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Gendered Perceptions of Workplace Satisfaction of Non-Teaching Staff

in the Community College

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Abstract

The last ten years have seen much discussion on gender issues among higher education leaders, faculty, and students. Noticeably missing from this discussion of gender, however, are the voice of non-instructional staff -- individuals who are neither administrators nor faculty – and the impact of gendered cultures on their work lives. This paper presents findings from a survey of non-instructional staff in four states regarding the impact of gender on their interactions with students and faculty, their perceptions of campus climate, and their perceptions of workplace satisfaction within the community college. Findings indicate that the proportion of men to women in the office, the gender of the leadership, and access to networks creates gendered sub-cultures that impact male and female staff differently. In addition, this study describes the presence and importance of gender roles among staff. Strategies that community colleges might use to address the gender issues among non-instructional staff are also provided.

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As of fall 2003, 45% of community college employees were termed non-instructional

staff, those who perform a variety of tasks on the campus but who *do not teach*. Of this group,

over 63% were women serving in positions ranging from maintenance to clerks to counselors to

presidents. At that same time, male non-instructional staff was working in those same positions,

yet often in smaller numbers (NCES, 2005). Non-instructional staff are a diverse group, where

some staff work behind the scenes keeping the college running smoothly, and others serve in

more prominent positions. In many instances students spend as much time interacting with non-

teaching staff as they do with teaching faculty. Despite serving the community college, *and* its

faculty and students, non-teaching staff are often marginalized, their experiences and input

frequently discounted. This population, however, is anything but unimportant to the community

college: it is part of the very fabric of college, contributing to the college climate and affected by

it as well. Exploring non-instructional staff perspectives of the college is vital to understanding

the organization and effecting change.

Research connects organizational climate to workplace satisfaction (Allen, 2001; Luthans

& Youssef, 2007) as well as institutional effectiveness (Brown & VanWagoner, 1999), and

cultivating a climate that encourages innovation is part of being an entrepreneurial president

(Jones-Kavalier, 2006). An organization's climate can influence an individual's behavior (Baker

& Associates, 1992), and the climate for managing communications is important in managing

conflict (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002).

What and who, then, comprise an organization's climate? Organizational climate refers to

the perceptions of the organization's members on the social, political, and physical nature of

their personal relationships affecting their ability to work within the organization (Denison, 1996). Constructs such as peer and supervisory support, workplace satisfaction, communication, organizational structure, and collaboration all contribute to a college's organizational climate. Perceived organizational climate influences the attitudes, behavior, and performance of individuals in the organization (Tziner & Dolan, 1984). As to who is involved in organizational climate, the answer is *everyone*, both males and females, from the student to the maintenance worker to the secretary to the advisor to the faculty member to the president. Everyone involved in the community college impacts the climate of that college, and the climate of the college impacts everyone involved. Understanding the perspectives of all college stakeholders will provide administrators with the necessary knowledge to develop a positive climate for all personnel.

Nature of the Study

While research has examined student, faculty, and administration's perceptions of campus climate (Lape & Hart, 1997; Schiller, Taylor, & Gates, 2004), little is known about the perceptions of the non-instructional staff, those staff members who are neither faculty nor senior administrators. This paper explores the community college from the vantage point of the non-instructional community college staff, a group often overlooked in the research, yet which serves as the backbone of any higher education institution. The current study describes the staff perception of organizational climate, including the impact of gender on their interactions with faculty and students and staff perceptions of workplace satisfaction within the community college.

