

Job satisfaction factors important to black journalists

by Sharon Bramlett-Solomon

Job appeal factors and job satisfaction motivations of black journalists are not very different from those found in studies of white journalists. The findings suggest that managers who want to make progress in increasing minority employment and retention should emphasize both job advancement possibilities and minority representation in managerial positions.

Ever since the Kerner Commission's 1968 report to the president criticized the U.S. media for their treatment of black Americans and condemned the media industry for its dismal minority hiring record,¹ concerned media managers have made at least some effort to address these problems. Ten years after the 1968 Kerner Report, the American Society of Newspaper Editors launched a campaign to make the nation's newsrooms racially proportionate to the U.S. population by the year 2000.² However, based on the number of blacks and other minorities employed in the news industry over the past 13 years, there is concern that the ASNE will not meet its year 2000 goal.³

The figures speak for themselves. In 1978, minorities constituted 6.3 percent or 3,402 of the 54,000 newspaper journalists in the United States. Since 1978, the average annual increase for minorities at daily newspapers has been .03 percent.⁴ At the end of 1991, minorities made up 9.4 percent or 5,120 of the 54,530-person newspaper work force.⁵ However, 51 percent of the nation's

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newspapers still have no minorities at all,⁶ and fewer than 2 percent of newsroom executives are minorities.⁷

Neither are figures on the broadcast side very promising. National studies of minorities and women conducted by Vernon Stone in conjunction with the Radio and Television News Directors Association show progress for women but not for minorities. In 1976, minorities represented 2,228 or 7.5 percent of the 29,600-person broadcast news work force, while in 1986 minorities made up 2,625 or 6.6 percent of the 39,835 workers in the field.⁸ Stone found that the decrease was most notable among black males.

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In other words, although the number of minority journalists employed by the U.S. news media has increased over the years, the growth rate is much slower than anticipated.⁹ Despite increased sensitivity regarding the need for racial diversity in the newsroom and unprecedented industry initiatives, U.S. newsrooms seem to be making only modest progress in hiring and promoting journalists of color. To move toward more racially diverse newsrooms, the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the American Society of Newspaper Editors have called upon news industry executives to quicken the hiring pace of minority journalists and to implement more effective retention and promotion policies.¹⁰

Study background

Two national profiles of U.S. journalists over the past two decades have analyzed patterns and trends among white journalists, their job conditions and job satisfaction, but these studies have revealed little about black journalists beyond their percentages in the field.¹¹ In one study by John W.C. Johnstone, Edward Slawski and William Bowman as well as another by David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, black journalist samples were too small to draw clear inferences. The few other studies that have examined the job satisfaction of black journalists are based largely on samples that favor news workers in either one U.S. region or in one medium.¹²

Clearly there is also a need for more information about the attitudes and perceptions that black journalists hold regarding their jobs and job environments.

Given the news industry's self-imposed goal to show a significant increase in the minority journalist work force by the year 2000, and given the fact

that so far only modest minority personnel increases in newsrooms have resulted, there is a need to analyze job conditions and trends in the status of minorities in the news media. Clearly there is also a need for more information about the attitudes and perceptions that black journalists hold regarding their jobs and job environments. It would be useful to know what factors black journalists consider important in judging the attractiveness of their jobs and whether black journalists are generally pleased or displeased with their work environments and why.

This study

This study examines factors that black journalists emphasize as important in judging the attractiveness of their jobs. In addition, the study examines job satisfaction among black journalists. Job satisfaction can be considered as individuals' attitudes and dispositions towards their jobs and the degree to which the job fulfills their needs, expectations and desires.¹³

Job appeal and the job satisfaction level of a journalist influence his or her attitude and behavior in producing news and information. Both job appeal and job satisfaction are of concern to media managers because they help determine the media's ability to recruit and retain qualified and talented journalists.

