

Daily newspaper journalists in the 1990s

by David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit

Over a decade has passed since the data were collected for the Gannett Foundation-funded 1982-1983 study of U.S. journalists which resulted in publication of *The American Journalist*.¹ During this time, great changes occurred in journalism and in the larger society. Even more dramatic changes occurred since the 1971 benchmark study, *The News People*, by John W. Johnstone and his colleagues.² These changes included the wholesale adoption of new technologies that have changed not only the speed of transmission of news, but also its nature.

But what of American daily newspaper journalists? Have they, too, changed dramatically in the past decade? As the following findings will suggest, the answer is both *yes* and *no*, but mostly *no*. The past decade has been one of some worrisome change, and some progress, among daily newspaper journalists, but it has also been a period of little growth in overall numbers and little change in the representation of women and minorities.

Methods

Because this study was intended to be a follow-up to the 1971 and the 1982-83 national surveys of U.S. journalists, the definitions of *journalist* and the sampling methods used by the earlier studies were followed closely in order to be able to directly compare 1992 results with those of 1971 and 1982. Many of the

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same questions were asked as in these previous studies, but some new questions reflect the changes in journalism and the larger society in the past decade.

Unlike the previous two studies, however, journalists from the four main minority groups - Asian Americans, Black Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans - were deliberately oversampled to ensure adequate numbers for comparison with each other and with white journalists. These oversamples of minority journalists were kept separate from the main probability sample when making comparisons with the earlier studies.

The findings are based on extensive interviews with 636 U.S. daily newspaper journalists who were included in a larger national probability sample of 1,156 U.S. journalists working for a wide variety of daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, and news services and magazines throughout the United States. These interviews were conducted by telephone from June 12 to September 12, 1992.

Journalists in the main probability sample of 1,156 were chosen randomly from news organizations that were also selected at random from listings in various directories.³ The response rate for this sample was 81 percent, and the maximum sampling error at the 95 percent level of confidence is plus-or-minus 3 percentage points. It is, of course, higher for the individual media groups. For the 636 daily newspaper journalists analyzed in this report, the maximum sampling error at the 95 percent level of confidence is about 4 percentage points, meaning that percentages reported here will not vary from those for all U.S. daily newspaper journalists by more than plus-or-minus 4 points in 95 of 100 random samples of this size.

The oversample of 254 minority journalists was chosen randomly from the membership lists of the four main minority journalism groups - the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA), the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), and the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA). The response rate for this oversample was 61 percent, and the maximum possible sampling error is just above 6 percentage points, but higher for the individual minority groups.

In drawing these samples, it was necessary to estimate how many full-time journalists were working in general interest mainstream news media in the United States. It was estimated that daily newspaper journalists make up 55 percent of the total U.S. journalistic work force, and the sample included 55 percent from daily newspapers.

General characteristics of daily newspaper journalists

Very little growth in the number of full-time daily newspaper journalists occurred in the past decade, as compared with the previous one. In 1982 the estimate was 51,650 full-time daily newspaper journalists. In 1992, the Ameri-

can Society of Newspaper Editors estimated 54,500, a growth of nearly 3,000 over the decade, compared with a growth of nearly 13,000 during the 1970s (from 38,800 to 51,650).⁴

But who were these journalists in 1992? As in 1982, it is difficult to talk in general terms about the *typical* U.S. daily newspaper journalist because there are more than 50,000 of them. The statistical profile from the 1992 national survey shows that the typical U.S. daily newspaper journalist was a white Protestant male who had a bachelor's degree from a public college, was married, 37 years old, earned about \$35,000 a year, had worked in journalism about 15 years, did not belong to a journalism association, and worked for a medium-sized, group-owned daily newspaper. But such a picture hides many individual differences. As the findings will show, there are substantial numbers of women, non-whites, non-Protestants, single, young and old, and relatively rich and poor journalists working in this country for a wide variety of small and large newspapers, both group and individually owned.

Many of these journalists differ from this profile of the typical journalist. For example, black and Asian journalists are more likely to be women than men, to be unmarried, to have higher incomes (\$37,000 - \$42,000) than the typical journalist, to have worked in journalism 10 or 11 years, to be members of at least one journalism association, and to work for larger (100-150 journalists) daily newspapers.

Hispanic journalists are more likely to be Catholic than Protestant, and to be more similar to blacks and Asians than to the *typical* U.S. journalist on other characteristics. Native American journalists are more likely to be of some other religion besides Protestant or Catholic, to make much less than the other groups (median income of \$22,000), and to work for very small newspapers or television stations (three or four journalists).

How do the daily newspaper journalists of 1992 compare with those of 10 or 20 years ago?

To begin, the median, or middle, age of these journalists has risen to 37 from about 33 in 1982. This is especially true for print journalists, whose median age is 37, compared to broadcast, where it is only 32.