Organizational Climate in Higher Education

While many studies have addressed organizational climate in non-education organizations, only a few studies have explored gendered aspects of organizational climate within higher education, and even fewer in a community college setting. Townsend and LaPaglia's (2000) study of faculty in the Chicago community college system, while not studying climate per se, explored male and female faculty perceptions of administrator attitudes and salary and rank differentials according to gender. They found statistically significant gender-based differences with women faculty more likely than men to perceive inequities in salary and rank and less likely than their male counterparts to agree that their administrators hold female and male faculty in the same regard. Hagedorn and Laden (2002) found that community college female faculty view college climate similarly to the way their male counterparts do, yet differ from the males in their perceptions of discrimination. Rosser (2004) discovered that gender impacts faculty intention to leave when combining faculty work-life perceptions with professional and institutional perceptions. Other research has explored faculty satisfaction, a component of organizational climate. Gibson (2006) examined the impact of the political climate on mentoring of women faculty, finding a gender gap in the availability of women in senior faculty positions to sere as mentors as well as concerns about issues of balance for women entering the field.

Research on Non-Instructional Staff

Before turning to the scant literature addressing non-instructional staff, we need to better understand some of the terminology involving this specific population. The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2005) divides higher education staff into two categories: professional staff and non-professional staff. Professional staff account for almost 72% of all public and private two-year college staff and include those assigned to positions in such areas as

executive, administrative, or managerial (4.8%); faculty (57%); research and instructional assistants (less than 1 percent); and other professionals who provide academic support and need at least a baccalaureate degree to apply (9.8%). Non-professional staff at two year institutions account for the remaining 28% of staff and includes technical and paraprofessionals, those with special skills but who jobs do not require a baccalaureate degree (7.2%), clerical and secretarial (14.2%), skilled crafts (1%), and service and maintenance (11.9%). This means that over 45% of community college staff *do not teach*. More than 63% are women, and females comprise the majority in all work groups except for service and maintenance. Over 63% of non-teaching and non-executive/administrative/managerial professional staff, 61% of technical and professional staff, and 85.5% of clerical and secretarial staff are women. This contrasts greatly with the 14.4% of skilled crafts and almost 27% of service and maintenance staff who are women (NCES, 2005). Non-instructional staff, then, is predominately female. Only a handful of studies within the past two decades, however, have examined non-instructional staff, fewer still have included non-professional staff, and none have explored non-instructional staff perceptions of college climate from a gendered perspective.

Some of the research on non-teaching staff has originated within various community college districts. In 1991, The North Carolina State Department of Community Colleges looked at multiple roles among administrative and non-teaching staff, along with colleges' recent hiring and employee retention experiences during a time of budget restraint (Planning and Research, 1991). This study excluded, however, the gendered aspects of these multiple roles on the employees, on their satisfaction with their job and any possible effects of multiple job roles on their job retention. Nonprofessional staff was also omitted from this study. A few years later, The San Diego Community College District conducted a survey of campus climate among classified

staff (Takahata & Armstrong, 1995). This was the first published study on classified staff perceptions of morale and relations, administrative responsiveness, and other aspects of college climate. While findings were generally positive as to climate, the only separation along gender lines was when men were more likely than women to report that they had seen sexist, racist, or homophobic graffiti or had heard disparaging comments about gays and lesbians. It must be noted, however, that 79.2% of respondents were female, and that respondents were not asked to identify their work group.

More recent research has not originated with the district office. Pettitt and Ayers (2002) assessed organizational climate and conflict communication behaviors of different job groups within a community college following a change in college leadership. Their findings suggest that climate may be related to the use of conflict communication behaviors of individuals. Although this study did assess behavior based on job group, it did not look more closely at the gender breakdown within each group to explore any possible relationship. Van Wagoner (2004) studied the four organizational domains of decision-making, programs, support services, and resources by surveying community college professional staff on organizational change. As with previous research, this study omitted nonprofessional staff from its sample and did not examine the influence of gender within the various work groups.

Research Questions

This study explored staff perception of organizational climate, including the impact of gender on staff interactions with faculty and students and staff perceptions of workplace satisfaction within the community college. The overarching research question guiding this study was What are non-instructional staff perceptions of the community college climate? Related

questions included the following: What is the impact of gender on staff interactions with faculty and students? What is the impact of gender on staff perceptions of workplace satisfaction?

