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A Cross-Cultural Look at Serving the Public Interest: American and Israeli Journalists Consider Ethical Scenarios

Dan Berkowitz, Yehiel Limor and Jane B. Singer

Abstract: This study explores how the social dimensions of a reporter's world shape ethical decisions through parallel surveys of daily newspaper reporters in Israel and one Midwestern US state. Through regression analysis, we found that personal factors (gender, years of education) were not related to ethical decisions nor were professional factors (professional experience, professional membership, having studied journalism). In contrast, the social context element (country of practice) was relevant for two of three ethical situations. We also found that personal, professional and social dimensions varied in their utility to ethical decision-making from situation to situation. Considering a reporter's ethical predisposition, this study found that personal value systems may be more important for ethical decision-making than formal written codes. This study suggests that ethical foundations shared across nations can create cultural bridges – but that diverging ethical perspectives also may create journalistic barriers.

Most of the concepts and theories about newswork and news organizations drawn from studies in the United States are grounded in specific social and cultural contexts. However, these contexts are often taken for granted by both researchers and readers of that research. This occurs because the contexts of these studies often appear to the researcher as a natural part of the socio-political and economic systems in which the newsmaking is embedded (Reese, 2001).

When scholars study newsmaking beyond US borders, this inattention to the ways in which news contexts are affected by cultural differences, including those connected with variations in national media and social structures and ecologies, becomes increasingly

problematic. The risk of misleading interpretations increases when findings and frameworks from US studies are transferred free of their context (Weaver, 1998).

Consideration of newsmaking context across national borders is especially important in the study of cross-cultural journalistic ethics. There is evidence that some aspects of media ethics transcend national borders. These include a quest for truth, including a global concern with media objectivity and accuracy; a desire for responsibility among professional communicators; and a compulsion for free expression, including varying regional emphases on the free flow of information (Cooper, 1990). But despite these underlying journalistic values, the nature of a reporter's ethical decision-making also is informed by context-dependent dimensions, including the reporter's professional judgment and social world. Differences in contexts may be elusive to study, but they are important to consider nonetheless.

This study explores how social dimensions of a reporter's world shape ethical decisions through survey data gathered from reporters in Israel and one Midwestern US state. The study relates these dimensions -- reporter's background, journalistic socialization, ethical attitudes and country of practice -- to three ethical decision-making situations. We suggest that although some commonalities should exist between the two groups of reporters, the context of their work world should also show some degree of differences. Further, these reporters may respond to varying situations in different ways because of differences in their social worlds.

By analyzing responses from both groups together, we are able to assess the role that national framework plays in the study of journalistic ethics. A multiple regression model is applied to our survey data to facilitate examination of all the dimensions together, with a separate analysis for each of three ethical problems.

Theoretical background: Global journalists and social influence

Two scholarly journals focusing on journalism research in a global setting (Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism and Journalism Studies) recently have been introduced. Globally oriented conferences dealing with issues facing media practitioners, held in the United States during the same period, have included 'What's News?' at Syracuse University in spring 2002 and 'Global Media: Quest for Universal Ethical Standards' at Washington and Lee University in fall 2001. And benchmark comparative studies about journalists across nations were published in the 1990s (Gaunt, 1992; Weaver, 1998). The setting is ripe for studies that incorporate more than one country in a single analysis.

We consider here three social dimensions that contribute to how a journalist views decisions about ethical problems: personal, professional and contextual. Within the personal dimension, a journalist's background is the focus. Journalists typically perceive themselves as independent minded, morally virtuous and working for the public good (McManus, 1997; Voakes, 1997). However, journalists' backgrounds vary across countries in relation to education, gender, training and other factors, and these factors, in turn, have been tied to differences in political and social orientation to some degree (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Social research suggests that much more is involved, and individual-level elements are not thought to be a large factor shaping news decisions (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Reese, 2001). Nonetheless, considerations such as gender and education level become important control variables to include in a multivariate analysis, especially across cultures where these elements could reflect fundamental differences between societies.

The second dimension we consider includes an array of influences from professional experiences. Workplace norms and values are learned on the job, and an individual's survival in a reporting job depends partly on the ability to make decisions in a way that reflects views of

others in the news organization, whether in relation to ethical situations or to other everyday situations (Eliasoph, 1988; Ehrlich, 1996). These encounters facilitate understandings about common beliefs and motivations that turn them into working realities. Journalists learn how news 'is supposed to go' in order to seem appropriate within an organization's cultural setting (Tuchman, 1978; Zelizer, 1993). These values and norms are sometimes enforced officially but more often unofficially, at least in the United States, because pronouncing official policy would conflict with foundational beliefs about a reporter's objective autonomy (Breed, 1955; Berkowitz, 2000).

