

**AMERICA'S AGED: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH  
TO NEWSPAPER COVERAGE**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to examine the treatment of the aged and their problems in one of the nation's most prestigious newspapers, the New York Times, and Oklahoma's largest daily, the Daily Oklahoman. The following research questions were asked:

1. How were the aged presented in these two newspapers?
2. What problems in aging were being covered?
3. Were the elderly being covered on a "spot news" basis or in a more in-depth fashion?
4. Did the newspaper coverage of the aged and the issues and problems associated with this growing segment of the American population increase, decrease or remain about the same in the last decade?
5. What emphasis did editors give stories about the elderly, and did the image and role of the elderly depicted in news stories affect editors' judgments? In newspaper jargon, did these factors affect how the editors "played" the story?

These questions have not been adequately answered as evidenced by the lack of literature in the area. In attempting to answer them, it was hoped that three objectives with sociological and practical implications would be achieved:

1. Illustrating how the elderly were presented in these two



newspapers. Such information would have sociological value, because the manner in which the elderly are depicted in newspaper stories could have great impact on the manner in which they are perceived by themselves and others. Such perceptions could influence attitudes toward and treatment of the old. The information also could have practical value, if newspaper editors would use it to determine if their coverage is fair and accurate, and not stereotypical.

2. Illuminating any gaps in the coverage of the aged in these two newspapers. If coverage of the problems of the aged is poor and incomplete, there may be a lack of public awareness of some of the serious difficulties the aged must face in modern American society. Ignorance could delay the origination and public acceptance of appropriate solutions. Editors should also be made aware of any gaps in coverage so the reporting of the aging story can be expanded.
3. Developing new methods of interdisciplinary research. New and improved methods could lead to more significant, meaningful research into media coverage of the aged, linking the knowledge of aging developed by social gerontologists with the skills of the professional journalist to improve public understanding of the elderly and their problems.

Such understanding is vitally necessary as America moves toward the 21st century. Isaac and Bynum (1977) have identified four demographic factors increasing the proportion of the elderly in American society. A drop in immigration to the United States since 1940 has cut off the nation from a large supply of young adults from Europe. Life expectancy

has increased, and by 2000 the 65-year-old person could expect to live to his mid-80s. Mortality and fertility rates have also declined, and these four factors could combine to increase the number of elderly persons in the United States from more than 22 million in 1975 to nearly 29 million in 2000, a rise of 30 percent. Predictions have been made that persons 65 and over could make up as much as 16 percent of the American population by 2050.

Stereotypical treatment in the mass media of such a large portion of the population could have serious consequences. In 1974, Hess pointed out several erroneous impressions then circulating about the elderly. They were thought to be unproductive workers with declining intelligence, emotionally and financially dependent on their adult children. They were thought to be no longer active in society, sexually incompetent, despairing and anxious, and could only look forward to being institutionalized by their younger relatives. A year later, Louis Harris (1975, p. 205) in a national survey found that the American public views persons over 65 as "passive, sedentary types who have lost the open-mindedness, mental alertness, and efficiency of the young, beset with economic problems, poor health and loneliness." The media, Harris concluded (p. 193), "may be protecting and reinforcing the distorted stereotypes of the elderly and myths of old age." In what kinds of discrimination could such attitudes, if allowed to continue, result?

It was with these concerns in mind that the present study was undertaken. The findings, coupled with new and appropriate private action and changes in public social policy, could benefit the elderly and the newspaper-reading public.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Communications scholar Wilbur Schramm was among the first to call attention to lack of visibility of the aged in the newspaper press in 1969. He had been leafing through his daily newspaper, and in a week's time he found four stories about old people. One was an inane story about a man refusing to stand on his head for his 90th birthday as he had done on his 85th, because that was "kid stuff." Another dealt with complaints from doctors and senators that programs for the aged were being handled improperly. The third was about a poll showing that older people knew more about politics than younger people, and the fourth concerned an oldster getting married at 83 to a woman he had been attracted to for 60 years.

Schramm understandably scored the newspaper press for the lack of coverage given to the aging story, which he called one of the most significant of the times:

The question is, at what depth have we a right to expect the media to cover this story? We have suggested some of the dimensions of the development that has been covered largely in terms of the politics of Medicare and Social Security, and the feature news of old people who have done things not expected of them. . . . Behind this type of news are a great human story and a great national problem. Tomorrow's old people and today's policymakers have every reason to be deeply concerned with them. Do they not deserve better than 'Gee whiz!' coverage (p. 359)?

Schramm, however, provided no hard data on how the aging story was

being covered. Indeed, content analysis of newspaper coverage of the aged has been slim to nonexistent.

A review of the studies in the area showed that researchers have examined aging in literature (see Arnhoff, Leon and Lorge, 1964; Chandler, 1948; Draper, 1946; Griffin, 1946; Haynes, 1962 and 1963; Loughman, 1977; Sohngen, 1977). They have looked at humor (Davies, 1977; Palmore, 1971; Smith, 1979), letters to "Dear Abby" (Gaitz and Scott, 1975), advertising (Francher, 1973; Smith, 1976) and periodicals (Duncan, 1963; Martel, 1968). Researchers have studied how the elderly have been presented in poetry (Sohngen and Smith, 1978) and in children's and adolescent literature (Barnum, 1977; Blue, 1978; Peterson and Karnes, 1976; Seltzer and Atchley, 1971). Television also has come under a lot of scrutiny (Anderson, 1962; Aronoff, 1974; Davis, 1971 and 1975; Harris and Feinberg, 1977; Inacy, 1974; Northcott, 1975; Petersen, 1973). In fact, television's treatment of the aged has been the subject of a Congressional hearing (U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, 1977).

The comprehensive inventory of research findings on the aged by Riley and Foner (1968) cited nothing on newspaper treatment of the aged in its section on media. And Hess, who helped Riley and Foner in their effort, wrote in a 1974 article that little has changed since Schramm indicted the news media in 1969. To correct the stereotypes of the aged on television, Hess maintained, one had to go to the newsweeklies, women's and family magazines, special publications or the Reader's Digest. She did not mention newspapers. Neither did McTavish (1971) in his discussion of content analysis research on the elderly.

An ERIC search identified several articles and books that dealt

with attitudes toward the aged, stereotypes of the aged and media use by the aged, but there was none specifically addressed to newspaper treatment of the aged and their problems. A hand search of the major journals in social gerontology and journalism, The Gerontologist, the Journal of Gerontology and Journalism Quarterly, turned up only two studies that employed a content analysis of newspapers on aging. Evans and Evans looked at amount and balance of coverage in five major metropolitan dailies from 1965 to 1975 and determined there had been no increase (cited in Peterson and Karnes, 1976, p. 226). McDonald (1973, p. 103), studying current and 10-year-old articles about the elderly in a midwestern newspaper, found that "there seems to be a significant increase in the number of aging articles; content analysis demonstrates that midwest readers continue to get a rather outdated, patronizing, and negative view of aging. . . ." McDonald discovered that the current stories could be grouped into four major categories, which he listed in order of greatest frequency: human interest, legislative action, biological orientation and social concern. The decade-old stories could be grouped under essentially the same headings, he added, but the order of frequency varied: human interest, biological orientation, legislative action and social concern. But McDonald's data covered only a three-month period and therefore might not have reflected any seasonal news cycles present in other parts of the year. His categories were crude and lacking in specificity. Both defects were corrected in this study.

The only other references to newspaper treatment of the elderly and their problems were subjective and not based on scientific research. A majority of the respondents in Harris' 1975 survey thought the media,

including newspapers, usually gave a fair representation of what the elderly are like or presented them better than they actually were. In his analysis of the Harris survey, Tebbel (1976, p. 13) commented that "gradually more and more newspapers are offering the unsteretyped view of aging and older people." But he pointed out that "newspapers seem to deal with the problems of the old only when they become news. . . ."

One media person participating in a workshop conducted by the American Jewish Committee (1978, p. 5) claimed that newspapers "sometimes went out of their way to accentuate the negative, as in the coverage of nursing home abuses." A newsman declared that newspaper coverage "was poor in nine-tenths of the country," although newspapers in the larger cities were doing a "comprehensive" job (pp. 10-11). Others at the workshop, however, thought newspapers treated love and sex among the elderly with seriousness and sympathy and that the printed press did a better job of handling old age, without as much stereotyping, than television.

The literature, then, contained complaints and a few kudos about newspaper coverage of the aged but little solid research. The gaps must be filled and the problems, if any, identified before meaningful action can be proposed and undertaken.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORETICAL NEXUS

The lack of hard data on the newspaper treatment of the elderly meant that some basic groundwork initially had to be done. This study, therefore, was necessarily a first step, an exploratory and descriptive project based on the proposition that before one can deal with more substantive questions about the effects of newspaper treatment of the aged and aging problems, one must first discover what that treatment is. Atkins (1976) called for no less. His list of research questions needing answers included the following:

How are older people depicted in the news, and what is the nature of news coverage of problems among the aged? Because aging people are frequently the subject of feature stories in the news media and the political and social issues of aging are increasingly significant news stories, systematic analysis of the news content of the mass media would be useful. This might examine how often older people are presented on television-radio newscasts and in newspaper and magazine articles, and give qualitative dimensions of these presentations. The relative ranking of issues and problems of the aged among other news developments would provide evidence of the priority of this topic area on the news agenda; comparisons across time would be particularly valuable (p. 109).

Determining the nature of the treatment will lay the foundation for later studies to measure the effects of such treatment.

The latter issue is the more important; indeed, this study arose from the proposition that the way individuals and groups are depicted in the mass media affects the way in which they are viewed by media consumers and themselves. This proposition may be extrapolated from

symbolic interaction theory.

Cooley (1922) claimed that society exists in the mind, that it is formed by the influence on each other of ideas that represent people and things. He wrote:

My association with you evidently consists in the relation between my idea of you and the rest of my mind. If there is something in you that is wholly beyond this and makes no impression upon me, it has no social reality in this relation. The immediate social reality is the personal idea; nothing, it would seem, could be much more obvious than this. Society, then, in its immediate aspect, is a relation among personal ideas (p. 119).

The term Cooley borrowed to describe this personal idea of the individual is "the looking-glass self," the concept that what a person is, or becomes, is formed by the reflections of himself he sees in the eyes of others. He wrote:

A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification (pp. 183-184).

Mead (1934), following Cooley's lead, claimed that a person has the tendency to see himself as he is seen by others, that he has a tendency to take over the attitudes that others have toward him. He wrote:

We are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as others see us. We are unconsciously addressing ourselves as others address us. . . . We are calling out in the other person something we are calling out in ourselves, so that unconsciously we take over these attitudes. We are unconsciously putting ourselves in the place of others and acting as others act. . . . We are especially, through the use of the vocal gestures, continually arousing in ourselves those responses which we call out in other persons, so that we are taking the attitudes of the other persons into our own conduct (pp. 68-69).