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Empirical studies of job satisfaction and job appeal most often have applied Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. Herzberg's two-factor concept contends that intrinsic job factors (achievement, responsibility, chance for advancement) contribute to job satisfaction while extrinsic factors (company policy, supervision, salary and working conditions) contribute to job dissatisfaction.¹⁴

Media scholars have used this theory.¹⁵ Job satisfaction was also examined in Johnstone's 1971 national survey of white U.S. journalists¹⁶ as well as in Weaver and Wilhoit's 1981 replication of the Johnstone study.¹⁷

Weaver and Wilhoit also probed job appeal among journalists, but again, the study did not address journalists of color.¹⁸ A 1991 national study of U.S. journalists by Ted Pease and J. Frazier Smith expanded on the Weaver and Wilhoit research by examining job satisfaction among 871 white and 446 nonwhite journalists. However, the study did not specifically address job satisfaction among minority respondents by race.¹⁹

Black journalists have complained of unfair newsroom treatment. They charge that they have little opportunity for job advancement, are overlooked for

management positions, are pigeonholed into token positions and must work twice as hard to be considered as qualified as their white colleagues.²⁰

Given such complaints and the news industry's modest record of hiring and promoting minorities; given the unprecedented efforts and commitment by the ASNE and professional journalism organizations such as the NABJ and NAHJ to make the nation's newsrooms more racially diverse; the information on what attracts black journalists to their jobs and keeps them there is of crucial importance.

Method

The data reported here come from a questionnaire administered to black journalists at the 1988 convention of the National Association of Black Journalists in St. Louis. The three-page, 28-item questionnaire was composed of questions from earlier research²¹ as well as questions specifically designed for this study.

Black journalists who attended the NABJ conference were asked to complete and return the questionnaire. (See Note 22 for the study's definition of black journalist.) The researcher and two graduate student assistants distributed the questionnaire at the most-frequented convention sites: the registration desk, all luncheon and dinner meetings, and all program sessions. Four hundred and twenty-two questionnaires were completed and returned out of the 500 distributed.

This purposive sample is limited by the fact that there may have been black journalists at the conference who did not receive a questionnaire simply because they did not visit the registration desk, NABJ luncheon and dinner meetings, or did not attend the conference program sessions.²³

Job satisfaction was measured by responses to, *All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job?* Responses were coded as **very satisfied**, **fairly satisfied**, **somewhat dissatisfied** and **very dissatisfied**. Job appeal was measured by responses to, *In judging the appeal and attractiveness of your job, how would you rank the importance of the nine job factors below on a scale from 1 to 3 (very important, fairly important, or not too important).* The nine factors, taken from the Weaver and Wilhoit study, were:

- ✓ Job salary;
 - ✓ Fringe benefits;
 - ✓ Freedom from supervision;
 - ✓ Chance to help people;
 - ✓ Editorial policies of the organization;
 - ✓ Job security;
 - ✓ Chance to develop a specialty;
 - ✓ Amount of autonomy you have; and
 - ✓ Chance for job advancement.
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Results

Fifty-five percent of the respondents were reporters, 16 percent editors, 11 percent copy editors and 5 percent photographers. Seven percent were broadcast producers, 4 percent news anchors, 2 percent news directors and 5 percent public relations practitioners. Forty-five percent were male, 53 percent were female and 2 percent did not report gender.

Almost three-fourths held college degrees (74 percent) and 70 percent of those degrees were in journalism. Respondents had an average of nine years in the journalism field (the range was from less than a year to 36 years). Forty percent earned less than \$30,000 a year, 31 percent earned between \$31,000 and \$50,000 a year and 29 percent earned more than \$50,000 a year. Figures from a 1992 survey by the Newspaper Association of America show that the median income was \$22,391 for U.S. journalists with one to four years of experience and \$30,053 for those with five years or more. The salaries of the black journalists surveyed are higher than the national average, but those attending the NABJ convention are considered among the nation's elite journalists - those who work primarily in large cities for large news organizations that pay some of the nation's highest salaries.