Besides socializing in the workplace, journalists gain professional socialization through formal training and membership in professional organizations. Journalism education instills an appreciation for the ideals of professional ideology, particularly those about journalistic independence and the social constraints that come from beliefs about that independence (Soloski, 1989; Altschull, 1995). Through courses and textbooks, journalists develop a common sense of how news should be reported and how they should respond to a variety of situations in their everyday working lives (Hackett, 1984; Hardt, 1998; Lee and George, 2000). Professional memberships continue to maintain belief in what has been learned in formal educational settings.

The third dimension we consider is a journalist's working context. Here, ideological dimensions of a society maintain the social status quo, subconsciously guiding journalists' decisions and acts (Hall, 1982; Soloski, 1989). This dimension draws on the larger press system within which a reporter works, providing broader and more universal values. Parts of these differences relate to press system arrangements, such as ownership, regulation and economic factors (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Hallin and Mancini, 1994; Altschull, 1995; Weaver, 1998; Reese, 2001; Robins, 2001; Avraham, 2002; Hafez, 2002; Perkins, 2002). The social role of a

journalist becomes important in this dimension because journalists are constrained to different degrees as they subconsciously convey symbolic content about meanings and social power.

Making news decisions: The ethical journalist

Among the dozens of media ethics codes in place around the world, the overwhelming majority focus on such themes as truthfulness, objectivity, honesty and accuracy (Cooper, 1990). In the United States, various professional associations as well as many media outlets have developed ethics codes to help guide news workers. The Society of Professional Journalists code probably is the most recognized. The current version urges journalists to seek and report truth fairly and honestly; to minimize harm to sources, subjects and colleagues; to act independently of all interests other than the public's right to know; and to be accountable to audience members and to each other (SPJ, 1996).

Both the value and the effectiveness of such essentially voluntary journalistic codes have been questioned. Although anything that enhances conversation about ethics is seen as a good thing, studies indicate codes have little direct effect on behavior in the newsroom, where the role of official policy is indirect at best (Borden, 1997, 2000). Boeyink (1994) pointed out the importance of other newsroom factors in determining a code's effectiveness. The two primary factors he identified were organizational- rather than professional-level items: the importance of ethical standards to media company management, and the extent of newsroom discussion and debate about ethics.

Around the world, ethics codes, as well as press councils (which have never caught on in the United States), indicate the growing professionalization of journalists. In Europe, at least 31 national codes of ethics for journalists stress such common functions as press accountability and protection of professional integrity from external influence. Most European codes stress the

truthfulness or accuracy of information (in 90 percent of the codes), fairness in information gathering (84 percent) and freedom of expression (74 percent) (Laitila, 1995). These concerns also have been found elsewhere, with common dimensions appearing in the Islamic Middle East (Hafez, 2002).

In Israel, the national press council provides an influential guide to ethical journalistic behavior, and ethics courts function as control mechanisms. The revised 1996 edition of the Israel Press Council's (IPC) extensive professional code begins with an assertion that the media institution should be guided by an orientation toward public service. It then offers ethical guidelines covering such topics as protection of source confidentiality; separation of advertising and editorial functions; restraint from any activity that might be construed as a conflict of interest or deception of the public; and prohibition of improper means of obtaining information (Limor, 2000). In practice, some observers say commitment to these principles is all but nonexistent; for example, journalists at smaller local papers typically are required to solicit advertising (Caspi, 1986).

From its establishment in 1963 through the end of 1997, the IPC dealt with 1,952 complaints. Of those, 191 were found to be wholly or partially justified by the court of ethics; many others were resolved through mediation before reaching the tribunal (Limor, 2001). An increase in the number of complaints over the years has been attributed to factors that include increasing media competition and worsening tensions between press and public (Caspi and Limor, 1999).

Studies in a number of nations, including the United States but not Israel, have sought to identify journalists' attitudes toward specific ethical situations, typically a set of controversial reporting practices. Among US journalists in the 1990s, 80 percent found it acceptable to use

confidential documents without permission. The only other practices from a list of 10 seen as justifiable by a majority of US journalists were getting employed to gain inside information (63 percent) and using hidden microphones or cameras (60 percent, with broadcasters much more likely than print journalists to approve). US journalists disagreed most strongly with divulging the names of sources once confidentiality has been promised; in fact, 'if there is a bedrock principle among journalists, it is that a commitment to a source's anonymity must be honored at all costs' (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996: 157). On other practices, journalists were divided.