What happens if the reflected image is a negative one? Cooley said that if the individual accepts the negative view another holds of him he might show "shame, confusion, abasement, humiliation,



mortification, meekness, bashfulness, diffidence, shyness, being out of countenance, abashed or crestfallen, contrition, compunction, remorse, and so on" (p. 243). Referring specifically to the elderly, several researchers (Busse, 1968; Comfort, 1977; Ivester and King, 1977; Maddox, 1969; Seltzer and Atchley, 1971; Ward, 1977) have speculated that attitudes toward aging might have even worse consequences than these.

Bennett and Eckman (1973) wrote:

Attitudes toward aging may be critical for adjustment and survival. It is possible that attitudes contribute to observed maladaptive behaviors among the aged, some of which may result in premature death. Negative views of aging, life in general, and oneself may result in an old person's unwillingness or inability to seek needed services, health care, or other types of assistance. Negative attitudes of old people may affect others in their environs, who in turn may feel free to respond negatively to old people or to ignore them completely. Negative views toward aging among the aged may reinforce negative views toward aging in the young, resulting in a feedback loop that further reinforces negative views in both young and old. The short-range effects of this feedback process may be to widen the gulf between young and old; the long-range effects may be to cause the young to dissociate themselves from their own aging. The net result of these processes may be the observed response in the United States today of neglect and rejection of the aged and a seeming inability or unwillingness to plan for one's own old age (pp. 575-576).

Hendricks and Hendricks (1977, pp. 117-119) termed this "feedback process" the "social breakdown" theory of aging. And Goffman (1963, p. v) said it is the result of stigma, "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance." Goffman wrote that "by definition . . . we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances" (p. 5).

Zusman (cited in Bengtson, 1973, p. 47) described in detail how the

social breakdown process works. It affects an individual already predisposed to psychological breakdown. Perhaps this person has an identity problem, or he cannot adjust to societal standards, which may or may not be inappropriate, for social relations. Meanwhile, others label him incompetent or somehow deficient. As a result, the individual takes on a sick, dependent role, and learns the behaviors that go with that role. His skills atrophy through disuse. Then the person begins to identify himself with the sick, dependent role, and begins to think of himself as inadequate. This makes the person even more susceptible to psychological breakdown, and the syndrome repeats itself and reinforces itself.

Bengtson and Kuypers (cited in Bengtson, 1973) applied the process to aging:

. . . We argued that the elderly are likely to be susceptible to and dependent on social labeling because of the nature of social reorganization in later life. That is, role loss, vague or inappropriate normative information, and lack of reference groups all serve to deprive the individual of feedback concerning who he is, what roles and behaviors he can perform, and what value he is to his social world. Second, this feedback vacuum creates a vulnerability to, and dependence on, external sources of self-labeling, many of which communicate a stereotypic portrayal of the elderly as useless and obsolete--a characterization common in a society which places so much importance on productivity. Third, the individual who accepts such negative labeling is then inducted into the negative, dependent position--learning to act like old people are supposed to act--and previous skills of independence atrophy. Fourth, he accepts the external labeling and identifies himself as inadequate, setting the stage for another vicious spiral (pp. 47-48).

Could the mass media have a role in this theorized social breakdown process? Could they be some of the "external sources of self-labeling," feeding the old and the young stereotypes of old age that reduce their life chances, destroy their pleasures, and fill their minds with fear of

old age?

They could be. Scientific research (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968) and subjective belief support the view that the mass media can at least reinforce, if not shape, the attitudes people have of others. For example, nine out of ten congressmen who made opening statements at a 1977 hearing on age stereotyping and television (U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, 1977, pp. 1-10) spoke of the mass media's power to influence and/or correct images of the elderly. The American Jewish Committee, in a 1978 report on a conference on media and the elderly, expressed the same belief: ". . . It is clear that the media today help reinforce and perpetuate myths and stereotypes about aging and the aged" (p. 3). W. Phillips Davison, a professor of journalism and sociology at Columbia University, told the conference, ". . . Even if they don't invent prejudices, the media often reinforce them. . . . Stereotypes, like any concept, theory or slogan, are magnified and perpetuated through the press and entertainment" (p. 27). Sohngen and Smith (1978, p. 181) blamed "mass culture, particularly television and the popular press," for continuing the presentation of negative stereotypes of old age to the public.

But the subjective belief rests on a tenuous assumption. Peterson and Karnes (1976) wrote:

The view of aging that is presented by the mass media is widely distributed; consequently, it is often assumed that it influences the stereotypes and attitudes of the consumer. This assumption is difficult to test, since the initial opinion or attitudes and the unlimited number of intervening variables all affect the final disposition of the consumer. Consequently, researchers must be content to quantify the input from the print or electronic media and then assume that over the long run this stimulus will have some reinforcing or modifying effect (p. 225).

Once the content is quantified, the researcher can hypothesize about effects and construct studies or experiments to test his hypotheses.

Hypotheses about media effect exist in social gerontology and in other fields. For example, Baran (1977), studying television programming and attitudes toward mental retardation, noted that people know little about the retarded, and that this leads to a lack of understanding and possible negative attitudes toward them. Harris (1975, p. 193) suggested that people may also lack valid understanding of the elderly. He noted that the public holds a distorted image of the old that tends "to be negative and possibly damaging." He reported that "the media . . . may be protecting and reinforcing the distorted stereotypes of the elderly and myths of old age." Drew and Miller (1977) and Orwant and Cantor (1977), studying the effects of sex-role stereotyping on reporting and news preferences, respectively, suggested that sexual stereotypes could influence the news judgment, reporting and writing of communicators, serving to perpetuate the stereotypes in the news media. Practitioners, in other words, might feed on the stereotypes in their own product and reproduce them, reinforced, for their audience's consumption.

It could happen with stereotypes of the mentally retarded, men and women, racial minorities--and the elderly. For reading the newspaper is one way of learning what others think of various groups in society. If a person sees himself portrayed as a buffoon who gets a kick out of standing on his head for his 85th birthday, he may come to think of himself as a buffoon. If readers see the elderly pictured as people who have no other problems than figuring out new ways to entertain and amuse younger members of society, they will have no knowledge of or sympathy

for the elderly's legitimate needs. It is difficult to move the ignorant to action. Similarly, if the aged are generally portrayed in the news media as less than functional, the stereotype is perpetuated that they can make only minimal contributions to society and therefore should disengage and retire.

What one reads in the newspaper thus becomes a significant symbol, which Mead defined as a mutually understood gesture. If the newspaper portrays a person in a certain way, he may in time come to accept this as the attitude of Mead's "generalized other," especially if others adopt the same attitude and use it as the basis of their actions toward him. He may then come to believe that the role pictured for him in the press is the proper one and come to adopt it.

Not all researchers believe that the aged person automatically accepts as true the images portrayed of the elderly by the media. And some maintain that the self-concept one holds before he becomes old may be an important factor in how he thinks of himself as an elderly person. Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory, Brubaker and Powers (1976) wrote:

. . . The self-concept held before old age may be important for late-life perception because . . . individuals selectively evaluate elements of a situation to maximize congruence between the self and the situation. As it relates to age perceptions, aged individuals selectively evaluate the state of being old so as to agree with the self-concept and thus may incorporate positive elements of the age stereotype into their self-concepts . . . (p. 444).

They said, in effect, that a person who thought well of himself as a younger person is likely to think well of himself as an older person. If the person with a positive self-concept accepts a negative stereotype of old age, it "would create dissonance between the 'private opinion'

and 'public opinion' since incongruous cognitive elements . . . produce dissonance and create pressure for change to reduce the dissonance." They added: "In short, the subjective definition of one's self as old and the selection of positive or negative elements of the stereotype of old age are mediated by a positive or negative self-concept" (p. 445). From this, one could infer that what the media do or do not say about the elderly will have little effect on the elderly person's self-concept. His self-concept determines whether he accepts positive or negative stereotypes of old, regardless of what the media put out. Presumably, if his self-concept tells him to accept positive stereotypes and the media put out negative ones, he simply ignores them.

The argument about whether the mass media affect the self-concepts of their audiences, symbolized by the seeming contradictions of symbolic interactionism and cognitive dissonance theory, could not be resolved here. One of the assumptions underlying this project was that the media have effects on their audiences, and therefore their content is important.

To study that content, to identify specifically the problems related to the aged and the aging process and the concomitant media treatment in the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman, was the overall goal of this project. To that end, the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. The aged were presented more negatively by the Times and the Oklahoman in 1970 than they were in 1977-78.
2. The aged were presented in more active roles by the Times and the Oklahoman in 1977-78 than in 1970.

Both of these hypotheses were generated directly from the foregoing

theoretical statements to identify the social value and types of roles imputed to the aged by these two newspapers and to discover any qualitative and quantitative change in social value and role repertoire between 1970 and 1977-78. Obviously, the underlying assumption of these two hypotheses was that the prevailing social value and role prescriptions for the aged reported by these two newspapers were valid reflections of society at large. Some believe that the mass media actually do more than just reflect society. Edward Ansello, associate director of the University of Maryland's Center on Aging, told congressmen:

The socializing media are, despite opinions to the contrary, more than reflective devices. The printed word and broadcast media tend to present, if they do anything, a distorted view of the elderly--but one compatible with the consensus of the general public, however wrong that might be. This is merely a self-feeding cycle. However, the media are both mirror and matrix. They not only reflect values and issues; they forge them (U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, 1977, pp. 233-234).

Journalists are routinely trained to consider the interests and needs of their audiences as they gather, write and edit the news.

In addition, the following hypotheses were proposed:

3. The coverage of aging problems in both papers significantly increased between 1970 and 1977-78.
4. The coverage of fraud in programs for the elderly was significantly greater than the coverage of other aging-problem categories in both newspapers.
5. Event-oriented reporting of the elderly in both newspapers was significantly greater than issue-oriented reporting of the elderly.

These three hypotheses grew out of an interest about what aspects

of the aging story these two newspapers were covering and in the way they were covering these aspects.



## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were derived from news and feature stories in microfilmed copies of the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman. Several studies have cited the Times as one of the most influential papers in the United States (e.g., Kwong and Starck, 1976; Ogan et al., 1975; Petersen, 1976). Petersen even suggested that the Times could be used "to set forth bench marks of journalistic performance which may invite related researches or to which the results of further investigations may be compared" (p. 544). The Times is also well regarded by newsmen (see "Nation's Editors," 1960; Griffith, 1977; "New York Times," 1977). Thus the Times provided an example of what the best coverage of aging in America could be like. The Oklahoman, on the other hand, provided an example of the newspaper coverage of aging read by more Oklahomans than any other. In 1970 and 1978, the years sampled, the Oklahoman had the largest circulation in the state (see Editor and Publisher Yearbook, 1970 and 1978). The two papers also represented audience and geographic diversity. The Times is a national newspaper aimed at a national elite, the movers and shakers in American society. The Oklahoman is a midwestern newspaper aimed at a more general audience.

A 1970 sample and a 1978 sample of each newspaper were drawn, supplying longitudinal data for analysis. The year 1970 was chosen because that was the first complete year after publication of Schramm's

complaint about poor media coverage of the aged. The year 1978 was chosen because that was the last full year before the projected completion of this study. Using 1978 presented a problem because a strike forced the Times to suspend publication from August 10, 1978, to the end of the year. Accordingly, 12 issues from the last half of 1977 had to be added to the 1978 Times sample using the technique described below. The 1977 issues made up for those 1978 issues of the Times that would have been included in the sample had they been published.

An every-12th-day sampling technique similar to the one described by Davis and Turner (1952) was used to select issues for each of the four samples. One day from the first week of each sample year was chosen at random for each paper. The issue of that day and the issue of every 12th day thereafter through the end of the year were put in the sample. The technique produced samples of about 30 issues each, more than adequate to indicate each newspaper's content on aging for that year. Actually, a sample of 12 issues a year, randomly selected, does an adequate job of representing the yearly content of a particular news subject category (Stempel, 1952). Because of the 1978 Times strike, however, issues for that sample were also selected by working backwards into 1977 from the starting date in the first week. The procedure was stopped after the required 12 issues were drawn. This sampling technique resulted in four samples that contained a relatively equal distribution of issues by days of the week and months of the year. This eliminated from the study any possible bias that weekly or seasonal news cycles would have introduced. Tables I and II show the daily and monthly distribution of issues in each of the four newspaper samples. The number of issues per day and the number of issues per month never

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF NEWSPAPER ISSUES PER DAY OF THE WEEK

Day	<u>Daily Oklahoman,</u> 1970	<u>New York Times,</u> 1970	<u>Daily Oklahoman,</u> 1978	<u>New York Times,</u> 1977-78
Sunday	4	4	4	5
Monday	4	4	5	4
Tuesday	5	5	4	4
Wednesday	4	4	5	5
Thursday	5	5	4	4
Friday	4	4	4	5
Saturday	4	5	4	4
<b>Totals</b>	30	31	30	31

TABLE II  
NUMBER OF NEWSPAPER ISSUES PER MONTH

Month	<u>Daily</u> <u>Oklahoman,</u> 1970	<u>New York</u> <u>Times,</u> 1970	<u>Daily</u> <u>Oklahoman,</u> 1978	<u>New York</u> <u>Times,</u> 1977-78
January	2	3	2	3
February	3	2	3	2
March	2	3	2	3
April	3	2	3	2
May	2	3	2	3
June	3	2	3	3
July	3	3	2	2
August	2	3	3	3
September	3	2	2	2
October	2	3	3	3
November	3	2	2	2
December	2	3	3	3
Totals	30	31	30	31

differed by more than one in any of the samples.

Every news and feature story in each issue drawn for the samples was read to determine if it dealt with the aged or aging in some way. Included was every story that mentioned a person 60 years old or older or who was referred to as an "old" or "elderly" person, a "senior citizen," and so on. Also included was every story that referred to aging problems, legislation that tried to solve these problems, or programs for the elderly. The four samples yielded a total N of 1,703 stories.

The major research tool used in the study was content analysis, which Berelson defined as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (cited in Holsti, 1969, p. 3). Each story was examined to determine how it depicted the elderly person portrayed and then assigned to a positive, neutral or negative image category to test Hypothesis 1. Image was defined as the overall impression a person receives from the appearance and behavior of another. Goffman (1959) in his dramaturgical analysis spoke of this image as a character derived from a performance staged by a performer, "a harried fabricator of impressions" (p. 252). While Goffman saw the performer as the initiator of his own image, congruent or conflicting images can also be emitted by the mass media. Positive images cause viewers or, in dramaturgical terms, members of the audience to like an individual. Negative images cause viewers to dislike an individual. Neutral images would cause no emotional or intellectual reaction in the viewer. For purposes of this study, newspaper stories were included in the positive image category if they were about elderly persons who were honored or praised, lived

active lives after retirement, performed civic duties, shot holes in one, climbed mountains and so on. Included in the negative image category were stories about elderly persons who lived in nursing homes, were tried for criminal acts, were criticized for their performance and so on. Included in the neutral image category were stories in which a specific elderly person was not mentioned, in which positive and negative elements canceled each other, or in which there were no positive or negative elements.

Each story was also examined to determine the activeness or passiveness of the elderly person portrayed and then was assigned to an active, neutral or passive role category to test Hypothesis 2. Role was defined as the behavior of a person who holds a particular position in society (see Mead, 1934, pp. 150-151). Such roles may be active or passive; i.e., they may involve the person being an actor or, in some instances, being the object of others' activities. A neutral role is one in which the individual is neither actor nor object. For purposes of this study, newspaper stories were included in the active role category if they were about elderly persons who worked, performed charitable acts or civic duties, pursued hobbies, filed court suits and so on. Included in the passive role category were stories about elderly persons who lived in nursing homes, retired without indicating they planned to keep active, were victimized by criminals and so on. Included in the neutral role category were stories in which a specific elderly person was not mentioned, in which active and passive elements canceled each other, and in which the activeness or passiveness of the elderly person portrayed could not be determined.

It should be pointed out that an "active" role is not necessarily a

socially acceptable role. For instance, if a story chronicled the exploits of an elderly bank robber, the story would be scored "active" on the role scale. Being a bank robber, however, is not ordinarily considered to be a socially acceptable role. Such a story probably would be scored "negative" on the image scale.

To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, each story was also coded into one of the following problem area categories:

--Income: stories about how much money old people have to spend and how this affects their life styles and living conditions.

--Health: stories about the physical and mental problems of the old and how they are dealt with by the subject and by society. Included would be stories about the normal physical processes of aging; the effects of environment, trauma, disease and heredity; hospitalization; visiting doctors; disability; drugs; chronic ailments; and the elderly's most common afflictions, heart disease, rheumatism and arthritis.

--Housing: stories about the living arrangements of the elderly. Included would be stories about life in the family setting or alone, adequacy of housing, maintenance of independence, institutionalization, housing projects, age-segregated living, and barrier-free architectural design.

--Transportation: stories about the transportation needs of the elderly and how the lack impinges on their lives. Included would be stories about auto or vehicle ownership and access, driver's licenses for the old, fear of driving because of physical limitations, the adequacy of public transportation, demand-scheduled transportation, and reduced fares.

--Employment: stories about the employment problems of the aged.

Included would be stories about types of jobs held by the elderly, wage ceilings and age discrimination in hiring and firing.

--Retirement: stories about retirement problems. Included would be stories about forced and voluntary retirement, the shock of transition, the loss of competency, supportive work environments and human relationships, and excess leisure time.

--Demographic shifts: stories about the increasing number of old people in American society, their migrations and changes of residence.

--Crime: stories about crime's impact on the elderly as victims.

The reasonably discrete categories listed above were identified by Davis (1976) as major problem areas for the elderly. Two other categories were also initially included:

--Public policy: stories about legislation for the elderly. This category was included to differentiate between stories that reported legislative attempts to solve the problems of the elderly and stories that reported the problems per se.

--Fraud: stories about fraud in government programs for the elderly. Such fraud may not affect the lives of the elderly but affects the program itself. The category was added because a pilot study (Buchholz, 1977) turned up so many newspaper stories that treated the situation.

As the study progressed, four more categories emerged as distinct types having nothing to do with aging problems. These were obituaries, retirement notices, wedding anniversary stories and "age only" stories. An obituary is a story about a person's death, usually including biographical details, a list of survivors, and the place and time of funeral services. Retirement notices report the impending retirement



of an individual and usually include details of his career history and post-retirement plans, if any. Wedding anniversary stories report the details of 50th and 75th wedding anniversary celebrations. They are often run in the society section. Falling into the "age only" category were stories in which old people were mentioned but which did not take up any of the aging problem areas listed above. Stories were placed into the problem area categories only if they handled the problem in general. For example, a story in the August 24, 1970, issue of the Oklahoman told how some nursing homes were trying to work with the health problems of their patients. This story was coded in the health category. On the other hand, a story in the December 13, 1978, issue of the Oklahoman reported that Boston Pops conductor Arthur Fiedler had undergone brain surgery. The story made no attempt to indicate that the elderly in general have more health problems than younger persons. It only covered an isolated event and thus was put in the age only category because Fiedler was 83. Another example was a story in the February 4, 1978, issue of the Oklahoman that told of an Oklahoma City church that posted a guard near the building to protect elderly churchgoers from muggers. The story pointed out that the elderly are often victims of this type of crime. The article was coded in the crime category. A story in the December 1, 1978, issue of the Oklahoman, however, reported that police had arrested some suspects thought to have been involved in an attack on an elderly person. The writer gave the reader no indication that the elderly have a special problem with crime. The story was placed in the age only category.

As each story was coded into a subject category, an "attention score" was assigned to it. The attention score is a measurement devised

by Budd (1964) in his study of United States news in the daily press of Australia and New Zealand. Briefly, the device attempts to measure how a story was "played" in the newspaper, or how much emphasis it was given, by assigning points to the story on the basis of headline size, location on the page, length, and location in the issue. A story with a headline two columns wide or wider gets one point; a story with a headline longer than half the number of columns on the page gets two points. A story whose first line of body type appears above the "fold," the midpoint of the page, gets one point. A story, including the headline and any accompanying photograph, that is three-fourths of a column long or longer gets one point. A story on page one, a departmental or section page, or an "open" page (one without advertisements) gets one point.

With this measurement, several questions about the stories under study could be answered. How much emphasis was given to stories in specific subject matter categories? Did stories in different image and role categories receive different play? Was there any change over time in how editors of the Times or Oklahoman played stories about the aged?

Using attention scores to answer these and other questions avoided the laborious calculation of column inches for each article, which were especially difficult to measure on microfilm, and the estimation of "news hole," the space available for all non-advertising copy in the newspaper. Budd found the attention score valuable as a tool for comparing coverage in different news categories and declared that the measure "showed results highly consistent with those obtained from the measurement of column inches or the counting of items" (p. 262). The attention score was especially useful when used with an item count, he added.

