

# JOB SATISFACTION AMONG OUTFITTERS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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The state of Montana is a prime destination for those who are interested in fishing and hunting activities. Outfitters operate statewide to provide guiding services to hunters and anglers, yet scant research has been directed toward the outfitting industry. Little is known about the attitudes of outfitters including the perceptions they hold toward their job. Using a symbolic interaction theoretical perspective, this study took a qualitative approach to data collection and examined job satisfaction among outfitters. Most outfitters found the job satisfying and would choose the job again if given the opportunity. The findings contribute to a greater understanding of the job of outfitter.

In contrast to the vast outdoor recreation literature that is available on hunting and fishing, scant research has been directed toward the study of guides and outfitters (Adams, 2000; Greer, Miller, & Yeager, 1999; Hussain, Munn, Grado, & Henderson, 2008; Nickerson, Oschell, Rademaker, & Dvorak, 2007). Given that it is a form of nature-based tourism (Curtin, 2009; Gaede, Strickert, & Jurin, 2010; Mordue, 2009; Reis, 2009), outfitting activities occur in rural areas that possess abundant populations of fish and wildlife resources (Dowsley, 2009; Dunk, 2002; Garland, 2008; McGrath, 1996).

Each year, millions of anglers and hunters in the United States go to the nation's lakes, rivers, and forests for outdoor recreational pursuits (Palmer & Bryant, 1985; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2006a). Some of these individuals enlist the services of outfitters to help them with their fishing and hunting experiences (Greer et al., 1999; Hussain et al., 2008; Wright & Sanyal, 1998). Outfitters also work at the international level and, for example, arrange hunts for individuals who go on safaris in Africa (Baker, 1997; Bryant, 2004; Bryant & Forsyth, 2005).

Dickson (2010) clarified the distinction between guides and outfitters: "Guides are licensed individuals who lead the hunts. Guides work for *outfitters*, who own the business of providing hunting services. Many outfitters are also themselves guides" (p. 23). It should be noted that prior to becoming outfitters most of these individuals were employed as guides for other outfitters and used the experience to

acquire the knowledge needed to operate their own outfitting business.

In addition to hunting and fishing, individuals use outfitters for other outdoor activities such as trips into wilderness areas (Gray, 1992; Roggenbuck, 2000), mountaineering (Davidson, 2008), and boating (Hjerpe & Kim, 2007). Outfitter services are especially helpful for nonresidents (Adams, 2000; Dizard, 2003; Wright & Sanyal, 1998). Outfitters provide clients with accommodations such as food, lodging, and transportation on their trips and also provide clients with useful knowledge about hunting and fishing techniques, species, and habitats (Dizard, 2003; Hussain et al., 2008; Lowrey, 1986).

Prior research on outfitters and guides has examined the history of guiding (Johnston, 2007; Lowrey, 1986; Randall, 1960), risk management behaviors (Gray, 1992), and the social psychology of guides (Holyfield & Jonas, 2003; Sharpe, 2005). Other studies have addressed economic impacts of outfitting (Adams, 2000; Hjerpe & Kim, 2007; Hussain, et al., 2008; Janecek, 2006) and hunting issues that impact outfitters and guides (Baker, 1997; Little & Berrens, 2008; Miller, 2003; Nicolaysen, 1997). One area of research that has been neglected is that of attitudes toward the occupation among those employed in the outfitting profession including job satisfaction.

In Montana, wildlife issues are politically important and receive a great deal of attention at the local as well as the national level (Bidwell, 2010; Brownell, 1987; Kelley, 2001; Shanahan, McBeth,

Tigert, & Hathaway, 2010). Each year, thousands of individuals hire outfitters to assist them with their fishing and hunting experiences in Montana, with most of these individuals being nonresidents (Adams, 2000; Eliason, 2008; Haggerty & Travis, 2006; Robbins, 2006; Robbins & Luginbuhl, 2005; Wright & Sanyal, 1998). Hunters come to Montana seeking big game species such as deer, elk, antelope, moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats as well as black bears, wolves, and mountain lions. Some hunters pursue upland bird hunting opportunities. Angling includes a diversity of fishing opportunities on lakes and reservoirs as well as trout fishing on world-class rivers. Describing the popularity of fly fishing in the state, Wright and Sanyal (1998) stated, "If fly fishing is reaching the status of a religion as some anglers have described, then Southwestern Montana is Mecca" (p. 37).

