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Bringing Dead Animals Back to Life: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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Abstract: Despite the prevalence of taxidermy products in society, little is known about the individuals employed in this occupation, including the extent to which they find their work satisfying. Using a qualitative approach to data collection, this exploratory study examined factors associated with job satisfaction among taxidermists in Montana. Findings suggest that most taxidermists find their work enjoyable. The best parts of the job include seeing happy and satisfied clients, pride and personal satisfaction with completed projects, the challenging nature of the work, and being able to be their own boss. The worst aspects of the occupation include being exposed to the odor of dead animals, skinning and fleshing hides and heads, dealing with damaged capes, and dealing with paperwork. The majority of taxidermists in the study would choose the occupation again, and for the minority who wouldn't choose the job again, low salaries were generally listed as the reason.

Keywords: Animals, Job Satisfaction, Montana, Taxidermists, Wildlife

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INTRODUCTION

A relatively common yet obscure occupation found in rural regions of the United States is that of taxidermist (Eliason, 2012a). Taxidermists are the individuals who reconstruct dead animals. The purpose of taxidermy is not only to preserve dead animals, but also to re-create them with the intent of making them appear lifelike. The objects produced by taxidermists, mounted fish and animals, are found on the walls of many U.S. homes as well as in a variety of commercial establishments such as automobile dealerships, department stores, bars, hotels, professional offices, and sporting good stores (Bronner, 2008; Bryant & Shoemaker, 1988; Cain, 2009; Desmond, 2008; Eliason, 2012a; Niesel, 1994).

The western U.S. contains an abundance of wildlife including big-game animals, so displays of dead wildlife in homes and other venues are common in the region. The western U.S., however, is in a process of transformation as the region is experiencing significant population growth and development that is modifying both the physical landscape and cultural fabric of these places (Robbins, Meehan, Gosnell, & Gilbertz, 2009). These forces of change are likely to affect rural occupations, especially those which rely on the use of natural resources including wildlife that is found in the region.

Although the preservation of dead animals has occurred historically and is a relatively common phenomenon (Aloi, 2012; Asma, 2001; Sofka, 2014), the animal related occupation of taxidermist has gone largely unexplored by scholars of animals and occupations (Eliason, 2012a; Bryant, 1979; Cunningham, 1995). Given social change associated with how animals are viewed in society (Palmer & Forsyth, 1992; Peggs, 2012), an understanding of animal related industries and occupations is especially important. The goal of this study

was to extend our knowledge of the taxidermy occupation by examining attitudes toward their work by those who are employed as taxidermists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of industries and occupations that deal with various aspects of live or dead animals including farmers and ranchers, wildlife biologists, veterinarians, animal control workers, and meat processing workers. Taxidermists work with dead animals and are in the preservation business. In her book about taxidermy, Milgrom (2010, p. 5) provided a definition of the practice and stated:

Taxidermy is the art of taking an animal's treated skin and stretching it over an artificial form such as a manikin, then carefully modeling its features in a lifelike attitude. The word is derived from the Greek roots *taxis*, "arrangement," and *derma*, "skin," although its usage became prominent only in the early 1800s when taxidermy began its evolution from a crude way of preserving skins to advance science into a highly evolved art form whose chief objective is to freeze motion.

Although the number of hunters in the United States has declined in recent decades (Bergman, 2008; Heberlein, 1991; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2006a), the demand for taxidermy persists because of the popularity of trophy hunting and the desire of individuals to obtain and preserve trophy specimens from their recreational outings including birds, animals, and fish (Bryant, 2004; Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2003). Eliason (2012a, p. 1) stated "These dead animals are subsequently re-created and preserved as mementos or souvenirs from successful outings." In a description of the status and prestige associated with the acquisition and possession of trophy wildlife, Bryant and Shoemaker (1988, p. 202) stated "The mounted game head has traditionally had "macho" value and social

status symbolism as trophy of the hunt or memento of the journey.”

