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Age in the Press

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Introduction

Our world, and those of us who live in it, are getting older.

With a worldwide demographic transformation toward “an aging society” before us, new issues and thus new stories evolve that warrant widespread media coverage. But is the print media — arguably the eyes and ears of our society — taking due notice?

Newspapers try to reach out to people as readers, as consumers and as citizens.

In many regards, our lives flow through the press, since it is in the midst of our communities. But the press also contributes in its own choices of action to the creation of perceptions and awareness. People — of various age and experience — are creating newspapers, but are the newspapers created catering to the news and needs of all people, or only the needs of those in “desirable” demographic categories?

An aging society, and the issues that such a changing society brings, should affect the press in many arenas. It presents news as well as the potential to change news values. It affects the use of different media forms through the day. It will have an enormous impact on the economy. It changes living patterns and the most basic family interactions in ways

that strongly affect patterns of media consumption. It is perhaps the most important transition to cover during the course of this century.

Editorial leadership can make a difference. There are newspapers of higher and lower standards in the real world, and there must be room for improvement, especially when a new type of journalism clearly would be met with vivid interest from its readers.

This study tries to cover an aging society in relation to all these aspects of the press: its *internal* realities, its *commercial* relations and its *public* responsibilities.

1. An aging society

The most read secular book during the 20th century is Benjamin Spock's "Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care," a tome published in 1946 that has sold 50 million copies. If the past century was marked by the deliberation of the young, our present century will likely be characterized by the changes of the aging. We have just begun a demographic transformation into an age structure that is previously unknown in the history of mankind. It will not only put new demands on existing programs, like social security and other pension systems like it, but also imply deep cultural dynamics and redefinitions. It may be the single most important transformation of our time.

Four main factors combine to form this transformation:

1. An unusually large number of "baby boomers" are entering a stage in life that was considered "old" or "upper middle age." Countries in Europe and elsewhere have other labels for the same type of extra large generations.

2. Life expectancy continues to increase. Worldwide, the average expected life span was 46 years in 1950, 66 years in 2000. For every decade since 1950, 2.5 years have been added to life expectancy, one more year of life for every four years accumulated. This trend is likely to continue, according to UN population studies, since there is still much to be done to bring down child mortality among major populations on earth. Yet, even in countries where child mortality is low, life span continues to increase. This could be measured by calculating the remaining years of life at age 65. In Japan this figure has gone from 12 years in 1950 to 20 years in 2000. Countries like the United States and Sweden have had a slower rate of progress but still with an increasing remaining life span even at high ages. Nearly every change in the developed world now means an increase in expected longevity for people over age 60; with child mortality rates already pressed to extremely low levels. A new demographic analysis shows that a group of countries already in the top of the life span league — Japan, France and Sweden — have in fact accelerated their increase in maximum life span during recent decades.¹ Among Swedish males, average age at death increased by 2.5 years during the 1990s alone. At the AAAS conference in San Francisco, February 2001, the Danish demographer Kaare Christensen concluded that there is still no empirical limit in sight of the increase in life span. Healthier life styles, better nutrition, less damaging work environment, improved sanitary conditions and the invention of antibiotics are some of the vital factors initiating progress.² The new biomedical revolution, marked by the mapping of the human genome, will probably give new impetus by enriching our basic understanding of the causes of aging as well as providing new instruments of early detection and preventive drugs for people in danger of diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's.

3. Health span, the number of years we live in a fairly healthy condition increases as well. New long-term group studies in Sweden show that, among males in the age groups of 65 to 74 and 75 to 79, poor health is declining. Improvement among women is somewhat less significant but still apparent.³ S. Jay Olshansky at the University of Chicago has shown that the abolition or suspension of specific diseases have a rather minor effect on how long humans live.⁴ A “cancer-free society” — promised in the Democratic platform for the U.S. presidential election 2000 — would extend the average life by three years, an Alzheimer’s-free society by only a few months. Defeating all major diseases would add approximately 15 years to the average life span. That is of some importance, but the most noticeable advancement is in life quality — adding more healthy years with less worry regarding illness. That is clearly within reach, due to the combination of more knowledge on what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and inventing more preventive measures through better understanding of causalities, the role of genetics and pathways of diseases.