It has been noted that natural resources are an important part of the state's tourism industry (Wilton & Nickerson, 2006). In terms of the economy, Montana jobs are among the lowest paying in the nation (Fritz, 2002; Malone, Roeder, & Lang, 1991). According to Wilton and Nickerson (2006), the outfitting industry is important for local economies: "Outfitters and guides are local entrepreneurs who typically spend their money locally, thereby reducing leakage to outside areas. It is this type of tourism income that most states often encourage because of the local benefit" (p. 21).

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical perspective used in this study was symbolic interaction. According to Shaffir and Pawluch (2003), this perspective has utility for the study of work since it focuses on "the experience of work from the point of view of those who engage in it" (p. 894). The concept of job satisfaction has to do with the extent to which individuals find their occupation satisfying. That is, it refers to whether or not someone likes their job and finds the work fulfilling and rewarding. An awareness of factors associated with job satisfaction is important since occupational turnover is more likely to occur when individuals do not find their work satisfying.

Outfitting is a traditional rural occupation that exists in an increasingly urban

society. Outfitters are private entrepreneurs who utilize public natural resources including land, water, fish, and wildlife for profit-making purposes. To properly manage and direct activities and efforts within their respective domains, natural resource management as well as tourism agencies must be aware of attitudes and opinions of diverse stakeholder groups. Consequently, there is a need for studies to examine job satisfaction among those employed in the outfitting industry. Given the economic importance of outfitting and tourism to state economies (Hussain et al., 2008; Nickerson & Dubois, 2008; Nickerson et al., 2007; Wilton & Nickerson, 2006), the development of a knowledge base on outfitting and those who work as outfitters is particularly time sensitive.

## METHODS

This study took a qualitative approach to data collection and used the technique known as interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989). Denzin described interpretive interactionism as "...the attempt to make the world of problematic lived experience of ordinary people directly available to the reader. The interactionist interprets these worlds" (1989, p. 7). With this end in mind, extensive quotes from outfitters are presented. Respondents were allowed to speak for themselves in order to identify the factors influencing job satisfaction in the outfitting industry. Summarization and interpretation of comments precede outfitters' responses.

A list of licensed outfitters in 2004 was obtained from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. In 2005, a mail survey was sent to all licensed hunting and fishing outfitters in Montana (n = 638). The survey instrument contained mostly open-ended questions about the job of outfitter. Outfitters were asked to indicate how satisfying they found the job, the best and worst parts of the job, how stressful they found the job, and if they would choose the job again. Respondents were allowed to answer in their own words so their perceptions of job satisfaction could be obtained in rich detail (Fowler, 1993). A few demographic questions were also asked. A total of 156 surveys were returned for a response rate of 24%.

In addition, phone interviews were conducted with 28 of the outfitters who returned a survey and agreed to participate. Phone interviews were used to clarify information in the surveys as well as obtain additional information about the job of outfitter.

## RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of outfitters were obtained in order to describe the outfitting population. Outfitters had an average age of 51. Respondents in the study averaged almost 19 years of outfitting experience, and the average age at which these individuals decided to enter the outfitting occupation was 30.

Additional demographic data on outfitters is provided in Table 1. Almost all (97%) of the individuals were male, while three percent were female. In terms of educational attainment, 22% had completed high school, 33% had attended some college, and 45% had earned a BS degree or higher. In terms of marital status, 80% of the individuals were married, 11% had been divorced, and 7% of respondents reported they were single (never married). With respect to total household income, 49% of the outfitters earned \$49,999 or less, and 51% earned \$50,000 or more. And finally, in terms of racial composition almost all (99%) of the outfitters were

White while one percent was Native American.

## SATISFACTION OF THE JOB

When asked how satisfying they found the job, most outfitters responses were positive and indicated that the job was satisfying. Some outfitters reported that the job was very satisfying and described the satisfaction they derived from teaching others about the outdoors and helping them learn new skills.

*Extremely. It's an honor that people are willing to spend precious vacation time on the water with me. And to teach someone a new skill is rewarding as well.*

*Very satisfying. Teaching a child how to find the North Star. Watching an insecure teenager take the last step to the mountaintop. Very satisfying.*

*Very. It's nice to introduce people to the outdoors who may not have a*

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Montana Outfitters in 2005

	N	Percentage
Sex		
Male	149	97%
Female	5	3%
Education		
Some high school	1	1%
High school graduate	33	22%
Some college	51	33%
BS/BA degree	44	29%
Graduate work	7	5%
Graduate degree	17	11%
Marital status		
Married	122	80%
Single (never married)	10	7%
Separated	1	1%
Divorced	17	11%
Widowed	2	1%
Household income		
\$14,999 or less	5	3%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	17	11%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	23	15%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	28	19%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	39	26%
\$75,000 or more	38	25%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	148	99%
Native American	1	1%

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chance without an outfitter to help them. Also it's nice to help a fisherman or hunter get the trophy they are looking for.