Methodology

This descriptive study used survey research techniques to investigate non-teaching staff perceptions of the community college climate. The survey was anonymous, and respondents did not identify specific community colleges. Sixty items explored Work Environment (including organizational, peer, and supervisory support; task interdependence, faculty-student interactions; job satisfaction; and organizational commitment). Respondents were asked to choose their level of agreement with each statement, using a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Questions on organizational, peer, and supervisory support were collapsed into three separate scales, and organizational climate was measured using these scales. Cronbach alphas for these scales were as follows: .80 for the Organizational Support Scale, .86 for Peer Support Scale, and a .80 for the Supervisory Support Scale.

The researcher randomly selected 75 public and private two year institutions in six states within an accrediting region and sent email invitations to all non-teaching staff at those institutions. This resulted in emails to 4,020 staff members. Of those emails, 162 were returned for a total of 3,858. Three submissions from faculty members were dropped, resulting in 460 respondents, a 12% return rate.

Findings

Description of Non-Instructional Staff

Respondents were placed into work groups using the NCES definitions (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Whitmore, & Miller, 2007). Other professionals (46.5%) was the largest work group,

followed by the clerical and secretarial group (23.9%), executives, management, or supervisory staff (22%), service and maintenance (6.6%), and the skilled crafts group (1.3%).

Almost 75% of respondents were female, and females comprised the majority in all work groups except for service and maintenance. Similar numbers of women and men in executive positions reported an annual salary between $66,000 and $74,999 (27% women, 27.8% men) as well as other professionals who reported an annual salary between $41,000 and $50,999 (31% women, 30.4% men). Almost 59% of female clerical and secretarial staff reported an annual salary between $31,000 and $40,999 as compared to 40% of male clerical and secretarial workers. It should be cautioned however, that the data for male clerical workers is skewed due to low numbers in that work group.

The question "Are you the primary wage earner in your family?" resulted in a significant association with gender $\chi^2(1)=22.480, p < .001$. Over 66% of females responded that they were the primary wage earner in the family, compared with only 33.7% of the males. This response is not significant, though, when disaggregated by work groups.

Interactions with Faculty and Students

Six questions addressed issues of faculty and staff interaction, with responses in a Likert format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). As detailed in Tables 1 and 2, women's jobs were more likely to require that they interact with faculty and students, but both genders were equally likely to interact with faculty and students even when not required by their jobs. Nonwhite men and women's jobs were more likely to require interaction with faculty and students, and nonwhite women were more likely to interact with faculty and students even when not part of their jobs. Overall, respondents were almost equally divided as to having close friends

who are faculty members, and they enjoy helping faculty members and students. Fewer non-white women than white women, however, reported having close faculty friends.

Table 1

Interactions: Percentage of Non-teaching Staff Responding Agree/Strongly Agree by Gender

Item	Percentage	
	Females (*n=342*)	Males (*n=114*)
My job requires that I interact with faculty and students	93.5	84.8
I interact with students even when it is not part of my job	85.3	84.8
I have close friends who are faculty members	50.9	47.8
I enjoy helping faculty members whenever I can	91.6	86.9
I enjoy helping students whenever I can	93.7	81.8

Table 2

Interactions: Percentage of Non-teaching Staff Responding Agree/Strongly Agree by Gender and Ethnicity

Item	Percentage			
	Females (*n=342*)		Males (*n=114*)	
	White	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite
My job requires that I interact with faculty and students	93.1	96.7	82.6	90.9

I interact with students even when it is not part of my job	83.9	90.0	57.7	95.4
I have close friends who are faculty members	54.4	40.4	47.1	47.6
I enjoy helping faculty members whenever I can	91.1	93.4	85.7	90.4
I enjoy helping students whenever I can	93.3	96.7	79.4	89.5

