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By J. Laurence Day

## The Latin American Journalist: A Tentative Profile

*Interesting differences as well as similarities are revealed by working journalists in Argentina, Bolivia and Mexico. They have professional aspirations, but may tend to compromise their ethics for economic gain.*

► In his study of professional journalists in Chile, Menanteau-Horta identified eight main requirements which can be used to identify an occupation as a profession.<sup>1</sup> He then discussed these requirements in terms of data he had gathered in a survey of journalists in Santiago, Chile. He concluded that the journalists of Santiago present a very marked orientation toward professionalization.

The present study, also based on survey data, reaches similar conclusions about respondents in Argentina, Bolivia and Mexico. In addition to the demographic data needed, the survey sought to identify the self-image factors among the respondents—all of whom were professional journalists.

The three countries were chosen because certain aspects of the journal-

istic situation in each offered opportunities for gathering new information. Also, these countries were representative of all Latin America in a number of ways.

Argentina, socially and economically advanced, still has many social and economic problems. Argentina was unstable politically and rapidly rising living costs cause problems for everyone including journalists. Its European ethnic makeup and traditions were also a factor of interest.

Mexico represents political stability and the kind of "benevolent" domination of the press typical of some other Latin American nations. It has made rapid economic progress and has a predominantly mestizo makeup.

Bolivia with its vast Indian population and its one "crop" (tin) economy is also of representative value.

### *The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire for the study was developed along lines generally similar to studies of professional journalists done in the United States. Those of particular use were Merrill Samuelson's job satisfaction study of journalists,<sup>2</sup> the Grey-Gerald<sup>3</sup> study of veteran

<sup>1</sup> Dario Menanteau-Horta, "Professionalism of Journalists in Santiago de Chile," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 44:713-24 (Winter 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Merrill Samuelson, "A Standardized Test to Measure Job Satisfaction in the Newsroom," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 39:285-91 (Summer 1962).

<sup>3</sup> David L. Grey and J. Edward Gerald, "How the Newsmen Lives— a Self-Image Study," unpublished paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism Convention, Austin, Texas, August 1964.

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metropolitan journalists and the McLeod-Hawley<sup>4</sup> study of professional journalists. Some questions from these studies were used intact except for translation into Spanish, others were adapted to suit the culturally different situation in Latin America. Others were new questions, designed to study problems peculiar to the area. One of these sought information on how Latin American journalists obtain their jobs (an offshoot of "extended family" studies), and what the journalists feel is the biggest impediment to press development in that area.

The study by Menanteau Horta on professionalization of Chilean journalists,<sup>5</sup> and one by Carter and Sepúlveda on media use in Chile, gave useful methodological and cross-cultural information.<sup>6</sup>

A preliminary version of the questionnaire was pre-tested through the cooperation of the Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Periodismo para América Latina (CIESPAL) of Quito, Ecuador. The questionnaire was distributed among participants of the Second Regional Seminar on Journalism Teaching and the Mass Media, in Mexico City. After the pre-test, refinements were made in the questionnaire, but the basic structure remained the same. Eventually, the author visited eight Latin American countries and interviewed scores of editors, publishers and working newspapermen. In the three countries where the questionnaire was used, three assistants were chosen and trained from among men who knew the local journalistic situation.<sup>7</sup>

### The Sample

Because of the limitations of funds and the time the author could spend in each country, and because of the facts of journalistic life in Latin America, the sample used for this study had to be a purposive one—not one drawn from a systematically prepared list of working journalists. The aim was to find out about journalists who work on metropolitan daily newspapers in

the capitals of the three countries.

Estimates were made of the size of working news and executive staffs of leading newspapers in the three countries. The assistants then sought to obtain a "mix" of interviews from the staffs of these newspapers. They had a rough estimate of the ratio of news executives—managing editors, city editors, news editors, etc., to reporters and sub-editors.

Statistically the sample is not ideal. But from the standpoint of contributing new knowledge in an area where little is known, it is worthwhile. It is an analysis of the responses of 94 working journalists from three Latin American capitals to a wide range of questions on how they live and what they think about their vocation.