4. Reproduction rates are falling worldwide to lower levels than ever known. In many European countries, 1.2 children per woman has become a common figure, while a birth rate of 2.1 children per woman is needed for long-term population stabilization. Therefore, Europeans that qualify as “baby boomers” hold an increasingly larger share of the population.

See Table 1

The fall in total fertility rates is a worldwide phenomenon. In Asia, the average number of children per woman has declined from 5.9 to 2.6 during the last 50 years; in Latin

America, from 5.9 to 2.7; in North America, from 3.5 to 2.0 — still surprisingly high. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only exception.⁵

The sum of these four changes means a demographic transformation of dramatic proportion. Median age — the age which half of the population is above and half below — in the so-called developed world was 29 years in 1950. By 2000, the median age increased to 38 years, with an expectation to reach 46 years in 2050. Sweden and Norway had the oldest populations in 1990, with the United States among developed nations with a younger population. The difference can also be seen in this table on the proportion of the over 65 population in the United States, Massachusetts and Sweden from 1920 to 2010:

See Table 2

The picture is now changing, with a dramatic increase of elderly in Asia and parts of Latin America (an increase of 200 to 300 percent from 1990 to 2025), a strong increase in United States (100 percent) and a nominal increase in a small group of countries, including Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom.

See Diagram 1

This demographic transformation will have a considerable impact upon perceptions of age and of the sequencing of life. What does it mean to be 50, if your prospect for a

healthy remaining life is 50 instead of 25 years? What projects are seen as possible, given this new time frame? How do new types of life cycles affect the old stereotype of fixed life stairs, with man walking upward, reaching the top at 40 and then heading toward the grave in a predetermined uniform pattern? New types of life stages will likely be carved in this process. They could be called “second-dream age,” “mentor age,” etc. A new impetus will be given to the type of analysis of life stages presented by Carl Jung in “The Stages of Life,” by Eric Ericson in “The Life Cycle Completed” and by Roger Gould in “Transformations.” Even if demographics change slowly, some of its psychological effects might occur rather quickly, due to the phenomenon social scientists such as Robert Merton and others call “the shadow of the future” — your perception of the future is a reality today, since you base some of your most important actions and life planning upon it.

The demographic transformation has very real implications for *education* —lifelong instead of limited to the younger years; *the labor market* — shortage of professionals and a need to develop new forms of contracts, rehiring, etc; *civic life* — an enormous new resource for volunteerism; *family structures* and socialization mechanisms (what if we see five living generations instead of three); *immigration* — a competition in countries with labor shortages and falling populations to attract working age people instead of shutting them out; *political life, markets* — with “middlescence” taking over from youngsters as the strongest consumer group and, in some ways, also the trend-setting group.⁶ The transformation is fundamental, since it involves our basic structures and perceptions of life as such.

2. Age in the Press —the study

Media is affected in three different ways by the demographic transformation:

- a) *As organizations.* Age structure transforms among professionals. The age composition of journalists change in much the same way as was recently described for nurses.⁷ The average age of registered nurses in America increased from 37 years in 1983 to 42 years in 1998 to a predicted 45 years in 2010. Nurses under the age of 30 were 30 percent in 1983, 12 percent in 1998 and 9 percent in 2000. Aging in combination with restraint in the total number of employed, due to tougher competition and a stronger need to control costs, lead to an unnatural age composition, affecting the normal mentorship relations between generations in the craft. The proportion of professional daily newspaper staff members younger than 25 in the United States dropped from 10 percent in 1988 to 3 percent in 1998.⁸ Many journalists of the same generation also means relatively fewer career positions in middle age, affecting previously followed career patterns.
- b) *As markets.* If we look at newspapers, an increasing share of the readership will be reaching the upper level of middle age. Consider the population of Massachusetts, and the wider market of *The Boston Globe*, with age composition changes between 1990 and 2010 as shown in Diagram 4.