Prior research on the taxidermic enterprise has examined topics such as the history of the practice (Andrei, 2004; Andrei, 2005; Asma, 2001; Bryant & Shoemaker, 1988; Farber, 1977; Madden, 2011; Milgrom, 2010; Péquignot, 2006; Star, 1992; Wakeham, 2008) and the display of dead animals and the meaning of taxidermy in society (Alberti, 2008; Bryant & Shoemaker, 1988; Desmond, 2008; Hansen, 2010; Haraway 1984-1985; Madsen-Brooks, 2009; Marvin, 2010; Patchett, 2008; Patchett & Foster, 2008; Poliquin, 2008; Poliquin, 2012; Shell, 2004; Simpson, 1999). Studies on the attitudes of those employed as taxidermists are limited (Eliason, 2012a).

While it is the fourth largest state in the U.S. in terms of land area, Montana is one of the smallest states in terms of human population and contains just over one million residents. Montana is a rural state that provides an ideal setting for the study, given the abundance of fish and wildlife in the state as well as the popularity of fishing and hunting activities by both residents and nonresidents (Eliason, 2008; Gude, Cunningham, Herbert, & Baumeister, 2012; Schorr, Lukacs, & Gude, 2014; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2006b; Wright & Sanyal, 1998). Wildlife issues such as bison and wolf management are important in the state and generate considerable political and media attention both locally and nationally (Bidwell, 2010; Brownell, 1987; Kelley, 2001; Nesheim, 2012; Scarce, 1998; Scarce, 2005; Shanahan, McBeth, Tigert, & Hathaway, 2010).

The Enforcement Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is the state agency responsible for providing licensing and oversight of taxidermists in Montana (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2012). The application process is very

straightforward and simple for an individual to obtain a taxidermy license in the state. Anyone who wants to become a taxidermist needs to fill out a one page application form and pay a \$50 license fee (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2012). In Montana, there are no formal educational or training requirements to become a licensed taxidermist. To ensure that taxidermy practice is done in accordance with established regulations, Montana law requires taxidermists to keep a written record of all animals they work on, including “(a) the kind and number of each article of wildlife; (b) the name and residence of the owner of the article of wildlife; and (c) all the articles of wildlife shipped and to whom and where shipped” (Montana Code Annotated, 2011). Montana game wardens enforce state taxidermy laws by conducting occasional inspections of the written records kept by taxidermists (Eliason, 2012a; Eliason, 2012b).

A symbolic interaction theoretical perspective was used in this study (Blumer, 1969; Colton, 1987; Samdahl, 1988; Shaffir & Pawluch, 2003). According to Blumer (1969, pp. 4-5), this perspective “sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people. ...symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact.” Past research has investigated the meanings of outdoor recreational activities such as all-terrain vehicle riding (Mann & Leahy, 2009) and camping (Garst, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 2009).

The symbolic interaction perspective is useful for the study of occupations because it helps us understand the meaning of work to those who participate in it (Eliason, 2014a; Shaffir & Pawluch, 2003). Describing the utility of this perspective as it

pertains to the study of work, Shaffir and Pawluch (2003, p. 906) stated:

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.

Taxidermy is an unusual occupation in that it deals with death and wildlife, and is commonly found in rural areas. Symbolic interactionism has been used as a theoretical framework for the study of unusual occupations in previous sociological research, including those associated with death (Thompson, 1991; Turner & Edgley, 1976). In a study of individuals employed in the death industry, Thompson (1991) investigated how funeral directors and morticians deal with the stigma that is attached to the work they perform. Turner and Edgley (1976) used the dramaturgical perspective to analyze the work of funeral directors.

