



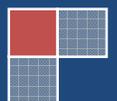
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## A Self-portrait of Israeli Journalists: Characteristics, Values, and Attitudes

Oren Meyers and Jonathan Cohen

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# A Self-portrait of Israeli Journalists: Characteristics, Values, and Attitudes

Oren Meyers and Jonathan Cohen\*

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the self-portrait of Israeli journalists in terms of their demographic characteristics, perceptions of public status, and views regarding professional issues. Findings from a survey completed by 333 respondents suggest that Israeli journalists are satisfied with and plan to continue working in their profession, which they perceive to be relatively well-respected. They consider print, radio, or television to be highest status news media, followed by online, and, finally, work for local and sectorial newspapers. While respondents believe they are generally free to publish news and data gathered, those covering social issues felt more restraints on their work than those focusing on economic matters. These findings are related to similar surveys conducted in other countries, as well as with Israeli journalists in the past.

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**The full bibliography (both in English and Hebrew) can be found in the full Hebrew version of the paper in *Media Frames* (2010) vol. 4, 107-132.**

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the foundations of a democratic regime, a free press must be able to inform the public about important events, critique government institutions and other centers of power, and maintain a public space in which differing and opposing opinions are openly discussed. Given these important roles, communication scholars have employed varied research perspectives and methodologies over the years to investigate the values that guide journalists in their work and the manner in which they function in advancing discussion of important questions that are or should be of public concern. For example, political communication researchers have studied journalists' role in shaping the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1993); critical theorists have focused on how journalists serve the hegemonic order via the use of seemingly professional practices (Herman, 2000); and other scholars have sought to assess how changes in communication technologies which impact how news information is transmitted contribute to journalists' perceptions of their work (Pavlik, 2001).

A complementary approach has sought to understand journalists through the three traditional foci of communication research – text, audience, production. Roeh (1994) studied the texts journalists produce in order to assess their values and functioning, as well as the social role of the journalistic community. Ehrich (2004) used depictions of journalists in popular culture to understand how the image of journalists has been shaped. Tsifti, Meyers, & Peri (2006) examined audience opinion regarding journalists' status, values, and functioning. And, from the perspective of production research, researchers have interviewed journalists and observed them at work (Deuze, 2005; Reich, 2008; Tuchman, 2002).

The study reported here is grounded in the research tradition that has focused on journalists' own interpretations. Various studies have employed qualitative, quantitative, as well as a combination of both methodologies to understand how good journalism is defined within journalistic discourse or in media more generally (Bennett, Gressett & Haltom, 1985; Livio, 2005; Schudson, 1988). In some cases, a survey of journalists has been employed as an operational tool to define good journalism. By doing so it is tacitly assumed that a large sample, one inclusive of the variety of journalists' activities, can represent the entirety of a journalistic community. Previous surveys of journalists investigated their demographic characteristics (age, gender, education), professional history<sup>1</sup>, salary levels, job satisfaction, political tendencies, as well as their opinions about a number of professional and values issues (e.g., the role of commercial considerations in decision-making by media operations; the desired balance between objectivity and interpretation; and willingness to compromise ethical principles in order to obtain information (Beam, 2006; Tsifti, Meyers & Peri, 2006)).

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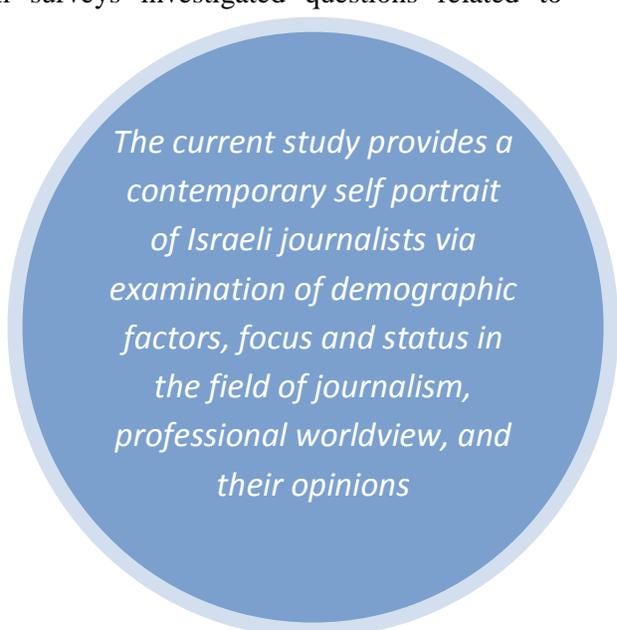
<sup>1</sup> The present framework does not allow a more comprehensive discussion of whether journalism can and should be defined as a profession (Katz, 1997; Marmari, 1997). Our present definitions rely on previous research in this area.

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Beyond providing a snapshot of a specific journalistic community at one point in time, some researchers working in this tradition have employed a synchronic approach. Weaver (1988) compared characteristics of journalistic communities and members' professional perceptions through a survey conducted in 21 countries. And, diachronically, the same survey was carried out among American journalists over four decades (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2003). Other long-term surveys investigated questions related to professional self-perceptions and interpersonal relations among selected groups of news professionals, such as homosexual and lesbian journalists (Aarons & Murphy, 2000).