See Diagram 2

The number of people in the age range of 40 to 64 is expected to increase by 808,000.

The number of people in the age range of 20 to 39 is expected to decrease by 66,000.

This effect is enhanced by the fact that the upper middle age group also reads newspapers more frequently per thousand in population. They also have, on average, accumulated more wealth than younger generations, and will most likely have more time for consumption. A study on “Time Use at Older Ages,” a collection of empirical evidence from nine countries, showed that what is classified as “active leisure activities” — civic duties, sports, travels, visiting restaurants, theatres and cinemas, studying, reading books, papers and magazines — increases among men from 45 to 70 and remains at a high level for some years. Women show a somewhat different pattern, with a consistently high level of around 10 hours per day. The report concludes: “The results for men indicate that part of the time that used to be devoted to paid work is indeed reallocated to active leisure — at least until the age of 74.”⁹

Other reports show that the fastest growing age group now using the Internet is the upper-middle age.¹⁰

In both the important media markets — as readers/audiences and as consumers for advertising — the new “middlescence” seems to be increasing in importance for the media.

c) As *agenda setters* for public discourse. The strong realities of an aging society give a new impetus to old questions (such as pension systems and financing of long term care); change the nature of other questions (such as immigration and labor market) —and give rise to wholly new questions (such as lifelong education and the concept of “retirement.”)

The revolutionary breakthroughs in medicine also raise the need to address existential questions of substantial dimensions: like our cultural values vs. new “lifestyle” drugs; retirement as an age for fulfilling personal interests vs. involvement in common causes;

how we look upon prolonging our reproduction periods when new technologies make it possible for women to give birth to children at the age of 60.¹¹ The demographic transformation gives rise to an enormous set of interesting new realities and questions. For journalism there is a gold mine of stories waiting to be written, insights to be presented, reflections to be stimulated, public issues to be raised — important to society as a whole and of high interest to the readers. They are in need of good journalism.

This study looks into these three dimensions of aging and the press. I have chosen to focus on two leading quality newspapers with strong local anchoring in their regions: *The Boston Globe* of Boston and *Dagens Nyheter* of Stockholm. In the third dimension of content and public agenda setting, I have also made comparisons with the *San Francisco Chronicle* and, to a limited extent, *The New York Times*.

It could be argued that additional insights would be offered by bringing in a more diverse selection of media: from countries that are more different (perhaps Japan), and from televised media as well as print. Those arguments are valid. The chosen research design, however, makes it possible to go deeper into a limited selection of media and to see how editorial and managerial leaders in equal types of settings handle the same challenge.

Given the time restraint, I have used approximately four weeks to collect the empirical evidence, which has proven to be the most efficient way of doing the study. The material collected is mainly based on interviews with experienced journalists at the respective newspapers, editorial leaders, and executives in marketing and newspaper strategies. I have also conducted some statistical analysis, for example, of age composition of the editorial staff and editorial leadership. As to content, I have made statistical analysis over

a 10-year period with the help of the Lexus Nexus Library System. I have read through and classified all articles in the *Globe*, in *Dagens Nyheter* and in the *San Francisco Chronicle* containing the word “aging” in combination with “population or society” for the second half of 1992 and the second half of 2000. I have also scrutinized all articles in these three newspapers during one month, January 2001, in order to get a better feeling for structure and their journalism as a whole, and to find examples of stories and perspective in the field of an aging society.

I have been able to broaden the insights given from *The Boston Globe* and *Dagens Nyheter* by cooperating with Paul Kleyman in San Francisco, editor of *Aging Today*, a publication of the American Society on Aging, and coordinator of Journalists Exchange on Aging (JEOA), an informal group of nearly 650 media professionals aimed at “sharing information, resources, contacts and experience in the coverage of the emerging age beat.” Paul Kleyman has helped me tabulate some questions from a survey to American journalists “on the age beat” as well as introducing me to approximately 60 journalists in this field at the March 2001 National Conference on Aging in New Orleans.