Scholars have used the symbolic interactionist perspective to study other types of rural, wildlife related occupations such as game wardens (Palmer & Bryant, 1985) and outfitters (Eliason, 2014a; Eliason, 2014b) and these studies provide insight into how the approach has utility for the study of occupations. Using a mixed-methods research design, Palmer and Bryant (1985, p. 133) studied Virginia game wardens and reported that these individuals had “a relatively high level of job satisfaction. ...the role of being an “official” in a position of authority (and power) and doing an “important” job which is adventuresome (if not actually thrilling in some cases) relates to high satisfaction with the work.” Eliason (2014a, p. 6) examined job satisfaction among individuals employed in the outfitting industry and found that

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

Due to the paucity of academic research devoted to the topic, little is known about the taxidermy industry and the individuals who are employed in this occupation. One topic that is important to understand when studying employment from a sociological perspective is job satisfaction, which refers to the extent to which individuals derive satisfaction from their employment. Individuals who enjoy the work they perform and find it invigorating and fulfilling should express high levels of job satisfaction. On the other hand, individuals who dislike the work experience and find it unfulfilling and unrewarding would be expected to express low levels of job satisfaction.

In an effort to enhance our understanding of the taxidermy occupation, the purpose of this study was to identify and describe factors associated with job satisfaction among taxidermists. Given the exploratory nature of the research, taxidermists were asked a variety of questions designed to elicit information about how they perceived their job and the meaning it has to them. Do taxidermists like the work they perform? What do they like most, and least, about the job? How stressful is the job? Would they choose this career again if given the choice? These were the questions of interest for the present study.

METHODS

To ascertain the attitudes of taxidermists toward their job, this exploratory research took a qualitative approach to data collection. A mail survey was developed that contained mostly open-

ended questions designed to elicit information about the taxidermist occupation (Fowler, 1993; Neuman, 2011). Given the lack of scholarly research on taxidermists, it was believed that this approach would be an effective way to obtain detailed information about the attitudes of taxidermists toward their job. With this goal in mind, statements from taxidermists about job satisfaction were obtained and are presented in the analysis.

This methodology was chosen because it allows respondents to provide responses to questions in their own words. According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, the words used by individuals to express their attitudes and feelings are important when the researcher is interested in learning the meaning of things to those individuals (Blumer, 1969). Tynon (1997, p. 40) conducted a qualitative study of Idaho elk hunters and described how "hunters' responses were in their own words, reflecting their own meanings, as opposed to lists of phrases representative of researcher-generated constructions." Obtaining the perspective of individuals in their own words is important when the goal of the research is to understand how those individuals view the world. As Henderson (2006, p. 48) noted:

The meanings of any symbol (e.g., leisure) have their origins in interactions, which are defined and changed by individuals according to the meanings that are held. The individual studied is the expert and the attempt is to describe their vocabularies, ways of looking, and sense of the important and the unimportant.

In a description of the utility of open-ended questions, Neuman (2011, pp. 324-325) stated "To learn how a respondent thinks and discover what is important to him or her...open questions are best. ...Open-ended questions are especially valuable in early or exploratory stages of research." According to Stokowski (2013, p. 19) "open-ended questions...seek specific

information related to a survey's identified topics of interest." In the survey, taxidermists were asked a variety of open-ended questions dealing with job satisfaction, including "How satisfying is the job of taxidermist?", "What is the best part of the job?", "What is the worst part of the job?", "How stressful is the job of taxidermist?", and "If you had it to do over again, would you choose to become a taxidermist? Why/why not?" Taxidermists were allowed to respond in their own words so that factors influencing their job satisfaction could be identified and described (Fowler, 1993; Henderson, 2006; Neuman, 2011).

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the agency in charge of issuing licenses to taxidermists (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2012), provided a list of names and addresses of licensed taxidermists in Montana in 2004 (N = 262). In February 2005, the survey was sent to all licensed taxidermists in the state of Montana. Forty-four taxidermists returned the survey, and the response rate was 17 percent. No follow up surveys were sent as it was believed that a single mailing of the survey to a specialized population such as this would generate a good response rate.