Respondents were contacted through their place of employment. Although 85% gave a newspaper as their "principal employer," 3% listed radio, 2% magazines, 7% wire service and 3% "other."

The breakdown of respondents according to job classification was varied enough to offer a balanced picture.<sup>8</sup> Reporters were 28% of the total, 13% chiefs of sections (wire desk, city desk,

<sup>4</sup>Jack M. McLeod and Searle E. Hawley Jr., "Professionalization Among Newsmen," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 41:529-38 (Autumn 1964).

<sup>5</sup>Menanteau-Horta, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>Roy E. Carter Jr. and Orlando Sepúlveda, "Some Patterns of Media Use in Santiago de Chile," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 41:216-24 (Spring 1964).

<sup>7</sup>In Mexico the assistant was Jaime Andres Arroyo Olin, photographer-reporter for *Diario de la Tarde*. In Bolivia the assistant was Guillermo Zavala, reporter for *Presencia*, and former IAPA scholar at the University of Minnesota. In Argentina, Teófilo Domínguez, cable editor of *La Nación* and former Ford Foundation scholar at the University of Minnesota, was the assistant.

<sup>8</sup>The word "reportero" was used in the questionnaire for the English word reporter. The word "redactor" was used to denote deskmen. In Mexico, however, a reporter is a "redactor," and in Argentina a deskman can be a "cronista." Some confusion may have resulted from these ambiguities and from other difficulties of translation. Job classifications in the U.S. and Latin America do not always match exactly. However, for purposes of the study, exact matches were not necessary. The study was seeking differences between news executives and working journalists, for the most part, and there seemed little ambiguity in the distinctions in that area.

regional, etc.), 6% news editors, 32% deskmen (copy editors, rewrite, etc.), 2% photographers, 6% publishers or high-level executives, 2% correspondents and 6% "other."

Comparison of "position in company" and education yielded mostly responses which one might expect. Job classifications were divided between "news executives" and "working journalists," and educational attainment between "high" education (university-professional) and "low" education (primary-secondary schooling). Twice as many of the news executives had high education as low (16% versus 8%) and nearly twice as many of the working journalists had high education as low (42% versus 22%).\* Although the differences were not significant ( $\chi^2 < .001$   $p > .05$ ), the fact that the high education category still contains the most working journalists is perhaps a hopeful sign for the future. Perhaps the more highly educated respondents now in lower echelon positions will move into executive positions later.

The comparison of job classification and age yielded predictable, although not significant, results ( $\chi^2 = 2.61$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Eighty-five responses were usable in that area. Of these, 39 were "younger" (34 or under) and held lower echelon positions. On the "older" group, 32 were working journalists and 14 held executive positions.

#### Demographic Data

Responses to most questions were so similar that the respondents were combined into a single group in most analyses. In cases where respondents in one country differed widely from the others, separate breakdowns are given.

The sample included 87 males and seven females. Of these 94 persons, 70% were married, 26% were single, 1% widowed and 3% divorced or separated. The father's occupation of 74%

when they were young was reported as "white collar," while 26% considered their fathers as being from the "working" class.<sup>9</sup>

As for fringe benefits, 85% received vacations with pay, 47% received medical insurance for themselves and family, 39% had company-paid life insurance, and 85% received annual cash bonuses. The bonuses ranged from a day's salary to more than two week's salary. All of the Bolivian respondents reported they were paid during illness (sick pay), while about half of the Mexicans and only about 10% of the Argentines did.

The groups had a high level of education. Respondents were asked to list the number of years spent in primary, secondary, professional school or university. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported having attended university or other advanced educational institution. About one third reported they attended secondary school, and fewer than five per cent reported only primary school education.

To a question on housing, 40% of the respondents said they lived in dwellings they owned or were buying, while 11% lived with parents or relatives. The rest rented houses or apartments.

