shape the work process. For example, Lowery (2004) found that newspaper design staffs that were predominantly female or that had a female director were given less control over their work than design staffs with a majority-male staff or a male director. However, Lowery also found differences based on organizational factors, including size; in smaller newsrooms, gender was not a predictor of how much autonomy the design staff had.

This is not to say that all women identify gender as a salient factor in their experiences; Ross’s (2004) survey of 22 women journalists in Britain found that work-life balance continued to be a pressing issue, especially for working mothers, but that respondents disagreed in their assessment of how much gender mattered in the newsroom. Some women considered it an important issue and described discriminatory treatment, while others insisted any problems (and their solutions) were individual ones.

Fullerton and Kendrick’s (2014) findings from a survey of undergraduate advertising students illustrate how a perceived conflict between gendered social norms and professional values trickle down to young people as they make decisions about their careers. Their study did not find gender differences in advertising students’ willingness to work long hours or in their desire for work-life balance. However, female students were more likely to think others would disapprove if they worked full-time with children at home while male students were more likely to think the opposite—that others would look down on them for staying home with children rather than working full-time.

Together, these studies suggest that in order to understand the relationship between gender and job satisfaction, scholars must pay attention to how men and women talk about their attitudes and perceptions and to the organizational environment in which they are working. In addition to measuring job satisfaction, this study seeks to examine the issues a particular group of women and men raise as well as the discourses they use to describe their work experiences.

## **Research Questions**

This study examines the attitudes and perceptions of male and female employees at Iowa newspapers by combining feminist theory with a three-component model of job satisfaction adapted from Reinardy’s (2012, 2009a, 2007) work in this area: 1) job quality, or the nature of the work itself, including its perceived autonomy, variety, importance, and the quality of the feedback received; 2) work-life balance, or the perceived “goodness of fit” between an employee’s job and the rest of his or her life, including personal interests and family obligations; and 3) organizational support, or the perception that employees are respected and supported by an employer, are not subjected to harassment or inappropriate treatment, and are rewarded in a manner commensurate with their contributions.

This study contributes to the literature on gender and job satisfaction in two important ways. First, it focuses on a media production environment that has not received as much attention from scholars as larger news organizations. Second, it approaches that environment holistically, soliciting the perceptions of employees across all departments and in all roles. Previous studies of job satisfaction at newspapers have focused on people in a particular

position, such as city editors (St. Cyr, 2008); sports editors (Reinardy, 2007); copy editors (Keith, 2005); female sports journalists (Hardin and Shain, 2005; Smucker et al., 2003); or executive/managing editors (Demers, 1994), with the goal of generalizing findings vertically, within professionally defined strata. However, a clear segregation of job duties is a hallmark of larger newspapers and does not reflect the milieu of community newspapers, where employees work in close quarters with overlapping roles. In addition, as Lavie (2004) demonstrated, gender can structure professional experiences in very different ways depending on the history and culture of a particular organization. Those with the same job title might experience their careers very differently based on the context in which they are working. A holistic approach offers a more in-depth look at organizational and contextual factors, which cut across job titles.

Based on the above considerations, this study is guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do men and women who work at Iowa newspapers compare in their perceptions of job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support?

**RQ2:** What language do women and men at Iowa newspapers use to describe their job intentions and satisfaction?

## **Method**

Employees at Iowa newspapers were invited to participate in an online survey Feb. 25–March 11, 2013. A link and a request to complete the survey initially were sent to members of the Iowa Newspaper Association, which provided a roster of email addresses. Of the 448 email addresses provided to the researchers, 14 were dead accounts, leaving 434 initial contacts. A reminder email was sent one week later. In addition, a snowball sampling technique was used to encourage participation by sharing the link to the survey via the association’s and the author’s Twitter and Facebook accounts with a message encouraging current newspaper employees to complete the survey and recommend it to others. In all, 158 surveys were returned, and 139 were fully completed (70 male, 69 female).