The 17 percent response rate was lower than anticipated. This is a limitation of the study. Part of the reason for the low response may have been that at the time of the survey many taxidermists were likely busy working on animal mounts that had been brought to them during the fall hunting season, and some may not have had time to complete the survey. Also, while an open-ended question format generates rich data from the respondents in their own words, some potential respondents may have been turned off by the time and effort required to provide such responses. Nonetheless, given that the research was exploratory and the goal was to elucidate factors associated with

job satisfaction among taxidermists as opposed to measuring it and generalizing it to a population as would have been the case with a quantitative research design, the low response rate is acceptable for the present study.

For data analysis, all of the written comments for each question were systematically examined by the author with the intent of identifying common themes that pertained to job satisfaction among taxidermists. For each question, data were placed into topical categories developed by the author according to common themes that emerged from the analysis. Representative statements from taxidermists that were illustrative of each category were selected for inclusion in the paper in order to help the reader cultivate an understanding of the perspectives of taxidermists regarding job satisfaction and the meaning it has for them. Summarization and interpretation of taxidermist responses is provided by the author.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Satisfaction of the Job

Taxidermists were asked to describe how satisfying they found the job. Overall, the majority of taxidermists reported the job was satisfying or very satisfying (N = 36/40, 90%). A minority of respondents who answered the question (N = 4, 10%) gave responses of “its okay,” “somewhat,” “It’s a hobby,” and “Artistically it is good, time per pay not so great.” As the following comments suggest, many of the taxidermists were enthusiastic in their responses and indicated that they found the job very satisfying:

- For me it is an absolute joy. I love nature and the outdoors so this helps connect me to it.
- It’s the best if you like hunting. If you’re into it just for the money you might have a problem.

- It’s great. I love it. I only wish I would have started earlier in my life.
- Very satisfying if you enjoy doing it and it’s not just a repetitious job.
- Very satisfying when people can enjoy what you have done.
- Most of the time it is very satisfying.
- I enjoy it, even after thirty years.
- For me it is very satisfying.
- Very satisfying to me.

In their description of the “definition of the situation” Thomas and Thomas (1928, p. 572) stated “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Thus, the extent to which taxidermists report experiencing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their job is related to the perceptions they have toward the work they do and how they define the experience in their own minds. Other taxidermists provided more detailed comments and indicated they found the job satisfying because of their ability to preserve and restore dead animals with the intent of bringing them “back to life.” Scholars have noted that taxidermy is a craft as well as an art (Bryant & Shoemaker, 1988; Sofka, 2014; Star, 1992). Some taxidermists characterized it as an art form and described the fulfillment and pride they derived from engaging in the activity:

- It gives you a great sense of pride when each job is completed and you have given back life to something that life is gone and brought back to be preserved and still enjoyed.
- Very satisfying—a creation of art, helping to preserve the natural beauty of an animal, to make it as life like as possible for others to enjoy.
- It’s a fascinating job and profession. It’s taking an animal and restoring it. Fish are probably the most fascinating for taxidermists to do.

- Very much so. To see a well done mount is probably comparable to an artist painting a picture.
- I feel good about myself when I can produce a head [mount] that the client brags about to his/her friends.
- Most of the time [it is] very satisfying. [It is] fun to watch a mount “come to life.”
- Very, to see you have re-created an animal or brought him back to life.
- It is a creative art. What more can be said?
- This is all I do and it makes my day.
- Very-I enjoy the end product.

Best Part of the Job

When asked to describe the best part of the job a variety of topics were evident in the responses of taxidermists. The most common response was that of being able to see a happy and satisfied client upon delivery of the final product. This is particularly important because as with most other types of service occupations (Eliason, 2014b), pleasing the customer and establishing a positive reputation for quality work is important in running a successful taxidermy business. Taxidermists must perform excellent work on the animals they mount so that those customers will continue to bring their trophies to them and so they will recommend the taxidermist to other potential customers. The following comments illustrate the positive experience taxidermists have when they see happy and satisfied clients:

- Seeing the face of a happy client when they see your finished job and the excitement and pride they have when they go. And the stories they tell about the hunt they experience.
- Seeing a completely satisfied customer drive off with his mount. Or a kid with his first animal and how excited they are.