Following this tradition, the current study provides a contemporary self-portrait of Israeli journalists via examination of the following characteristics: demographic factors (age, gender, education, degree of religiosity); focus and status in the field of journalism (e.g., the media in which respondents work, areas they cover, seniority in the profession, salary levels); professional worldview (e.g., the balance between audience interest and the importance of topics, obtaining a scoop versus precision in reporting); perceptions of ability to function according to the journalists' worldviews (e.g., perceptions of degrees of freedom enjoyed, factors that inhibit freedom, professional respect); and their opinions, in principle, about central social issues (e.g., privatization, social gaps). It should be noted that this study did not examine a specific theoretical question, although it may lay the foundations for a fact-based discussion of the nature of the journalistic community in Israel.



*The current study provides a contemporary self portrait of Israeli journalists via examination of demographic factors, focus and status in the field of journalism, professional worldview, and their opinions*

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Our use of a survey and our choice of an analytic approach reflect our assumption that the question of who is a journalist does not have an essentialist answer. What prepares a person to be a journalist? What is a good journalist? Or, what is the journalist's public obligation? These are questions that are under constant negotiation between various groups of observers (e.g., journalists themselves, the people they cover, and media consumers), and they continuously change over time under varying social and cultural circumstances.

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A study conducted by the late Shmuel Schnitzer (*Ma'ariv's* editor, 1980-1985) published in the 1964 yearbook of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists under the title "The Israeli journalists and their public image" offers an illuminating comparative example that stresses the changes that have taken place over time in Israeli journalism. Indeed, the questions asked and responses received in the survey highlight the continually changing nature of the discussion of questions that relate to journalists' values, status, and the public roles of their professional community. As the title suggests, this study sought to clarify the public's view of the character of the Israeli journalist. However, the sample was very narrow and included 58 "ministers, functionaries, party heads, security personnel, economists, rabbis, scholars, artists, lawyers, authors, and intellectuals" who were asked "to share their opinions about the Israeli press and the manner in which it fulfills its role" (Ibid, p. 49). And, only 13 of those selected actually provided responses to the questionnaire.

The "public" appeared again and again as a construction in Schnitzers' opening chapter of the 1964 Yearbook, presenting three popular perceptions used in referring to journalists and their work: the "street," that is, all those who have no direct contact with journalists and who "relate to them usually as having much more power than they possess in reality" (Ibid, p. 39); "functionaries and officials," who according to Schnitzer "view the journalist instrumentally, as a facile tool that a smart person can manipulate given the insatiable desire for information and, accordingly, there is no difficulty 'selling' an item together with a bit of a 'spin'" (Ibid, p. 40); and, finally, "intellectuals – who look down upon the journalist from on high – and see that their primary intellectual characteristic is superficiality. After all, they chose the only profession that does not require any training or need to pass an examination" (Ibid).

Schnitzer seemed to be bothered by what appeared to him to be the inferior image of Israeli journalists and, principally, the assertion that their main professional characteristic is superficiality. Therefore he initiated another survey, this time of the journalists themselves, in order to prove "the broad horizons, universality of their education, significant capabilities in [matters] beyond the press [...] the seniority and experience they bring to their work" (Ibid, p. 42).

Thus, the motives for organizing the survey, questions asked, and responses received, together present a portrait of the Israeli journalist in the mid-1960s and shed light directly and indirectly on the values of this professional community and its self-perception<sup>2</sup>. The 359 journalists included in the sample were the first to return the questionnaires, which apparently were distributed among members of the journalist union. In addition, we learn about the borders and internal hierarchical structure of the community, particularly from the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> The important article by Karlbach entitled "What is a Newspaper" deals with similar questions while developing a journalistic creed that seeks, in the spirit of early statehood, to establish the professional authority of the Israeli press based on its devotion to the Zionist enterprise. (1992 [1951]).

Schnitzer did not include in the sample most of the part-time journalists, a majority of whom were reporters covering different regions and peripheral areas of the country.

According to this survey, a decisive majority of Israeli journalists in 1964 were of European [Ashkenazi] origins (over 90%); less than ten percent (24 of 359 respondents) were women<sup>3</sup>; slightly less than a third (30.6%) had worked up to ten years in the press and slightly more than a third (37%) had been in the profession from 10-20 years. As noted, many of the items included in Schnitzer's questionnaire sought to refute the assumption of journalists' superficiality. We learn that 22.8% had studies or were currently studying in university, while another 6.6% had a yeshiva education. Many reported that they understood two to four languages. Another criterion for journalism excellence, according to the survey, was the respondents' participation in "befitting" extra-journalistic activities (e.g., publishing books of poetry, translating books and plays, participation in activities of political parties or public institutions). 21.5% of the respondents responded that they did indeed participate in such activities. Schnitzer's survey did not, however, include questions that related to journalistic values or practices.

Similar to Schnitzer's investigation, the present survey sought to gain clarification of the manner in which Israeli journalists perceive their work, status, and public function in the specific reality in which they conduct their professional work today. Therefore, our survey sought to gain insight into journalists' views on the following key developments and dilemmas characterizing journalism in Israel and elsewhere.

*In contrast to the early days of the state, when most journalists were employed by media organizations owned by the state, political parties, or unions, the vast majority of contemporary journalists are employed by privately owned media organizations.*

## **DOMINANCE OF COMMERCIAL MEDIA**

In contrast to the early days of the state, when most journalists were employed by media organizations owned by the state, political parties, or unions (Peri, 1999, p. 28), the vast majority of contemporary journalists are employed by privately owned media organizations whose primary goal is making a profit. The dominance of the commercial media model in Israel has changed the press in institutional, organizational, and personal ways. Competition between media outlets is open and stronger

<sup>3</sup> Though the number of women was not explicitly stated in the survey, when displaying the distribution of ages in the sample it was noted that women were excused from reporting their age. The number of missing values for this variable was 24.