By dividing the total attention score in each subject-matter category . . . by the number of items in the same category, an average score-per-item can be obtained which can be placed on a scale ranging from 0 to 5 points. In this manner, if any subject-matter category . . . receives consistently strong play, its averaged attention score per item in that category would reveal that fact (p. 262).

Another advantage is that the attention score is an interval-level measurement, increasing its statistical utility.

To test Hypothesis 5, each aging story was also classified as "event-oriented" or "issue-oriented" following the definitions used by Ryan and Owen (1976). To be coded as event oriented, "articles must take as their starting points timely events--definite happenings pinpointed in space and time--and they must convey important details about those events" (p. 636). Event-oriented stories would include articles about an elderly man being robbed by young toughs, passage of an amendment to Medicare or Medicaid, or the indictment of three nursing home supervisors for welfare fraud. To be classified as issue oriented, articles had to fit the following definition:

Articles must provide an overview of or background for a timeless social problem or issue, or one aspect of a larger social problem or issue. The issue is the starting point of the article, not a specific event pinpointed in time and space. Include stories about: (a) findings or reports released by groups which have studied specific social problems for some time (even if the information is released during a news conference or similar planned event); (b) events which occurred some time ago but which are put into perspective by the later article; and (c) 'interpretative' or 'background' stories about important issues . . . in the news (pp. 636-637).

An example of an issue-oriented story was one in the October 18, 1970, issue of the Times which reported a trend among business executives, inspired by a desire to cure social ills, to retire early so they could enter government work or higher education.

Another story category, human interest feature, was added as the research progressed for stories that failed to fall into the event- or issue-oriented categories. Ordinarily, news stories deal with timely events or trends that have a significant impact on their audience, involve prominent persons or organizations, or occur geographically or psychologically near to their audience. Human interest stories, on the other hand, interest their readers because they deal with the "human-ness" of the people involved. Feature stories affect emotions, making their readers want to laugh or cry, feel sympathy or disgust or love or hate. Such stories often describe no timely newsworthy events or trends, but report instead unusual situations, unusual accomplishments or interviews about a person's life, habits or thoughts. One example was an October 18, 1970, interview in the Times with artist Georgia O'Keeffe, who was 83. Another was the November 19, 1978, story in the Oklahoman about a retired school teacher who sews for a hobby. Neither story described a timely newsworthy event and neither dealt in general with any problem of the elderly as an issue. They fit instead into the human interest feature category.

The five hypotheses were tested with chi-square, a statistical procedure designed to examine the relationships between categories of frequencies. The technique, in effect, compares empirically observed frequencies with those theoretically expected under a certain assumption to determine if there are any marked differences (Blalock, 1960). Ordinarily, one assumes there are no statistically significant differences between the observed and expected frequencies. If there are, and if the differences probably did not occur by chance, one rejects the assumption of no difference and draws the appropriate conclusion. The

criterion for rejecting this assumption of no difference is arbitrarily set by the researcher. For purposes of this study, the assumption of no difference was rejected if the observed frequencies would occur by chance fewer than five times out of 100, the 0.05 level of significance.

The questions about newspaper "play," the emphasis editors give to specific story categories, were dealt with by one-way analysis of variance, which Steele and Torrie (1960, p. 99) defined as "an arithmetic process for partitioning a total sum of squares into components associated with recognized sources of variation." Put another way, one-way analysis of variance tests "the probability that observed mean differences between two or more treatment groups could have occurred by chance or random fluctuation" (Ward, 1979). The technique was used to determine if editors gave significantly different play, as measured by attention score, to stories in different image and role categories. Each category was considered a treatment group in conducting the one-way analyses.

Since one-way analysis of variance tests only the difference between high and low treatment group means, gap tests were used when appropriate to determine if any significant differences existed between the high and middle treatment group means and the middle and low treatment group means. The procedure, which Steele and Torrie called a least significant difference or lsd test, uses t-scores and the standard error of difference among the means to identify significant differences among treatment group means (Ward, 1979).

If significant differences in play were discovered, an eta correlation ratio was computed to test the effect the image or role variable had on newspaper play. This technique demonstrates what proportion of

the total variance is explained by the variance between treatment groups (Ward, 1979).

The image and role variables under examination in this study should provide information about how the elderly were depicted by the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman in 1970 and 1977-78 and offer some insights into the concepts of the aged held by the public and the elderly themselves. The subject-matter categories should provide clues about the information available to the elderly and the public on aging problems and perhaps provide a basis for establishing criteria for adequate coverage. Finally, the story-type variable might provide an explanation for the way in which the aging story was being covered in these two newspapers.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Image

What kind of a picture of the elderly did the readers of the Daily Oklahoman and the New York Times get in 1970 and 1978? On the basis of the 1,703 stories collected from the four samples, the image was largely a neutral one. (See Table III.) A majority of the stories, 56.4 percent, were classified neutral on the image scale. This did not necessarily mean that editors and reporters of the two newspapers were following the traditional journalistic precepts of objectivity. This could have been the case. But stories were also classified neutral if no specific elderly person was mentioned, as in stories on legislative action on programs for the elderly. Others falling into the neutral classification were those in which neither positive nor negative elements predominated, or canceled each other. An example would be one of the Oklahoman's obituary "roundups," in which the unrelated deaths of several persons were reported in one story with subheads separating the information about each individual. If, for instance, two of the five persons mentioned in the story were portrayed with positive images, two with negative images and the fifth with a neutral image, the story would be classified in the neutral category.

Of the remaining stories from the four samples, 67.6 percent, more

than two-thirds, presented a positive image of the elderly person portrayed. Table III also shows that the overall distribution held up, more or less, for each of the samples. Each sample produced a majority of neutral stories and about twice as many positive as negative stories.

TABLE III  
NUMBER OF STORIES PRESENTING POSITIVE, NEGATIVE  
OR NEUTRAL IMAGES OF THE ELDERLY  
(PROPORTIONS IN PARENTHESES)

Sample	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Totals
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u> , 1970	67 (0.229)	37 (0.127)	188 (0.644)	292 (1.000)
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u> , 1978	109 (0.300)	63 (0.174)	191 (0.526)	363 (1.000)
<u>New York Times</u> , 1970	139 (0.264)	72 (0.137)	316 (0.600)	527 (1.001)
<u>New York Times</u> , 1978	187 (0.359)	69 (0.132)	265 (0.509)	521 (1.000)
Totals	502 (0.295)	241 (0.142)	960 (0.564)	1703 (1.001)

The Daily Oklahoman in the two years sampled ran significantly more neutral image stories than positive or negative image stories, even though the proportion of neutral stories dropped by 11 percent between



1970 and 1978. (See Table IV.) A 71-story increase over the eight-year period fell mostly into the positive and negative categories. More of the story increase between the two samples, seven percent, presented positive images of the elderly than negative images, but the increase in the number of positive and negative image stories in the Oklahoman from 1970 to 1978 was not significant.

TABLE IV  
PROPORTION OF POSITIVE, NEGATIVE AND NEUTRAL  
STORIES IN THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND  
1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Totals
1970	0.23	0.13	0.64	1.00 (292)
1978	0.30	0.17	0.53	1.00 (363)
Totals	0.27	0.15	0.58	1.00 (655)

$$X^2 = 9.22 \quad p < 0.01$$

There was a significant difference, however, in the way positive and negative image stories were played or emphasized by Oklahoman editors in 1978. A one-way analysis of variance indicated that there was a significant difference at the 0.01 level in the way editors played

positive and negative image stories about the elderly. (See Table V.) Such a difference would occur by chance only one time out of 100. The 109 positive image stories in the 1978 Oklahoman sample had a mean attention score of 2.9 out of a possible range from 0 to 5. The 63 negative image stories had a mean attention score of 2.2. The higher the attention score, the better the play or emphasis editors have given the story, and the more likely readers are to notice it. On the average, therefore, positive stories in the sample received somewhat better play than negative stories, meaning that image had some slight effect on how Oklahoman editors played stories about the elderly in 1978. Even though an eta correlation showed that image type accounted for only 3.8 percent of the variation in play, editors of the Oklahoman in 1978 were likely to give better play to stories that pictured the elderly positively than to stories that pictured them negatively. This indicated that editors felt their readers would be or should be more interested in stories depicting a positive image of the elderly. Gap tests, which compare differences in group means, could not be computed for other image groups because of large differences in group Ns. A one-way analysis of variance computed for image groups in the 1970 Daily Oklahoman sample showed no significant difference in play, perhaps indicating that editors were more sensitive to the image of the elderly in 1978 than in 1970.

The New York Times in the two years sampled also ran significantly more neutral image stories about the elderly than positive or negative image stories. (See Table VI.) The Times ran about the same number of stories about the elderly in 1970 and 1978, and a decrease of 10 percent in the number of neutral stories in the 1978 sample was made up for by a

TABLE V  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF IMAGE TYPES, DAILY  
OKLAHOMAN, 1978

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (1% Level)
Between Groups	28.310	2	14.155	7.163	4.71
Within Groups	711.497	360	1.976		
Total	739.807	362			

eta = 0.196

TABLE VI  
PROPORTION OF POSITIVE, NEGATIVE AND NEUTRAL  
STORIES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1970 AND  
1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Totals
1970	0.26	0.14	0.60	1.00 (527)
1978	0.36	0.13	0.51	1.00 (521)
Totals	0.31	0.13	0.55	0.99 (1048)

$\chi^2 = 11.57$        $p < 0.01$

similar increase in positive stories, a significant difference. (See Table VII.) There were no significant differences between the numbers of positive and negative image stories in the two sample years.

TABLE VII  
PROPORTION OF POSITIVE AND NEUTRAL STORIES IN  
THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1970 AND 1978  
(N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	Positive	Neutral	Totals
1970	0.31	0.69	1.00 (455)
1978	0.41	0.59	1.00 (452)
Totals	0.36	0.64	1.00 (907)

$$X^2 = 11.54 \quad p < 0.01$$

Image affected the way Times editors played stories about the elderly in both sample years. Although an eta correlation showed that image type accounted for only 8.4 percent of the variance in play, a one-way analysis of variance demonstrated that there was a significant difference at the 0.01 level in the way editors played positive and neutral stories in 1970. (See Table VIII.) The 139 positive stories received a mean attention score of 2.0. The 316 neutral stories

received a mean attention score of 1.2. On the average, therefore, positive stories received somewhat better play than neutral stories. Gap tests on other image group means could not be computed because of large differences in group Ns.