The respondents included 30 publishers; 26 reporters/writers; 25 managing/executive editors; 18 midlevel editors; 17 directors of advertising or circulation; 5 sales/account executives; and 18 respondents who answered “other” or left their job title blank. The vast majority identified themselves as white and heterosexual, and about 65 percent were married, making the group slightly more homogeneous than the state as a whole. The respondents also skewed older than the state’s newspaper workforce overall, perhaps reflecting the rural or small-town locations of these publications, where the population is older on average than in the state’s metropolitan areas.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 28.4 percent of news analysts, reporters, correspondents; 40.7 percent of editors; and 46.8 percent of general and operations managers in Iowa are over 45 (“12w. Detailed Census Occupation by Older Age Groups, Sex, and Race/Ethnicity for Worksite Geography, Total Population,” retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/people/eetabulation/data/eetables20062010.html>). For state demographics, see the State Data Center of Iowa, “Iowa Quick Facts,” retrieved from [www.iowadatacenter.org/quickfacts](http://www.iowadatacenter.org/quickfacts).

The survey included demographic and categorical questions; Likert-type items assessing perceptions of job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support; and four open-ended questions: 1) “If you plan to continue working in the newspaper industry, what is your reason for staying?” 2) “If you plan to exit the newspaper industry, what is your reason for leaving?” 3) “What, if anything, would you change about your job?” 4) “What, if anything, would you change about the direction of your organization?” The Likert-scale section included 14 statements for each component of job satisfaction, such as “I believe what I do matters to the organization,” and asked respondents to rate how much they agreed (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree).

Male and female responses to both the Likert-scale items and the open-ended questions were compared. The open-ended responses allowed respondents to type as much as they wanted; there was no limit on comment length and no constraints on content beyond the guidance suggested by the question. This accomplished the qualitative objective of privileging the perspective of the participants (Schwandt, 1998). Categorical analysis (Maxwell, 2014) was used to compare the language men and women used in their responses as well as the topics they raised. The three-component model of job satisfaction comprising job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support was used as a guiding—though not a determining—framework.

## **Findings**

A chi-square test of independence revealed a relationship between gender and salary, with significantly more men reporting salaries in the highest ranges [table 1 near here]. Only one woman reported a salary of \$100,000 or greater, while 11 men reported salaries that high, including 5 men who reported salaries of \$150,000 or greater. This gap might be explained, in part, by the gender breakdown of the publishers and reporters who responded to this survey. Men made up 73 percent of publishers but only 40 percent of the reporters. However, enough upper-level women responded to the survey that the differences in salary cannot be attributed to job title alone. The sample included 29 women in management, of which 1 woman, or 3.4 percent, reported earning a salary of more than \$100,000. By comparison, the sample included 43 men in management, with 11 men, or 25.6 percent, reporting a salary of more than \$100,000.

Chi-square tests did not reveal a relationship between gender and other variables, such as years of experience, hours worked, newspaper circulation, recent promotions, and new skills. Except for the publishers and reporters, all other job categories had about the same number of male and female respondents. T-tests of means conducted on summary statistics for the Likert-scale items measuring job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support indicated no statistically significant gender differences [table 2 near here].

The rest of this analysis focuses on the open-ended responses. The four open-ended questions yielded 175 responses from women and 186 responses from men, for a total of 361 responses. Male responses totaled 2,534 words, while female responses totaled 2,386 words. Two forms of categorical analysis were used to examine the responses: 1) Frequently used language was categorized by gender and word type and then compared to examine whether differences existed in the ways men and women wrote about their work. 2) Responses were categorized by the topics raised in relation to the guiding theoretical framework for job satisfaction, allowing for comparisons while also leaving room for unexpected themes to emerge.

## *Language Use*

Word-cloud software was used to compile a list of the 100 most frequently used words in male and female responses. High-frequency functional words, such as articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and any form of the verbs “to be,” “to have,” or “to do,” were excluded for their lack of descriptive power. From the lists that resulted, words were grouped into high-frequency verbs, adjectives, and nouns by gender. Words that could fall into more than one category—such as “pay,” which might function as either a noun or a verb—were eliminated. This resulted in unambiguous lists of high-frequency words, which were then cross-referenced. Any male/female duplications were removed, leaving gender-differentiated lists of words that were used frequently by men but not by women, and vice-versa [table 3 near here].