Aside from a few medium-specific differences, degrees of tolerance were not strongly related to either situational or personal characteristics of the US journalists. There were no statistically significant differences among reporters and editors, men and women, or those working on larger or smaller news staffs. However, older journalists, especially those for whom family and religious influences were important, were more likely to reject the questionable practices. Education also had an effect: The more years of schooling the journalist had, the more likely he or she was to find the practices potentially acceptable (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996).

Preliminary results of a 2002 replication of this study suggest a recent decline in tolerance for undercover employment, which just over half of the US respondents now see as potentially justified. Using confidential business or government documents without authorization remained justified in the views of more than three-quarters of the journalists surveyed. For the first time in 2002, badgering unwilling informants to get a story was seen as justified by about half the respondents, or 52 percent (Weaver et al., 2003).

Because Israeli journalism has historically been influenced by the British model, it is worth looking at British journalists' reactions to similar ethical situations. In general, the British seem more likely to justify controversial reporting practices than their US colleagues. Although

failing to keep a promise of confidentiality is seen as problematic everywhere, 9 percent of British journalists in a 1995 study (Laitila, 1995) said doing so may be justified on an important story, compared with 5 percent of US journalists. Paying for information (‘checkbook journalism’) was supported by two-thirds of UK journalists but just 20 percent of the Americans, and more than twice as many British as US journalists (47 to 22 percent) said claiming to be somebody else to get a story might be justifiable (Henningham and Delano, 1998). A decade earlier, Kocher (1986) also found that British journalists were more likely than German journalists to justify controversial methods of gathering information.

Beyond the United States and United Kingdom, research indicates that the social context in which the journalists work, at least as suggested by their nationality, is an important factor in perceptions of acceptable reporting practices. Studies show considerable variation among journalists in different countries; in fact, strong national differences seem to preclude any universal journalistic perceptions or values, with societal differences outweighing the influences of media organizations, journalism education or professional norms (Weaver, 1998). Of course, the journalists within a particular society, not having the benefit of cross-cultural comparison, may perceive the relative strength of influences differently. Algerian journalists, for example, said that the most influential factor on their own sense of ethics was day-to-day newsroom learning (Kirat, 1998); in Finland, a majority of journalists pointed to their national press council as providing useful advice for everyday work (Heinonen, 1998).

In summary, extensive research into sociology of news work issues has indicated that the influences on journalists are complex and multi-faceted, encompassing individual backgrounds, organizational factors, professional concepts about appropriate norms and behaviors, and the

broader social contexts within which journalists work. Journalists' ethical decisions, then, potentially are rooted in a variety of aspects of their socialization to the workforce.

Applying ethical theory to specific situations

The present study involves comparing journalists' opinions on three specific scenarios focusing on different ethical issues. Two of the scenarios involve source relations -- negotiating with a source and protecting source confidentiality -- while the third involves the use of deception to obtain a story deemed important to the public interest. These kinds of ethical dilemmas are central to journalism, and the SPJ code deals explicitly with these matters. For instance, its guidelines advise journalists to 'identify sources whenever possible' in order to provide the public with information allowing assessment of the sources' reliability and to 'question sources' motives before promising anonymity'. However, the code states bluntly that once made, promises should be kept. Journalists also are advised to avoid 'undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information', though the code makes an exception for situations when 'traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public' and emphasizes that use of such methods should be explained in any resulting story. And the code urges journalistic independence; journalists are to 'remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility' (SPJ, 1996).

The Israel Press Council's code of ethics (1996) also refers explicitly to these issues. It states that 'journalists shouldn't use faulty means to gather information, including violence, threat, seduction, and privacy intrusion... that may damage the public's trust in journalistic work'. Another clause refers to the confidentiality issue: 'A newspaper and a journalist shouldn't disclose the identity of a confidential source, unless the source itself agrees to be exposed'. In

several cases, journalists have been brought before IPC ethics tribunals, charged and convicted for using deceptive means while gathering information.

A considerable amount of research has focused on the reporter-source relationship. One of the most controversial stories of the past decade, the San Jose Mercury News' 'Dark Alliance' series on the alleged connection between the CIA, Nicaraguan contras and the inner-city crack cocaine trade, highlights several key issues. Among those relevant here is the extent to which a reporter can ethically use a source as a surrogate for the reporter's own eyes and ears. The Dark Alliance reporter, Gary Webb, stymied in his attempts to interview a source who had been placed under a gag order by the US Drug Enforcement Agency, arranged with a defense attorney to ask the questions in court that Webb wanted answered. The mainstream journalistic community generally criticized Webb for acting irresponsibly (McCoy, 2001). In analyzing the ethics involved in this decision, Carter (1998) suggests that journalists seeking information from unwilling sources have a range of options. They begin with the most innocuous -- asking, even begging, the source -- and proceed along the scale toward the most serious -- deception, illegal activity, threats -- until journalists either get the information they want or are constrained to stop by their ethical framework.