TABLE VIII  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF IMAGE TYPES, NEW YORK  
TIMES, 1970

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (1% Level)
Between Groups	88.305	2	44.153	24.127	4.66
Within Groups	958.723	524	1.830		
Total	1047.028	526			

eta = 0.290

The same relationship appeared in the 1978 Times sample, even though image type accounted for less of the variance in play, 2.8 percent, than it did in 1970. A one-way analysis of variance showed there was still a significant difference at the 0.01 level in the way editors played positive and neutral stories. (See Table IX.) The mean attention score for the 187 positive stories was 2.5, and the mean attention score for the 265 neutral stories was 2.0. On the average, therefore,

positive stories got somewhat better play than neutral stories in 1978, too, indicating that editors had a tendency to accentuate the positive. Gap tests on other image group means could not be computed because of large differences in group Ns.

TABLE IX  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF IMAGE TYPES, NEW YORK  
TIMES, 1978

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (1% Level)
Between Groups	28.418	2	14.209	7.435	4.66
Within Groups	989.893	518	1.911		
Total	1018.311	520			

eta = 0.167

Even though 960 of the stories in the four samples, 56.4 percent, were coded in the neutral image category, and even though there were 502 positive image stories and only 241 negative image stories, the number of negative stories did not decrease between 1970 and 1978 as Hypothesis 1 predicted. As Table X shows, there actually was a significant increase in negative image stories over the eight-year interval. Even though the Times had three fewer negative stories, a drop of about four

percent, in 1978, the number of negative stories in the Oklahoman rose from 37 to 63, an increase of 70 percent.

TABLE X

PROPORTION OF NEGATIVE STORIES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	<u>New York Times</u>	Totals
1970	0.34	0.66	1.00 (109)
1978	0.48	0.52	1.00 (132)
Totals	0.41	0.59	1.00 (241)

$$X^2 = 4.67 \quad p < 0.05$$

Do the data in Table X mean that readers of the Daily Oklahoman and the New York Times in 1970 and 1978 came away with negative images of the elderly? Hardly. Most of the stories in the four samples presented no image of the elderly at all, or balanced positive images with negative ones. Of those stories which presented an image, most were positive. And in all the samples but one, positive image stories had higher attention score averages than stories in the negative or neutral image groups. Only in the 1970 Daily Oklahoman did negative image stories

have a higher mean attention score than positive image stories. In that sample, the mean for negative stories was 2.1, the mean for positive stories was 2.0, and the mean for neutral stories was 1.7. The F-ratio calculated in a one-way analysis of variance was not significant even at the 0.05 level. Thus, thorough readers of the Daily Oklahoman and the New York Times in 1970 and 1978 should have come away with positive images of the elderly if they came away with any images at all.

#### Role

How did the elderly make news in the 1970 and 1978 Daily Oklahoman and New York Times? Was it by being active, which some social gerontologists believe leads to the greatest happiness and life satisfaction in old age (see Lemon, Bengtson and Peterson, 1976)? Or was it by being passive, what some social gerontologists might call disengagement (see Cumming, 1976)? As far as the editors of the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman in 1970 and 1978 were concerned, the elderly were more likely to get into print if their roles were active rather than passive, if the elderly were actors, rather than people who were acted upon. Table XI shows that 757 stories about the elderly in the four samples, 44.5 percent, were coded in the active role category. This outcome was largely the result of the number of active role stories in the New York Times. In 1970, 264 stories, more than half of the stories selected from the sample issues, fell into the active role category. More than 250 stories, nearly 49 percent, were coded in the active role category in the 1978 Times sample. Only in the 1970 Daily Oklahoman sample was there not at least a plurality of active role stories. The category was two stories short.



TABLE XI  
 NUMBER OF STORIES PRESENTING THE ELDERLY IN  
 ACTIVE, PASSIVE OR NEUTRAL ROLES  
 (PROPORTIONS IN PARENTHESES)

Sample	Active	Passive	Neutral	Totals
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u> , 1970	106 (0.363)	79 (0.271)	107 (0.366)	292 (1.000)
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u> , 1978	134 (0.369)	124 (0.342)	105 (0.289)	363 (1.000)
<u>New York Times</u> , 1970	264 (0.501)	147 (0.279)	116 (0.220)	527 (1.000)
<u>New York Times</u> , 1978	253 (0.486)	167 (0.321)	101 (0.194)	521 (1.001)
Totals	757 (0.445)	517 (0.304)	429 (0.252)	1703 (1.001)

The next largest number of stories, little more than 30 percent of the 1,703 stories in the four samples, was placed in the passive role category. The 429 neutral role stories made up about one-fourth of the articles under study. These were stories in which no elderly person was portrayed, in which active characteristics balanced out passive ones, or in which the role of the elderly person depicted could not be determined.

The Daily Oklahoman ran 71 more stories about the elderly in 1978 than in 1970, and most of the 24 percent increase fell into the active or passive role categories. (See Table XII.) There actually was a

greater increase in the number of passive role stories than in the number of active role stories, while the number of neutral role stories stayed about the same. The change over the two sample years, however, apparently was too small to be statistically significant.

TABLE XII  
PROPORTION OF ACTIVE, PASSIVE AND NEUTRAL STORIES  
IN THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND 1978  
(N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	Active	Passive	Neutral	Totals
1970	0.36	0.27	0.37	1.00 (292)
1978	0.37	0.34	0.29	1.00 (363)
Totals	0.37	0.31	0.32	1.00 (655)

$$x^2 = 5.63 \quad 0.05 < p < 0.10$$

There was a significant difference, however, in the way Daily Oklahoman editors played active, passive and neutral role stories in 1970 and 1978. A one-way analysis of variance showed there was a significant difference at the 0.05 level in the way editors played active and neutral role stories in 1970. (See Table XIII.) The 106 active role stories in the 1970 Oklahoman sample had a mean attention score of 2.0.

The 107 neutral stories had a mean attention score of 1.6. On the average, therefore, stories which depicted the elderly in active roles received somewhat better play than stories in the neutral role category, even though an eta correlation showed story role type accounted for only two percent of the variation in play. Gap tests were conducted with other role group means, but the computations demonstrated no significant differences in the way active and passive role stories were played, or in the way passive and neutral role stories were played.

TABLE XIII

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF ROLE TYPES, DAILY  
OKLAHOMAN, 1970

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (5% Level)
Between Groups	9.893	2	4.946	3.142	3.04
Within Groups	454.748	289	1.574		
Total	464.641	291			

eta = 0.146

In the 1978 Oklahoman sample, the role variable affected the way editors played active and passive role stories and active and neutral role stories. Mean attention scores for active, passive and neutral

role stories were 3.0, 2.1 and 2.2, respectively. A one-way analysis of variance showed the difference between active and passive group attention score means was significant at the 0.01 level. (See Table XIV.) But gap tests demonstrated that the difference between the two means, and the difference between the active and neutral group means, actually was significant at the 0.001 level. On the average, therefore, active stories received somewhat better play than passive and neutral stories. Another gap test showed that play for passive and neutral stories was about the same. An eta correlation indicated that story role type accounted for 7.6 percent of the variation in play.

TABLE XIV  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF ROLE TYPES, DAILY  
OKLAHOMAN, 1978

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (1% Level)
Between Groups	56.384	2	28.192	14.854	4.71
Within Groups	683.423	360	1.898		
Total	739.807	362			

eta = 0.276

The New York Times in 1970 and 1978 consistently portrayed the elderly in more active roles than in passive ones. The 217 neutral role

stories made up the smallest category. As Table XV shows, the proportion of active, passive and neutral role stories remained relatively constant in the 1970 and 1978 samples. There were no significant differences among the number of stories per role category.

TABLE XV  
PROPORTION OF ACTIVE, PASSIVE AND NEUTRAL  
STORIES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1970  
AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	Active	Passive	Neutral	Totals
1970	0.50	0.28	0.22	1.00 (527)
1978	0.49	0.32	0.19	1.00 (521)
Totals	0.49	0.30	0.21	1.00 (1048)

$$x^2 = 2.51 \quad 0.20 < p < 0.30$$

There was a significant difference, however, in the way editors of the New York Times played stories about active and passive old persons in 1970 and 1978. Stories depicting the elderly in active roles consistently got better play than stories depicting the elderly in passive roles in both samples.

An eta correlation showed that the image variable accounted for

7.9 percent of the variation in story play in 1970. A one-way analysis of variance demonstrated that there was a significant difference at the 0.01 level in the way editors played active and passive stories. (See Table XVI.) The 264 active stories in the sample received a mean attention score of 1.9, while the 147 passive stories received a mean attention score of 1.1. On the average, therefore, active role stories received somewhat better play than passive role stories in the 1970 Times. Mean differences between active and neutral stories and passive and neutral stories could not be tested because of large differences among group Ns.

TABLE XVI  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF ROLE TYPES, NEW YORK  
TIMES, 1970

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (1% Level)
Between Groups	83.149	2	41.575	22.595	4.66
Within Groups	963.879	524	1.840		
Total	1047.028	526			

eta = 0.282

In the 1978 Times sample, story role type accounted for 12 percent of the variation in play. As in the 1970 sample, there was a

significant difference at the 0.01 level in the way editors played active and passive role stories. (See Table XVII.) The mean attention score for the 253 active role stories in this sample was 2.7, and the mean attention score for the 167 passive role stories was 1.7. On the average, therefore, active role stories got somewhat better play than passive role stories. Gap tests between other role group means could not be computed because of large differences among group Ns.

TABLE XVII  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE--ATTENTION SCORE  
COMPARISON OF ROLE TYPES, NEW YORK  
TIMES, 1978

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Ratio	Critical F (1% Level)
Between Groups	123.513	2	61.757	35.760	4.66
Within Groups	894.798	518	1.727		
Total	1018.311	520			

eta = 0.348

There was also a significant increase in the number of active role stories between 1970 and 1978 as predicted by Hypothesis 2. (See Table XVIII.) Although the Times ran four percent fewer active role stories in 1978 than in 1970, the Oklahoman ran 26 percent more.

TABLE XVIII

PROPORTION OF ACTIVE STORIES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	<u>New York Times</u>	Totals
1970	0.29	0.71	1.00 (370)
1978	0.35	0.65	1.00 (387)
Totals	0.32	0.68	1.00 (757)

$$X^2 = 3.13 \quad p < 0.05^*$$

\* Even though a chi-square value as large as 3.13 could be expected to occur by chance only 10 times out of 100, that would not be significant by the criterion established for this study. The significance level, however, can be halved to 0.05 because the direction of the relationship was predicted in advance (Blalock, 1960, p. 218). Therefore, the increase in the number of active role stories between 1970 and 1978 is considered to be statistically significant.