3. Age and organization

The median journalist at *Dagens Nyheter* was born in the early 1950s, and is approaching his or her 50th birthday. The median age of journalists at *The Boston Globe* is slightly younger at 45. Both newspapers mirror the boom generations of their countries, those being born in the 1940s in Sweden, and in the 1950s in the United States. But both newspapers have an under-representation of young journalists, compared to their populations. Only 5 percent of journalists at *DN* and 6 percent at the *Globe* were born in

the 1970s, being 30 years old or younger. This is a typical expression of two general factors in media: a) people going into the profession today generally have a longer education, starting their careers at a later stage; b) traditional media organizations have gone through years of downscaling, not expansion, due to increased competition and with an eye toward profit levels. Forty-two percent of journalists at *Dagens Nyheter* are age 50 or older, and 32 percent at the *Globe* fall into that category.

But while journalists on average are older at *DN*, the editorial leaders are younger than at the *Globe*; 35 percent of the senior editing staff are younger than 40 at *DN*, none at the *Globe*! The editorial leadership at the *Globe* is dominated by “baby boomers” in the same narrow age range. Everyone, with the exception of the editor, is between the age of 43 and 54, while at *DN* there is a wide spread of ages in the editorial leadership and a stark difference toward the main group of journalists. While nearly 80 percent of the editorial leadership are younger than 50, 42 percent of all journalists — including the leadership — are older than 50.

See Table 3

This difference likely mirrors *DN*’s editorial shake-ups in recent years, partly due to economic challenges during the 1990s, as a financial bubble burst in the Swedish economy in 1989.

The difference is also shown in the rate of turnover of top editorial leaders. See Diagram 6.

See Diagram 3

In the 25 years from 1951 to 1975, only four persons at *DN* served as editors and/or executive editors with main responsibility for the news desk — a legally responsible editor and his deputy. During the next 25 years, from 1976 to 2000, 14 persons served in those top positions. The *Globe* also experienced a somewhat increased volatility — from four to seven persons — but not of the same magnitude.

See Table 4

The number of people leaving these top positions was only two during the first quarter century period, both at *DN* and the *Globe*. Average (median) age at departure was 60 at *DN*, and 70 at the *Globe*. During the next 25 years, 13 persons left the top positions at *DN*, five at the *Globe*. Average age at departure was down to 49 at *DN*, but still 62 at the *Globe*. We see a common change from stable to less stable years, from very long periods in charge (at least 20 years at the *Globe*) to shorter duration. Stability has, so far, mainly been preserved at the *Globe*. It is not a difficult forecast — in light of general tendencies and the *DN* experience — that the *Globe* will likely undergo a major change in its editorial leadership within a few years and during a time of recession. The change from family to corporate ownership makes it all the more likely. The *Globe* appears to be in a state of waiting for something big to happen.

Important differences aside, some age-related pressures go in the same direction at the two newspapers, and at newspapers in general. The staff is aging; and there are many journalists in older-age groupings. Newspapers feel a need to recruit more young people, while economic constraint prohibits expansion of staff. Increased competition and pace of change, as well as new management ideas, lead to a demand for “dynamic leadership” and “new energy” often associated with young, “energetic” business-like leaders also on the editorial staff.

These factors give rise to at least three types of internal problems or tensions:

1. *The professional life cycle problem.* Normally in an organization, people make “careers.” Many at the age of 40 have “advanced” to leadership of some manner, in higher or mid-management positions. They also fill mentorship roles, introducing the next generation into the culture and history of the organization, as well as transmitting tacit or overt knowledge about the craft. Both of these factors — career and socialization — get disturbed if the age distribution is distorted. There are few career positions in relation to the size of the groups. And there are few apprentices in relation to the number of potential mentors. In many organizations, this tends to lead to discontent.¹²