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than in the past, and commercial considerations (often measured by exposure and media consumption) have become primary criteria in the journalistic decision-making process (Caspi, 2007). In addition, many reporters claim that the rise of the commercial model threatens journalistic freedom in two main ways: First, the primacy of commercial interests can cause the news organizations' decision-makers to abandon investigative endeavors due to fear that advertisers or governmental powerbrokers may be harmed and, in turn, endanger the outlet publishing the story (Tausig, 2006). Second, there is apprehension that owners will mobilize or enlist their media organizations to advance their own commercial interests and harm competitors (Ezrachi, Goshen, and Leshem, 2003).

## PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT

Extensive changes in the nature and structure of journalists' terms of employment in Israel have occurred with the decline in the centrality of public-state ownership and the nearly complete disappearance of the political party press. Until the mid-1980s, most journalists

Until the mid-1980's, most journalists were employed under collectively bargained contracts, which is no longer the case. A majority of journalists today are employed via a personal contract.

were employed under collectively bargained contracts. This provided them with job security and a relatively narrow salary range. A significant decline in the number of journalists working under collective contracts began with initial publication of the *Hadashot* newspaper in 1984, and since then

nearly all journalists who have joined the profession over the last twenty years are employed through individual contracts. This change has reduced journalist job security and contributed, first, to the creation of a growing "class" of journalists employed as freelancers; second, stimulated mobility of journalists between different media organizations; and, third, contributed to creating gaps between a small group of journalists who enjoy high salaries [N.B., primarily working in television] and a large group of mid-range and junior journalists who earn much lower salaries (Balint, 2006; Dror, 2009).

Furthermore, many media critics argue that journalists who earn a low income which is based on the number of items or headlines they get published, and who are uncertain about their professional future, will most likely remain in the profession for a shorter period of time, will prefer expediency over precision, and are more likely to be influenced or manipulated by sources and those who control the media (Avrahami, 2005; Ben Aroya, 2005).

## RISE OF NEW MEDIA

Print media was the primary and most influential form of mass communication during the first decades of the state. In contrast, recent decades have seen the growth of electronic and online journalism along with the decline in the primacy of print media in terms of the number of readers, advertising, and employees (Benziman, 2005; Hodierna, 2009). The dominance of new media technologies also influences the practice of journalism. For example, the existence of the “never-ending deadline” makes it difficult for news websites to determine veracity and to cross-check information – both common practices in the print media (Kirsner, 1997). Furthermore, online news websites need to produce new information at a high frequency and low cost. Such demands may lead to greater dependence on external sources to provide information that serves their needs.

In addition, it is now possible for online news websites to tailor news to the needs of specific audiences. The potential for such activity in conjunction with the disappearance of printing and distribution costs makes it possible for news websites to offer content or author packages to suit the specific preferences of the different audiences (Pavlik, 2000).

## GENDER SHIFT

One of the central changes in the makeup of the Israeli journalistic work force is the significant rise in the number of women working in the profession: If in the early 1960s only seven percent of the members of the journalist union were women, while 40 years later the percentage had risen to 37% (Lachover, 2000). Following this shift, studies exploring whether the change in the gender balance has led to changes in emphases and journalistic coverage have produced inconclusive results (Lavi, 2000). Our study approached this question in a different manner. Instead of investigating whether gender differences are reflected in the final journalistic product, we sought to determine, first, if gender differences shape the journalists’ professional views; and, second, if there are differences in employment conditions and job satisfaction between male and female Israeli journalists.

*One of the central changes in the makeup of the Israeli journalistic work force is the significant rise in the number of women working in the profession, from 7% in the 60’s to 37% today.*

## GROWTH OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Up until the beginning of the 1990s, communication studies were only available in graduate degree programs offered by Hebrew University's Department of Communication and Journalism (Adoni & First, 2006). Over the last two decades more than 15 departments of communication studies in Israeli universities and colleges have been accredited to award

*Over the last two decades more than 15 departments of communication studies in Israeli universities and colleges have been accredited to award academic degrees*

BA degrees and, in a few cases, graduate degrees, with specializations in journalism, advertising, marketing, and more (Communication departments, 2009). Thus, in contrast to previous decades, academic training in the field of communication now exists in Israel and, as a result, at least a portion of the new journalists who have entered the profession are graduates of these programs. The present study sought to investigate if the changes in education and training of journalists have led to change in how journalists relate to, and opinions toward, their profession.

## GENERATIONAL SHIFT IN ISRAELI JOURNALISM

All of these trends suggest that journalists who began to work in the profession within the last two decades represent a new generation of reporters whose professional worldview has been shaped by all of the factors cited above: i.e., the growing commercial emphasis in the press, changes in employment patterns, growth of new media, blossoming of academic communication studies, and more. Thus, the present study sought to investigate whether the professional worldviews of young journalists as well as their feelings regarding the journalistic profession and their future in it are significantly different from the views held by their veteran colleagues.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The survey was conducted in late 2008 among Israeli journalists and examined different aspects of their work. Beyond seeking to characterize the journalistic community, the survey focused on respondents' perceptions of their profession and their work conditions, as well as their personal and professional values. The survey was conducted by the University of Haifa's Survey Center and was sponsored by the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists.