Workplace Satisfaction

Seven questions targeted job satisfaction, and eight items looked at organizational commitment, all with responses in a Likert format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Job satisfaction. Table 3 shows comparative findings of responses to statements dealing with job satisfaction. Overall, respondents were satisfied with their jobs, with levels of satisfaction varying only slightly by gender. Over two-thirds of both men and women viewed their current job as a good fit with what they looked for in a job. They also reported that the demands of their current job were a good match to their personal skills, their abilities and training, and their education. Women were more likely than men to respond that their institution's values and culture provided a good fit with what they value in life. Women who had been at their current job for 10 or more years, who were primary wage earners, and who worked between 11 and 20 hours per week also reported higher overall levels of job satisfaction.

Table 3

Workplace Satisfaction: Percentage of Non-teaching Staff Responding Agree/Strongly Agree by Gender

	Percentage	
Item	Females	Males
	(*n*= 271)	(*n*= 89)
There is a good fit between what my job offers me and what I look for in a job.	71.0	68.5
The job that I currently hold gives me just about everything I want from a job.	52.5	51.7
The demands of this job are a good match to my personal skills.	84.2	83.1
My abilities and training are a good fit with the requirements of this job.	88.9	86.4
My personal abilities and education provide a good match with the demands that my job places on me.	83.6	84.3
My personal values match my institution's values.	65.2	52.8
My institution's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.	63.7	56.8

Examining job satisfaction by work group and gender provides additional insight. Overall, female executive staff reported higher levels of satisfaction with their job when compared to any other work group. Female service and maintenance staff were the least satisfied of all work groups, with male service and maintenance staff, overall, being more satisfied than their female counterparts. While over two-thirds of both female and male

executives viewed their current job as a good fit with what they looked for in a job, less than two

thirds of male and less than one third of female service and maintenance staff were as satisfied

with job fit. Female service and maintenance staff were least likely to agreed/strongly agree that

the demands of their current job were a good match to their personal skills and their education.

Women executives and service staff were more likely to respond that their institution's values

and culture provided a good fit with what they value in life as opposed to the males in their work

groups.

Organizational commitment. Responses to questions on organizational commitment

differed slightly by gender with women appearing to be overall more committed to their

institutions than the men. Gender differences in responses were significant in two instances.

Women were more likely to report feeling as though they belonged at their community college

($t(350) = 2.03$, $p = .043$) and that they enjoyed working for their institution ($t(350) = 2.11$, $p =$

.035). Otherwise, respondents agreed/ strongly agreed that they were proud to tell others that

they worked at their institution, would be happy to work for their institution until they retire, are

satisfied with their jobs, and feel as though their institutions deserve their loyalty (women's

responses slightly higher than those of the men). Responses also varied by work groups. Female

executive staff and clerical staff were more likely to agree/strongly agree with all organizational

commitment statements than were respondents in other work groups.

Perceptions of organizational climate. Organizational climate was measured by a Peer

Support Scale, Organizational Support Scale, and a Supervisory Support Scale. Overall,

responses differed by gender on all three scales, with response means higher from women than

the men (see Table 4). Peer group support, however, was the only scale that differed significantly

($t(339) = 3.07$, $p = .002$) across gender. Viewing perceptions of organizational climate through

the work groups shows some definite shifts. Although perceptions of supervisory support

differed significantly ($F(4,338) = 2.405$, $p = .049$) by workgroup with service and maintenance

staff responses significantly lower than those offered by the executive work group, gender

differences within the workgroups were not significant. Female executive staff provided the

highest ratings overall, giving peer support the highest ratings, followed by organizational

support, then supervisory support. Male service and maintenance staff provided the lowest

ratings overall, giving organizational and peer support the highest ratings and supervisory

support the lowest.