- Preserving the natural beauty and life like qualities of the animal and seeing the satisfied customer.
- [When you] stand back and look at what you have created, and of course compliments from clients.
- When someone’s eyes light up the first time they come to pick up the finished product.
- To see people’s faces when they pick up their animal.
- The smile and thanks from the customer.
- Seeing the smiles on customers faces.
- Seeing the smile on the customers face.
- Having a satisfied client.
- Seeing the people enjoy your work.
- Handing the finished product over.

Other taxidermists described the positive feelings of pride and personal satisfaction they experienced that were associated with the successful completion of a project:

- When everything goes right and I’m done with a fish mount, and it looks the same as when they pulled it out of the water.
- Finishing a fine game animal and he looks alive when completed.
- The best part is putting the finishing touches on a mount.
- Completing a mount that satisfies me and my standards.
- The satisfaction of a good piece of work.
- Finish work, last minute details.

Several taxidermists indicated that the best part of the job had to do with the challenging nature of the work:

- Exciting specimens to work on though many may be the same year in and year out.
- Sculpting a new form that no one else has and that will really look real.
- [The job provides a] variety of new challenges from day to day.

For some taxidermists, the ability to function independently and “be their own boss” was listed as their favorite part of the job:

- Creativity. Setting your own hours. Having a favorite animal to mount.
- Being your own boss if you own the shop, like I do.
- [I get to] be my own boss.

Research suggests that many taxidermists participate in hunting and fishing activities themselves (Eliason, 2012a). Since taxidermists are part of the hunting culture, having the opportunity to meet folks with similar interests and being able to hear their hunting stories were mentioned as the favorite part of the job by some of these individuals:

- Working with good hunters which means good people and getting to see so much trophy sized big game.
- Visiting [with] different people from all over the U.S. and listening to their hunting stories.
- Meeting the hunters and seeing the animals.
- Talking hunting stories with fellow hunters.

Worst Part of the Job

Shaffir and Pawluch (2003, p. 904) stated “Dirty work refers to those aspects of their tasks that most workers would prefer not to do. Every occupation has its dirty work. In all occupations, those involved must come to terms in some way with the fact that some of their tasks are *infra dignitate* (Solomon 1968).” The task of working with remnants of dead animals can be an unpleasant prospect, even for seasoned veterans of the taxidermy trade. When asked about the worst part of their job, taxidermists reported that being exposed to the odor of dead animals as well as working with skulls were the least desirable tasks

they were required to perform. Comments from taxidermists were blunt, yet conveyed the essence of their displeasure with these aspects of the job:

- Working with maggot infested spoiled rotten heads.
- Stinky rotting heads that [arrive] in a plastic bag.
- Boiling skulls, tanning and people who don’t pick their mounts up.
- Getting stinky skulls to boil. Improper handling of hides by client or guides.
- Skinning and boiling skulls.
- Picking the skulls clean.
- Blood and guts-smell.
- The smell.

In addition to odors, the job of taxidermy can be messy at times since the animal bodies or parts must undergo skinning and fleshing procedures in order to get them prepared for mounting. Skinning refers to the action of separating or removing the skin from an animal. The fleshing process involves “scraping meat off the skin” (Milgrom, 2010, p. 13). Other responses from taxidermists indicated that the processes of skinning and fleshing the hides and heads were the most undesirable aspects of the job:

- Skinning and fleshing for most taxidermists. I don’t have a problem because that is the first step in mounting. If you can’t do the skinning and fleshing good then you can’t do the rest of the mount good.
- Cleaning my shop after fleshing hides prior to salting them. It can get messy.
- Skinning and fleshing out game heads.
- Skinning out and hide cleanup.
- Fleshing buffalo hides.

A number of responses suggested that sewing capes, and working with damaged capes brought in by hunters, were undesirable tasks associated with the job:

- Getting animals that are spoiled or poorly taken care of, on the verge of being impossible to mount, then the client wants it to be perfect.
- To have to tell a customer that their animal cannot be done when they first bring it in to us.
- Trying to produce a good quality mount from shot up or poorly handled specimens.
- Dealing with poorly taken care of animals.
- Damaged or spoiled capes.
- Stretching and sewing the cape in place.
- Sewing small critters.

