Is there such a thing as a “global” journalist?

Comparing journalists across national boundaries and cultures is no easier. In fact, it is more complicated, given the dramatic changes in journalism during the past decade. In addition to the many characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that could be said to depend on the specific situation, there has been a blurring of the boundaries between journalism and other forms of public communication, and between journalists and those formerly known as media audiences. This makes it even more difficult, though not impossible, to look for general patterns and trends. There are still similarities that seem to cut across the boundaries of geography, culture, language, society, religion, race, and ethnicity, as well as differences that are not easily explained.

The similarities and differences are on the basis of **basic characteristics, working conditions, and professional values** of journalists from more than 30 societies.

**A Profile of Global Journalists**

**Backgrounds and Demographic Profiles**

In our latest study of U.S. journalists, conducted during the summer and fall of 2002, we concluded that the statistical “profile” of the typical U.S. journalist was much like that of 1992. The typical U.S. journalist then was a White Protestant, married male in his 30s with a bachelor’s degree. In 2002, this average journalist was a married White male just over 40, less likely to come from a Protestant religious background, and slightly more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree (Weaver et al. 2007). This demographic profile of U.S. journalists is similar in some ways to the profiles of journalists in other areas of the world, but there are some notable differences as well.

**Gender**. For example, men were more typical than women in newsrooms in 23 of the 29 countries or territories reporting gender proportions (see Table 38.1), although in some countries women were almost as numerous as men (Australia, Brazil, Britain, Denmark, Hong Kong, Hungary, Spain, and Sweden), whereas in others women lagged far behind (Belgium, Israel, Japan, Korea, and the United Arab Emirates). The average proportion of women journalists across these 29 countries and territories was 41%, an increase from the 33% reported as an average in the fi rst edition of The Global Journalist in 1998. However, the U.S. fi gure did not change from 1992 to 2002, in spite of all the women enrolled in U.S. journalism programs.

**Age**. Another similarity between the United States and the rest of the world as represented here is that journalism tends to be a young person’s occupation, with most journalists between 25 and 45 years old. The average age of journalists ranges from 32 to 53 in the 29 surveys reporting it, with the youngest journalists coming from Australia, Britain, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where the average age is from 33 to 36, and the oldest from Japan, where it is 53. In most places, journalists are younger on average (39 years old) than is the work force in general. In many countries, young people become journalists to gain some experience before leaving for more lucrative and stable jobs in other fields, especially public relations. This seems to be a fairly common pattern around the world.

**Education**. Although most U.S. journalists hold a four-year college degree, this is not the case in several countries, as Table 38.1 indicates. The locations with the lowest proportions of college graduate journalists are Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, New Zealand, Slovenia, and Switzerland—all below three-fourths. Those with the highest are Brazil, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan—all above 95%. Only one country (Finland) reports less than half of its journalists holding a four-year college degree, and the average for all 28 countries reporting this figure is 82%, so it is far more common than not for journalists to be college graduates in this group, although the variation across countries is substantial. It is less typical for journalists to be graduates of journalism programs in college, however. Of the 25 nations reporting this figure, the average is 42.5%. Only eight countries reported more than half of their journalists had concentrated on journalism in college. In the other 17 countries or territories reporting this proportion, most did not exceed one-third, with the lowest figures from Finland, France, Israel, Japan, Korea, and Switzerland. Thus whatever journalistic benefits or deficiencies are attributed to journalism education must be tempered by the fact that most journalists are not graduates of college-level journalism programs in this sample of nations.

**Marital Status**. Only 14 countries reported the proportion of journalists who were married. Only six countries reported figures above one-half, and the average for all 14 reporting is 50%, making it impossible to conclude, as in the United States, that the typical journalist tends to be married.

**Race and Ethnicity**. Only 13 of the countries and territories represented in this study reported a figure for racial and ethnic minority journalists. The figures for the other 11 countries reinforce the conclusion of the 1971 U.S. study by Johnstone et al. (1976) that journalists come predominantly from the established and dominant cultural groups in society. This seems to hold true especially in Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, Britain, and Israel, where the figures for minority journalists are all below 5%. Switzerland is close behind, with only 6% minority journalists.

**Size of Workforce.** The estimated number of journalists working in the 25 different countries and territories reporting this figure varies tremendously, as one would expect given the great differences in the sizes and populations of these places. The countries with the largest populations—Brazil, Britain, China, France, Germany, and the United States—have the most journalists, as one would expect, but it is surprising that Brazil has so few considering the size of its population. Some of these differences are undoubtedly due to different methods of estimating the total number of journalists, and some may refl ect different definitions of who qualifies as a journalist. It does seem that those countries most advanced economically and most democratic politically tend to have larger numbers of journalists as compared to population. Thus, in terms of demographics, the journalists from the various countries and territories were fairly similar in average age, but varied considerably in gender, percent of ethnic/racial minorities, level of education, and whether they concentrated on journalism in college. They also varied substantially in representation based on population.

**Working Conditions**. Obviously the working conditions of journalists also dif er widely in the nations represented in this book, not only in terms of material resources but also in professional autonomy, political pressures, and norms and traditions of journalism that af ect the subjects and approaches taken in reporting the news of the day. One of the most important indicators of the working conditions of journalists is their level of job satisfaction, which in some cases is linked to their perceived autonomy or freedom. In the United States, for example, declining levels of job satisfaction and perceived autonomy have gone hand-in-hand since the early 1970s (Weaver et al. 2007).

**Job Satisfaction**. The proportions of journalists considering themselves “very satisfied” with their jobs varies greatly among the 22 studies that reported this. Those countries or territories with the smallest percentages of very satisfied journalists were Chile, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates, with Singapore and Slovenia not far behind; those with the largest were Britain and Finland. Some countries with relatively high percentages—such as Finland, Colombia, and Israel—reported relatively high figures for perceived autonomy as well. The average for all 22 countries that reported “very” satisfied figures was 27.5%, below the U.S. figure of 33%.

**Professional Values** The definition and measurement of journalists’ professional values, including roles and ethical standards, has been debated by scholars and commentators for at least a century. Some of these debates center on whether journalism is a profession and some on whether journalism should be on. The often stated view that journalism is not a true profession is similar to that expressed by Weaver and Wilhoit in the first American Journalist book. They wrote that “American journalists are unlikely ever to assume a formal professional status” because of their skepticism of institutional forms of professionalism such as certification or licensing, membership in organizations, and readership of professional publications.