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## SAMPLE

In the tradition of previous studies of journalistic communities (Weaver, 1998), a “journalist” was defined for purposes of this study as someone who gathers and edits information for a news media outlet (i.e., graphic designers, proofreaders, etc. were not included in the sample). This definition includes journalists and editors working in different types of print and electronic media, including online news outlets. The need for this general definition is due to the absence of an authoritative listing of Israeli journalists.

In order to select the research sample, we started with the list of 391 journalists surveyed for a previous study (Tsfati & Livio, 2005), which had been created through the credits ascribed to journalists in print, online, radio, and television media. This list included both freelance and fully-employed journalists. The Tsfati & Livio list was compared with two additional lists: First, the list of members of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists, which is the largest and most active such association in Israel. The Association’s list of members consists of approximately 1,000 names, and includes members throughout the country as well as many individuals no longer working actively as journalists. The second list consulted was created by the Yifat News Service, and also includes non-journalists such as radio host and music editors.

A comparison of these lists was undertaken for the purpose of creating a sampling frame comprised of active journalists, as defined in the research, whose personal details could be obtained and from which the research sample could be selected. The final sampling frame consisted of 756 journalists.

In preparing an inclusive sampling frame, we sought to ensure representation of different journalistic groups and outlets; for example, we included persons who work in all types of media (print, radio, television, and online), in public and commercial operations, in general and sectorial, national and local, and in Hebrew as well as other languages. In addition, we sought to ensure that the sample would represent both veteran and young journalists involved in reporting on a variety of topics.

Table 1: Number of Media Included in Sampling Framework

<b>Media</b>	<b>Names of Media Organization</b>	<b>No. Journalists in Sampling Framework</b>
<b>Online</b>	<i>Walla, YNET, NRG</i>	20
<b>National Radio Stations</b>	<i>Kol Yisrael, Galei Zahal</i>	69
<b>Regional Radio Stations</b>		25
<b>Daily Hebrew Print Newspapers</b>	<i>Ha'aretz, Ma'ariv, Yedioth Achranot</i>	169
<b>Free-of-charge daily newspapers</b>	<i>Yisrael Hayom, Israel Post, 24 Dakot</i>	37
<b>Ultra-Orthodox newspapers</b>	<i>HaModiyah, Yom leYom, Yaded Ne'eman</i>	20
<b>Right-wing, religious-nationalist newspapers</b>	<i>Makor Rishon, B'shevah</i>	19
<b>Financial newspapers</b>	<i>TheMarker, Globes, Kalkalist</i>	48
<b>Local newspapers [ownership]</b>	<i>Schocken, Ma'ariv, Yediot Tikshoret</i>	187
<b>Newspapers in Arabic</b>	<i>Al A'hali, Al Masar, Al Ittihad, Hadit el Nas, Ma'alhadat</i>	20
<b>Television news</b>	<i>Channels 1, 2, 10</i>	106
<b>Media outlets in other languages</b>	<i>Vesti, Jerusalem Post, Channel 9</i>	36
<b>Total</b>		<b>756</b>

A random sample of telephone numbers from the sampling frame was employed with the aim of selecting 300 journalists. Altogether, 702 journalists were contacted, and they were told that the survey was being conducted in advance of the annual conference of journalists where the findings would be presented (we assume that this explanation motivated many of the respondents to participate in the survey). Three hundred and thirty-three respondents completed the interviews in full (321 via telephone and 12 in writing via fax). The response rate was 49% according to the formula of the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR RR2) – rather high for a telephone survey.

This data gathering process was stopped after 150 interviews in order to ascertain if the interviewees to date were representative of different media organizations, according to the following categories: medium, local/national, public/private, sectorial/general, Hebrew/other languages. This interim analysis revealed that there was a satisfactory representation in all categories except for an over-representation of interviewees from local newspapers owned by the Yedioth Tikshoret chain. No further interviewees were selected from this group.

In summary, we are aware of the limitations and deficiencies of this sampling process, due in large part to the absence of authoritative and up-to-date information about the population of journalists in Israel. Thus, like its predecessors, this study does not provide us with an accurate assessment of the representative character of the sample. Still, the rigorous sampling procedure conducted through the study was devised in order to create a sample that would be as representative as possible.

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey's questions addressed the following areas: respondents' perceptions of journalism's status as a profession in general, as well as in relation to other professions and comparatively between media; job satisfaction; views about media influence and public trust in news media; degree, limiting factors, and changes over the years in the freedom of the press; professional and socio-economic worldview; and, finally, factual matters regarding the journalists' employment and work (e.g., seniority, beats, their news organization and their role in it, personal information – gender, age, religiosity, wages, type of employment, other activities, education and professional training).

## FINDINGS<sup>4</sup>

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

Males constituted 67.6% of the sample; the average age of the respondents was 38.65; the average number of years respondents worked as journalists was 13.5 years, with a quarter working for five years or less, and approximately half for ten years or less. In terms of religious

*Three percent of the journalists define themselves as ultra-orthodox, 12.2% as religious, 11% as traditionalists, and 73.8 as secular.*

affiliation, three percent define themselves as ultra-orthodox, 12.2% as religious, 11% as

<sup>4</sup> Full details regarding the statistical analysis, illustrative tables and significance tests can all be found in the Hebrew version. These were removed from this report for the sake of brevity. Unless explicitly noted, all relationships reported below are significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

traditionalists, and the remainder (73.8) as secular. Approximately 70% have an academic degree, with the average number of years of education reported to be 15.46. And, in terms of the relevance of their studies to their professional work, 51.7% of the respondents reported that their studies were not related to their work, 23.7% studied communications, 6.8% studied journalism, and for 17.8% their academic studies are related to their primary area of coverage.