Job satisfaction

Table 1 indicates that black journalists are generally more satisfied than dissatisfied with their jobs. Seventy percent of those surveyed were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their jobs while 30 percent were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

These findings overall are consistent with the positive job satisfaction levels found in the Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman; Weaver and Wilhoit; and Pease and Smith studies. However, the black journalists are more moderate than white journalists in their level of satisfaction. Only 20 percent viewed themselves as very satisfied, whereas 49 percent of the journalists in Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman; 40 percent in Weaver and Wilhoit; and 53 percent in Pease and Smith reported themselves as very satisfied.

The data also show that job dissatisfaction is significantly higher among black journalists than found in the other studies. When compared with

**Table 1: Job Satisfaction among Black Journalists:
A Frequency and Percentage Comparison**

Very satisfied	20.7%
Fairly satisfied	49.5
Somewhat dissatisfied	23.8
Very dissatisfied	6.0
<i>N=416</i>	

the Weaver-Wilhoit study, black journalists were almost twice as likely (30 percent) as white journalists (17 percent) to be dissatisfied.

Job satisfaction was also measured by the future plans of the black journalists. Almost three-fourths (74 per-

cent) said that in five years they planned to still be working journalists, while only 16 percent said they hoped to be working in another field. The remaining 10 percent said they were undecided about this. No significant differences were found on the question across the various print and broadcast media.

Table 2: Factors Most Important to Black Journalists in Judging Jobs

	(% saying very important)
Chance to advance	78%
Chance to help people	70
Job security	66
Editorial Policies	62
Salary	57
Autonomy	52
Chance to develop a specialty	51
Fringe benefits	50
Freedom from supervision	42

N=442

Job appeal factors

Table 2 ranks the percentage of respondents who rated each job factor as **very important**. Black journalists were most likely to stress the chance for job advancement. The second most highly rated job factor was the chance to help people and the third was job security.

Job salary was ranked in the middle and given slightly less emphasis than newsroom editorial policies. Responses for newspaper and magazine journalists were not significantly different from responses by radio and television journalists. Neither were there differences by gender, education, or employment region in how black journalists rated the nine job factors.

Ratings by the respondents in this study do differ from those found by Weaver-Wilhoit. (see Table 3) Among white journalists, the most highly rated job factor was the chance to help people, followed by job security, editorial policy and job autonomy. Each of the four factors was considered more important among white journalists than the chance for job advancement, the top rated factor among black journalists.

These findings parallel other studies that show journalists of color are more likely than whites to aspire to move into management positions. However, such aspirations probably have been met with frustration, given that industry figures show black journalists do not move into management positions as fast as white journalists. Yet the findings in this study suggest that to attract blacks

and other minority journalists, journalism must be seen as a field where there is a chance for professional advancement.

Another major difference between the white and black journalists was in how they rated money. (see Tables 2 and 3) Black journalists placed much more importance on salary than white journalists. While black journalists tended to give salary middle ranking, white journalists were more likely to place it at the bottom of the list. On the other hand, neither black nor white journalists ranked money at the top of the list, which suggests that money is not the overriding job appeal factor for either group. Also interesting was the importance that both black and white journalists placed on having a chance to help people. Both ranked the chance to help people at the top of the list, indicating that altruism may be as important today as it was in the days of the muckraking journalists.

Conclusions

Although the findings in this study cannot be portrayed as representative of all black American journalists, nor of all NABJ members, they do reveal some interesting patterns and trends. The overall level of job satisfaction among those surveyed tends to be positive, though more tempered than the satisfaction levels reported in studies of white journalists. Certainly this is good news for media managers, given charges by black journalists that the media industry shows lackluster commitment and laggardness in its recruiting, retention and promotion of journalists of color.

Findings show that certain job factors do appear to have more appeal in attracting black journalists, with chance for job advancement leading them all. Yet the percentage of blacks who advance compared to their white counterparts is very small.