Both papers had a significant tendency to present the aged in more active role stories than in passive or neutral role stories. (See Tables XIX and XX.) Table XIX shows a significant difference between the proportion of active and passive role stories in the two papers in 1970 and 1978. Table XX shows a significant difference in the two papers in the proportion of active and neutral stories in 1970 and 1978. In the New York Times, however, the aged were significantly more likely to appear in passive role stories than in neutral role stories. The



TABLE XIX

PROPORTION OF ACTIVE AND PASSIVE STORIES IN THE  
NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN,  
 1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Active	Passive	Totals
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	0.54	0.46	1.00 (443)
<u>New York Times</u>	0.62	0.38	1.00 (831)
Totals	0.59	0.41	1.00 (1274)

$$\chi^2 = 7.74 \quad p < 0.01$$

TABLE XX

PROPORTION OF ACTIVE AND NEUTRAL STORIES IN THE  
NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN,  
 1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Active	Neutral	Totals
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	0.53	0.47	1.00 (452)
<u>New York Times</u>	0.70	0.30	1.00 (734)
Totals	0.64	0.36	1.00 (1186)

$$\chi^2 = 36.42 \quad p < 0.01$$

tendency was reversed in the Oklahoman. (See Table XXI.) Further research would be necessary to explain why.

TABLE XXI  
PROPORTION OF NEUTRAL AND PASSIVE STORIES IN THE  
NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN,  
1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Neutral	Passive	Totals
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	0.51	0.49	1.00 (415)
<u>New York Times</u>	0.41	0.59	1.00 (531)
Totals	0.45	0.55	1.00 (946)

$$x^2 = 9.81 \quad p < 0.01$$

So the thorough reader of the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman in 1970 and 1978 was presented primarily with a picture of an active oldster. In all but one sample, the 1970 Oklahoman, there were more active role stories than any other type, and active role stories received better play as indicated by higher attention score means than passive role stories.

#### Subject Categories

Even if the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman in 1970 and 1978

were generally depicting the aged with positive images and in active roles, that does not mean they were covering the aging story thoroughly, informing their readers what it was like to grow old in modern American society and reporting significant developments in that process. Table XXII shows that neither paper lived up to its traditional obligation to report events and trends important to its readers. Most stories covered events and situations that would have been reported regardless of the age factor.

Stories about the elderly in the four samples predominantly fell into the six non-problem categories: age only, obituaries, public policy, retirement notices, anniversaries and fraud. All together, these non-problem stories made up more than 97 percent of the stories in the four samples. Most of the information reported in these stories would have been reported regardless of the age of the persons involved. For instance, a person's death, provided it meets the news value criteria of the individual newspaper, will be reported whether it involves a 46-year-old man or a 66-year-old man. The activity or inactivity of legislative bodies will be covered whether the issue in question involves the old or the young, the rich or the poor, the white or the black, the male or the female. Less than three percent of the stories in the four samples covered areas that social gerontologists have identified as problem areas for the elderly: health, retirement, housing, crime, employment, income, transportation and demographic shifts. No stories in the Daily Oklahoman samples covered the problems the elderly have with transportation, being mobile enough to take care of their daily needs. And this in the newspaper that covers a city with one of the largest land areas in the United States. Have the elderly no

TABLE XXII  
 NUMBER OF STORIES PER SUBJECT CATEGORY  
 (PROPORTIONS IN PARENTHESES)

Subject Category	<u>Daily Oklahoman, 1970</u>	<u>Daily Oklahoman, 1978</u>	<u>New York Times, 1970</u>	<u>New York Times, 1978</u>	Totals
Age Only	143 (0.490)	216 (0.595)	237 (0.450)	311 (0.597)	907 (0.533)
Obituaries	107 (0.366)	88 (0.242)	261 (0.495)	158 (0.303)	614 (0.361)
Public Policy	12 (0.041)	27 (0.074)	13 (0.025)	23 (0.044)	75 (0.044)
Retirement Notices	6 (0.021)	4 (0.011)	9 (0.017)	4 (0.008)	23 (0.014)
Anniversary	10 (0.034)	7 (0.019)	0 (0.000)	0 (0.000)	17 (0.010)
Fraud	9 (0.031)	2 (0.006)	0 (0.000)	6 (0.012)	17 (0.010)
Health	2 (0.007)	9 (0.025)	2 (0.004)	3 (0.006)	16 (0.009)
Retirement	2 (0.007)	4 (0.011)	1 (0.002)	4 (0.008)	11 (0.006)
Housing	1 (0.003)	0 (0.000)	2 (0.004)	6 (0.012)	9 (0.005)
Crime	0 (0.000)	2 (0.006)	1 (0.002)	2 (0.004)	5 (0.003)
Employment	0 (0.000)	2 (0.006)	1 (0.002)	0 (0.000)	3 (0.002)
Income	0 (0.000)	1 (0.003)	0 (0.000)	2 (0.004)	3 (0.002)
Transportation	0 (0.000)	0 (0.000)	0 (0.000)	2 (0.004)	2 (0.001)
Demographic Shifts	0 (0.000)	1 (0.003)	0 (0.000)	0 (0.000)	1 (0.001)
Totals	292 (1.000)	363 (1.001)	527 (1.001)	521 (1.002)	1703 (1.001)

problems in getting around in Oklahoma City? The New York Times samples contained not a single story about the increasing number of elderly persons in American society, a trend that social gerontologists feel will have a significant impact on many aspects of life in the United States. And this in the newspaper that attempts to be the nation's newspaper of record. Is this demographic shift not worthy of record? Out of 1,703 stories, there were only one about demographic change, two about transportation, three each about income and employment, five about crime and nine about housing. Only the elderly's problems with retirement and health merited more than 10 stories each, and this out of what effectively was four years' worth of newspaper coverage. Does this small amount of coverage adequately explain the unique problems the elderly face in American life today?

It seemed that the surest way for the old to get into the Daily Oklahoman or the New York Times in 1970 or 1978 was to die. Almost a quarter or more of each sample was composed of obituaries. (It should be noted that one reason the Times appeared to place more emphasis on running obituaries than the Oklahoman is that the Times ran a separate story on every death. The Oklahoman, on the other hand, usually ran obituary "round-ups," which combined several unrelated deaths into a single story with separate subheads for each individual.)

When the subject categories were examined by attention score means, however, a different rank order of importance emerged. In this case, greater emphasis was given to problem-area stories on retirement, demographic shifts and crime over stories in the largest numerical category, age only. (See Table XXIII.) A Spearman rank correlation coefficient showed a weak negative relationship between number of stories

TABLE XXIII  
 STORY SUBJECT CATEGORIES ARRANGED BY ATTENTION  
 SCORE MEANS (N IN PARENTHESES)

Subject Category	<u>Daily Oklahoman,</u> 1970	<u>Daily Oklahoman,</u> 1978	<u>New York Times,</u> 1970	<u>New York Times,</u> 1978	Overall
Retirement	1.5 (2)	3.3 (4)	4.0 (1)	3.5 (4)	3.1 (11)
Demographic Shifts	--- (0)	3.0 (1)	--- (0)	--- (0)	3.0 (1)
Crime	--- (0)	2.5 (2)	4.0 (1)	2.5 (2)	2.8 (5)
Age Only	2.0 (143)	2.6 (216)	2.4 (237)	2.7 (311)	2.5 (907)
Fraud	2.4 (9)	3.0 (2)	--- (0)	2.3 (6)	2.5 (17)
Housing	2.0 (1)	--- (0)	2.0 (2)	2.7 (6)	2.4 (9)
Anniversaries	2.0 (10)	3.0 (7)	--- (0)	--- (0)	2.4 (17)
Employment	--- (0)	3.0 (2)	1.0 (1)	--- (0)	2.3 (3)
Public Policy	2.2 (12)	2.6 (27)	1.5 (13)	2.3 (23)	2.3 (75)
Health	3.0 (2)	1.8 (9)	2.0 (2)	2.7 (3)	2.1 (16)
Income	--- (0)	0.0 (1)	--- (0)	3.0 (2)	2.0 (3)
Transportation	--- (0)	--- (0)	--- (0)	2.0 (2)	2.0 (2)
Retirement Notices	1.8 (6)	2.8 (4)	1.1 (9)	2.5 (4)	1.8 (23)
Obituaries	1.4 (107)	2.0 (88)	0.7 (261)	1.0 (158)	1.1 (614)
Total N	292	363	527	521	1703
Means	1.8	2.4	1.5	2.2	2.0
Standard Deviations	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4

and attention score means ( $r_{\rho} = -0.202$ ). Note, however, that only these three problem-area categories averaged above the midpoint in the attention score range. All other subject categories averaged below 2.5. In fact, only two problem-area stories out of 1,703 received an attention score of five, a story on retirement in the 1978 Oklahoman sample and a story on crime in the 1978 Times sample. Only 12 problem-area stories received an attention score of four. Note, too, that one of the high means was composed of the score for only one story. One story out of 1,703, even if given relatively good play, does not indicate much of an awareness of or interest in the subject category.

Examining each newspaper separately, one found that there were significantly more stories in the non-problem categories. In the Daily Oklahoman samples, there was a slight increase in the proportion of problem category stories between 1970 and 1978. (See Table XXIV.) In the New York Times, however, a slight decrease in the number of non-problem category stories was accompanied by a slight increase in the number of problem category stories. (See Table XXV.)

Even though the number of stories about aging problems in the Daily Oklahoman and the New York Times showed an increase between 1970 and 1978, the increase was not significant. (See Table XXVI.) Hypothesis 3 was therefore rejected. However, when the non-problem categories of public policy, fraud, obituaries, retirement notices, anniversaries and age only stories were added to the problem categories of income, health, housing, transportation, employment, retirement, demographic shifts and crime, there was a significant increase in the coverage of the elderly in both newspapers combined between the 1970 and 1978 samples. (See Table XXVII.) Notice that the overall increase

TABLE XXIV

PROPORTION OF PROBLEM AND NON-PROBLEM CATEGORY  
STORIES IN THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND  
1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Problem	Non-Problem	Totals
1970	0.02	0.98	1.00 (292)
1978	0.05	0.95	1.00 (363)
Totals	0.04	0.96	1.00 (655)

$$X^2 = 5.69 \quad 0.01 < p < 0.02$$

TABLE XXV

PROPORTION OF PROBLEM AND NON-PROBLEM CATEGORY  
STORIES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1970 AND  
1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Problem	Non-Problem	Totals
1970	0.01	0.99	1.00 (527)
1978	0.04	0.96	1.00 (521)
Totals	0.02	0.98	1.00 (1048)

$$X^2 = 5.81 \quad 0.01 < p < 0.02$$



TABLE XXVI

PROPORTION OF STORIES ABOUT AGING PROBLEMS IN THE  
NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN,  
 1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	<u>New York Times</u>	Totals
1970	0.42	0.58	1.00 (12)
1978	0.50	0.50	1.00 (38)
Totals	0.48	0.52	1.00 (50)

$$x^2 = 0.25 \quad 0.25 < p < 0.35$$

TABLE XXVII

PROPORTION OF STORIES ABOUT THE ELDERLY IN THE  
NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN,  
 1970 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

Year	<u>Daily Oklahoman</u>	<u>New York Times</u>	Totals
1970	0.36	0.64	1.00 (819)
1978	0.41	0.59	1.00 (884)
Totals	0.38	0.62	1.00 (1703)

$$x^2 = 5.26 \quad 0.02 < p < 0.05$$

came about because of the increased coverage of the Oklahoman. The proportion of stories in the Times dropped over the eight-year period.