Newspapers seem to differ in this respect, though. My interviews with journalists in the upper middle-age range, at *DN* and the *Globe* as well as others, do not show disappointment with a lack of “career.” The basic reason is the professional value system. Journalists want to write, and the most respected journalists are those considered to be the best reporters and writers. The prospect of a managerial position is often seen more as an unavoidable suffering than something to strive for. Reporters or columnists involved in important subject areas — such as health care, politics, education, communities — get

much of their stimulation and confirmation from readers and professionals in their fields. If journalists are “esteem maximizers,” they usually do not require hierarchy in order to feel esteemed, or even admired, by colleagues and communities. Lately, newspapers have also been inventive in creating career roles that do not demand hierarchy: “senior” reporters, “mentoring” journalists, internal teachers on how to write or specialize in subject areas, etc.

2. *Generational tensions*. It is natural for a new generation to revolt against the customs of the preceding one, and for the mature generation to be critical against values, judgement and responsibility of the following generation. Some of this sentiment is found in my interviews with senior journalists, but less than I expected (admittedly, I have not interviewed younger journalists about their view on seniors in the editorial staffs).

“Young journalists are often knowledgeable, write well and work hard, but they often lack a deeper purpose, just ‘want to be something within media,’ ” said one senior reporter at *Dagens Nyheter*. NBC’s Tom Brokaw expressed himself in nearly the same words at the Theodore White seminar at the Shorenstein Center in February 2001.

“Younger journalists want to do things fast, not to check facts and make fact finding research to the same degree that we do. They also put less emphasis into well written articles and accept that more jobs are done by telephone or the Internet, less by going outside the paper in order to learn,” said a senior *DN* reporter.

But on the whole, I have found an acceptance from senior journalists, not only of the need to bring in the next generation of journalists, but also to work with them. There is no widespread criticism of younger journalists among the older ones and no deep feelings of antagonism. Older journalists still find an interest among newcomers to learn from those

with more experience. Mature journalists also understand the importance for the future of newspapers to reach out to younger readers.

3. *Senior journalists vs. management values.* This is the one tension that emerges strongly throughout my interviews. The more concrete basis for it is twofold:

One has to do with *downsizing*. Cuts at both the *Globe* and *DN*—like at so many other newspapers - have been directed toward senior journalists, who have been offered a variety of buyout packages. *DN* went through two waves of cuts in personnel during the 1990s, giving buyout offers to journalists over the age of 55; the latest occurring in January 2001 and given to everybody over the age of 58. *DN* pays 75 percent of salary from the age of 60 to the normal retirement age of 65. A majority of those over 58 accepted. At the *Globe*, offers have been more subtle for legal reasons, but with the same basic approach. Many senior reporters have found the offers generous and have left on good conditions, happy to start anew on a freelance basis, sometimes working with even more energy than before. But no matter how these offers were received at an individual level, they are viewed as an expression of attitude from the newspaper's leadership that they are searching for "new blood" and not giving value to "experience." "It has been clear that management simply wants older journalists to leave," said a senior special reporter at *DN*. "There is a strong focus on the young, and in recruiting younger journalists. Managers worry that the paper is not in tune with the young. They also find younger journalists more manageable, easier to work with than senior journalists of stature," said one mid-management journalist at the *Globe*. "The management tendency is clear: 'Clean the house, get cheaper and more controllable younger journalists: management has been talking about 'the dinosaurs', people over 40-50,'" said a senior

special reporter at the *Globe*. “It makes a big difference when we have recruited compliant younger journalists,” said a top editorial manager at the *Globe*.