Studies have found that minority journalists rarely advance to management ranks because they not in the managerial pipeline.²⁵ And less than 2 percent of newsroom executives are minority.

Because job satisfaction and job attractive-

Table 3: Factors Important to U.S. Journalists in Judging Jobs

	(% saying very important)
Chance to help people	61%
Job security	57
Editorial policies	57
Autonomy	50
Chance to advance	47
Chance to develop a specialty	45
Fringe benefits	26
Salary	23

N=1,001

Source: Weaver and Wilhoit, 1981.

ness are central to the commitment journalists make to their field, the enhancement of both should occur whenever possible. The findings in this study show that job appeal factors and job satisfaction motivations for black journalists are not very different from those found in studies of white journalists. Both groups rate the chance to help people as a top factor in their perceptions of job attractiveness. The findings show also that among black journalists, as found earlier among white journalists, money is not the major yardstick.

The findings suggest that among black journalists, job appeal levels tend to be highest when a glass ceiling is not placed over their advancement into management positions and when their salaries are competitive. Managers who want to make progress in increasing and retaining minorities should emphasize both job advancement possibilities and minority representation in managerial jobs. They could elicit the help of the National Association of Minority Media Executives, a group formed to work for the advancement of more minorities into the top ranks of the newsroom.²⁶

If the news industry's goal is to improve the news product through enhancement of color diversity in the journalism work force, then media managers must be alert to job appeal factors that are most valued by blacks and other journalists of color.