This aging of American journalists is more dramatically illustrated by looking at the proportions in each age group. Those under 25 have shrunk to only about 2 percent of all journalists, down dramatically from both 1971 and 1982, mainly because of the small growth in number of new jobs during the 1980s.

The number of journalists 25-34 years old declined to 35 percent since 1982-83. And those 35-44 grew the most as a group, and are in 1992 the largest age segment in American daily newspaper journalism (40 percent). Those 45-54 years old have continued to decline since 1971, as have those 55-64 years old, suggesting relatively fewer *elders* in American newspaper journalism as compared with the early 1970s. Whether that will change much in the next decade as many of those in the large 25-44 group move into their 50s depends on how many stay in journalism and how many move on to other occupations. Survey

results do show that 21 percent of all daily newspaper journalists say they would like to be working outside the news media in five years, compared to 11 percent in 1982-83.

One thing that has surprisingly not changed much at American dailies is the percentage of women working full time. In spite of rapidly increasing enrollments of women in U.S. journalism schools during the 1980s, and the emphasis on hiring women since the late 1970s, the overall percentage of women journalists in daily newspapers has remained virtually unchanged.

However, when those journalists with less than five years experience are considered, it's clear that the percentage of women is much higher (about 45 percent). It is also higher for those with five-to-nine years experience (about 44 percent). But because the growth rate in daily journalism has been so small during the past decade, and because there are far fewer women than men with 15 years or more experience, these increased percentages of women hired during the past decade have not changed the overall percentage of women in U.S. daily newspapers from 1982 to 1992.

It appears that women have had some success in rising within the ranks of their organizations, as 33 percent of them say they have some supervisory responsibility for news-editorial staff, compared with 39 percent for their male colleagues. These findings show that editors and managers have been successful in hiring and promoting more women during the 1980s, but this success has not been reflected in the overall proportions of women because of small growth in the field, and possibly because women do not stay in newspaper journalism as long as men.

The representation of minorities on newspaper staffs has improved, but the percentage is still not equal to their proportions in the overall population. There has been some increase from 3.9 percent during the past decade; but the 7.6 percent for 1992 still lags behind the 24 percent estimated by the 1990 U.S. Census, but not too far behind the percentage of minorities estimated to have bachelor's degrees (9 percent).

Again, if only those daily newspa-

Table 1: Gender of daily newspaper journalists (%)

	Men	Women
1971	77.6	22.4
1982-83	65.6	34.4
1992	66.1	33.9

Table 2: Gender of daily newspaper journalists by years in journalism (%)

Years	Female	Male
20+	22.7	77.3
15-19	27.7	72.3
10-14	37.6	62.4
5-9	44.2	55.8
0-4	44.6	55.4

per journalists hired during the past decade are considered, the overall percentage of minorities is considerably higher than 7.6 percent, suggesting that there have been increased efforts - and some success - in minority hiring during the 1980s. But the percentage drops off sharply for those journalists with 10 or more years of experience, probably because of less emphasis on minority hiring during the 1960s and 1970s, and possibly because more minorities are leaving journalism after 10 years on the job.

In 1992, African-Americans at 4.6 percent were the most numerous minority journalists working for U.S. daily newspapers, whereas Native Americans at 0.5 percent were the least common.

In terms of religious backgrounds, daily newspaper journalists have not changed much in the past decade, and they reflect the overall population fairly closely.

Although there hasn't been much change in religious backgrounds, there has been a notable change in political party preference, with more of these journalists identifying themselves as Democrats, and slightly fewer saying they are Republicans. The proportion calling themselves independents has also dropped a bit.

When compared to the overall U.S. population, journalists are 8-to-13 percentage points more likely to say they are Democrats, and 12-to-17 points less likely to say they are Republicans, depending on which poll is used as a measure of the overall U.S. adult population's party preference. The percentage of journalists claiming to be independents is close to the overall population percentage.

Table 3: *Minority daily newspaper journalists by years in journalism (%)*

Years	
20+	4.7
15-19	5.0
10-14	4.8
5-9	13.3
0-4	15.6

Table 4: *Religious backgrounds of daily newspaper journalists (% 1992)*

Religion	
None	7.3
Other	4.0
Jewish	3.8
Catholic	28.1
Protestant	56.9

Educational backgrounds of journalists

The percentage of U.S. journalists with at least a college bachelor's degree continues to increase and in 1992 was up to 84.3 percent from 62.6 percent in 1971.