The other issue has to do with *journalistic values*. Senior journalists have the impression that content has become much less important than it used to be, and that new management styles distort a focus on good journalism. “The problem is not so much caused by mid-management being younger, but more by a pressure from above into a new ‘rational’ management style, in which the purpose of the paper is declared in the form of written strategy documents, and process and market mean more than content,” said a senior special reporter at the *Globe*. “Management style contains a completely new language, brought in from the general management literature and business schools. It’s a mixture of process language and psychology. It’s also a greater emphasis on costs. The style is totally different from what it was, not as much journalistically driven as before. No soul of fire from the editorial leadership,” said one senior reporter at *DN*. “New leadership are managerially inclined, drawing in consultants, etc. They are less interested in content and also more uncertain in their journalistic direction, waiting for others to make themselves felt or for surveys to tell them what to do,” said a senior columnist at the *Globe*. “What mature journalists and reporters tend to react against is not their young colleagues or that the paper wants to reach out to young readers, but the increasingly managerial perspective at a newspaper, not recognizing the self-esteem and important role of experienced and very knowledgeable reporters,” said a recently retired top manager at the *Globe*.

The explanation often given by senior people at the *Globe* is the change of ownership. *The New York Times* Company took over in 1993 and has, after an initial five-year period, stepped in more heavily. This is perceived as having increased economic pressure. “When the publisher and the owner were the same and placed in the same building, it was possible to go to them, present a good project and hope that they would accept the effect on costs. Now, the owners demands are given from outside. It’s a new distance. ‘You have to produce the numbers,’ ” said a senior mid-manager at the *Globe*. But the criticism among senior journalists is exactly the same at *Dagens Nyheter*, which has not gone through any change of ownership.

The frustration among experienced journalists is strongly expressed by a well-known, senior special reporter at the *Globe*: “Nearly no good writers above the age of 40 to 45, who don’t want to take administrative assignments, feel at home anymore. In the new management culture they treat you like children. Mature, professional reporters don’t feel recognized for their expertise and professionalism. It is no longer ‘the writers paper’ and the new management style has created a climate of anti-creativity.”

4. Age and markets

The Boston Globe and *Dagens Nyheter* find themselves in about the same market situation. They are traditional quality morning newspapers, bearing a long and proud liberal history (the *Globe* born in 1872, *DN* in 1864) and strongly anchored in booming high-tech regions (Boston and Stockholm). In spite of their strong positions, the feeling of vulnerability is increasing. In the readers market, they meet competition from new media and over peoples’ use of time. In the advertising market, they fear loss of

important revenues to the Web in certain types of advertising (jobs, housing, travels and auto) that are also crucial for the instrumental value of the paper to readers (*news, views* and *use* as three functions of a newspaper). The *Globe* has seen a decline in circulation from 504,000 daily in 1995 to 470,000 in 2000, a loss of 34,000. *Dagens Nyheter* has met a decline from 382,000 daily in 1995 to 369,000 in 2000, a loss of 13,000. Of the daily circulation of *DN*, 96 percent is subscribed. The *Globe* depends more on sale of single copies, having a weekday subscription rate of 72 percent.

Interviews with top editors as well as leading managers in charge of marketing and strategies make it clear that the “middlescence” population segment has been out of focus at both *DN* and the *Globe*. Other categories have been given priority for making changes and expending energy. When I asked top managers at the *Globe* to describe their market focus in recent years, they came up with the following:

- a) *The young*. “We don’t want to lose the young Internet generation, ages 18 to 34, and the advertising directed to it,” said a vice president at the *Globe*. “Youth and their readership habits have been the main concern.” “18-34 has always been in the focus and still is,” said a top editorial manager at the *Globe*.
- b) *High-tech people*. When asked to correlate it to age, the answer has been “professional people moving into the region at ages of around 25 to 40.” This has to do with a fear of losing people “on the move” in a region characterized by highly educated professionals moving in and out.

- c) *Geography*. In the new economic geography, a newspaper must observe new patterns of settlement, commuting and dynamics. In Boston, it's important for the *Globe* to reach out to expanding areas to the west of the city.
- d) *The non-college population*. There is a fear that the type of omnibus paper, taking a central position in the community as a whole that both the *Globe* and *DN* represents, would be undermined if large population categories like immigrants stop to read the newspaper.
- e) *Women*. There is a concern that the newspaper is written in a way that attracts fewer women than men. At both the *Globe* and *DN* market studies have alerted the editorial leadership about this tendency.