Juxtaposing words that were similar in function or meaning demonstrates clear differences in the discourses used by men and women to talk about their work. For example, three of the top verbs used by men—“hire,” “sell,” and “provide”—represent external actions; they require someone to be on the receiving end. In contrast, both of the top verbs used by women—“think” and “afford”—represent private actions or states. Further, the verbs “hire” and “sell” suggest more power and financial agency in a professional context than the verb “afford,” which implies a more tenuous financial situation. The fourth high-frequency male verb, “try,” juxtaposed with the high-frequency female verb “think,” presents a further contrast.

In the gender-differentiated lists of adjectives, the clearest contrast was a male emphasis on volume or substance—marked by the adjectives “small” and “big”—vs. a female emphasis on scale or rank, indicated by the adjectives “higher” and “low,” which are more relational. Further, the high-frequency male adjectives “important,” “main,” and “financial” evoke a greater sense of professional efficacy than the top adjectives used by women—“same” and “poor”—which are more tenuous or even negative.

The gender-differentiated lists of nouns draw a specific picture of women’s and men’s position within the work structure. Juxtaposing the high-frequency nouns results in male-female contrasts such as “revenue/wages,” “equipment/employees,” “margins/hours,” “circulation/stories,” “product/website,” “career/responsibilities,” and “day/night.” The nouns used in male responses—which also included “growth,” “resources,” “sales,” and “profession”—are more in keeping with a position in management. The nouns frequently used by women are more connected to people and labor, articulating the discourse of an employee closer to the production process. For example, the high-frequency male noun “revenue” and the high-frequency female noun “wages” both describe income, but the first uses the vocabulary of business and finance while the second refers to income earned on an hourly basis, which is typically the case for lower-level employees. Further, unlike the nouns used by men, the high-frequency female nouns of “management,” “editor,” and “publisher” suggest an emphasis not only on people, but also on position. Similar to “higher” and “low,” this language works to construct a discourse of rank or relation.

These findings might be explained in part by the greater number of male respondents in management. Forty-three of the male respondents, or 61 percent, were in management, compared with 29, or 42 percent, of the women. Those in management might be expected to write in terms of sales, resources, revenue and margins, while those in lower positions might be expected to write in terms of hours and wages. Yet the differences are striking in their depiction of a gendered work structure in which men are associated with capital and profit and women are more associated with labor and production. Analyzing the language these respondents used to

talk about their work illustrates how they construct it for others, while examining the topics they raised reveals the issues they consider the most salient in terms of their job satisfaction.

### *Job Satisfaction*

The three-part model of job satisfaction was a good fit for both the women and the men in this study, but enough outlying topics emerged in the responses to warrant the addition of a fourth component: economic environment. Combined, the four themes of job quality, work-life balance, organizational support, and economic environment formed a nearly complete framework for the responses related to respondents' career intentions and desire for changes in their jobs or organizations. Some gender differences emerged in this part of the analysis.

*Job quality: 'a good living' vs. 'making a difference.'* The qualitative responses indicated that job quality was the most salient source of satisfaction for both men and women. Using words such as "love," "enjoy," and "passion," people working in all areas of newspapers expressed a deep commitment to their work and attached great importance to it. A strong professional identity emerged from the positive comments male and female respondents made about their choice of careers. The comments also revealed a deep commitment to community newspapers from employees in both advertising and journalism.

One key difference emerged in the way male and female respondents wrote about their perceptions of job quality. Men were more likely to mention salary as a positive aspect of their jobs, framing their satisfaction in terms of financial rewards, professional competence, and self-satisfaction. Women were more likely to frame their satisfaction in terms of interpersonal relationships, professional experience, and perceived contributions. Both men and women viewed their jobs as important to their communities and enjoyed the nature of the work itself, including their interactions with members of the community. But while men were more likely to use language that directly asserted their competence, women were more likely to highlight their extensive experience or contributions.

The following comments are representative of those related to job quality:

**Male, publisher (age 65+):** "I love my work, my profession and my lifestyle. I have worked other jobs, but none gave me the self-satisfaction I feel in newspaper work."