It's clear that the bachelor's degree has become the minimum qualification necessary for practicing journalism in U.S. daily newspapers. But the college degree with a major in journalism is still not held by a majority of U.S. full-time journalists, despite the large numbers of journalism school students graduating in the 1980s. In fact, there has been no change overall in the percentage of college graduates who majored in journalism during the past decade, probably because of the very slow growth in number of mainstream journalism jobs and the aging of existing journalists. But when those who majored, minored, or took college classes in journalism are summed, the percentage rises from 39.4 to 62.3, nearly two-thirds who have been exposed to journalism education in college.

Table 5: *Political party identification of daily newspaper journalists (%)*

Party	1982-83	1992
Other	2.2	3.3
Independent	39.6	36.0
Republican	16.7	13.7
Democrat	41.4	47.0

Salaries

Daily newspaper salaries eroded badly during the inflationary spiral of the late 1970s. As a result, the industry has been playing *catch up* during the last decade. The increase in median income from \$21,000 in 1981 to \$35,180 in 1991 did exceed inflation by nearly 18 percentage points, but the latest figure still is less than income estimates for other somewhat comparable occupational groups, such as internal auditors and accountants, who made average salaries of about \$37,000 in 1990.⁵ And this gain in salary did not restore journalists' purchasing power on average to late 1960s levels.

Public relations personnel earned a median salary of \$46,556 in 1991, but that figure includes responses from high-level management as well as staff. Account executives earned \$35,724, a figure roughly comparable to newspaper journalists.⁶

Table 6: *Inflation vs. median salary increases for daily newspaper journalists (%)*

Increases	1970-81	1981-91
Salary	83.9	67.5
CPI	134.1	49.8

Daily newspaper journalists were paid more than their colleagues in television (\$25,625), but news magazine journalists, who tend to be concentrated in large urban areas, earned a median salary of \$66,071 in 1991.

The decline in the rate of inflation over the last decade enabled the increase in daily newspaper journalists' income to exceed the rise in the Consumer Price Index. But this progress in salary did not restore journalists' relative buying power to its late-1960's level.

One encouraging finding is that the salary gap between men and women appears to be closing. Overall median salaries for women on daily newspapers are now 84 percent of those for men, compared to 64 percent in 1981.

When experience in journalism is considered, the gender gap is significantly less, with no real disparities at the beginning and senior levels.

The gap that remains among the mid-level personnel is an anomaly that almost disappears when a variety of other characteristics - such as organization size, geography, and ownership - are considered. Equally significant is the finding that the salaries paid to Asian, Hispanic and African-American minority journalists do not appear to differ significantly from the compensation given their colleagues. Native Americans, who typically work for very small newspapers, do tend to earn somewhat less.⁷

Overall, the most important correlates of the amount of money made by newspaper journalists are not surprising. The size of the newspaper, job responsibilities, and years experience in journalism are the key determinants.

Table 7: *1991 median income of daily newspaper journalists by years in journalism*

Years	Female	Male
20+	\$42,273	\$42,045
15-19	\$41,071	\$42,083
10-14	\$32,143	\$36,400
5-9	\$26,591	\$29,583
0-4	\$19,167	\$18,750

Job satisfaction

Although newspaper journalists are sometimes said to be complainers by nature, studies of job satisfaction over the years have shown them to be comparatively happy in their work. That has changed. Job satisfaction in newspapering appears to be in significant decline.

Only 25 percent say they are very satisfied with their job, about half the satisfaction rate 20 years ago, and 40 percent of that a decade ago. A majority in 1992 are at least fairly satisfied, but the overall decline in job happiness is considerable.

The decline in job satisfaction among daily newspaper journalists parallels that of other media, but the trend among journalists does not appear

to reflect changes in the general work force of the country. Studies of the national work force and sub-groups such as office workers and university professors suggest much higher levels of job satisfaction than newspaper journalists reported in this study.⁸

What are the causes of the apparent trend toward disgruntlement among journalists? Surveys cannot supply the answer, but they may point to areas of concern.

Daily newspaper journalists were asked about the importance of a number of factors in how they felt about their jobs.

Table 8: *Importance of factors in rating jobs*
(% of daily newspaper journalists
saying very important)

Organizational editorial policies	66.8
Job security	62.0
Chance to help people	58.3
Amount of autonomy	52.9
Chance to develop a specialty	43.7
Chance to influence public affairs	38.8
Fringe benefits	37.5
Chance to get ahead in organization	35.5
Pay	21.4

The editorial policies of the newspaper - meaning the aggressiveness and resources with which news staffs may pursue their work - is the factor on which there is the most consensus. It has been an important factor in studies over the last two decades, but it is a top choice of about 10 percentage points more journalists than in 1982. Women (72 percent) are somewhat more likely to stress the importance of editorial policies than are men (64 percent).

A similar jump in the importance of fringe benefits has occurred over the decade, but benefits are ranked as *very important* by only a minority of newspaper journalists. Pay is not considered a very important factor by very many in the sample, a finding consistent with earlier studies. Autonomy - the ability to get stories covered and to influence story angle - also ranks in importance about where it has for two decades.