Table 4

Perceptions of Organizational Climate by Gender

Item	Females	Males
	(*n*= 271)	(*n*= 89)
	M(SD)	*M(SD)*
Peer Support Scale	3.80(.58)*	3.54(.829)*
Executive, Administrative, Managerial Staff	3.86(.09)	3.52(.13)
Other Professional Staff	3.76(.57)	3.78(.61)
Clerical and Secretarial Staff	3.83(.55)	3.51(.97)
Service and Maintenance Staff	3.77(.64)	3.32(1.01)
Supervisory Support Scale	3.51(.65)	3.42(.79)
Executive, Administrative, Managerial Staff	3.60(.66)	3.53(.58)
Other Professional Staff	3.44(.66)	3.64(.64)
Clerical and Secretarial Staff	3.58(.58)	3.22(1.23)
Service and Maintenance Staff	3.55(.58)	3.05(1.05)

Organizational Support Scale	3.58(.68)	3.45(.72)
Executive, Administrative, Managerial Staff	3.72(.61)	3.31(.68)
Other Professional Staff	3.47(.70)	3.60(.62)
Clerical and Secretarial Staff	3.73(.64)	3.33 (1.50)
Service and Maintenance Staff	3.62(.44)	3.32(.81)

* $p < .05$

Summary of Results

The first research question posed in this study examined the impact of gender on the interactions between non-teaching staff and faculty and students. Findings here varied slightly by gender:

- Although a woman's job was more likely to require that she interact with faculty and students, men and women were equally likely to interact with faculty and students even when not a part of their jobs.

- Nonwhite women were more likely than white women to interact with faculty and students even when not part of their jobs.

- Both genders were equally likely to have close friends who are faculty members, but fewer non-white women than white women reported having close faculty friends.

Obviously non-teaching staff enjoy interacting with faculty and students, whether or not required to do so by their jobs, although in most instances, women non-teaching staff choose interaction over men non-teaching staff.

A second research question investigated the impact of gender on staff perceptions of workplace satisfaction, encompassing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover

intent, and organizational climate. Although in most instances respondents reported similar levels of workplace satisfaction, two significant findings between genders emerged:

- Women were more likely to report feeling as though they belonged at their community college.

- Women were more likely to enjoy working for their institution.

Levels of job satisfaction varied only slightly by gender:

- Women were more likely to report a good fit between their institution's values and culture and their personal values.

- Female executive staff reported the highest levels of job satisfaction.

- Male service and maintenance staff were more satisfied than their female counterparts who did not view their jobs as a good match to their personal skills and their education.

Responses to questions on organizational commitment differed slightly by gender with women appearing to be overall more committed to their institutions than the men.

- Women were slightly more proud to tell others that they worked at their institution and would be happy to work for their institution until they retire.

- Women were slightly more likely to feel that their institutions deserved their loyalty.

- Although not significant, female executive staff and clerical staff had higher levels of commitment than respondents in all other work groups.

Again, although not significant, responses to questions dealing with turnover intent differed slightly by gender:

- Men showed a higher likelihood of leaving their jobs than women did.

- Less than one fifth of respondents often think about quitting their job will probably start looking for a new position within the next year.

- Female other professional staff had the highest overall turnover intentions, followed by male service and maintenance staff.

- Female executive staff reported the lowest overall turnover intention.

- Over one fourth of female other professionals often think about quitting their jobs.

Peer, supervisory, and organizational support were used to measure organizational climate. Overall, responses differed by gender on all three scales, with response means overall being higher among women than among men:

- Peer group support was the only scale that differed significantly across gender.

- Although perceptions of supervisory support differed significantly by workgroup, *gender* differences within the workgroups were not significant.

- Service and maintenance staff responses were significantly lower than those offered by the executive work group.

- Female executive staff provided the highest ratings overall, giving peer support the highest ratings, followed by organizational support, then supervisory support.

- Male service and maintenance staff provided the lowest ratings overall, giving organizational and peer support the highest ratings and supervisory support the lowest.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore gendered perceptions of community college non-instructional staff to determine the impact of gender on their interactions with students and faculty, their perceptions of campus climate, and their perceptions of workplace satisfaction.