**Female, publisher (55–64):** "Belief in the ongoing, important role a community newspaper plays in the strength of that community; continuing to capitalize on the expertise that comes from 37 years in this field."

**Male, director of advertising (age 45–54):** "I enjoy the work and make a good living."

**Female, director of advertising (age 35–44):** "I really enjoy the challenges/changes that the industry is facing right now and I strongly believe in the power of newspapers for news and advertising."

**Male, managing/executive editor (age 35–44):** "This is the best job I've ever had, and I happen to be pretty good at it. So, why wouldn't I stay?"

**Female, managing/executive editor (age 35–44):** “I enjoy my job and making a difference.”

**Male, director of circulation (age 45–54):** “I have done this job for 30 years. Starting in circulation and now being a manager over circulation and all production and distribution. I’m good at what I do. It’s in my blood.”

**Male, director of circulation (age 45–54):** “The possibility of advancing to a publisher position plus this is what I have done for 25 years. Starting over in a different field would likely be a big step backward in terms of income.”

**Female, management—other (age 65+):** “I love what I do and I feel I am making a positive contribution to my workplace, my community and my industry.”

**Male, reporter (age 35–44):** “I like the work. There’s never a dull day.”

**Female, reporter (age 45–54):** “I enjoy working with people and hearing their stories. It allows you to touch the lives of others when you least expect it.”

**Female, reporter (age 18–24):** “Newspapers can help communities in a way that no one else can through promoting businesses [and] events and by being a watchdog of several levels of government.”

*Work-life balance: flexibility vs. conflict.* The comments related to work-life balance revealed this aspect of job satisfaction to be less salient to this group than job quality. Responses were also more conflicted. Some identified the flexibility of their work schedules to be a positive aspect of their jobs, while others expressed dissatisfaction with long hours and wished for more time with their families. Surprisingly, women were slightly more likely to cite this area as a satisfying aspect of their jobs, while men were slightly more likely to mention it as a source of dissatisfaction. Overall, responses in this area lacked the passion—both positive and negative—seen in other areas, suggesting this issue is not particularly salient to this group of employees.

One reason this group might depart from previous studies showing work-life balance to be a major conflict for women—more so than for men—is that most of the newspapers represented here are weekly publications, resulting in a publication schedule that is less grueling and perhaps offers a more flexible schedule. The responses indicated these organizations had not adopted the 24/7 news cycle made possible by the Internet. The culture at these newspapers also might be less competitive than at metropolitan dailies, and commute times are likely shorter.

The fact that men mentioned a conflict between work and family, an issue that typically emerges for women, might be an indicator of historical gender expectations working against them. These men might feel pressured to uphold the idealized “masculine” role of breadwinner despite a desire to spend more time with their families, demonstrating how gender stereotypes can work against men as well as women. In addition, women in this survey were slightly more likely to work part time, which might allow for more flexibility, but also—as a later comment will show—might have been imposed on them, making the lower pay a more salient issue.

The comments below are representative of those related to work-life balance:

**Female, managing/executive editor (age 45–54), working 40–49 hours/week:** “In a perfect world I wish I were done earlier to have more family time in the evening.”

**Male, managing/executive editor (age 25–34), working 50–59 hours/week:** “I’d love to be able to do the job in less time, but haven’t figured out how. You get out what you put in!!”

**Female, director of circulation (age 45–54), working 20–29 hours/week:** “Fits in well with my family schedule, flexibility, creative opportunities, like my co-workers, close to home—which means little travel time.”

**Male, publisher (age 25–34), working 70+ hours/week:** “It would be nice to balance my work and personal life. As the owner of a set of small publications, the margins are thin and there’s way more work than I can get done in a 40-hour work week; especially so if I want to put out the quality of paper I desire to produce.”

**Female, reporter (age 45–54), working 40–49 hours/week:** “Enjoy the flexibility and diversity.”

**Male, copy/web editor (age 35–44), working 50–59 hours/week:** “Lots and lots of hours here. Would like more time with family.”