## RESPONDENT'S MEDIA EMPLOYMENT AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES

Nearly three quarters of the respondents work solely in national media, 11.7% only in local media, 12.6% in both sectors, and one percent report for foreign media. Although respondents were allowed to indicate they were employed in up to three types of media, over 80% provided only one response. Therefore, we related only to the first response of all the respondents. Accordingly, we found that 52.5% work for a newspaper, 17.4% for a weekly/monthly magazine, 11.7% work in radio, 13.8% in television, and 4.5% for internet news. 61% are employed as reporters, slightly over 25% are editors, approximately 4% were chief editors, and one respondent was an owner of a media outlet. 14.8% of the respondents cover political and foreign affairs, 8.1% military and security, 9.9% economics, 22% different social domains (e.g., education, health, welfare, labor relations, environment, etc.), and 45.2 cited other areas of coverage than these categories, or general reporting.

## WAGES

In comparing respondents' salaries with the average national income (8,100 NIS at the time the research was conducted; Central Statistical Bureau, 2009), 15% reported their wages to be much less than this amount, 13.5% stated it was slightly less, 13.2% stated it was similar to the average, 29.1% slightly higher, and 20.1% much higher than the national average. A majority of the respondents (73.1%) were employed via a personal contract, 14.8% are included in a collective group contract, 8.6% work as freelancers, and 3.5% cited "other" employment patterns. Approximately 73% claimed that their work as journalists was their sole source of income, while 23% reported having an additional source of income (about 3% did not respond to this question).

A significant relationship was found to exist between level of income and employment in different media: Journalists working for national media reported having a higher salary than those working for local media outlets. In addition, a connection was found between salary and type of employment: Those who signed a personal contract reported earning more than those included in a collective contract. Freelancers and "others" earn the lowest salaries.

What explains journalists' salaries? In attempting to identify salary predictors, a regression equation was constructed to predict income using the following predictors: gender, age, education, professional seniority, media and journalistic role. These variables were introduced into the equation in two stages: Initially, gender, age, and years of study were compared, followed by professional role and media. Four of these six variables were found to predict salary. Age and education were positive predictors in the first stage of the regression, with men reporting higher income than women. When seniority, professional role and media were included, the strongest predictor was seniority in the profession. In addition, when controlling for seniority, age had a reverse role: young journalists earn more than those who are older with equivalent seniority. Journalistic role and medium were not found to predict income when controlling for age, gender, and seniority.

## PERCEPTION OF THE INFLUENCE OF ISRAELI JOURNALISM

*Israeli journalists believe that they have a relatively strong influence on politicians, a somewhat weaker influence on the public's voting patterns, and a moderate level of influence on Israeli society as a whole*

Respondents were asked to assess the influence of the press on Israeli society in three domains (scale from 1 [very limited influence] through 7 [very strong influence]). According to the respondents, Israeli journalism is seen to have a relatively strong influence on politicians, a somewhat weaker influence on the public's voting patterns, and a moderate level of influence on Israeli society as a whole.

Compared with a 2007 survey that investigated the public's perception of the influence of journalism (Cohen, Weimann, & Tsfati 2007), our survey found that the public believes that the press has moderate influence on the economy (4.0 of 7), somewhat greater influence on enforcement of law (4.7 of 7), and the most influence on Israeli politics (5.6 of 7). Although

the questions were stated in a somewhat different manner (N.B., the 2007 questions asked about journalists while the 2008 survey focused on the press), it appears that the public and the journalists agree that the press has the most influence on politicians. Indeed, Cohen, Tsfati & Sheaffer (2008) reported that while Knesset members felt that the influence of Israeli journalism on the voting public was too great (3.5 of 7), even they agreed that the influence of the press on other politicians was especially great (3.98 of 5).

*The public believes that the press has moderate influence on the economy, somewhat greater influence on enforcement of law and the most influence on Israeli politics*

## PUBLIC TRUST IN ISRAELI JOURNALISM

*The public's degree of trust in the press is slightly lower than the journalists' perceptions*

Respondents were asked about the degree of public trust in the press on a scale of 1 (great trust) to 7 (very limited trust). Our survey found that, according to the respondents' perception, the public has moderate trust in the press. In the above-mentioned (2007) survey, the public at large was asked to state the degree of its trust in journalists (i.e., not in the press, as in the present survey). The survey found the public's degree of trust to be slightly lower than journalists' perceptions of it. However, much greater trust was found when the public was asked to estimate the degree to which others trust journalists. This suggests that though there is reason to be concerned by the public's moderate degree of trust in the Israeli press, there is some comfort in knowing that the journalists perceive correctly the degree of trust held by the public in them.

Interestingly, in the survey conducted by Tsfati & Livio (2003) among Israeli journalists, 55% of the respondents claimed that news coverage is replete with factual mistakes that borders on negligence and 70% claimed that not enough emphasis is placed on correcting mistakes. Furthermore, the researchers noted that approximately 68% of the journalists believed that the public has little trust in the press, but 35% of the journalists believe that the public has great trust in their work and in their specific media outlet. And, in their summary, the authors write that the journalists gave the press a score of six out of ten, which seems to correspond to the moderate public trust perceived by the journalists in the present sample.

