A PROFILE OF NEWSCASTERS AT ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TELEVISION STATIONS IN ONTARIO

Thalia Theofani Assuras

The television newscaster at any English-language Ontario station is likely to be a male in his thirties, probably without a university or college degree. He has been a newscaster for about six years and probably earns between $30 - $35,000 annually.

L'annonceur à la télévision dans toute station de langue anglaise en Ontario est vraisemblablement un homme dans la trentaine, probablement sans diplôme d'université ou d'école technique. Il a été annonceur pendant six ans environ et il gagne probablement $ 30 à $ 35?000 par an.

The television newscaster has become the predominant agent of news with the evolution of television into the primary source of information in North America and elsewhere. In the United States television news has overtaken newspapers as the principal news source and television news dependence increased from approximately 50% in the 1960's (Bogart, 1968; Robinson and Swinehart, 1968; Roper, 1969) to over 60% in the early 1970's (Robinson, 1972). In a more recent study (Atkin and Elwood, 1978) television was cited as the number one news choice among more than 200 students in six high schools in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Television has been identified also as the major source of political information for many Americans (Roper, 1973; Powers, 1977).

Norman Swallow (1966) says of television news in Britain, "...its audience exceeds the
readership of the national newspapers put together, and does so by a margin that, throughout the world, increases every year...."

Information about television news usage in Canada is difficult to find. However, the average Canadian spends more than four hours a day watching television (Jamieson, 1966, 9) and Canadians have been identified as the world's greatest television consumers (Information Canada, 1972). The Kent Commission report also indicates that Canadians have a high preference for television news in most news categories (Kent, 1981, 35). Canadians' preoccupation with television and the similarities between Canadian, American and British societies would suggest that television news is a primary source of information for Canadians also.

As television news has become more influential so has the anchorperson. In a 1974-75 study, nearly a majority of Americans (47%) said they regarded television newspeople as having too much power, along with big business (88%), rich people (79%), and other groups (11%) (Pierce, 1977).

Yet, what is known about the anchorperson and his or her occupation? Independent Television news of Great Britain, a leader in the development of the newscaster says:

The news is presented not by readers but by newscasters — that is by men of personality and authority. But they are not just personalities. They are above all working journalists, whose authority stems from professional experience and skill, and who do their share of gathering and writing the news, as well as presenting it (Swallow, 1966).

Walter Cronkite, the most popular newscaster in the U. S. and one of the ten "most influential decision makers in American" (Feinman, 1977) also describes the news—readers as journalists:
If we do our jobs well, we do those things—reporting, writing, editing—as well or better than the print journalist, but beyond that we have to have special skills...to present our material through the spoken word and in a visual medium, frequently to think on our feet and to be right the first time with no editor imposed as a protective buffer between us and the public (Cronkite, 1976, 24 - 25).

Others assert that newscasters are not journalists and regard them as performers only. Magazine editor Peter C. Newman wrote that "most news-readers are little more than glorified disc jockeys spinning the Top 20 news stories a night, their hair sprayed into place, their molars polished to perfection" (1981, 3). He claimed also that Walter Cronkite is "one of the last of the television anchormen who actually served an authentic apprenticeship as a journalist." Ron Powers concurs: "anchormen, weathermen, reporters all, each represented a radical discontinuity with journalistic tradition" in the 1970s (Powers, 1977). Still others regard news-readers as faces only or as much showbusiness stars as are actors and singers (Swallow, 1966; Columbia Journalism Review, 1976).

Few studies have been done about the television newscaster. Research which is available is either descriptive (Powers, 1977; Swallow, 1966; Pierce, 1977) or includes television newscasters within an aggregate of broadcasters (de la Garde and Barrett, 1977; Bambrick, 1971; Fischer, 1978; Weinthal and Garrett, 1974; Idsovoog and Hoyt, 1977; Stone, 1974; Johnstone, et. al, 1976). Still other sources consider television reporters only (Ismach and Dennis, 1978). Of this information, little is about broadcast journalists in Canada.

This study of Ontario newscasters was undertaken to determine the extent to which
these news-readers can be considered journalists and how closely their general profile resembles that of other broadcast journalists.

Method

Information about the newscasters' family background, education and employment experience was obtained during a telephone questionnaire which required approximately twenty minutes to complete.