On response to the question as to the social class to which "you think you belong," 62% said middle class (*clase media*), 27% upper middle class (*media acomodada*) and 1% upper class (*clase alta*). Only 8% said they belonged to the laboring class (*clase obrera*). No one placed himself in the lower class category (*clase baja*). Two percent didn't answer the question.

The profile thus is of well educated, urban individuals whose lives are stable in terms of dwelling, marital status and other similar characteristics. Evidence failed to support the hypothesis that since Latin American journalism is less developed than that in the United States, the journalists would resemble U.S. journalists of three or four decades ago.

There are some factors which indi-

\*N=83.

<sup>9</sup> Job classifications were adapted from those listed in the 1960 U.S. Census. These were arbitrarily divided into two groups—white collar and working class.

cate that these journalists consider themselves less than ideally situated.

In the matter of salary, for example, 72% of the respondents reported a monthly income from their principal employment equivalent to \$250 or less. Forty-four per cent reported they made less than \$150 a month. When all sources of income were considered, 67% of the respondents earned less than \$400 a month. Nineteen per cent failed to answer the questions concerning over-all salary. This income was considered by most respondents to be inadequate. In terms of per capita income of the countries involved, however, it is above average. But these individuals are well-educated and highly trained. Their positions and social standing demand that they maintain a standard of living which their income does not match.

Another area of interest is the number of hours the individuals spend at their jobs to attain the social level indicated. Some 72% reported working more than 35 hours a week at their principal employment; 32% reported working more than 45 hours a week on the main job. Considering all their gainful activities, 60% reported working more than 55 hours a week and 30% said they worked more than 65 hours a week.

### *Job Satisfaction*

To get a more precise measure of how the respondents themselves feel about their own jobs and journalism as a profession, a modified form of the job satisfaction index reported by Samuelson<sup>10</sup> and used by Gerald and Grey was included in the survey. Factors in the job satisfaction index included:

- 1) Feelings about journalism as a profession.
- 2) Future prospects in the present job.
- 3) Utilization of professional skills.
- 4) Freedom and self expression.
- 5) Pressure of company policy.
- 6) Job prestige (respondent's estimate of his job's prestige).

7) Job prestige (respondent's idea of how his family sees his job).

8) Use of professional abilities and skills.

A five-point scale was used. Those who marked "very satisfied" rated highest in job satisfaction. Medium satisfaction included those who were "fairly satisfied." "Low" satisfaction included "uncertain," "fairly dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied." "Low" job satisfaction was low only in relation to others in the survey, not necessarily in an absolute sense.

In Table 1 are shown the results of the job satisfaction responses obtained on the questionnaire. The table gives a breakdown of respondents of each country as well as a combined score for the respondents. As the combined section indicates, job satisfaction was rather high in all areas. For example, 63% of the respondents indicated they were satisfied with their profession and didn't want to change. In their own jobs, as opposed to the profession as a whole, 34% considered themselves very content, 55% relatively content and 10% expressed relative discontent. One respondent said he was very discontent.

Respondents were even less enthusiastic about the prospects for the future in their own particular job. For example, 40% of the Bolivians felt they had "little prospect for the future" in their company; 35% thought they had "very good prospects for the future." The Mexicans were the reverse: 43% expressed "very good" prospects and 33% "little prospects." This made the combined group average out to roughly one third in each of the "high," "medium" and "low" categories.

Also interesting were the respondents' opinions of the prestige of their positions as opposed to what they thought was the opinion of their family. In the combined breakdown, 17% of the respondents thought their families had a "high" opinion of the prestige of the respondents' positions. But 60% of the