Hypothesis 4, which predicted that the coverage of fraud in programs for the elderly would be significantly greater than the coverage of aging problem areas in both papers, could not be tested because the expected frequencies were too small to compute  $X^2$  legitimately. However, since the number of fraud stories was smaller than the number of problem area stories, the hypothesis was contradicted and therefore rejected.

The data discussed above did not provide much hope that meaningful coverage of aging problems is improving, at least not in the Daily Oklahoman and the New York Times. The number of non-problem area stories overwhelmed the number of problem-area stories in the four samples, even if some of the problem-area categories compiled higher attention score means than some of the non-problem categories. While both newspapers showed an increasing tendency to cover the problems of the elderly, the increase was not statistically significant. At least the Oklahoman showed a significant increase in awareness that the elderly are fit subjects for newspaper coverage. The Times failed to do even that. What kind of an example did the Times, considered one of the nation's best newspapers, thus provide? And what knowledge can Oklahomans be expected to have of the problems of the elderly when the state's largest circulation daily provided such sparse coverage?

#### Story Orientation

Why were the problems of the elderly apparently not being covered in these two newspapers? It was not because reporters and editors were

callous to the cries of hurting people, but because their traditional journalistic training had focused their attention on something else.

Since the time of Pulitzer and Hearst, newsmen have asked themselves five questions to help them decide whether to write and publish a story: Is it timely? Is it local? Does it involve anyone of prominence? Is it significant to a large number of readers? Does it have human interest? For the aging story, all of these questions can be answered with a resounding "yes." But the reporter and the editor have not been trained to hear the response. They are listening, but they are listening for something else--the clash of events.

Most reporting is based on events. Many of the basic reporting textbooks define news as the report of an event (see, for example, Charnley and Charnley, 1979; MacDougall, 1977).

Events are relatively easy to cover. They are concrete, and it is obvious to the reporter and the editor that there is something going on--someone dies in a traffic accident, a crowd of angry taxpayers protests waste at a city council meeting, a famous author comes to town to speak. Events are also easy for the reader to understand. The way they are reported, they seem to have beginnings and endings. They are episodic, like short stories or television shows.

An event-centered definition of news, obviously, has its problems. Events seem to happen in a vacuum without social history or context. They beat against people day after day, seemingly unrelated and discontinuous. If carried to its logical extreme, this definition means that there can be no news without a concrete happening. Blacks simmered in a stew of discrimination and injustice, all without press notice, until the freedom riders surfaced in the late 1950s and gave news writers

something they could report. Women were subjected to the same kind of treatment, also without newspaper coverage, until leaders of the women's movement began speaking out and demonstrating in the 1960s. Newspapers like the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman may be ignoring the serious problems of the elderly for much the same reason, because no one has stepped forward to focus events as part and product of their dynamic social contexts. It is not apparent on the surface of things that the elderly have problems because prices go up and their income stays the same, because physical infirmities make it difficult for them to satisfy basic needs, because they are especially vulnerable to certain kinds of crime, because an excess of leisure time is not always the godsend that people might expect. While each special problem of the elderly is composed of thousands of events, none of them considered in isolation fits the traditional definition of news. Reporters and editors must be able to see all of these events culminating in social trends that have significance for their readers before one can expect much coverage.

Such an explanation of why the Times and the Oklahoman apparently did not cover the problems of the elderly is difficult to prove without interviewing reporters and editors about why they covered or failed to cover a particular story. But the data in this study provided evidence that such an explanation may be valid. Stories about the elderly in the four samples were overwhelmingly oriented toward events, meaning that in most cases something newsworthy by traditional journalistic standards had to happen before the elderly received coverage. This militated against meaningful coverage of aging problems, because rarely do they culminate in events considered newsworthy by traditional standards.

Table XXVIII shows that nearly 80 percent of the stories in the four samples were event oriented. The proportion in each sample ranged from a high of 0.928 in the 1970 Daily Oklahoman to a low of 0.699 in the 1978 New York Times. Issue-oriented stories made up little more than 11 percent of the 1,703 stories the two papers printed about the elderly in 1970 and 1978.

TABLE XXVIII

NUMBER OF STORIES ORIENTED TO EVENTS, ISSUES OR  
HUMAN INTEREST (PROPORTIONS IN PARENTHESES)

Sample	Event	Issue	Human Interest	Totals
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u> , 1970	271 (0.928)	11 (0.038)	10 (0.034)	292 (1.000)
<u>Daily Oklahoman</u> , 1978	287 (0.791)	36 (0.099)	40 (0.110)	363 (1.000)
<u>New York Times</u> , 1970	428 (0.812)	54 (0.102)	45 (0.085)	527 (0.999)
<u>New York Times</u> , 1978	364 (0.699)	88 (0.169)	69 (0.132)	521 (1.000)
Totals	1350 (0.793)	189 (0.111)	164 (0.096)	1703 (1.000)

In the 1970 and 1978 Daily Oklahoman, there were significantly more

event-oriented stories than issue-oriented stories or human interest features. (See Table XXIX.) As the number of stories about the elderly increased between 1970 and 1978, so did the proportion of issue-oriented and human interest stories. The proportion of event-oriented stories dropped drastically.

TABLE XXIX

PROPORTION OF EVENT, ISSUE AND HUMAN INTEREST  
STORIES IN THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, 1970  
AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Event	Issue	Human Interest	Totals
1970	0.93	0.04	0.03	1.00 (292)
1978	0.79	0.10	0.11	1.00 (363)
Totals	0.85	0.07	0.08	1.00 (655)

$$X^2 = 24.34 \quad p < 0.01$$

There were also significantly more event-oriented stories than issue-oriented stories or human interest features in the 1970 and 1978 New York Times samples. (See Table XXX.) The decrease in the proportion of event-oriented stories between 1970 and 1978 benefited the proportion of issue-oriented stories more than the proportion of human interest features.

TABLE XXX  
 PROPORTION OF EVENT, ISSUE AND HUMAN INTEREST  
 STORIES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1970  
 AND 1978 (N IN PARENTHESES)

	Event	Issue	Human Interest	Totals
1970	0.81	0.10	0.09	1.00 (527)
1978	0.70	0.17	0.13	1.00 (521)
Totals	0.76	0.14	0.11	1.01 (1048)

$$X^2 = 18.34 \quad p < 0.01$$

Considering all 1,703 stories in the four samples, there were significantly more event-oriented stories about the elderly than issue-oriented stories, as predicted by Hypothesis 5. But there was also a significant increase in the number of issue-oriented stories between 1970 and 1978. (See Tables XXXI and XXXII.) Table XXXI shows that the proportion of event-oriented stories decreased relative to the proportion of issue-oriented stories. Table XXXII shows that the Times was more likely to run issue-oriented stories about the elderly than the Oklahoman.

The above data, of course, did not conclusively prove that traditional journalistic thinking about what makes news prevents reporters and editors from covering the aging story in a meaningful way. But the data indicated that such might be the case. They also indicated that

TABLE XXXI

PROPORTION OF EVENT- AND ISSUE-ORIENTED STORIES  
IN THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY  
OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND 1978 (N IN  
PARENTHESES)

	Event-Oriented	Issue-Oriented	Totals
1970	0.91	0.09	1.00 (764)
1978	0.84	0.16	1.00 (775)
Totals	0.88	0.12	1.00 (1539)

$$x^2 = 20.04 \quad p < 0.005$$

TABLE XXXII

PROPORTION OF EVENT- AND ISSUE-ORIENTED STORIES  
IN THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE DAILY  
OKLAHOMAN, 1970 AND 1978 (N IN  
PARENTHESES)

	Event-Oriented	Issue-Oriented	Totals
<u>Daily</u> <u>Oklahoman</u>	0.92	0.08	1.00 (605)
<u>New York</u> <u>Times</u>	0.85	0.15	1.00 (934)
Totals	0.88	0.12	1.00 (1539)

$$x^2 = 18.84 \quad p < 0.01$$



there may be grounds for hope that the situation is improving. There was a significant increase in issue-oriented reporting about the elderly between 1970 and 1978 in the two newspapers. The Times, as one would expect from its reputation as one of America's best newspapers, was more likely to cover trends in aging than the Oklahoman. Such trends are national in scope, and it is often difficult to see their application at the local level when one is trying to cover all the crimes, controversies and club meetings of a metropolitan area of more than 765,000 people.

Journalism students are also being made more aware that social trends and issues make news, too. Textbooks for public affairs reporting courses are beginning to emphasize that it can be more meaningful to cover societal institutions as processes rather than as day-to-day activities (an example is Hage et al., 1976). Such textbooks are opening up to the student the possibilities of using social science research techniques to collect data for stories about social trends and issues (Meyer, 1973; McCombs, Shaw and Grey, 1976, are examples). One may hope that in the future, when these reporting students become professionals, there will be better coverage of social trends and issues in general and of the aged and their problems in particular.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study began with a list of five questions concerning the treatment of the elderly and their problems in the New York Times and the Daily Oklahoman in 1970 and 1978. They can now be answered.

1. How were the aged presented in these two newspapers?

More favorably than the media critics might lead one to believe. Most stories studied presented a neutral image of the elderly, and, of the remainder, positive image stories outnumbered the negative image stories two to one. This blunted the effect of a significant increase in negative image stories, mostly in the Oklahoman, between the 1970 and 1978 samples. Significantly more stories in the four samples depicted the elderly in active roles than in passive or neutral ones, and the number of active role stories increased significantly between 1970 and 1978.

2. What problems in aging were being covered?

Very few. Both newspapers ran significantly more non-problem category stories about the elderly than problem-area stories. Out of 1,703 stories about the elderly in the four samples, only 50 dealt with unique problems the old are forced to face.