There also has been some investigation of the suitability of relying on second-hand sources rather than direct observation in situations where deception may be required in order to obtain that first-hand report. For instance, Frank (1999) points out the danger to journalistic integrity involved in reconstructions of events that 'privilege storytelling over reporting' (p. 155). Frank identifies the key ethical issue as attribution: making clear to the reader what was directly observed and what was not.

Perhaps the most controversy in source-reporter relationships stems from the use of anonymous sources. As mentioned above, the adherence to promises of confidentiality is widely considered to be a fundamental of journalistic ethics, grounded in the general moral duty to keep promises once made as well as in the particular professional obligations of the journalist (Day, 2000). Indeed, as Borden (1995) suggests, 'the most pertinent duty to consider when dealing with questionably obtained information is that of fidelity, or honoring promises' (p. 225). Such a duty might be overridden by a significant public interest, but such exceptions should be rare and the benefits of renegeing on a source should be proportional to the harm caused. On the other hand, a reporter's excessive friendliness with a source creates the inference, true or not, of bias toward that source (Merrill, 1997). Savvy sources also can manipulate journalists, who are urged to consider two key questions: How much direct knowledge does the source have, and what motive might the source have for misleading a journalist, gilding the lily or hiding important facts (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

Deception, another issue relevant to the current study, also has received extensive scholarly attention. Indeed, philosophers and ethicists have debated for millennia the question of whether it is ever acceptable to lie. This is a basic ethical dispute between two schools – the deontological (which holds that people are duty-bound not to act immorally, whatever the circumstances) and teleological (which holds that acts and deeds must be judged at least in part by their consequences) (Day, 2000). Opinions range from Immanuel Kant's view that all deception is morally wrong to the Machiavellian perspective that self-enhancing ends justify virtually any means used to obtain them, with an enormous range of situation-specific judgments in between those extremes. Many journalists today follow the broadly utilitarian approach of

John Stuart Mill, which suggests determining appropriate choices by trying to anticipate what actions are likely to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people (Merrill, 2000).

Among contemporary ethicists, Sissela Bok (1989) has explored the issue of deception in detail. For journalists, she says, deception interweaves both self-serving and altruistic motives. The reporter who uses deception to get a good story benefits personally, and the social benefits also may seem significant, without undue harm to a single individual. Nonetheless, she warns, the potential loss of faith by the public is a high price to pay: 'Trust and integrity are precious resources, easily squandered, hard to regain' (p. 249).

Comparing contexts of the journalists in this study

In research comparing journalists across press systems, a sense of working context becomes important in seeking to understand where they make common choices and where they differ. Here, we look here specifically at the dimensions of training, education, demographics, gender, workforce diversity and contours of the press systems in Israel and in one region of the United States. This comparison is somewhat delicate because the differences in geography, media landscape, ownership and audience cannot provide an ideal match even through other potential US samples. Overall, Israel contains about one-seventh the square miles of the Midwestern state we studied, yet has about twice the population. Both countries have private ownership of newspapers, and funding for both systems comes from sales of copies, subscriptions and advertising. However, Israel has just three mainstream daily newspapers, all national (all local newspapers are weeklies), while the United States supports a complex web of national, regional and local dailies. Even within the single state we studied, there are considerably more daily and weekly newspapers. Yet we feel our comparison is plausible because of the way it considers

variations on the same basic media system and because the goal is to test a model rather than to project population proportions.

Regarding training, journalists in the United States and Israel show clear contrasts. More than half of US journalists have majored in journalism or a related area. In the United States, a college degree has nearly become a requirement for being hired as a journalist, with more than 89 percent of American journalists holding at least a bachelor's degree (Weaver et al., 2003). This contrasts sharply with Israel, where a much smaller proportion of journalists hold any college degree and journalism education in particular is relatively recent, much like the British system (Caspi and Limor, 1999; Gaunt, 1992). University communication programs in Israel, which were introduced in the early 1990s, tend to be more theoretical than applied, with most journalists recruited through social contacts and trained on the job.

Beyond education, the background of journalists in the two countries is comparable. A typical American journalist is a 41-year-old Caucasian male Protestant with somewhat liberal political leanings (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1976; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Weaver et al., 2003). In Israel, local newspaper reporters and editors tend to be younger and more middle class than the general population (Caspi and Limor, 1999), a trait that seems to be common in the journalism workforce of many countries (Weaver, 1988).