One respondent was enthusiastic about the job and described outfitting as an enjoyable lifestyle.

*On good days, fantastic. On bad days, still the best life to live.*

Some outfitters indicated a preference for catering to fishing and non-consumptive clients such as wildlife viewers, instead of hunters. This was because hunters tended to have greater expectations for success on their trips.

*Pretty satisfying! Fishing/sightseeing is very relaxing and rewarding—more helping people to enjoy the wilderness and outdoors. Hunting is more stressful, more goal oriented, harder on all.*

*The guest ranch summer clients are very satisfying. Hunting [clients] somewhat less because the hunting egos sometimes get in the way of the client enjoyment.*

While they enjoyed the job and found it rewarding, some outfitters also indicated that it wasn't a very lucrative occupation.

*Very satisfying at times. [It] requires a lot of work and is not as glorified as many people think. I do not recommend anyone to become an outfitter for the money.*

*It can be very rewarding at times, mostly though it's just a tough way to make a hard living.*

*Very rewarding physically and mentally. Financially [I] might make more washing dishes. Lifestyle is good overall.*

Other outfitters described the job as rewarding for the most part, but also expressed frustration because of the fact they had to deal with governmental agencies.

*Living in God's greatest creation is awesome. Shaking the hand of a happy client is absolutely rewarding. Being self-employed is challenging. Dealing with federal agencies is horrendous.*

*At times great. Other times not worth the BS required to be legal. It's frus-*

*trating to accept I am not free enterprise. The system controls us to death, i.e. high turnover, burnout rate of outfitters.*

#### BEST PART OF THE JOB

Outfitters were asked to describe the best part of the job. Responses indicated that helping people have a great outdoor experience that would provide lasting memories was the best part of the job for many outfitters.

*Helping others attain the game and trip of their dreams.*

*Feeling good when you know your client had a good experience. Having clients return year after year and knowing you are making their trip enjoyable, one that they will always remember and cherish.*

*The joy of people getting in touch with nature. Muscles are sore, faces sun burned and dirty, mosquito bites, but they're grinning and saying they had the best time of their life-then, it's all worthwhile.*

*Seeing clients have an outing that becomes a memory for life.*

Some outfitters believed the best part of the job was getting to meet people.

*Visiting with successful people from across the U.S. and Europe. Helping a young, old or any hunter accomplish their goal of getting an animal.*

*Meeting great people and being outside.*

*The people and livestock, the being out in the woods for such a long extended time. Also, the wildlife is rewarding.*

Other responses indicated that being in the outdoors was the best part of the job.

*Riding the high country, mules loaded and no phones, t.v., cars or noise.*

*The best part is being outdoors. No matter how bad the weather gets, I would rather be working outside than inside.*

Some outfitters liked being their own boss, and rated it as the most positive aspect of their job.

*Being your own boss.*

*Working with people to give them a quality outdoor experience. Being your own boss. Being outside working in the outdoors.*

#### WORST PART OF THE JOB

When outfitters were asked to describe the worst part of their job, government regulations and paperwork were frequently mentioned. In terms of government regulations, outfitters described having to deal with extensive bureaucratic regulations by agencies in both the state and federal government. Outfitters must be licensed by the state in order to work legally (Montana Code Annotated, 2009). Outfitters that work on public land also have to comply with regulations of federal agencies such as the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

*Putting up with the constant assault of governmental regulation be it state or federal.*

*It is a tossup between sales and dealing with governmental agencies.*

*Long days and weeks with not much rest. Government regulations by the thousands.*

*Short season, high expenses, regulating agencies constantly tightening the noose.*

*Dealing with the idiots at USFS [United States Forest Service].*

*Dealing with government agencies—Montana Board of Outfitters and the Forest Service.*

*Regulations, paperwork brought on by the Board of Outfitters and Forest Service.*

Outfitters also expressed a dislike for paperwork, and indicated that much of it originated from regulations associated with governmental agencies.