3. Were the elderly being covered on a spot news basis or in a more in-depth fashion?

Spot coverage reigned supreme. Significantly more stories in the

four samples were oriented toward events than issues. There was a significant increase in the number of issue stories between 1970 and 1978, but issue stories still made up only 11.1 percent of the total.

4. Did the coverage of the aged and aging problems increase during the last decade?

Only in the Oklahoman. There was a significant increase in aging coverage in the Oklahoman between 1970 and 1978, indicating perhaps that the editors of this paper were growing increasingly aware of the need for coverage. But the Times' coverage inexplicably declined, and further research is needed to determine why. More stories were devoted to the problems of the elderly in 1978 but not significantly more.

5. What emphasis did editors give stories about the elderly, and did the image and role of the elderly depicted in news stories affect editors' judgments?

Few subject categories received mean attention scores at the upper end of the attention score range from 0 to 5, and very few problem-area stories got play of a 4 or a 5. Image and role seemed to have some slight affect on the play stories about the elderly received. In three of the four samples, positive image stories had higher mean attention scores than negative image or neutral stories, and they received significantly better play than negative stories in one sample and neutral stories in two others. Active role stories also had higher mean attention scores than passive role or neutral stories in all four samples and received significantly better play than neutral stories in one sample and passive role stories in the other three. The generally better play for positive image stories and active role stories lent weight to the statement that the elderly were treated more favorably by

these two papers in 1970 and 1978 than one might have expected.

Should the coverage of the elderly be even more favorable than it was in these two newspapers? The question is one that journalists and social gerontologists might disdain to answer. Both are more interested in truth than in a public relations exercise in image building, regardless of whether the truth is favorable or unfavorable to the elderly.

What is really needed is an end to stereotyping, whether it be positive or negative, whether it be candy-coating the elderly as "senior citizens" and "golden agers," or depicting a weak, passive oldster and pretending that all the aged are just like him. Several persons have called for an end to such ageism, and several have said that the mass media can be potent instruments for ending it and educating the American people about what it's really like to be old (see Butler, 1969, and Peters, 1971, for examples). Edward Ansello, associate director of the University of Maryland's Center on Aging, told a House select committee that "we have over two thousand years of 'bad press' on aging" (U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, 1977). He continued:

However, the media can also be instruments for consciousness-raising. In fact, most old persons are not ill, nor self-pitying, nor incapable as so much of the public believes. The media can help end the self-feeding cycle of stereotyping through sensitivity to the fact that ageism does exist (pp. 234-235).

Elias S. Cohen, commissioner of Pennsylvania's Office for the Aging in 1960, called for using the mass media, public relations and emotional appeals to remake the image of the elderly. "If people must have stereotypes," he wrote, "let us provide some which come closer to reality" (p. 342). Bengtson and Kuypers (1973, p. 49) suggested that several inputs be made into stages of the social breakdown syndrome to

turn it from a vicious cycle into a benign process. The mass media could be used for this purpose.

Newspapers and other mass media should also strive to cover the aging story more thoroughly. Data in this study indicated that one of the nation's most prestigious newspapers was not doing an adequate job of covering a story of immense social concern. Aging sooner or later will affect everyone in this nation. Everyone should have a complete, accurate picture unshaded by rosy tints of what aging is like. Then the fear of aging can be replaced by knowledge, and the problems of aging can be attacked and solved.

The newspaper reading public should be able to expect many things of its newspaper. It should serve as a bulletin board of events, advising its readers of upcoming items of interest. It should serve as a watchdog, making sure that public officials are performing the people's business properly and ethically. It can also entertain and help its readers with their day-to-day shopping. But in addition, readers should be able to expect their newspaper to keep them abreast of events and trends that have significant impact on their lives. They should be able to learn, for instance, that the proportion of elderly persons in the population is growing and that this could fundamentally alter the fabric of their daily existence. More products will be aimed at the elderly and the commercials advertising them will become more prominent. Elderly persons will become more visible in American society, and younger people will have more of a chance to interact with them. The old will be working longer, making less jobs available for the young. More money will have to be spent on social programs for the elderly to solve the myriad problems besetting them. The Social

Security system will come under increased strain as the number of retired persons grows, and younger members of the work force will find themselves paying more and more in taxes and Social Security.

As the young grow older, they will find themselves faced with many of the same problems facing the elderly today unless this society has been able to find solutions in the interim. American newspaper readers should be able to expect their newspapers to warn them of what lies in the future by describing the plight of the elderly in the present. This could provide part of the socialization to old age that Rosow (1974) contended was missing from American society. And it could serve as a spur to action for those who have failed to act because they did not understand that action was necessary.

For newspapers to provide this kind of information to their readers, reporters and editors must first learn about the problems of the elderly and then find ways to tell about them. Less emphasis should be placed on covering events and more on covering trends. Events must still be reported, but it is a rare event that has much direct impact on ordinary readers. Often events are merely signposts pointing the way to a significant trend lying beneath the surface. It's the trend that reporters and editors must learn to recognize.

A good place with which to start would be the periodic Census Bureau reports describing the demographic characteristics of the newspaper's circulation area. What is the number of elderly persons in the area? What proportion of the population do they comprise? Has this proportion increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last five years, ten years, twenty years? How has the change in the number of elderly persons, if any, affected the life of the community?

Armed with census data, reporters could probe into the records of many government agencies in the community to gauge the impact of the elderly. Officials at county health and welfare offices should be able to say how many persons over 65 they work with and whether that number has increased over the past several years. How much of a drain do the elderly place on the county budget and consequently on the ad valorem taxes paid by all property owners? Visits to public transportation agencies could reveal whether the elderly are increasing their use of city buses and taxi firms and whether any increased use is requiring more subsidization from the public coffers. Reporters can use police records to learn if there has been an upsurge in crime directed against the elderly and what forms this crime takes in the local community. Public housing agency officials can be questioned about the adequacy of housing they provide the elderly poor and whether increased expenditures have been necessary. Most of the other problems of the elderly, once journalists learn what they are, can be treated in much the same way with information from public and private sources.

Social gerontologists could do much to help the mass media cover this story. They can make sure that the findings and conclusions of their research into aging issues and problems are made available to print and broadcast media outlets through university and institutional public information offices. They can make themselves available to the press for interviews about aging processes and problems. Social gerontologists headquartered at colleges and universities can conduct workshops, symposia and seminars for journalists to educate them about aging and its problems. The Southern Newspaper Publishers Association funds a yearly series of meetings for journalists in this region about various

social concerns and problems, and social gerontologists in this area should start work now toward setting up one on aging. Once journalists are educated on the issues, they can be expected to pursue the story.

Mass media coverage of aging would benefit not only the media's audience, but the media themselves. Persons 65 and older make up more than 10 percent of the country's population, and the percentage is growing rapidly. Research has shown that reading is one of four leisure activities at which the old spend a lot of time (Rush and Kent, 1975). "Persons beyond 60 are more likely than younger people to rate the newspaper as the most 'entertaining' medium and as somewhat more important to them than television" (Rush and Kent, 1975, p. 12). Another study (Moshey, 1972, p. 52) concerned with the reading habits of 10 male and 40 female retired professionals found that all the men and 36 of the women read newspapers. Thirty-four of the retirees read the New York Times (p. 121), but the study apparently did not attempt to determine what the respondents thought of the Times' coverage.

More and more, the elderly are coming to be considered a major segment of the market for advertisers (see Clancy, 1975; Schiffman, 1971). With more elderly subscribers and viewers, the mass media are allowed to charge more for their advertising space and time, thus generating more income. Sellers of products for the old, if they can be shown more elderly persons are reading a particular newspaper or watching a particular television station, will be more likely to place advertisements for their products with those media, generating even more income. One way for the media to attract elderly viewers and subscribers is to do a better job of covering the aging story.

With all the benefits that can come to the old, to the American



mass media, and to the national population in general, more research should be done on coverage of the aged and their problems. This study should be replicated, because its findings came from one researcher who spent hours in a darkened room looking at newspapers on a microfilm reader. Replication is the only sure way that a greater generalization of findings can be achieved. Similar studies should also be conducted with other newspapers in other locales and regions to see if the job of covering the aged is being done as well or as poorly elsewhere. For example, studies of newspapers published in the retirement communities of the Southwest would probably yield vastly different results from those found in this research. One could attempt a study of aging coverage in the American newspaper in general, although the task and expense of coming up with a representative sample of national news coverage would be enormous.

There are many questions that could be asked beyond those addressed in this study. What social roles are the elderly playing in mass media reports? What specific stereotypes, both good and bad, are still being published? What demographic characteristics are displayed by the elderly who make the news columns, and are they consistent with those of the elderly population of the nation or the newspaper's coverage area? What are the characteristics (race, sex and so on) of the elderly who are featured in newspaper photographs? And, probably most important, what do the editorial decisions on what to publish about the elderly mean to those who make them? The answers to these and other similar questions can be used to make further assessments of how well the American press is covering the aging story.

Such research is interdisciplinary in nature. To be conducted

properly, it must draw on the knowledge of at least two fields. The social gerontologist who attempts it without a knowledge of how the mass media work, what their values and criteria are, and how stories are covered and edited and published and by whom, could have data without a complete knowledge of what it means. Not only is it important to know what people do, but why they do what they do and what their actions mean to them. If the social gerontologist learns what the media do concerning the aged without learning what those actions mean to the media, he will have gained little. Correspondingly, the communications scholar, despite all his specialized knowledge of the media and perhaps his professional experience, will not even know all the relevant questions to ask about aging coverage unless and until he knows something about the aging process and the concomitant social causes and consequences of the elderly's problems. If society is really an entity made up of separate but functionally interrelated parts, interdisciplinary research is mandatory to get a better understanding of how society works.

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**APPENDIX**

**RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The New York Times

The Daily Oklahoman

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Section: \_\_\_\_\_ Page: \_\_\_\_\_ Column: \_\_\_\_\_

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Image: pos neg neu Role: act pas neu

Orientation: event issue hif

Subject Categories

Attention Score

Income	Headline: $\geq$ 2 cols	1
Health	> 1/2 # cols/pg	2
Housing	Position: above the fold? (1st line of body text)	1
Transportation		
Employment	Length: $\geq$ 3/4 col (incl head & pix)?	1
Retirement		
Demographic shifts	Location: PI, departmental, or section pg?	1
Crime	Total: _____	
Public policy		
Fraud		
Obit		
Ret Notice		
Annivers		
Age only		
Comments:	_____	
	_____	
	_____	

VITA<sup>2</sup>

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