Most US and Israeli journalists are male. Only about one-third of US journalists are women (Weaver et al., 2003). In Israel, the proportion is slightly larger. In 2002, 39.4 percent of the journalists at Israel's three large daily newspapers were women (Limor and Lavie, 2002), up from 33.7 percent in 1991 (Limor and Caspi, 1994). Fewer than 10 percent of US journalists are racial minorities (Weaver et al., 2003), while the majority of Israeli journalists are of European origin (Caspi and Limor, 1999). In all, journalists of these two countries offer a good balance of

similarity and contrast that allows for meaningful comparison, while also offering sufficient variation in relation to our theoretical premise.

Research questions

Drawing on the previous discussions of theory and context, three research questions follow:

- RQ1: How are the three dimensions of personal factors, professional socialization and journalistic social context (as indicated by nationality) related to ethical decision-making?
- RQ2: To what degree do these influences vary by particular ethical issue or situation?
- RQ3: To what degree does a reporter's general predisposition to ethical decision-making relate to decisions in specific situations?

Method

Our three dimensions of ethics decisions are compared within three different ethical situations through multiple regression analysis. We offer the following model for the contextualization of ethical news decision-making, drawn from the previous discussions:

$$\text{Ethical Decision} = \text{Personal} + \text{Socialization} + \text{Ethical Orientation} + \text{Social Context}$$

To explore the notion of ethical decision-making, we drew on three journalistic situations that are familiar to journalists all over the world. This study adopted the general data collection strategy used by Voakes (1997) although survey items were modified and different scenarios were developed, in part to incorporate changes in ethical issues and in part to develop situations with clear conceptual distinctions. Changes also were made because the data were collected for a larger international comparative project (although that international data is not part of the present study). Legal dimensions were eliminated because different legal systems would confound

comparisons. For example, one country included in the larger study forbids — by law as well as codes of ethics — exposure of the identity of juveniles involved in crimes.

A survey questionnaire was drafted with three ethical scenarios drawn from one author's professional and academic experience, then refined through discussions with several experienced journalists. The final form of the scenarios considered their utility for both this study and the larger project. The first situation involved negotiating with a source for story information:

A reporter gets a tip about improper conduct in a major department of a large city. The reporter meets with the top city official who is in charge of that department to check out the information. The official says that the issue would not be of any public interest. He proposes that the reporter should give up the story, and in return the official will provide him with interesting information relating to three other city officials. The official gives the reporter enough hints to make it clear that the information would be valuable and reliable. The reporter agrees to the deal, stops following up the original story and starts working on the new stories. These turn out to be good stories, they are published, and they attract a lot of attention.

The second situation involved deception initiated by a reporter in the perceived public interest:

A few people have contacted a reporter and have given information that their parents are badly treated at a private nursing home. In at least one case, a person died because of improper treatment. The reporter calls the director of the nursing home and asks to visit the place. The director refuses and says that he won't allow him to get into the building. A relative of a resident of the nursing home invites the reporter to join him on a visit there

to see what's going on. At the entrance, the relative presents the reporter as a family member, while the reporter remains silent.

The third situation concerned protecting source confidentiality that required a reporter to falsely attribute information in order to protect a source:

A senior police source gives a reporter information about improper conduct of a top public official. The information might lead to a major story. The condition of the police source is that the information would not be attributed to police sources, but instead to sources close to the top public official. The reporter, after becoming convinced of the importance of the story, agrees to this condition, receives the information, and publishes it attributed it to an unnamed source close to the public official.

Respondents were then asked, 'Would you act the same way as the reporter did in this scenario'? Possible responses were 'yes,' 'maybe', and no'. To create a variable appropriate for multiple regression analysis, we examined the distribution of responses and combined 'yes' and 'maybe' into one group, so that the variable would be dichotomous (and equal interval) rather than simply nominal. Exact proportions in each category varied across the three ethical scenarios.

We used several survey items to assess our three dimensions related to ethical decision-making. Personal factors considered in our analysis included gender (male/female) and level of education. For level of education, we created a measure with three levels of education: high school, some college, and college degree. We considered whether the respondent held any sort of college degree, not just a degree in journalism, which we thought to be more an aspect of professional socialization.

To measure socialization, we included three survey items. First, we assessed professional experience, measured in the number of years working as a journalist. This measure considers informal socialization into professional values and norms. Second, we asked whether a respondent had studied journalism or not, which corresponds to formal training in journalistic beliefs. An answer of 'yes' was coded as 1, while 'no' was coded as 0. Third, we asked whether the respondent was a member of a professional organization, again coding the yes/no measure as 0 or 1. This measure represents a commitment to or at least an awareness of the values of the professional and the press as a social institution.