An altruistic satisfaction in helping people is seen as *very important* by a majority (58 percent). Female journalists (67 percent) are considerably more likely than their male colleagues (54 percent) to value altruism highly.

Analysis of extensive open-ended comments by newspaper journalists about their reasons for job dissatisfaction tends to support some of the key findings above. Of those who are unhappy, a little more than half point a finger at management. The criticisms tend to cite management's tightfisted policies on

covering the news with too few resources, or too much concern about audience appeal at the expense of substance. About 28 percent of them, however, complain about salary, and another 15 percent cite their lack of opportunity for promotion in organizations strapped with declining resources. About 15 percent of the *dissatisfied* newspaper journalists say their news staffs are not large enough now to cover the news properly.⁹

Journalists who were generally happy with their jobs were more eclectic in the reasons cited than were their *dissatisfied* colleagues, confirming the finding of previous studies that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are separate concepts. About a third of the *very satisfied* journalists said their autonomy on the job was the key. About 20 percent cited good salaries as making their work satisfying, and another 20 percent said their job was challenging and interesting. A little less than 20 percent said management's pursuit of good journalistic practice was their source of satisfaction. About 15 percent praised their colleagues (and the adequacy of staff size) in describing their job satisfaction.

Statistical predictors of satisfaction

An intensive analysis of a large number of questions from the interviews with newspaper journalists revealed some predictors of job satisfaction. The most important factor was the extent to which journalists see their organization as doing a good job at informing their audience. This finding is consistent with earlier studies.

The number of journalists who say their newsroom is doing an outstanding job appears to have declined slightly, but not enough to explain much of the apparent trend toward job dissatisfaction.

The second most important factor that correlates with job satisfaction is the frequency of comment from supervisors. The more often newspaper journalists say their editors comment on their work, the more likely they are to be happy with their job. Ironically, newsroom editors report higher rates of comment on their staffs' work in the 1992 study than did those interviewed in 1982-83.

And the number of newspaper journalists who say they get comment regularly from their editors is now 41 percent, compared to 29 percent a decade ago.

Closely following comment by supervisors as a factor in job satisfaction is feedback from the audience. The greater the frequency of comment from

Table 9: *Daily newspaper journalists' rating of how well their organization informs the public (%)*

	1982-83	1992
Outstanding	14.1	9.8
Very good	47.6	46.4
Good	30.3	33.2
Fair	7.1	9.4
Poor	0.9	1.1

newspaper readers, the more likely the journalist is to have higher sense of job satisfaction. This source of feedback appears to have declined. About 40 percent of newspaper journalists say now that they hear from their readers regularly, as compared to 57 percent in 1982-83.

Another important predictor of job satisfaction is autonomy, the discretion to choose the stories on which the journalists work. However, the actual amount of autonomy journalists perceive on their jobs appears to have declined over the decade.

Only a minority (38 percent) of those who do reporting say they have almost complete freedom in selecting the stories on which they work. Other indicators of autonomy also suggest a decline. A slim majority of daily newspaper reporters (56 percent) say they almost always can get an important story covered if they suggest it, but that is down from 64 percent a decade ago. Only 49 percent of reporters say they have almost complete freedom to decide which aspects of a story should be covered, compared to 67 percent in 1981-82.

As previously discussed, it is those newspaper journalists who are very satisfied who tend to cite autonomy as a reason (in open-ended discussion). Those who are dissatisfied rarely mention autonomy.

Newspaper journalists who place a high value on the analytic and interpretive role of journalists in explaining complex problems to their readers seem to respond to their jobs somewhat differently than do their colleagues who see that as less important. That attitude, stress on the analytic role, appears to predict higher job satisfaction.

Combining all the predictors of job satisfaction discussed above suggests that there are more questions than answers in the data. Only about 20 percent of the variance in job satisfaction among daily newspaper journalists is explained by the analysis. And, viewed another way, some factors that are not related to job satisfaction are surprising. Ownership form of the organization - whether the journalist works for a privately owned group, a publicly traded group, or an individually owned newspaper - makes no difference. Neither gender nor race¹⁰ appear to be a significant factor. And income levels do not appear to predict job satisfaction among daily newspaper journalists.

Journalistic roles

The daily newspaper journalists in the sample were asked a battery of 11 questions about the importance of various aspects of the possible roles of the news media. Specifically, each journalist responded to questions such as: "How important is it for the news media to get information to the public quickly?"

Two journalistic roles are seen as extremely important by a majority: investigating government claims, and getting information to the public quickly. There are no significant differences by race or gender on these journalistic roles.