*Organizational support: pay and professionalism.* The open-ended responses revealed incongruence between workload and compensation and between organizational practices and professional norms. Salary emerged as a pressing issue, particularly for women. The comments were generally unflattering toward corporate ownership, although one respondent expressed appreciation that her newspaper had been bought by a company she considered better than the previous owner. Other comments indicated a frustration with co-workers and with managers who do not hold employees accountable. Overall, the responses expressed a desire for more professionalism through consistent personnel policies and higher salaries, but with less paperwork and fewer trivial tasks.

In addition, several female respondents commented that they were not respected in the workplace, while none of the male respondents made a similar comment. The male respondents generally indicated a higher level of individual support from their employers, with a couple of men expressing gratitude for the mentoring they had received and optimism about their prospects with the employer. No female respondents mentioned having been mentored, and one woman specifically commented that she would like a mentor. While both male and female respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their salaries, women used more acute language that framed the issue as a crisis.

The following comments are representative of those related to organizational support:

**Male, managing/executive editor (age 35–44):** “No imminent plans [to leave], but the level of pay does not meet the job demands. That can be frustrating.”

**Female, director of advertising (age 35–44):** “I’d like to have more concrete rules/policies from HR in order to supervise my staff members more effectively.”

**Male, copy/web editor (age 25–34):** “I should be working with reporters, generating story ideas and helping our newspaper make a direct impact instead of just reading copy and slapping it on the page.”

**Female, design/production editor (age 35–44):** “No raise. No promotion. NO ONE CARES. . . . Make rules that apply to all. Expect people to follow the rules. PUNISH people.”

**Male, managing/executive editor (age 55–64):** “I would love to be able to work with more folks with the same journalistic ideals.”

**Female, assigning editor (age 18–24):** “If I do not get a raise soon, or offered more hours, I will be forced to look for another job. I am currently part-time and have been for over a year and a half.”

**Male, managing/executive editor (age 45–54):** “Owners must take action against those who don’t pull their weight and take advantage of their good graces.”

**Female, reporter (age 18–24):** “I know most people in this field aren’t making a lot of money, that’s not why we go into it. But when I can’t make ends meet while working 60 hours a week . . . that takes a lot out of me emotionally.”

**Female, reporter (age 25–34):** “I do not get paid as I should. I do not enjoy writing. I am not treated with respect.”

**Male, managing/executive editor (age 45–54):** “Burnout. And the thankless position you find yourself in day in and day out. Now with a corporation owning the paper, it will probably get worse as far as changes and new directions are concerned. A feeling of what matters and what doesn’t is starting to influence my well-being.”

**Female, reporter (age 55–64):** “I am actively seeking other employment because of the poor wages. I can’t continue to work in a job that pays wages that qualify my children for reduced cost lunch at school. I like the work but I can’t afford to do it much longer.”

*Economic environment: an industry in turmoil.* The open-ended responses indicated a need for a fourth category of job satisfaction to address the role of economic environment, which emerged as a significant source of stress and dissatisfaction for newspaper employees in terms of available resources, workplace morale, and organizational adaptability. Countering reports that community newspapers are healthier than other sectors of the news industry because of the unique niche they fill, each respondent who mentioned resources indicated either that revenue was down due to a decline in the surrounding local economy or that his or her newspaper was



failing to adapt to changes in the media industry. Some older respondents indicated they were simply running out the clock until retirement.

The following responses are representative of comments in this area:

**Male, publisher (age 55–64):** “Can’t fight the Main Street decline in rural Iowa—advertising dries up, can’t do the things you’d like to do.”

**Female, director of advertising (age 35–44):** “I truly enjoy working in the newspaper industry—it is exciting and offers daily challenges that are different from the challenges of yesterday. However, I have considered leaving to work in an industry with a more positive outlook.”

**Male, director of circulation (age 45–54):** “Staffs have been cut so dramatically that we are ill prepared to deal with illnesses, weather emergencies, etc. Everyone is doing more – for less. We need to stop taking out the ills of the industry on our staffs. Profit margins, which are still healthy, may need to reduce to maintain a viable and engaged staff that is committed to putting out an important product—the daily newspaper.”

**Female, advertising–other (age 25–34):** “I don’t think I can change anything. Newspapers will eventually become obsolete.”