To measure reporting context, we used a simple, broad measure, as suggested by the literature: the country where the respondent worked. Although this measure is not sensitive to the particulars of a social context, we felt that it would help identify a basic difference among reporters from Israel and the United States. This was another dichotomous measure, with Israel coded as 0 and United States coded as 1.

The third research question asked how a *reporter's general predisposition* to ethical behavior relates to specific ethical decisions. We assessed this idea in two different ways, in each case using a 10-point scale (10 = 'very much'):

To what extent do you agree that when it comes to issues of ethics, the public interest is more important than the means that were used to get the information for an important story?

To what degree do you think that journalistic codes of ethics hurt the ability of journalists to fulfill their public responsibility?

Questionnaires for the survey in Israel were translated into Hebrew and distributed in March 2001 to all reporters at the country's three largest general-circulation daily newspapers,

ranging in size from 100,000 to 350,000 copies. A confidential mail survey at those papers produced 109 completed questionnaires, about a 50 percent response rate.

For the US data, a mail survey was conducted in February 2001 among reporters at the five largest daily newspapers in one Midwestern state, with circulation ranging from 46,000 to 159,000 copies. Questionnaires were mailed to all reporters at each of the newspapers, with names gathered either from staff lists or by inspecting bylines during one week of newspaper issues preceding the start of the survey. In all, 124 questionnaires were mailed using techniques for increasing response rate such as reminders, second questionnaire mailings, commemorative postage stamps and personalized, hand-signed mailings recommended by survey research texts (Dillman, 1978; Erdos, 1983). A total of 94 questionnaires were returned by respondents, but after excluding incomplete and late questionnaires, 88 questionnaires were used in the analysis, representing a 74.6 percent final response rate.

Our rationale in choosing these data was relatively straightforward. Most basically, one of the study's authors lives in Israel, is quite familiar with that country's newspapers and had ready access to each of the daily newspapers' newsrooms for survey data collection. Similarly, another author lived in the selected Midwestern state, understood the local newspaper environment and had previously conducted a successful survey of the state's newspaper journalists. Reporters at the state's largest newspapers exhibited characteristics of their counterparts nationwide; for example, many worked at a chain-owned newspaper company and had prior experience at several other newspapers. Moreover, we felt that comparing these two groups of reporters would provide groups with common roots in a marketplace press system, yet with diverging cultural contexts. To accomplish this study's research goals did not require a national sample in the same way that a study developing a workforce portrait would.

Data were examined through multiple regression, using the model presented at the beginning of this section.

Results

The first step in our data analysis was designed to provide a comparative profile of the two groups of reporters. This information appears in Table 1.

Table 1
Here

Comparing the two groups of reporters, the Israeli reporters at these newspapers are more likely to be male, with fewer having studied journalism or completed a college degree than the US reporters who were surveyed. Israeli reporters were also more likely to be members of a professional organization. However, the Israeli and US journalists were about the same age and had the same average amount of experience in journalism. Overall, then, there are some differences and some similarities between the two groups so that background characteristics could conceivably account for different responses to ethical situations, especially in terms of gender, education, and professional memberships.

Table 2
Here

Table 2 indicates how the survey respondents from each nation said they would act in each scenario. This information provides overarching patterns related to social context and helps assess the distribution of responses to each of the three scenarios. Results show clear differences in response to the first two scenarios, with US reporters much less likely to negotiate with a source and Israeli reporters much more willing to use deception in the nursing home scenario. The two groups of reporters were much more similar in their views about the situation involving

source confidentiality, with approximately half of each group saying they would not make the same deal with the police official. It is useful to note that although distributions of responses to each scenario are not evenly divided, each of the three decision alternatives on the continuum has a sizeable proportion of respondents.

Table 3
Here

Multiple regression results are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5. In Table 3, the dependent variable is the scenario involving negotiating with a source for a story. Based on the correlation coefficients, studying journalism, concern for the public interest, and country were all significantly related to the ethical decision outcome. Those who had studied journalism were less likely to support negotiating with a source in this case, while those with a higher concern for the public interest were more likely to support the reporter's decision. In addition, as with the cross-tabulation results in Table 2, Israeli journalists were more likely to go along with the arrangement. The regression results were somewhat different, with studying journalism no longer a significant predictor of the ethical decision. Both concern for public interest and a reporter's country were still statistically significant, but their beta values were somewhat lower, as might be expected in a multivariate analysis. In all, Table 3 suggests that these latter two variables were most closely linked to supporting the ethical decision. Personal factors and professional socialization were not important here.