Despite this being a descriptive study, the findings afford us much insight into the college climate through the eyes of our non-instructional staff.

Townsend (2006) delved into the issues of what constitutes a positive organizational climate for women and minorities in the community college, suggesting that we need to be cognizant of how our cultural assumptions, whether spoken or not, affect the ability and willingness to change the college climate. Applying this suggestion to the current study, when thinking about community college staff, do we assume that female staff will be more nurturing of students and faculty than male staff will be? Do we assume that non-instructional staff are all alike, with the same views, values, and goals? Studies such as the current one will help us recognize the sometimes gendered lens through which we may be viewing non-instructional staff.

This study suggests several strategies and research topics worthy of consideration. First there is a need for continued dialog and education concerning college climate and gender. Everyone responsible for crafting the community college workplace should be educated as to the gendered perspectives of non-teaching staff job satisfaction as well as the influence of college climate on job satisfaction. Once leaders (and others) understand the components of climate and the gendered nature of any underlying practices and perceptions affecting the climate, steps can be taken to change the climate to meet the needs of all employees.

Leaders also need a better understanding of the impact of gender on staff interaction, particularly interaction with students. Interaction with co-workers has been connected to employee and customer retention (Alexandrov, Babakus, & Yavas, 2007); a case can be made that staff interaction with students also impacts their retention as community college "customers." Interaction has been linked to organizational climate as contributing to workplace

satisfaction (Schuetz, 2005), and studying the gendered relationships that occur between staff and faculty and staff and students will help leaders to better understand college climate. Leaders who understand college climate are better able to effect change.

Regular assessment of employee job satisfaction, coupled with their perceptions of and satisfaction with college climate, is vital for leaders who want to craft a climate that supports all employees. Although researchers tend to assess employee satisfaction, colleges seldom grasp the opportunity to do so. Colleges that want to reduce employee turnover, improve morale, and enhance organizational commitment need to understand their employees' satisfaction with their jobs as well as the college's climate to help guide action in maintaining satisfaction. Leaders with the mission of enhancing equality and equity can use such an assessment to explore the effect that differential treatment coming from college climate, essential in achieving gender equity.

More knowledge on the link between workgroup gender composition and job satisfaction is also necessary. Leaders who understand the impact of gender-balanced work groups on such issues as job satisfaction, turnover intent, organizational commitment, and organizational climate can better press for change or design effective solutions for problem areas. While research has explored the connection between employee satisfaction and work group gender diversity across business organizations (Fields & Blum, 1997), this topic has not been studied in the community college setting. Leaders aware of such issues can then direct the necessary resources (incentives for the individual, access to an internal candidate pool for hiring and promotion, etc.) inward toward personalized career development programs and support and outward toward recruitment. Helping both women and men acquire the skills and training in areas where they are normally

under-represented to increase their numbers in those fields is likely to improve employee

perceptions and satisfaction, leading to lower levels of turnover.

Since work environment is an important component of job and climate satisfaction, a

final strategy is to strengthen the various support systems within the college. The supervisor, for

instance, impacts a college climate in a variety of ways. A supervisor's communication or human

resource skills are vital in creating a positive climate for career development through skill

development support, performance appraisal, and fostering peer support. In many instances

supervisors serve in a gatekeeping capacity by disseminating information about the college and

the climate. Supervisors who lack the necessary communication skills or who communicate with

some gender bias could well impact an employee's satisfaction with both job and climate.

Although the quality of supervision was not part of this study, the gendered aspects of

supervision need to be addressed, particularly in non-gender-balanced workgroups. Providing

training and education on workplace satisfaction, the gendered aspects of communication, and

how to foster a climate of support is necessary when striving to improve the climate for all.

Further research into the impact of supervisors on college climate and job satisfaction will also

prove helpful.

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