Table 10: *Importance daily newspaper journalists assign to mass media roles (% saying extremely important)*

Investigate government claims	69.9
Get information to public quickly	69.6
Analyze complex problems	54.4
Let people express views	52.0
Avoid stories with unverifiable facts	50.0
Discuss national policy	44.1
Be an adversary of government	25.9
Develop intellectual/cultural interests	18.0
Reach widest possible audience	17.2
Be an adversary of business	16.9
Provide entertainment	16.1
Set the political agenda	5.1

The analytic-interpretive role appears to divide journalists, with about half seeing it as of great importance. Asian (68 percent) and African-American journalists (60 percent) are somewhat more likely to say the analytic role is extremely important than are their colleagues. All four minority groups are somewhat more likely to see as extremely important the development of the intellectual and cultural interests of their audiences. About a third of these journalists see that as extremely important, compared to only 18 percent of their majority colleagues.¹¹

An adversary stance toward either government or business, which some critics see as characteristic of journalists, is a high value for only a few daily newspaper journalists. The reluctance of daily newspaper journalists to identify strongly with an activist role also is suggested in the finding that only a few say setting the political agenda is very important.

For the most part, the perceptions of journalistic role are broadly similar to those of a decade ago.

A small, but significant, shift is apparent in the transmission role, as more journalists see that as highly important as compared to a decade ago. The biggest change, though, is the decline among those who place high value on reaching the widest audience. Both these changes likely reflect technological developments that enhance the speed of information processing and the fragmentation of mass audiences into specialized markets. Interestingly, newspaper journalists tended to be less sympathetic to an entertainment role in 1992 than they were a decade ago, perhaps a reaction against increasing emphasis on this role in many newspapers.¹²

Controversial reporting practices

One of the most significant aspects of contemporary public debate about mainstream news media is the ethics of various reporting practices. This is an especially troublesome area for survey research because of the difficulty of asking a respondent to evaluate a reporting tactic that is removed from the context of a news story on which “it depends.” This study asked daily newspaper journalists to consider nine practices individually and to say whether they may be justified on occasion, or whether these practices would not be approved under any circumstance.

Overall consensus is apparent on only two items. Almost 90 percent say they could justify using confidential business or government documents without authorization. And, overwhelmingly, newspaper journalists say a promise to protect confidentiality of a source must not be broken.

A majority of newspaper journalists say they could justify getting employed in an organization in order to gain inside information, but a slightly larger majority reject the idea of claiming to be somebody else in an undercover investigation. Most journalists also are not congenial to the notion of paying people for confidential information, or to the practice of some broadcast journalists in using re-creations of news events.

Table 11: *Controversial reporting practices
(% of daily newspaper journalists
saying it may be justified)*

Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	88.6
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	63.4
Using hidden microphones or cameras	57.8
Badgering unwilling informants to get a story	54.6
Making use of personal documents such as letters and photographs without permission	54.4
Disclosing names of rape victims	47.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	21.6
Claiming to be someone else	20.2
Paying people for confidential information	17.2
Agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so	4.4

Daily newspaper journalists tend to be evenly split on using hidden microphones, using personal documents without permission and badgering unwilling informants. They are also divided on the issue of disclosing the names of rape victims. (Both male and female journalists are about equally divided on the issue.)

Minority journalists' attitudes about the various reporting practices are roughly similar to those of their colleagues, with two exceptions. Only about a fifth of the Native Americans could accept the disclosure of rape victims' names. Badgering unwilling informants is acceptable to fewer Hispanic (42 percent), black (40 percent), and Native American (33 percent) journalists than to their white and Asian colleagues.

These results suggest some change in attitudes about some of the more important reporting practices over the decade.¹³

The largest shift is toward a greater tolerance for using confidential information from official and business sources. This change probably reflects a greater awareness of problems of government secrecy and the difficulty of access to official computerized data bases. But there is a similar pattern in attitudes about the use of personal documents and letters without permission.

Plans to leave the profession

A serious problem of retention of news-editorial personnel may be just ahead for daily newspapers. More than 20 percent of the journalists surveyed in 1991 said they plan to leave the field within five years, double the figure of 1982-83.

The reasons given for planning to leave daily newspapering cover more than a dozen categories, none dominant. Often several reasons are interwoven.

About 18 percent of the *leavers* say they just feel the need for a new challenge or personal change. A writer with some supervisory responsibility, early 40s, for a mid-size southern paper said: "At the moment it seems that [some other job] would be more fulfilling for me. So it's less a criticism of the news media than an exploration of what I think I would be best at." An editor on a mid-size daily in the Midwest, in her 40s, said, "I feel like I've done everything. I feel like I've discovered everything I can here and I need a new challenge." The editor of a very small paper in the South said, "For a change. I've been doing it for so long. I can't really point to any specifics in the industry that I have complaints against."