## PROFESSIONAL FREEDOM

The transition from a highly mobilized and ideological press, dominated by party-sponsored and public media outlets, to the model of the commercially controlled press, raises a number of different questions regarding changes in the degree of freedom enjoyed by journalists. In comparison with the past, the military censor tends to increasing openness in publishing security information, though legal orders limiting publishing freedom in these domains are issued occasionally (Negbi, 2005). While the mechanisms of political pressure have weakened, they may well have been replaced by media barons who use the media to advance their economic interests.

When asked about the degree to which they feel free to publish what they want (scale from 1 [not free at all] to 7 [very free]), the findings reveal that respondents feel relatively free to publish what they want. Half of the respondents (50.3%) thought that during the 1980s Israeli journalism enjoyed *somewhat* or *significantly less* freedom than it does today;

*Israeli journalists feel relatively free to publish what they want, compared to two decades ago*

17.9% thought the two periods were similar in this regard; 13.9% claimed they did not know; and, only 17.9% thought that the freedom of the press had been reduced in comparison to the 1980s.

While a weak link was found to exist between respondents' feelings with regard to professional freedom and professional seniority, no significant connections were found between feeling free to publish whatever s/he wishes to publish and age or education. In comparing between reporters by coverage areas, no connection was found between these areas and the journalists' feeling that they could publish what they want.

*Limiting factors:* Respondents were asked to assess on the same scale how much each of eight factors limited their freedom to publish what they wanted. The three factors that respondents identified as contributing most to limiting their professional freedom are those immediately responsible for supervising their reporting: editors, legal advisors and the military censor. As the least influential factors, respondents ranked family and close social circle, advertisers, and fear of consequences.

*The factors that contribute most to limiting journalists' professional freedom are editors, legal advisors, and the military censor*

In addition, feelings of respondents specializing in coverage of different areas were compared with regard to factors that they felt influenced their professional freedom. Compared to financial reporters, significant differences were found among reporters who cover economic and social issues, who tended to feel more limited by advertisers as well as by owners or financial stakeholders. In addition, reporters who cover economic and social issues felt they were more limited by editors than did political reporters.

In terms of seniority, a weak connection was found between the journalists' years of employment in the profession and the feeling that their sources limit their journalistic freedom. Thus, veteran journalists reported feeling less pressure from their sources than did reporters new to the profession. It is possible to interpret this finding in one of two ways: On the one hand, veteran reporters are more confident about their status and capabilities, and thus they feel they have greater freedom in their relations with sources. On the other hand, one could argue that this finding is the result of the extended socialization of veteran reporters; that is, close, ongoing familiarity with sources of information can blur the feeling that this is a set of relations involving pressure (Sigal, 1986). No other relationships were

found between seniority and degree of influence on the gap between what journalists want to publish and what is actually published.

## JOURNALIST'S VALUES

We sought to determine the degree of agreement among respondents regarding central dilemmas that characterize journalists' work. To do so, we asked them to state their degree of agreement with regard to five statements (on a scale from 1 [totally agree] to 7 [totally disagree]).

There was a relatively high degree of agreement with the statement: "The role of journalists is to expose the public to important stories without consideration of the possible implications of publishing these stories." This finding supports Shamir's 1988 study of senior Israeli journalists where more than 90% respondents agreed with a similar statement. There was moderate agreement regarding the four other statements.

With regard to all five statements dealing with fundamental journalistic dilemmas, no significant difference was found between those who studied communication and the other journalist-respondents. This finding is similar to findings from previous studies that found that the fact that Israeli and American journalists undertook communication or journalism studies did not serve as a significant predictor of their stance with regard to ethical issues (Berkowitz, Limor & Singer, 2004). Unusual among these results was that

*Young journalists agreed more than veterans with statements: "When it comes to stories considered to be important to the public, the obligation of the journalist is to obtain the story even if the price paid to do so involve a certain degree of ethical compromise."*

respondents with formal communication studies agreed slightly less with the statement "Thoroughness is much more important than speed in good journalism." ( $M = 5.72$ ) in comparison to respondents without background in academic communication studies ( $M = 6.06$ ;  $t = 1.95$ ,  $df = 327$ ;  $p = .052$ )

When the connection between agreement with the statements and seniority was examined, we found one weak but significant connection which is evidence that young journalists agreed more than veteran respondents with the following statement: "When it comes to stories considered to be important to the public, the obligation of the journalist is to obtain the story even if the price paid to do so involves a certain degree of ethical compromise." ( $r = -.152$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It is possible to interpret this finding as due to younger journalists not having yet adopted professional norms or as evidence of generational changes in the professional

ethos. Or, we may speculate that young journalists are more prepared to make compromises with regard to ethical questions than are veteran colleagues since they feel less secure in their status and are enthusiastic to advance up the professional ladder. Only long-term research can determine the nature of these changes.

## PROFESSIONAL RESPECT

Journalists participating in this survey were asked to assess the degree to which their profession is respected (scale - 1 [not respected] to 7 [highly respected]). According to these respondents, their profession is relatively well-respected. In order to contextualize this finding, we asked the respondents to rate how respected other professions are compared to journalism (scale – 1 [much less respected] to 7 [much greater respect]). Respondents were asked to rank the following professions – teacher, physician, public relations representative, politician and lawyer. PR representatives were perceived as the least well-respected in comparison with journalists, followed by politicians. Teachers and lawyers were ranked slightly below journalists, while physicians received the highest respect ranking.