*Dealing with government paperwork.*

*Paperwork, not having control over how the government is going to regulate river use.*

*Paperwork, licensing, government permitting agencies.*

*Turning in a client who has made a game law violation. PAPER WORK.*



*The paperwork and all the rules and regulations.*

*PAPER WORK. Dealing with more and more government regulations.*

*Bureaucracy and paperwork.*

Outfitting work is seasonal in nature and is often concentrated into relatively short time periods. Some outfitters reported the worst part of the job was working long hours when guiding clients. Others mentioned having to wake up very early in the morning to take care of clients.

*I miss not being able to spend as much time with my family in the fall. The hours are long—even when I love what I do.*

*18 hours a day for 3 months.*

*Getting up at 3:00 a.m. to fix breakfast.*

*Up at 4 a.m. for five weeks.*

Other responses indicated that certain facets of the job such as crowding issues, camp set-up and take-down, and the physically demanding nature of the job while in the elements, were regarded as the most negative aspects of the job.

*The short over-intense work period. Working on such crowded rivers, in competition with so many non-guided out of state anglers.*

*Shoeing a hind hoof on a nervous horse. Hot day. Sweat stinging in the eyes. Horse tail swatting at flies. Back hurts. Empty belly. 3 more to go.*

*Setting up and taking down camp. A lot of work.*

#### STRESS OF THE JOB

When asked to describe stress of the job, some outfitters indicated it was very stressful. Stressful events included the booking season, which is the time when outfitters obtain clients for the year. Other outfitters said the most stressful time was during the hunting and fishing seasons.

*Can be very stressful from booking, to everyday trying to produce for your client.*

*Very stressful during the December through April booking season. No hunters means no income.*

*I am constantly worried about my*

*livelihood.*

*I don't have any hair on top of my head, is that an indicator? It really is pretty stressful.*

*Highly, lots of outfitters get to drinking heavily.*

*Very. There are no old outfitters still outfitting. This is a young man's job.*

*During hunting, very, because you never get to leave the situation. As one corporate CEO put it to me, this is a real "pressure cooker" when you don't kill elk.*

*During the season stress is tremendous. Fishing might be slow, water conditions change. Clients want changes.*

*With some clients [there is] no stress, others can be demanding, but a lot of the stress comes from outside your business. It's the other people crowding the river. You don't go fishing to see people—you go to see fish and wildlife. Montana rivers are a crowd scene. Yet the state tries to represent itself like a wilderness. It's misleading to visitors.*

Some outfitters reported that they found the job moderately stressful, and most of these comments suggested that stress was associated with uncertainty with respect to income.

*Moderately stressful—a six on a ten scale with ten being wound tighter than [a] banjo.*

*Moderate. Mostly related to funds. We don't make huge money.*

*Moderate. Income each year is always uncertain. Will you get enough clients booked? Will there be fires/drought in [the] area? Shut off forest service [land]? What legislation will be passed to hinder business?*

*Like any other demanding occupation, outfitting has its own stressful moments but overall it is a very satisfying job when you can bring smiles to your clients. We certainly strive to provide the utmost satisfying experiences to all.*

Some outfitters indicated the job was not very stressful, and claimed that stress can generally be avoided by consistently being prepared.

*Compared to other professions, it is not that stressful. Most of the stress comes from lack of preparation (which I try to circumvent) or variables beyond the outfitter's control (weather, water conditions, etc.).*

*Can be stressful. Stress can be reduced through good preparation, good help, and hard work. This job is not for the lazy man.*

*In the field—not. At the desk—very.*

#### CHOOSING THE JOB AGAIN

Outfitters were asked if they would choose the job if they had it to do all over again. Almost ninety-one percent (90.8%) indicated they would choose the job again. When asked why most reflected on the general lifestyle.

*Yes, it's a great way of life.*

*Yes, because it allows me a lot of free time to spend with my family and it is a healthy lifestyle. I am 53 and very few men in their 20's have my health and vigor.*

*Yes. The rewards far outweigh the negative aspects of the job.*

*Yes. It's the most fun you can have while going broke.*

Other outfitters expressed a love of the job that was related to what they considered to be enjoyable work as well as the free time the job provided.

*Absolutely. I wake up at 6 a.m. and can't wait to go to work. That is a feeling most people don't ever have.*

*Yes. To get paid for something you love is a dream come true.*

*Yes, I love my life, my office is on a river and I get 6 months off a year.*

Some outfitters reported that they liked being their own boss and would choose the occupation again for that reason.

*Yes. I like working for myself. Independence is great. I will meet more interesting people again this season.*

*Yes, because I enjoy being my own boss.*

Some outfitters were more ambivalent in their responses, and indicated they

might choose the job again but had some reservations that had to do with things such as crowding issues and the work hours.