Table 4
Here

In Table 4, the dependent variable is willingness to use deception to get story information. The same three variables (journalism, education, public interest, country) were again significantly correlated to making this ethical decision, with noticeably higher correlations for country of practice and emphasis on the public interest. Like the previous scenario, having studied journalism was not a significant predictor in the regression analysis. The public interest and country measures had a noticeably stronger relationship to the dependent variable for this scenario, with the signs of both beta coefficients in the same direction as in the previous regression analysis. Again, personal factors and professional socialization were not related to the dependent variable.

Table 5
Here

The results from Table 5, for the dependent variable concerning protecting source confidentiality, did not show relationships as strong as did the other two regression analyses. Unlike the previous two tables, country of practice was not significantly related to the dependent variable, which matches expectations from the cross-tabulations in Table 2. Concern for the public interest was the only significant measure in the regression analysis, with a beta coefficient close to that of the first scenario. In addition, a modest statistically significant correlation appeared for the concern that codes of ethics hamper journalists' efforts to fulfill public responsibility, but that relationship did not hold in the regression analysis. Once more, personal factors and professional socialization were not related to support for the reporter's ethical decision.

Finally, the responses to likely action for the each scenario were positively correlated to the others. In particular, the second scenario concerning deception was moderately correlated to

responses for both the first ($r = .30$) and third scenarios ($r = .44$). Decisions for the first and third scenarios had a lower correlation (.15), however. Notably, none of the correlation coefficients was negative. Altogether, these three correlations suggest that there was some degree of common ethical vision among our respondents, but that the context of a situation was also an important factor.

Discussion and conclusions

The first research question asked how three dimensions – personal factors, professional socialization, and social context – related to ethical decision-making. The three regression analyses showed that across scenarios, personal factors (gender, years of education) were not related to ethical decisions. Professional factors (professional experience, professional membership) were also not particularly important. Having studied journalism was a significant factor in two of the three scenarios when considered on its own, but the relationship did not hold for the multivariate analysis. In contrast, the social context element (country of practice) was relevant for the first two scenarios and remained as a statistically significant predictor of ethical decision-making when considered along with the other dimensions of our model. Thus, this cross-cultural study supports previous research examining ethical differences among journalists in individual nations: The social or national context of newsmaking may be most important in shaping journalistic decisions.

The second research question asked if the personal, professional, and social dimensions varied in their relationship to ethical decision making from situation to situation. This study found that to be so in two ways. First, the strength of beta coefficients changed from situation to situation, suggesting that some ethical situations can be more easily explained than can others. Second, for the third scenario (protecting source confidentiality) only concern for the public

interest was related to supporting the reporter's decision, while a respondent's country of practice (social context) was also relevant for understanding ethical decision-making in the other two situations. Thus, the nature of ethical situations resonates with cultural contexts in different ways.

The third research question asked if a reporter's general predisposition toward ethical decision-making would be related to ethical decisions in specific situations. The results of this study found that one dimension of ethical predisposition – valuing the end result of public interest over the means of getting a story– was relevant across the three situations. That predisposition was most closely related to the scenario involving potential deception. It was the only measure related to the scenario about protecting source confidentiality, where even social context was not involved. Concerns for codes of ethics, in contrast, were not related to ethical decisions in regression analyses for the three scenarios. This finding suggests that personal value systems may be more important for ethical decision-making than formal written codes.

The finding that journalists were split in their views of the scenario about source confidentiality is somewhat surprising in light of the literature indicating that journalists generally see protecting sources to be very important in all contexts. It is possible that the journalists in our survey saw additional factors at work here that mitigated their decision. For instance, they may have seen both options as involving anonymous sources so that the wording of the attribution to a 'top public official' rather than 'police sources' was less important.

The fact that having studied journalism was not significant in the three regression analyses was surprising given the large gap in journalism education between the two groups of reporters. This finding suggests that formal socialization to the profession might not shape ethical views to the same extent as less formalized learning that takes shape over time in a

culture. As Table 1 found, both groups of journalists had similarly significant experience, with approximately 14 years in the profession.

The findings related to the impact of an overall ethical philosophy – notably the ends-versus-means debate – are worthy of more investigation. It would be intriguing to explore where such a philosophy comes from, particularly whether it derives from a social or cultural context or from specific ethical training. This result supports the focus of other researchers and of ethicists over the years on the need to weigh the benefits and drawbacks associated with lying, particularly when doing so can be perceived as serving a broadly defined ‘greater good’.