*Public Relations professionals were perceived as the least well-respected in comparison with journalists*

Similar questions about public respect of journalists versus other professions were utilized in the 2007 survey. And, as was the case in our survey, politicians and PR professionals were less respected than journalists; lawyers and reporters received similar rankings; teachers and physicians were much more highly respected than journalists. Thus, in general, it does appear that journalists and the public-at-large hold relatively similar views regarding journalists' status.

In terms of the respectability of various types of journalism (measured by a scale of 1 [not respected] to 7 [highly respected]), work for national media is perceived by the respondents as more respected than work for local media, and work in online journalism is perceived as less respected than work for older media outlets. Covering social issues is perceived as less respected than reporting on political, foreign or military issues, and culture, while fashion and entertainment reporters are perceived as less respected than reporters covering any other areas. The perceived respectability of journalism was not predicted by seniority but was predicted by perceived professional freedom and perceived public trust in journalists.

## SATISFACTION

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We asked three questions in order to examine journalists' degree of professional satisfaction. The first question asked directly how satisfied respondents were with their work as journalists. In general, their degree of satisfaction was quite high. No connection was found between seniority of work as journalists and any of the three items used to examine professional satisfaction. However, a connection was found between salary and satisfaction: Respondents with higher pay reported having higher satisfaction. Similarly, a rather large correlation was found between the degree of perceived respect for their profession and job satisfaction.

Another item employed to investigate satisfaction asked respondents to share how satisfied they would be if their children chose to work as journalists. Using a three point scale (satisfied, not satisfied, don't know), 37.2% responded positively, 33.1% negatively, and the remainder (29.7%) stated they did not know.

The third question asked about respondents' willingness to continue working as journalists (four point scale from 1 [very interested] to 4 [not interested at all]). Only 7.3% of the respondents chose one of the two options indicative of unwillingness to continue in the profession, while 47.3% stated that they were interested in continuing and 45.4% stated they are very interested in continuing to work as journalists.

In summary, the journalists who participated in the survey were satisfied with their professional choice, though they appear to be less satisfied with the idea that their children would continue in their footsteps.

## GENDER

As noted, one of the important changes in Israeli journalism over the last few decades is the significant number of women who have entered the profession. Women comprised about a third of the respondents in the current study, in comparison with the 1964 study mentioned earlier in which women were less than a tenth of the respondents. Therefore, the present study investigated the roles and status of women in the press and their views of the different topics included in the survey.

According to the findings, a connection was found to exist between gender and several of the domains examined. Taking into consideration their relative proportion in the sample, men tended to cover political, foreign news, and security domains, while women disproportionately tended to cover various economic and social fields. Proportionally, the women who responded to the survey have less seniority in the profession than male respondents (Men – M 14.4, SD 10.28; Women – M 11.5, SD 8.97), and they are more

educated (77.8% earned a BA degree compared to 67.4% of the men). Even though the women have a relatively higher education, they reported having a lower salary than did male respondents. In response to the question regarding salary, in comparison to the national average (=3), the response of female journalists was that their salary is slightly less than the national average, while the males' response was that their salary is higher than the national average. Even controlling for a variety of other variables (e.g., seniority, role, and medium) (Table 1 above), gender continued to be a predictor of income (significantly, despite the disparity in compensation there was no difference in satisfaction between male and female respondents).

No significant differences between women and men were found with regard to the degree of agreement with statements that relate to journalistic values and professional dilemmas; that is, in their assessments of the influence of the media on Israeli society, perceptions of professional status, or public trust in the press. However, men reported having a greater degree of professional freedom to publish what they want in comparison to women. Whereas more than their male counterparts, female journalists felt that editors, owners, advertisers, and legal advisers influenced the gap between what they wanted to publish and what they did in practice, no difference was found with regard to other influential factors (editors – women 5.19, men 4.53; owners – women 4.12, men 3.17; legal advisers - women 4.8; men 4.02; all  $p < .05$ ; marginal finding regarding advertisers – women 2.98, men – 2.53).

## DISCUSSION

The present survey presents a recent self-portrait of Israeli journalists. It maps the demographic characteristics of working journalists and clarifies the manner in which members of the professional community respond to the question: “What is an Israeli journalist today?” while considering their stance with regard to pivotal professional and value issues. The analysis of the findings suggests a number of conclusions.

This study found that respondents have a rather high degree of satisfaction from being journalists, on all three of the measures examined. It is interesting to note that according to the findings of a previous survey (Cohen, Weimann, Meyers, and Tsfat, 2007), the public-at-large expressed less interest than the journalists themselves in having their children work as journalists.

The findings of this survey of Israeli journalists are very similar to those from surveys conducted among American journalists. For example, in 2003, an overwhelming majority of the American respondents claimed that they were “very satisfied” (33.3%) or “somewhat satisfied” (50.6%) with their work. At the same

*The findings of this survey of Israeli journalists are very similar to those from surveys conducted among American journalists*

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time, the American study provides a basis for long-term comparison of data. Here we find a decline in the number of journalists who are very satisfied with their work, from a pinnacle of 49.9% in 1971 to a nadir of 27.3% in 1992, as well as the limited rise in the decade that followed (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2003). By way of global comparison, the countries with the highest level of journalists' satisfaction with their work are Mexico (67%), Chile (54%), and Canada (38%).