For some taxidermists the worst part of the job was not in the shop, but in the office. It included paperwork associated with managing the business aspect of the occupation. In addition, a low salary was considered the worst part of the job for some respondents. Scholars have noted that Montana jobs tend to pay less than jobs in other states (Fritz, 2002; Malone, Roeder, & Lang, 1991), and some of the taxidermists in the present study indicated their earnings were dismal:

- Extra time, and lack of money. It's a great hobby, but hard to run as a business. We deal with client's pleasure. But [in terms of] our livelihoods, clients waste our time in the shop or at the grocery store. For example, we cannot get away from [hearing their] "stories."
- The lack of being able to make a good living. By the way, note what kind and year of vehicle a taxidermist drives or what kind of house (\$) he lives in.
- Having to manage a small business. I wish I could just work on mounts.
- Long hours! Working for minimum wage a lot of the time.
- It's an enjoyable trade but you don't make any money at it.

- Paper work, record keeping for tax purposes, etc.
- Paper work.
- It's not a lucrative business.

Stress of the Job

When asked to describe the stress associated with being a taxidermist, many taxidermists indicated the job was not very stressful for the most part. Comments suggested it could quickly become stressful, however, if taxidermists took on more work than could reasonably be handled:

- At times it can be stressful if I'm worried an animal I have may be close to being spoiled and I may not be able to do it. I don't get an overload of work-[I] don't like too much pressure to get something done. Generally [it is] not too stressful.
- It's up to the individual. I don't have a problem. If you're greedy and take [on] too much there's where the stress starts.
- [It is] stressful only if you are too busy with too many clients or if you are into competition mounts for shows.

Other taxidermists indicated that most of the stress they experienced was associated with impatient clients. The taxidermy process is often protracted over time, especially given the volume of work that many taxidermists accept. Taxidermist comments revealed that clients are often unaware of the length of time that is necessary to complete a mount:

- Very, people call and want their critter right now, when it's out of your control. Your cape may be at [the] tanner, or [you are] waiting on parts.
- It is a misunderstood profession. People don't realize how long it takes to get something done properly.
- Very-everyone wants their trophies yesterday.
- Very. Too many impatient customers.

A couple of taxidermists described the fall season as being the most stressful. This is because hunting season occurs during this time, which is when most of the work arrives at the taxidermy shop:

- The only stressful time of the year is hunting season when most of the year's work all comes in at once.
- At times [it is] very [stressful]. The fall is very hectic.

CHOOSING THE JOB AGAIN

Taxidermists were asked if they would choose to become a taxidermist if they had it to do over again. The overwhelming majority (N=34, 83%) of taxidermists said they would choose the job again, while a minority (N=7, 17%) would not pursue a career in taxidermy. Most of the comments from taxidermists who would choose the job again indicated it was because they liked the work and found it intrinsically satisfying:

- It is a satisfying job I can take pride in. I enjoy the beauty and appreciate animals. Taxidermy can be self taught, has a fairly low start up cost, and can be done at home so I can be self employed.
- For me it is relaxing and rewarding. I used to be an industrial electrician and millwright in sawmills. When they broke down I had to fix it now, on the spot. [It was] very stressful and extremely dangerous. No more.
- Such a wide variety of work so it's always some[thing] different each day. Not repetition day after day.
- Yes. It is an art form that I have enjoyed all my adult life.
- Yes. I was made to do this.

Some taxidermists said they would choose the job again because they enjoyed being their own boss:

- I'm my own boss and it's a rewarding profession but I've worked for peon's wages most of my life.
- Absolutely. I love the self-employment and the satisfaction of working/creating with my hands.
- I like being my own boss and doing what I want when I want.
- Probably! I like to be my own boss!
- Yes. Self employment and I enjoy it.