A list of television news-readers at English-language stations in Ontario was compiled from the Mathews' list (8.80, vol. 24.2) and the Canadian Advertising Rates and Data (CARD), December 1980. In addition, names of newscasters were requested from newsroom personnel at each of the stations.

French-language television stations were omitted to avoid factors, such as cultural variables, which might have distorted the results.

Results

There are forty-two fulltime newscasters at English-language television stations in Ontario; 34 are men and 8 are women. Thirty (72%) were interviewed.

Can newscasters be described as journalists?

According to D. K. Wright, "Journalism refers to the process of news reporting - the collection, writing and editing of material of current interest for presentation through print or broadcast media" (1974). Thus, reading on-air exclusively fails to qualify a newscaster as a journalist.

Wright's definition of journalism was used in determining whether the newscasters in this study could be described as journalists. Table One lists the functions considered to be com-
ponents of the journalistic process. It indicates that, based on Wright's definition, the news-readers in this investigation can be considered journalists.

In addition to their role as anchorperson, several of the respondents perform other journalistic functions. Two individuals are also the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Number performing</th>
<th>Per cent of total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story research</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write from own research notes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write using other's notes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewrite wire copy or other's copy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign stories</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit copy</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare visual material</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine format of newscast</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read copy, exclusively</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
news director at their station; one is an assistant news director; a fourth is a sports director and sportscaster; and a fifth is a sportscaster.

Twenty-four said they also participate in public affairs programs or other projects at their station or network. Their roles in these projects include: writer, host of specials, host of a weekly public affairs program, interviewer, producer, director, story editor, reporter, assignment editor, researcher or camera person.

Twenty-one of the respondents have also served an authentic apprenticeship as a journalist since they were reporters for newspapers and/or radio and/or television before becoming news-readers.

In addition, before taking the newscaster’s chair at their present station, 15 individuals had been hired at the same station for other jobs, eleven having been two or more of the following: foreign correspondent, reporter, business editor*, writer, director of news and current affairs, producer, director, sports director*, sportscaster, talk-show host, weekend anchorperson, weather announcer, radio announcer, and narrator. Some worked on current affairs programs and documentaries and in sales.

Demographic Profile

Family Background

All but one of the respondents, who was born in England, were born in Canada and the majority (63%) said their parents were Canadian citizens at birth. Of the 11 parents who became Canadian citizens by naturalization, nine were from England or the United States and one couple was from Australia.

Only four of the parents had jobs connected with the communications field. Of the fathers
one was a filmmaker and producer and one scheduled films; among the mothers one was a talent agent and another a writer.

Nineteen of the news-readers are from families in which the father's career can be labelled as "white collar." These occupations ranged from teaching to accounting. Blue collar jobs ranged from farming to mining. Most (21) of the mothers were homemakers.

Age and Marital Status

Figure one indicates the age distribution among the newscasters. Most of the anchormen are married; in contrast, half of the female newscasters are single (Table Two). Of those who are married, 63% have spouses who are working. The sole male spouse is an ambulance technician and driver. Sixty per cent of the female partners are homemakers; other occupations include that of teacher, freelance writer, merchandising executive and clerk. One of the wives is attending college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education

Only four of the thirty newscasters have a university degree. Ten have college diplomas and five completed high school only. The remaining eleven attended either university, college, or high school but did not graduate. The educational background was similar among men and women and among older and younger broadcasters.

Less than one-third said they had received formal training in journalism. Each of these individuals qualified his or her response by explaining that their courses focused on the art of communication rather than the development of journalistic skills. Table Three states the communication disciplines listed by the newscasters and indicates that the majority who took these courses were 30 years of age or younger.

The newscasters did say, however, that they regard formal training in journalism as good preparation for becoming a journalist and or a newscaster and felt that it gives one a better chance of obtaining a job in the field.

Employment Experience

All of the newscasters who participated in this study entered media related occupations between the age of 11 and 24. However 56.7% have also worked in at least one occupation outside of the communications industry. These jobs ranged from that of manager and civil servant, to seismologist, helicopter pilot and farmer.

Half of the news-readers have less than six years experience in their occupation. Of this group, ten are men and five are women and only three (one woman) have worked at more than one establishment. One woman has been a news-reader for six years and with more than one company. This is in contrast to nine of the men, five of
Figure One

Age Distribution of newscasters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A: 20 - 30 years old; B: 31 - 40 years old; C: 41 - 50 years old; D: 51 - 60 years old
Figure Two

Educational Levels Achieved By Newscasters

- Graduated
- Did not graduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HS</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
whom have been at more than one station.