Sometimes the idea of needing a new challenge was intertwined with other circumstances. An editor-writer on a very large southern paper: "It's a young person's profession. After 20 years you get pretty burned out. I have done what I felt I wanted to do with this career and I want to move on to something new. Job security is not very good in journalism. One of the things I would tell students is that they should be prepared to move from paper to paper to get

ahead in their careers, and that even if they have been a long time at one paper, their job security can be wiped away with a sudden change in management. I am also not convinced that newspapers will be as big or influential as they have been in the past."

Slightly fewer (16 percent) say they are disappointed in the superficiality of the profession. A reporter, age 31, on a large southern paper is an example: "I am just sort of fed up with the superficiality of daily journalism."

"The genre of journalistic writing is more limited than I feel satisfied with. I'd rather work with something that allows a little more depth."

That's really the bottom line. I feel like most journalism, most organizations - whether at a paper or television - just skim the issues rather than analyzing. It's stenography." A woman writer with some supervisor responsibility on a mid-sized paper in the Northeast, said: "The genre of journalistic writing is more limited than I feel satisfied with. I'd rather work with something that allows a little more depth." A young woman writer who had some supervisory responsibility on a small southern paper said: [The paper] is more interested in entertainment-type stuff ... than hard news." A western reporter on a very large paper said, "I just think that after 10 years, you've done all you can do ... and it's time to move on to something else. There's a limited scope in the work you can do as a daily reporter. [There's] not enough detail and depth in newswriting."

Another 16 percent are tired of either the long hours or the particular work schedule required in their job. A typical response was by a writer-editor in his 40s, working on very large paper in the Northeast: "The hours stink. My family has become extremely important to me - more important than my career and I'd rather be with my family." An editor his late 30s, working on a large southern paper, said: "Because the demanding work hours of the news media do not go well with my family situation. When I got the job I was single and had no cares in the world. Now I've got a wife and two almost-grown children. I've learned there's more important things than work and the work hours are a big part of it. You have no social life." The need for more flexible hours is suggested by a young woman who writes for a very large paper in the East: "I just had a child. Being a teacher would be more flexible." A woman, 29, who writes and has some supervisory responsibility on a mid-size eastern paper, said, "I'm planning a family soon, [and I] want better hours."

"The day-to-day grind of deadlines can get very tedious, and I'd like to quit while I still have some hairs that haven't turned gray."

The stress and *burnout* of news work is cited by about 12 percent of those who say they want to change jobs. A Midwestern writer, in her early 40s, working for a small paper, said: "There's a lot of stress involved. Sometimes I

don't enjoy writing as much as I used to." A very young photographer on a small southern paper said: "The day-to-day grind of deadlines can get very tedious, and I'd like to quit while I still have some hairs that haven't turned gray."

Another said: "It's stressful. The hours are bad. It doesn't mesh with my family life well, and the rewards are small. You have to be very self motivating. With bad economic times the paper had to down-size staff, but it didn't down-size expectations." The notion of burnout was frequently mentioned in the general context of stress. For example, a young female reporter on a very large paper in the South: "I'm getting kind of burnt out on the whole thing, and the hours are sometimes a problem. I don't know that I want to be running around to dangerous neighborhoods."

"Things are changing. Technology is becoming more a part of the journalist's job and with TV it is hard to put out a newspaper that can compete..."

A writer and sub-editor for a mid-size northeastern paper, in his early 40s, said: "Things are changing. Technology is becoming more a part of the journalist's job and with TV it is hard to put out a newspaper that can compete. The hours are long and inconvenient for a morning newspaper. You work at night and it's hard to have a personal life. It's high stress." Other settings for burnout are mentioned by a writer, late 30s, working on a very large southern paper: "Mostly burnout, but the stagnancy of the industry ... [It's] not where I want to be ... [I] work a lot of hours and the pay was not enough."

A similar percentage (12 percent) complain of low salaries. A young reporter, a woman at a small paper in the Midwest, said: "Because the hours are long and the pay is poor." A young photojournalist on a small paper said: "One [reason] is pay. I didn't feel the return on my effort and the risk I had to take in some situations put me in a position where I could plan a future for my family and financial future." Another wanted to move to public relations: "While the media is something I enjoy doing and I think it is helpful to the community ... there are some salary restrictions that I'm faced with in journalism, and I think public relations is closely tied to journalism in that I can continue to write and I would continue to meet people ... and be acting in an educational environment."

"...After about a decade of editing for a newspaper, it's possible to exhaust your creative satisfaction."

A few (6 percent) say they want a more creative job. One said: "Personal and creative satisfaction. After about a decade of editing for a newspaper, it's possible to exhaust your creative satisfaction." A young, male reporter for a mid-sized southern paper, said: "Just to enjoy the freedom of working for myself and the creativity of writing fiction."