**Male, copy/web editor (age 25–34):** “If I end up [leaving], it will be because of the pay and the resigned feeling I see among so many of my colleagues that our industry is dying (which I do not believe).”

**Female, reporter (age 45–54):** “It is hard for smaller newspapers to afford the newest technology and that can sometimes be frustrating in a world where technology matters.”

**Male, reporter (age 45–54):** “I’ve got 10–15 years until retirement and hope I can ride the storm out.”

## **Discussion**

Consistent with previous studies, quantitative measures showed no statistically significant differences in the job satisfaction of male and female newspaper employees in Iowa. However, the qualitative findings revealed differences in the discourses these men and women used to describe their perceptions and attitudes. The male respondents were more likely to use language that evoked professional efficacy, a sense that one could act upon the work environment in various ways. The female respondents more likely to use language that related to production and suggested a less secure position in the workplace. The significant discrepancy between the salaries of men and women in this group accentuated this difference.

It is important to note the findings of this study are not generalizable, due to its small sample size. In addition, the quantitative measures did not include an item that specifically addressed salary—an oversight that should be corrected in future research. However, the qualitative findings contain insights for researchers and industry professionals.

Although the issue of work-life balance did not appear to be as important to this group as other areas of job satisfaction, the responses were mixed. It was striking to see men describe the kind of work-family conflict long attributed to women—hardly a victory for anyone. As Robinson (2005) wrote: “[T]he salient question to ask is not whether one gender group is more career-oriented than the other, but rather, how can newsroom work be restructured so that the work-family interface can be accommodated for both female and male professionals (p. 115).

Organizational support emerged as an area that offered the most opportunity for employers to influence the job satisfaction of women and men. As feminist theory teaches, gender functions to create different experiences for male and female employees. Employers who are mindful of this are more likely to create an environment that is supportive of both. As a group, women would clearly benefit from higher salaries. In addition, employers might consider tapping their professional networks to pair less experienced employees with mentors outside the organization. Men, as well as women, might benefit from an organizational culture that offers—and encourages employees to use—flexible scheduling options. All would benefit from more focused work practices that treat employees’ time and workload as finite resources.

The recommendation, then, is not to ignore gender in the workplace, but to be conscious of it. This reinforces the findings of feminist theorists who have prescribed a cultural approach to the study of gender, looking behind media *content* to examine media *practice*.

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Table 1  
*Salary ranges of Iowa newspaper employees*

Salary range	Gender	
	Male	Female
\$10,000–\$19,999	3	11
\$20,000–\$29,999	15	27
\$30,000–\$39,999	12	15
\$40,000–\$49,999	9	6
\$50,000–\$59,999	8	3
\$60,000–\$69,999	4	2
\$70,000–\$79,999	3	2
\$80,000–\$89,999	1	0
\$90,000–\$99,999	2	1
\$100,000–\$109,999	1	1
\$110,000–\$119,999	2	0
\$120,000–\$129,999	0	0
\$130,000–\$139,999	3	0
\$140,000–\$149,999	0	0
\$150,000+	5	0
$\chi^2$	23.4	
* $p$	0.02	

\*Significant < .05

Table 2  
*Male and female summary statistics on Likert-type measures\* of job satisfaction*

Category	Male		Female		<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>
	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.		
Job quality	4.812	(1.23)	4.740	(0.95)	0.38	124
Work-life balance	4.199	(1.37)	4.530	(1.53)	1.31	127
Organizational support	5.066	(1.28)	5.090	(1.07)	0.11	125

\*Some items were reversed for comparison; the higher the mean, the higher the satisfaction.



Table 3  
*High-frequency words used in open-ended responses,  
 listed in order of frequency*

Verbs		Adjectives		Nouns	
<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Hire	Think	Some	Same	Equipment	Hours
Try	Afford	Small	Higher	Career	Employees
Sell		Important	Poor	Circulation	Stories
Provide		Main	Low	Day	Management
		Financial	Every	Profession	Editor
		Big		Revenue	Website
				Corporation	Publisher
				Resources	Media
				Sales	Wages
				Growth	Responsibilities
				Variety	Night
				Margins	Activities
				Product	
				Life	