<sup>10</sup> Samuelson, *op. cit.*

TABLE 1

JOB SATISFACTION INDEX	Respondent's feelings about journalism as a profession	Respondent's opinion about his future with the company	Does his present job utilize his professional abilities?	Respondent has enough freedom so as to be able to feel pride in his work	Does his company make him conform strictly to its policy?	How do respondent's relatives regard his job as to prestige?	How does the respondent himself regard the prestige of his job?	Respondent's feelings in general about his present job
<i>Argentina</i>								
Number	N=37	N=41	N=41	N=41	N=39	N=41	N=41	N=41
Low	14%	37%	29%	32%	26%	34%	8%	22%
Medium	27%	41%	47%	39%	20%	46%	46%	54%
High	59%	22%	24%	29%	54%	20%	46%	24%
<i>Bolivia</i>								
Number	N=15	N=20	N=20	N=20	N=19	N=19	N=20	N=20
Low	6%	40%	30%	25%	16%	26%	0%	5%
Medium	33%	25%	65%	55%	42%	69%	45%	75%
High	61%	35%	5%	20%	42%	5%	55%	20%
<i>Mexico</i>								
Number	N=33	N=33	N=33	N=32	N=33	N=33	N=33	N=33
Low	3%	33%	10%	10%	21%	15%	2%	0%
Medium	30%	24%	51%	69%	38%	64%	18%	45%
High	67%	43%	39%	21%	41%	21%	80%	55%
<i>Combined</i>								
Number	N=85	N=94	N=94	N=94	N=90	N=93	N=94	N=94
Low	8%	36%	22%	23%	22%	26%	4%	11%
Medium	29%	32%	52%	53%	31%	57%	36%	55%
High	63%	32%	26%	24%	47%	17%	60%	34%

respondents themselves thought that the prestige of their job was "high." In the individual countries, the Mexicans showed the most marked difference. Eighty-five per cent of the Mexicans thought their job was "high" in prestige, while 21% thought that their families shared that opinion.

*Journalists and Job-Seeking*

With regard to job-seeking by journalists, the questionnaire asked respondents how they obtained their principal employment. The hypothesis was that most of the respondents would have received employment through a friend or relative. That, indeed, was the case: 40% reported that their present

principal employment was obtained through help of a friend on the staff, while 13% said they got their jobs through a relative.

On the other hand, 14% were accepted on the basis of personal application, and 11% were taken on after winning some sort of competitive examination, and 9% got jobs through a union or professional organization. Of the remaining respondents, 11% obtained their jobs in "other" ways (which they listed, but none of which were readily classifiable) and 2% didn't answer the question.

The number of extra jobs held by the respondents also was examined. Given the rising cost of living and

minimal salaries paid to journalists, it was expected that most respondents would be working in one or more jobs in addition to their principal one. They were asked to mark each outside job held, and it turned out that nearly all respondents had one or two extra jobs. For example, 15% worked extra on newspapers, 7% at radio stations, 19% on magazines and 9% for a wire service.

Public relations claimed 22% of all respondents for extra work. Half the Argentines listed public relations as outside employment, while only 10% each of the Bolivians and Mexicans listed it. Another 28% of the respondents worked at extra jobs "outside the mass media." These included everything from city magistrate to announcer at a hippodrome.

### *Press Development*

Respondents differed in their opinions on the main handicap to press development. They were asked which of the following conditions *most* impeded the development of the press in their own country:

- 1) Limited economic resources of the mass media.
- 2) Lack of technical and professional journalistic training.
- 3) Lack of ethical standards in the press.
- 4) Legal restrictions by the state.
- 5) Extra-legal restrictions by state or private pressure groups.
- 6) Low general education of the country.
- 7) Low general economic situation of the country.

In the combined average, "limited economic resources of the mass media" was cited by 24% as the thing that most impedes press development. Next largest "cause" was said to be extra-legal restrictions, which was marked by 19% of the respondents. Low general education and lack of technically and professionally trained journalists were each cited by 17%. Finally, the low general economic level of the country

itself was considered by 11% to be the biggest obstacle to press development.

Each country had a different emphasis. For the Argentines, "limited economic resources of the mass media" was the biggest problem (36%). Bolivians were just the opposite—40% felt that the impediment was the low general education level of the country, while none felt that extra-legal restrictions were the biggest problem. Technical and professional underdevelopment and extra-legal restrictions were cited by Mexicans (30%) as the biggest problem, while they were least worried about the general economic situation as a factor (6%).