About 5 percent of the leavers are pessimistic about the future of the field. Typical is a writer-editor on a very large southern paper, in his early 40s,

who said: "Well, I think it is a dying profession." Closely related is the idea of stagnancy in the field. A reporter, 42, for a mid-size eastern paper said, "The industry is depressed right now. Everyone's not moving at all. The future's not very bright." A reporter, 42, on a mid-size southern paper, said, "My specific personality is more geared to print...[but] print media are undergoing major change and they are losing their product real soon because people are not reading any more."

About 5 percent of the daily newspaper journalists mention a lack of promotion as reason for leaving. For example, a writer, with some supervisory responsibility on a mid-sized, northeastern paper, almost 30, said: "I've been in it for a while and I kind of have the impression it's not something I want to grow old in - not a career for older people. I find it difficult to climb the ladder in journalism. The kind of thing I like to do makes it difficult to advance."

Some 2 percent complained about the corporate environment. For example, a woman writer, early 40s, on a large paper in the Northeast: "I think the news media have been corrupted by the corporate system and bottom-line thinking." A writer, 25, at a very large western paper said: "We have a fading of the privately owned or family or locally owned newspaper and the rise of the chains ... and what I perceive to be a lessening of the quality of the ... business - and I say *business* and not profession [Now I] see poor writing, less imaginative writing, less colorful writing, and frequently with either a political or personal agenda." Another: "It seems like ... the line between newsrooms and advertising is getting grayer and grayer all the time It seems that we are sort of catering to advertisers and that sort of thing I suppose."

There is a smattering of other reasons for leaving newspaper journalism. Typical are these: not having the personality for daily journalism, wanting more autonomy, feeling that helping others could be done better in another job, or having an "abusive" work situation.

Reasons given by minority journalists who want to leave the profession roughly parallel those of their colleagues. (The sample size, though, is quite small.)

Statistical discriminants of commitment

An intensive analysis of factors that most discriminate between newspaper personnel planning to leave the profession and those who say they want to stay in journalism suggests these points. Not surprisingly, job satisfaction is highly associated with staying in the field. The importance of job satisfaction, however, is substantially greater now than it was in a similar analysis a decade ago. In our 1982 study, job satisfaction was simply one of several factors that were moderately associated with career commitment. Now it appears to be the most important factor. Perhaps this change reflects fewer attractive opportunities for journalists outside the media field in the present economy. Whatever the

explanation, the 1991 *leavers* are a far less happy lot than the *defectors* were a decade ago.

Next in significance is gender. Women make up 24 percent of the defectors, compared to 18 percent who are men. The sample size of defectors is, of course, quite small (N=121), but gender as a factor is statistically significant.¹⁴ The irony is that gender is not a significant predictor of job satisfaction, as noted above.

Those who are involved in professional organizations (such as the Society of Professional Journalists) are more likely to be among the *stayers*. Membership in such groups appears to be declining, having dropped from 45 percent in 1972 to 37 percent in the present study.¹⁵

The last element that discriminates significantly between the stayers and the leavers is the newspaper's performance. Those journalists who feel their newspaper is doing an excellent job at informing the audience are more likely to want to stay in the field. The feeling that the newspaper is doing an excellent job, as noted above, appears to have declined somewhat among newspaper journalists generally.¹⁶

Several other factors are associated with plans to leave, but they are not statistically significant. It is the experienced newspaper journalists, apparently, who are more likely to say they are staying in the field, unlike a decade ago. At that time, it was the more experienced journalist - called "the best and the brightest" - who planned to leave. Being married is also associated with the leavers.

In our 1982 study, job satisfaction was simply one of several factors that were moderately associated with career commitment. Now it appears to be the most important factor.

Conclusions

The substantial growth in numbers of journalists working in daily newspapers that characterized the 1970s has stalled, a finding that corroborates earlier data collected by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. In spite of that, the industry appears to have made some progress in attracting minorities, with the figure now at about 8 percent. This by no means indicates sufficient diversity in the newsroom, but the figure is close to U.S. Census estimates of the percentage of minorities who have bachelor's degrees.

Stalled growth in employment appears to have affected the representation of women, as they are at the same percentage in the work force (34 percent) as a decade ago. There is evidence of greater parity of representation of men and women at the entry levels of newspapers, and women appear to have been rising to the supervisory ranks in increasing numbers. One-third of the women now say they have supervisory responsibility, compared to 39 percent of their male colleagues.

The median age of daily newspaper journalists, now 37, has risen and is about the same as it was before the rapid influx of large numbers of young, entry-level employees in the 1970s. Professional identity appears to have declined, however, with a smaller minority of the work force belonging to journalism organizations than in 1982-83.