A couple of responses indicated that those individuals would choose the job again because it allowed them to get their own animals mounted:

- Yes. I don't make much money at it, but I do get my trophies mounted the way I like.
- Yes, because it's the only way I can afford my own head mounts.

Of the individuals who indicated they would not pursue taxidermy again, the most common reason was the low salary of the job:

- No. It's one of my worst decisions in my life. Financial. Out of the 23 years I worked, I could count the years I made between \$14,000 and \$21,500 (my top year) on one hand.
- Probably not, but I like working for myself.
- No. It's not a high profit business.

One taxidermist expressed concern that a loss of habitat was having a negative effect on the volume of wildlife taken, which this individual predicted would eventually result in a lack of work for taxidermists in the future:

- Habitat loss is leading to less animals taken. I wouldn't recommend starting out in it now. There's not enough work for everyone down the road.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study enhance our understanding of the taxidermy occupation and suggest that most taxidermists in Montana are satisfied with their job and would choose it again if given the choice. The majority of taxidermists characterized the job as satisfying or very satisfying, and enjoyed the artistic practice of restoring dead animals with the goal of creating a lifelike appearance.

The best part of the job revolved around the satisfaction taxidermists derived from seeing happy customers who were pleased with their work as well as from the feelings of pride taxidermists experienced upon the completion of projects. Taxidermists also enjoyed being their own boss as well as meeting people and listening to their hunting stories. The worst aspects of the job were dealing with odors, fleshing and skinning of hides and skulls, dealing with damaged capes that customers brought to them, and the low pay of the job.

Findings of the present study suggest that the job of taxidermist is generally not too stressful, unless an individual takes on more work than he/she can handle. Other sources of stress include impatient customers and the large volume of work that arrives during hunting season in the fall.

As previously mentioned in the Methods section, this study used a qualitative approach with a small sample of taxidermists. A limitation of the present research is that the response rate was very low (17%). In addition, the sample is from a single state and the open ended responses from the research subjects were shorter than the author would have preferred. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study are meaningful and provide useful knowledge about the taxidermist occupation that can be used to inform additional studies on the topic.

To broaden our understanding of the taxidermy occupation, it would be useful to determine the total number of taxidermists practicing in the U.S., as well as the number of taxidermists that are employed in each state. Data of this sort are essential for establishing baseline knowledge regarding the size and extent of the taxidermy industry, and this information would allow researchers to see where taxidermy practices are geographically concentrated and to observe regional variations.

Future research should use a quantitative approach to study job satisfaction among taxidermists. Close-ended questions using a Likert design could be developed and sent to a large sample of taxidermists from around the U.S. in order to further our knowledge about attitudes of individuals employed in this occupation. One of the reviewers of this article suggested that it might be beneficial for researchers to contact a taxidermy association to obtain their support in an effort to boost the response rate of future surveys of taxidermists.

Milgrom (2010, p. 16) stated that “taxidermists, who tend to be solitary workers, purposely cut themselves off from the outside world. No other profession has so steadfastly barred visitors from its dreary workshops.” Scholars should employ sociological fieldwork techniques to further enhance our understanding of taxidermists and the work they perform. This type of methodology has considerable potential to yield valuable information about the techniques used by taxidermists as well as their interactions with clients. For example, using a dramaturgical perspective as described by Goffman (1959) and Turner and Edgley (1976), taxidermists work in their shops or “backstage regions” to produce finished products that are prominently displayed in a variety of “frontstage regions.” A sociological

analysis of the dynamics associated with the taxidermy shop would represent a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the taxidermy occupation and the impression management techniques used by these individuals in the course of their work (Goffman, 1959; Turner & Edgley, 1976).

Studies should also investigate taxidermy in countries around the world in order to get a cross-cultural perspective of the job. It would be useful to know the extent to which taxidermy is practiced across the world in terms of both the number of individuals employed in the industry as well as the volume and types of items that are produced in each country. Comparisons could be made in terms of how the practice is carried out in different regions of the world. It is hoped that the present study will stimulate additional research on the taxidermy occupation.

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