One of the challenges in this study was developing scenarios that transferred similarly to the journalists of both countries. Although the literature was consulted carefully, and the authors drew on their professional backgrounds, it is still difficult to assess whether the overall group of respondents generally interpreted each scenario in the same way. As might be the case for our sample, a journalist working for a national newspaper would likely have a different sense of ‘public good’ based on a broad, varied public-at-large, while journalists working for a city or state paper would likely see a narrower sense of ‘public’ and its related sense of ‘good’.

Regardless of the challenges in study design, we suggest that this sort of cross-cultural approach is becoming more crucial in an increasingly globalized media environment. As correspondents work in other countries, and as news events attract global coverage, shared ethics create cultural bridges – but diverging ethical perspectives also may create barriers, at least in the short term. Over time, as journalists from various nations increasingly interact, ideas about ‘proper’ professional behavior and professional achievements will continue to be exchanged. To a degree, many of the professional norms adopted by journalists in democratic countries all over

the world are 'made in the USA'. Further study should continue to examine whether the American perspective on ethical journalism gains dominance and if so, where, when, and to what effect. The Israeli media, although rooted in East European and British journalistic traditions, are under continual flux, especially in the last two decades of Americanization. With both Israeli and US journalists functioning in democratic societies, this study emphasizes the need for broader research, in which ethical attitudes among journalists will be explored not only in democratic societies, but in non- and semi-democracies, as well.

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Table 1: Comparison of reporters' characteristics in Israeli and US samples.

Characteristic	Israeli reporters (n=103)	US reporters (n=88)
Gender (% female)	31.4	43.7
Age (mean years)	38.5	37.5
Studied journalism (%)	30.1	89.8
Completed college degree (%)	63.7	95.5
Years of journalism experience (mean)	14.7	14.3
Member of professional organization (%)	44.6	34.5

Table 2: Comparison of reporters' likely behaviors — act the same way as reporter — for the three ethical scenarios between countries (n=197)

Scenario	Israeli reporters	Midwest U.S. Reporters	Combined %
Negotiating with a source*			
No	44.8%	81.8%	61.7%
Maybe	41.0	10.2	26.9
<u>Yes</u>	<u>14.3</u>	<u>8.0</u>	<u>11.4</u>
Total% (n)	100.1% (105)	100.0% (88)	100.0% (193)
Deception initiated by reporter*			
No	9.4%	44.8%	25.3%
Maybe	10.3	17.2	13.4
<u>Yes</u>	<u>80.4</u>	<u>37.9</u>	<u>61.3</u>
Total% (n)	100.1% (107)	99.9% (87)	100.0% (194)
Protecting source confidentiality			
No	48.6%	59.1%	53.3%
Maybe	24.3	25.0	24.6
<u>Yes</u>	<u>27.1</u>	<u>15.9</u>	<u>22.1</u>
Total% (n)	100.0% (107)	100.0% (88)	100.0% (195)

* Statistically significant by Chi-Square test at $p < .01$

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis results for scenario related to negotiating with a source for a story (n=184)

Variable	beta	r
Gender (1=male)	-.02	.00
Education (3 = college degree)	.15	-.02
Studied journalism (1=yes)	-.10	-.23**
Years as a journalist	.12	.02
Member of professional organization (1=yes)	-.14	-.06
Public interest more important than means to get story information (10=very much)	.22**	.31**
Codes of ethics hurt journalists' ability to fulfill public responsibility (10=very much)	.05	.10
Country (1=US)	-.25**	-.31**

For the dependent variable, 1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes for the question, "Would you act the same way...?"

Adjusted R-Squared = .14

* = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis results for scenario related to using deception to get story information (n=185)

Variable	beta	r
Gender (1=male)	.01	.05
Education (3 = college degree)	.11	-.07
Studied journalism (1=yes)	.08	-.21**
Years as a journalist	.04	.02
Member of professional organization (1=yes)	-.01	.07
Public interest more important than means to get story information (10=very much)	.42**	.49**
Codes of ethics hurt journalists' ability to fulfill public responsibility (10=very much)	-.03	.08
Country (1=US)	-.38**	-.45**

For the dependent variable, 1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes for the question, "Would you act the same way...?"

Adjusted R-Squared = .32

* = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis results for scenario related to protecting source confidentiality (n=186)

Variable	beta	r
Gender (1=male)	.05	.04
Education (3 = college degree)	.01	-.04
Studied journalism (1=yes)	.16	.02
Years as a journalist	.00	-.03
Member of professional organization (1=yes)	.01	.03
Public interest more important than means to get story information (10=very much)	.26**	.31**
Codes of ethics hurt journalists' ability to fulfill public responsibility (10=very much)	.11	.19**
Country (1=US)	-.11	-.13

For the dependent variable, 1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes, for the question, "Would you act the same way...?"

Adjusted R-Squared = .08

* = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$