Notes

1. **Report of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders.** New York: Bantam, 1968, p. 367.
 2. Mary A. Anderson, *The Goal: Full Minority Representation*, **Presstime**. April 1988, p. 24; Nick Kotz, *The Minority Struggle for a Place in the Newsroom*, **Columbia Journalism Review**. March/April 1979, p. 26; George Garneau, *Not Enough Progress*, **Editor & Publisher**. May 1988, p. 10; Abe Rosenfeld, *Minorities in the Newsroom*, **ASNE Bulletin**. May/June 1987, p. 16.
 3. **The Changing Face of the Newsroom.** Reston, Va.: ASNE Human Resources Committee, 1989, p. 57; *ASNE Finds Scant Progress for Minorities*, **Presstime**. May 1990, p. 76; *Minority Hiring at Newsrooms Makes Gains*, **Presstime**. May 1991, p. 56.
 4. Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 24; Garneau, *op.cit.*, p. 10; Rosenfeld, *op.cit.*, p. 16.
 5. *ASNE 1992 Newsroom Employment Survey*, **ASNE Bulletin**. May/June 1991, p. 33.
 6. *ASNE Finds Scant Progress*, *op.cit.*, p. 76; Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
 7. *Newsroom Integration Still Crawling at a Snail's Pace*, **NABJ Newsletter**. April 1989, p. 1; *Minority Task Force Regroups*, **Presstime**. March 1991, p. 43.
 8. Vernon Stone, *Trends in the Status of Minorities and Women in Broadcast News*, **Journalism Quarterly**. 65(Summer 1988), pp. 288-293.
 9. Jay Harris, *ASNE Survey Finds Minorities Comprise 4% of Newsroom Employees*, **Editor & Publisher**. April 15, 1978, p. 9; Edward Trayes, *Black Journalists on U.S. Metropolitan Daily Newspapers: A Follow-up Study*, **Journalism Quarterly**. 56(Winter 1979), pp. 711-714; *ASNE Finds Scant Progress*, *op.cit.*, p. 76.
 10. *Newsroom Integration Still Crawling*, *op.cit.*, p. 1; Kotz, *op.cit.*, p. 27; Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 26; *ASNE Finds Scant Progress*, *op.cit.*, p. 76.
 11. John W.C. Johnstone, Edward Slawski and William Bowman, **The News People**. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1976, p. 183; David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, **The American Journalist: A Profile of U.S. News People and Their Work**. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 163. The Johnstone study consisted of a national random sample of 1,328 journalists in which only 2 percent were minorities; the Weaver-Wilhoit study consisted of a national random sample of 1,001 journalists in which 5 percent were minorities.
 12. Vernon Stone, *Pipelines and Dead Ends: Jobs Held by Minorities and Women in Broadcast News*, **Mass Comm Review**. 18(Fall 1988), pp. 10-19; Donald L. Guimary, *Ethnic Minorities in California Dailies*, **Journalism Quarterly**. 65(Winter 1984), p. 1009-1011; Trace Regan and Hochang Shin, *Minority Journalists in Ohio: A Study of their Job Satisfaction*, paper presented to the Minorities and Communication Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Portland, Ore., July 3, 1988.
 13. Merrill Samuelson, *A Standardized Test to Measure Job Satisfaction in the Newsroom*, **Journalism Quarterly**. 39(Summer 1962), pp. 285-291.
 14. Frederick Herzberg, **Work and the Nature of Man**. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers, 1966, p. 71.
 15. Harold C. Shaver, *Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction among Journalism Graduates*, **Journalism Quarterly**. 55(Spring 1978), pp. 54-61; Grace H. Barrett, *Job Satisfaction among Newspaperwomen*, **Journalism Quarterly**. 61(Autumn 1984), pp. 593-599; Lori
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- A. Bergen and David Weaver, *Job Satisfaction of Daily Newspaper Journalists and Organization Size*, *Newspaper Research Journal*. 9:2(Winter 1988), pp. 1-13.
16. Throughout the present study, the Johnstone study and the Weaver-Wilhoit replication are labeled studies of *white journalists* simply because the minority journalists data samples in these studies were so small they were almost nonexistent or did not allow clear inferences to be drawn about minority journalists.
 17. Johnstone, et al., *op.cit.*, p. 183; Weaver and Wilhoit, *op.cit.*, p. 65.
 18. Weaver and Wilhoit, *op.cit.*, pp. 174-182.
 19. Ted Pease and J. Frazier Smith, *The Newsroom Barometer: Job Satisfaction and the Impact of Racial Diversity at U.S. Daily Newspapers*, *Ohio Journalism Monographs*. No. 1(July 1991), pp. 1-35.
 20. Mark Fitzgerald, *Minorities and Newspapers*, *Editor & Publisher*. September 3, 1988, pp. 14-15; Richard Shafer, Sherry Ricchiardi and Robert Knight, *Factors that May Keep the Revolving Door Turning for Minority Journalists in American Newsrooms*, *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*. 5:2(1989), pp. 16-22.
 21. Johnstone, et al., *op.cit.*, p. 183; Weaver and Wilhoit, *op.cit.*, 93.
 22. A *black journalist* was defined in this study as any black person attending the NABJ convention who works in the print or broadcast journalism field, including a small number of public relations practitioners in attendance who make up 4 percent of the 422 -person study sample.
 23. NABJ president Dewayne Wickham reported after the St. Louis conference that 1,300 people registered for the meeting. However, while the overwhelming majority of the conference participants were black journalists, the actual number of black journalists who registered for the conference was unknown, simply because the registration forms did not include racial designations. Therefore, it was impossible to determine what percentage of black journalists who registered for the conference is represented by the 422 respondents in this study sample. See NABJ Newsletter (September 1988), p. 2.
 24. **1992 Newspaper Industry Compensation Survey**. Reston, Va.: Newspaper Association of America, 1992.
 25. Stone, *op.cit.*, p. 18; Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 22; Shafer, Ricchiardi and Knight, *op.cit.*, p. 21.
 26. *Retention of Minority Employees Becomes a Central Focus*, *Presstime*. February 1990, p. 43; *Minority Executives Form New Organization*, *Presstime*. February 1991, p. 21.
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