Salaries have improved, with increases outpacing inflation over the decade. The median figure of \$35,180 is still below pay levels of other somewhat comparable occupations. The salary gaps between men and women and between the majority and the minorities appear to be greatly diminished, if not eliminated.

Job satisfaction among daily newspaper journalists seems to have declined over the decade. Accompanying that change is a significant reduction in the number of journalists who think they have the extent of professional autonomy that news people thought they had a decade ago. The explanations given by journalists for their feeling of job satisfaction are, of course, complex. Some common perceptions of highly satisfied journalists are these: a feeling that the organization is doing an excellent job informing the audience (and in an analytic-interpretive style), a strong sense of personal autonomy on the job, and frequent comments from editors and readers.

A serious problem of retention may be in the offing, as one-fifth of the journalists studied say they plan to leave the field, double the figure of a decade ago. The strongest predictor of career commitment is job satisfaction. That is hardly surprising except for the fact that a decade ago, the defectors were far less likely to be as clearly dissatisfied with their jobs as they are now. The most concrete factor that emerges, however, is that of gender: women are significantly more likely than men to say they are leaving the field. An employee-retention problem among female journalists on daily newspapers is apparent, and it is likely to get worse. The samples of minority journalists studied are not large enough to say for sure, but job satisfaction and career plans of these personnel seem to be roughly parallel to those of their majority colleagues.

Changes in the audience appear to be reflected in a perception that reaching the largest number of readers is not as important as it was a decade ago. Speed in getting the news to the public - likely a reflection of new technology's capacity for immediacy - has become more salient. Investigating government claims remains a high value.

While not rejecting the adversary role, newspaper journalists generally do not see it as their highest responsibility. In fact, there is evidence that they feel considerable caution about an activist role in their news work.

On the other hand, there seems to be recognition that some aggressive reporting practices may be more acceptable in an environment of government secrecy and the ease with which access to information is affected by computerized data bases. Use of confidential government, business, and personal documents is now seen as justifiable on occasion by an increasing majority of newspaper journalists.

Notes

1. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, **The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work**. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986 and the 2nd edition (with Lori Bergen, Dan G. Drew, and Sue A. Lafky), 1991.
2. John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, and William W. Bowman, **The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work**. Urbana, Ill., 1976.
3. These directories include the **1991 Editor & Publisher International Year Book**, **The Broadcasting Yearbook 1991**, the **1991 Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media**, and the Summer 1991 **News Media Yellow Book of Washington and New York**. Systematic random sampling was used to compile lists of 181 daily newspapers (stratified by circulation), 128 weekly newspapers, 17 news magazines, 28 wire service bureaus, 121 radio stations, and 99 television stations, for a total of 574 separate news organizations.
4. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, **The American Journalist**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986 and 1991, p. 13.
5. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics **Occupational Outlook Handbook**, May 1992, Bulletin 2400, p. 17.
6. *Seventh Annual Salary Survey*, **Public Relations Journal**, August 1992, pp. 10-28.
7. The conclusion about minority salaries is based on the entire "oversample" of minority journalists, so it includes minority journalists from all media.
8. Louis Harris & Associates, *Steelcase Office Environment Index 1991*, found 43 percent "very satisfied." The National Opinion Research Center's *General Social Survey of 1990* reported 46 percent of the national adult work force were "very satisfied." Susan H. Russell et al., *Profiles of Faculty in Higher Education Institutions*, 1988, p. 75, found 35 percent of full-time faculty to be "very satisfied."
9. Multiple answers were accepted, so these figures do not add up to 100 percent.
10. The sample sizes of minorities among newspaper journalists are small, so this tentative conclusion is based on the entire sample of minority journalists in all media combined. If the individual groups are separated, Asian and African Americans are a little less likely to be very satisfied, but Hispanic and Native Americans are somewhat more likely to be happy on the job. When the entire sample is considered in a regression analysis, race does not appear to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction.
11. These minority results are based on the entire sample of minority journalists from all media. This is done because the number of daily newspaper journalists from the minority groups is too small.
12. The questions about letting people express their views, developing intellectual/cultural interest, and setting the political agenda were not asked in the 1981-82 study.
13. Questions about hidden microphones, using re-creations, and disclosing the names of rape victims were not asked in 1981-82.
14. Discriminant analysis, a standard multivariate statistical procedure, is used. It determines the "power" of the various factors to discriminate between the "defectors" and the "stayers." The coefficients obtained are analogous to beta weights in regression analysis. A positive number means the factor is a characteristic of "stayers," and a negative one means it is associated with "defectors." In this analysis, job satisfaction is .69 and associated with "staying." Female gender is -.44 and associated with "defection."

15. The discriminant function is .26 for professional memberships.
16. The discriminant function for perception of newspaper performance is .26.

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