According to our survey, the percent of Israeli journalists interested in continuing to work in the profession is 97.2%. This is the highest rate among all the countries where similar surveys have been conducted. Canada and New Zealand were the next highest countries,

*The percent of Israeli journalists interested in continuing to work in the profession is 97.2%, but only one-third of the journalists would be satisfied if their children chose to work as journalists.*

where 82% surveyed journalists reported being interested and very interested in continuing to work as journalists (Weaver 1998). Of course, these international findings are only illustrative and cannot be used as statistically comparable because they were obtained in different ways and nearly a decade ago.

Journalists' education is another matter of great interest. Parallel to the steady growth of Israelis with academic degrees, there has been a significant increase in the number of journalists with a higher education. If in 1964 22.8% of the journalists held an academic degree or studied in the university, our 2008 survey found that 70.8% had earned an academic degree, and this does not include those who were engaged at the time they were surveyed in studying for a B.A.

The findings also illuminate the growing popularity of communication studies among journalism professionals. As noted, the growth of the academic study of communication began 20 years ago and today more than 30% of Israeli journalists hold an academic degree in communication or journalism. It is interesting to compare these findings with those from the US, where communication and journalism studies were introduced more than a hundred years ago. In 2002, 89.3% of US journalists held an academic degree, with 49.5% having earned their degree in communication or journalism (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2003).

With regard to salary, nearly half of the surveyed journalists reported their salary to be slightly higher than the national average. If we examine these data in comparison with those holding academic degrees similar to journalists, on the basis of the 2006 data published by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the average income for those who completed 16 years of education or above stands at 40% higher than the national average, and thus can be categorized as much higher than it. However, this comparison is problematic, as many Israeli journalists earned a BA degree in three years (i.e., 15 years of education) and are not included in the category of those with 16 years of education. However, a gross comparison reveals

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that the journalists' salary is much less than other relevant groups in the market. And, in comparison with average salary of journalists in the United States of America in 2002 of \$43,588, it was 20.4% higher than the average national salary in the United States (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2003). Interestingly, the 1964 survey of Israeli journalists did not include a question about income.

As noted previously, the primary rationale for conducting the 1964 survey of journalists was the feeling that members of the intellectual elite lacked respect for journalists and that politicians related to them as tools that are an easy target for manipulation. The present survey shows that journalists, the public at large, and even politicians (according to a previous survey) think that journalists do have a significant influence on politicians. In addition, journalists perceive themselves to be more respected than politicians, and the public shares this perception.

The findings that online journalistic work is perceived to be less respected than work in other news media conforms with precedents in the history of the profession, when journalists who worked in the “old” media fortified their professional authority by means of exclusion of (or in this case, by means of the label “less well-respected than”) journalists in the newer media. For example, journalists working in radio during the 1930s – then the up-and-coming medium across the map of American media – were not perceived to be “real journalists” in the view of print journalists. And, in the 1950s, television reporters were not accepted as members in American professional journalist organizations, and they felt that they were not awarded the professional status they deserved (Zelizer, 1992). These findings also echo the 2007 public survey from which we learned that television and radio journalists were perceived by the public at large to be the most respected, followed by press and online journalists, sectoral journalists and, lastly those working for local newspapers. The interesting difference is that the public assigned a higher status to the electronic media journalism, while the professional community does not distinguish between the journalists working for the written press and their colleagues in the electronic media.

*Online journalist work is perceived to be less respected than work in other news media*

With regard to the sense of journalistic freedom viewed from a comparative international perspective, Israeli journalists believe they have relative freedom to publish whatever they wish (M 5.5 on a seven point scale, SD 1.4). This places them among a group of journalists from Canada, the US and Finland where over 80% of journalists report that they are from “somewhat to very” satisfied with the degree of freedom they enjoy (Weaver, 1988). The findings of our survey also suggest that social reporters (covering education, crime, health, welfare, labor relations, environment and so forth) feel more restricted in publishing everything they wish to report while, by way of comparison, financial reporters feel less restricted. This finding has important significance given the ownership structure of most of Israeli media organizations. It appears that the areas covered by financial reporters as well

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their worldview, or at least their professional viewpoint, are very close to the worldview of those who could restrict their freedom to publish what they want to report. This finding could have significant implications for the development of “internal censorship”, when journalists learn by trial and error what are the topics that they can cover freely versus those that will be more difficult to report upon (Darnton, 1975; Fishman, 1980). Furthermore, these feelings can advance internal selection processes, and journalists can choose to cover certain areas in which there are fewer obstacles to publishing.

In summary, contrary to claims heard frequently in intra-journalistic discourse, this study’s findings suggest that Israeli journalists are by and large satisfied with their work, feel relatively free to publish what they are interested in publishing, and the overwhelming majority of them are interested in continuing their professional career in journalism.

In addition, analysis of the findings according to the variable of seniority in the profession did not reveal there to be a “generational gap”: Young journalists are not clearly distinguishable from more veteran colleagues with regard to issues such as professional satisfaction, freedom of reporting, perception of professional respect, and positions of agreement with value-laden statements. At the same time, it is impossible to conclude from these findings that the negative feelings reflected in the internal professional discourse are misinformed. While the survey does provide an up-to-date answer to questions regarding Israeli journalists’ perceptions, it is possible that the survey’s findings do not yet fully reflect the breadth of the more recent changes that the Israeli press has been undergoing, including those brought on by the present economic crisis. Therefore, future surveys may be more successful in identifying the influences of these processes.

*Israeli journalists are by and large satisfied with their work, feel relatively free to publish what they are interested in publishing, and are interested in continuing their professional career in journalism*