*Maybe/probably. As pressure on our resources increases it's going to get tougher and tougher to show clients a good time, i.e. a "quality experience."*

*Yes. I think I would have, but I would have got out or changed jobs 15 years ago, just as the state and fly fishing started to really grow. It's been less enjoyable every year since 1990.*

*Maybe, for the money, but not for the glory. It's terrible hours and a lot of disappointments. [...] I'm trying to get out of the outfitting business. I don't enjoy the hours, the cold, the rich people and the difficulty of finding help. I made lots of money doing it but now I enjoy school bus driving. I do summer trips—camping—and hourly horseback rides which involves no pressure to get game.*

Some outfitters who indicated they would not go into outfitting again cited a variety of concerns for their negative decisions. These included government regulations, environmental groups, economic factors, and the physical demands of the job.

*It used to be fun—a love beyond anything I could ever have done. But dealing with wolves, grizzlies, government regulations, greenies, anti's, Defenders of Wildlife, Sierra Club, Humane Society—is wearing on me and it's not much fun anymore! [...] I would] not [go into outfitting] under the current conditions. With all of the above mentioned adversities, it's nearly impossible to have a "viable" business. [It's] impossible for someone starting out new and making huge payments.*

*I regret to say no. I've had too many bureaucratic hassles and have no retirement and a business with no real value because permits and leases are all subject to whims or changes in rules or laws. I loved it when I could just enjoy guiding my guests and wasn't always fighting to survive the paperwork system.*

*No. I don't enjoy hunting anymore. I don't like dealing with the government agencies with no common sense.*

*No. My body is broke up and I have*

*lost lots of money in the business. No glory. [...] you don't get paid enough and you're disliked by many.*

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine job satisfaction among outfitters using a symbolic interactionist perspective. This perspective is useful because it helps us understand the meaning of work to those who engage in a particular occupation as described by Shaffir and Pawluch:

Symbolic interactionism provides a way to understand, from the perspective of those who do it, the meanings that work has in their lives. It is an approach that concerns itself with the significance we attach to the work we do, the rewards we derive from it, the obstacles and problems we confront in doing it, the goals and ambitions we have for it, and the context that it provides for so many of our social interactions. (2003, p. 906)

Most outfitters in this study enjoyed their job and derived a great deal of satisfaction from helping others enjoy the outdoors. Although they feel that they do not earn a lot of money, outfitters enjoy the lifestyle because it tends to complement their personal interests.

Positive aspects of the job were helping people, meeting people, being outdoors, and getting to be their own boss. Negative aspects of the job were primarily associated with government regulations, paperwork, and long hours.

Job stress tended to result from the client booking season as well as during hunting or fishing seasons when outfitters feel pressure to "produce" results for their clients. The majority of outfitters would choose the occupation again if given the choice.

To enhance our understanding of the phenomenon, future research should continue to examine job satisfaction in the outfitting occupation. The outfitters in the present study engaged mostly in hunting and/or fishing activities. Studies should examine job satisfaction of outfitters who focus on other activities such as boating and mountain climbing. Studies should also examine outfitter attitudes in different states and regions of the country to provide additional perspective on factors that affect job satisfaction. Ethnographic methods would likely yield useful information.

Continuing research should take a quantitative approach to the study of job satisfaction among outfitters. Questions with quantitative measures could be

developed and sent to a large sample of outfitters in order to further our knowledge about job satisfaction among individuals employed in this occupation. Age and duration in the outfitting business could be correlated with job satisfaction, leading to new insight about the phenomenon.

Outfitters in the present study expressed concern with government regulations. Future studies should analyze how government agencies regulate the outfitting enterprise at both the state and federal levels. It would be useful to understand the extent to which outfitting rules and regulations differ from state to state and across federal agencies. Another direction for future research would be to see if outfitters understood the reasoning behind the regulations and the consequences to the resources if there were no regulation of the industry.

Further research efforts should examine the clientele of outfitters. In particular, studies should investigate clients and the expectations they have of outfitters. What type of attributes do clients seek in terms of the outfitters they hire? Do clients focus on the overall hunting or fishing experience, or do they expect outfitters to provide them with a certain quality or quantity of game or fish in order for the experience to be considered successful? Studies could assess levels of client satisfaction with outfitters. This type of study would provide important information about the outfitting experience from the client's perspective.

It is hoped this study will stimulate additional research on outfitters and their clients to enhance our knowledge base about this important, but neglected, recreational occupation.

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