These findings are not representative enough to be used to say "This is how Latin American journalists are." The figures do contribute insight into what 94 individual Latin American journalists in three different countries seem to be like.

### *Aspirations and Realities*

McLeod and Hawley developed a measure of "degree of professional orientation" in their study of professionalization among newsmen.<sup>11</sup> Part of their index of professionalization was a measure of the importance respondents attached to 24 job characteristics. On the basis of sociological studies of professionalization in other occupations,<sup>12</sup> the 24 characteristics were divided into 12 which professionally oriented persons should value highly and 12 which they should stress less. This index, with certain modifications necessitated by language and cultural differences, was used as a measure of professionalization of Latin American journalists in the present study.

The respondents were asked to state how important each characteristic was to *them* in an "ideal" job as well as

<sup>11</sup> Jack M. McLeod and Searle E. Hawley Jr., "Professionalization Among Newsmen," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 41:329-38 (Autumn 1969).

<sup>12</sup> The methodology and several specific items were taken from Duane Marvick, "Career perspectives in a Bureaucratic Setting" *Ann Arbor: Michigan Governmental Studies*, 1954, No. 27, p. 50.

how well their present job provided this. This yielded a measure of *desired* satisfaction as well as *obtained* job satisfaction.

In general, it was assumed that professionally oriented persons should desire a job that uses their professional skills and knowledge, that contributes an essential service, that has an effect on the client and organization worked for, that permits free expression and that has competent supervisors and co-workers. On the other hand, they should give less emphasis to the monetary, security, prestige, and human relations aspects of a job.

The profile evolved from this effort was very similar to the rest of the data gathered on the questionnaire—namely, that the respondents seem to be moving toward professionalism and that their ideals—their aspirations—are higher than the level achieved in their real life situation.

In examining the tendency toward professionalism, a 24-point continuum was developed, with 24 being the highest degree of professionalism and zero being the lowest. Twelve should be the median or cross-over point between professional and non-professional. The numerical difference between the “ideal” professional and “ideal” non-professional items was found. This was divided by the number of respondents in each group and this “average difference” was used as the measure for locating the group in the continuum.

When respondents of all three countries were considered, the professionalization index of the “ideal” (desired job satisfaction) was 12.81—directionally moving toward professionalism. Ideal indices for the three individual countries were in the expected direction in terms of data produced by the questionnaire.

When the “real” situation was discussed—that is, the *obtained* job satisfaction in terms of the 24 characteristics—scores were somewhat lower in all cases. The “real” index for all countries was 12.20 below the 12.81

cited for the “ideal.” The Argentines had a “real” index of 12.30 as compared to their 13.0 “ideal” and the Bolivians had the closest, 12.10 “real” and a 12.35 “ideal.” The Mexicans, on the other hand, went from a 13.03 “ideal” to an 11.60 “real.”

### *Profile in Summation*

There is a “dicho” or saying in Spanish which goes “en el país de los ciegos, un tuerto es rey” (In a land of blind people, a one-eyed man is the king.).

This saying is interesting in relation to the professionalization level of the Latin American journalist. Data supporting this paper indicate that the Latin American journalist is a rather well-educated, urban individual who receives a number of social and economic benefits—vacation, bonuses, hospitalization, retirement. He considers himself middle- or upper middle-class socially and in general is happy in his work.

He is, on the other hand, an individual who may compromise professional ethics for economic gain. He works at several jobs, some of them on competing media and accepts remuneration from news sources. These practices cannot help but compromise his professional standing and outlook.

The journalist of this profile is barely professional in terms of characteristics he desires in a job. He borders on the non-professional in terms of professional characteristics he has *obtained* in his present principal employment. Taking the good and bad, the Latin American journalist could be called a “one-eyed man.”

In terms of political and economic stability, literacy and general education, per capita income, housing transportation, communication, Latin America is under-developed. Its people are groping toward modernization.

Hopefully, the Latin American journalist and others with at least “one good eye” will be able to lead the rest of the area toward a time when all of them can “see.”