Three men have eleven to fifteen years of experience at more than one station. One man has been an anchor at more than one establishment for almost twenty years and another has over twenty years experience, although at more than one station.

Table Three

Communication courses taken by newscasters at Ontario's English-language television stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Graduation certificate</th>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio &amp; Television Broadcasting</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio &amp; T.V. Arts</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Arts</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Arts</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Radio &amp; T.V.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast journalism</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Broadcasting</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Production</td>
<td>Diploma &amp; Certificate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.V. Communication (Master's level)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>under 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Salary

Table four lists salaries relative to the size of the city in which the newscasters work. The remuneration quoted represents that received for reading news on-the-air plus performing other functions.

Newscasters in cities with fewer than 100,000 people make less than $30,000 annually.
Table Four
Salaries of newscasters at Ontario's
English-language T.V. stations
(Relative to size of city)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (x10)</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer to to to to to to to than</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1,000 5 - - - - - - 2* 3*

250 to 1,000 - - - - 1 1 - - 2

100 to 250 - 1 1 1 1* 1 1 - -

10 to 100 1* 2** 1 1 - - - -

10 or less 2 1 - 1 1 - - -

Numbers indicate number of individuals in each salary bracket.
* - indicates number of women in that salary bracket.
Those in cities of more than 100,000 generally earn above $30,000.

It is likely that the five respondents from Toronto (population over one million) who would not reveal their salaries earn more than $40,000 and probably more than $60,000 annually. This is estimated from the answers given by others in that city and from the fact that an increase in salary appears to parallel an increase in population. Anchorwomen in Toronto generally tend to earn less than the men in that city. However, this trend of unequal pay relative to sex does not seem to be obvious for female newscasters in smaller centers. However, two-thirds of the women said their salary was inappropriate. On the other hand, almost one half (46%) of the men found their remuneration satisfactory.

Discussion

Newscasters at Ontario's English-language television stations can be described as journalists. Their substantial participation in "the process of news reporting" indicates that they can be regarded as more than performers. Furthermore, a background as a reporter among a majority of the news-readers points to development in the journalistic tradition.

The applicability of the label "journalist" makes possible a comparison of the newscasters' profile with that of broadcast journalists in general. In this study, male news-readers outnumbered the females by five to one. In various reports on broadcast journalists the difference has been cited as five to one (de la Garde and Barrett, 1977), ten to one, and seventeen to one (Wienthal & O'Keefe, 1974), while one aggregate survey of print and broadcast journalists listed a ratio of four to one (Johnstone, et. al., 1976).
The News People (Johnstone, et. al., 1976) makes mention of economic heritage: approximately 62 per cent of journalists' fathers are white collar employees. A similar percentage was found in this study.

Approximately 70 percent of the newscasters are between twenty and forty years old. This correlates with the 78.5 per cent cited in a Montreal study (de la Garde and Barrett, 1977) but contrasts with the 56.3% given in The News People. Compared to American Journalists, the news-readers in this investigation have achieved lower levels in the educational system. Of these newscasters four have an university degree and eleven a college diploma. In Canada, however, colleges are generally oriented toward occupational training rather than academic instruction. College in the United States generally corresponds to university in Canada. One American study indicates that T. V. news directors are well educated men, ninety percent have attended college and forty percent have received an undergraduate degree (Shuneman, 1966). A study of Ohio broadcasters determined that seventy six percent have a college degree (Fischer, 1978) and Wienthal (1974) found that fifty seven percent of broadcast newspersons have a college degree. Of the journalists surveyed by Johnstone, et. al. 86.1 percent had at least some college training, 39.6 percent having received a degree.

In 1974 the average annual income of American journalists was $ 11,000 (Wienthal and O'Keefe). In this study, one-sixth of the newscasters said they earned between $ 10,000 and $ 15,000 annually and the norm is approximately $ 25,000 in a city of at least 100,000 people. United States network newscasters Walter Cronkite, Tom Snyder, and Barbara Walters have earned at least $ 400,000 annually (Powers, 1977). Powers also reports a Chicago anchorman received $ 100,000 annually in the
1970s. While network newscasters located in Ontario earn the highest salaries among those surveyed here, their remuneration only just approaches that of the local Chicago anchor.

FOOTNOTES

* still remains in that position.

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