The list at *Dagens Nyheter* is quite similar. *DN* is conducting a very ambitious project to categorize every subscriber according to two main variables: age and education. This results in a number of “segments” — young people with higher education, young people with lower education, etc. — and the result is a detailed analysis to target and better understand a specific market, framed in terms of demography. The basic idea behind this segmentation is to find “breaking points” in peoples’ life cycle, to be aware of and influence crucial moments: when you move away from home; when you move to another city; when you leave college for your first job; when you form a family; after a divorce; when kids leave home, etc. Among the segments, priority at *DN* has been given to three categories: a) students, b) young people entering the job market (often coming to a big city from a smaller city), and c) highly educated people age 35 to 45 (due to competition for these groups of readers with another quality paper, the conservative *Svenska Dagbladet*). Special in-depth studies are also carried out on a geographical basis, as to

new patterns of commuters in the greater Stockholm area, people living in cities one or two hours away but perceiving Stockholm as their cultural center, known as “mental Stockholmers.”

To analyze risks or opportunities in different sub-populations is not the same as compiling a newspaper. The market perspective should be competing with a publishing perspective. Editors should have ideas of their own regarding their newspaper, what message to convey, what to expand upon and what areas to emphasize, no matter what the market research dictates.

In fact, the relationship between market pressure and journalistic output is closer now than it has been in many years. With circulation down and important advertising revenues threatened, editorial leaders have also become more attentive to market needs. Their increasing managerial style and language have brought the different cultures at a newspaper closer. Marketing and business people at the newspapers refer to “a new openness” from editors. Common planning groups for different projects, including mid-management journalists, are now the rule.

The steps taken to incorporate a market need to a change in content has also been shortened. At the *Globe*, for example, emphasis on young readers has led to more content about music, specific sports, a calendar for events, and new high-tech coverage with an “18 to 35 targeting” according to one top editorial manager. Emphasis on young professionals has led to an enlarged business section and much more about technology. Leisure, arts and travel have been added “for a younger, more active audience” said one vice president. The ambition to reach the new high-tech areas has contributed to zoning,

adding local material and sections to the paper (these new areas have been surprisingly hard to reach for the *Globe*, probably due to a combination of competition from local community papers and from *The New York Times*, professional magazines and the Web). The threat to important advertising markets emerging from the Web has inspired new journalistic efforts to create a more attractive editorial environment for ads, thereby preserving the printed paper as the leading market place for housing, recruitment and cars.

The same holds true for *Dagens Nyheter*. One example is the important special event supplement published each Friday, “*DN Pa Stan*” (*DN In the City*), containing comprehensive calendars of movies, theaters, museums and restaurants. This useful supplement was changed several years ago from having a middle-age appeal into a much younger one in language, coverage and symbolism.

Here we have a segment of the population and market for newspapers — people between the age of 45 and 70 — which is characterized by the following:

- It’s an extensive group.
- It is increasing in numbers more rapidly than any other group.
- It has a high media interest.
- Its members also, on average, are able to allocate more time and possess more economic resources than most other groups.

This group, however, has been largely ignored in market strategies at the newspapers I have studied. How do we explain this mystery?

The best explanation seems to be that people in this group are taken for granted. They have not been expected to stop reading or to move to the Web. They are simply there, a loyal core of readers who require limited attention. People of age 45 and older constitute 52 percent of daily *Boston Globe* readers in Boston, 48 percent of daily *DN* readers in Stockholm (6 and 3 percentage points, respectively, more than their share of the general population).¹³ They are, on average, more loyal as newspaper readers, as shown by a “Loyalty Study” carried out by the *Globe*. A larger share of readers in this group compared to younger groups agree with the sentence “While I may rely on a variety of news and information sources, *The Boston Globe* is the one source I can’t do without.”¹⁴ Still, it’s a question of degree. Not all people older than 45 are certain about their choice of newspaper. *DN*, with its more sophisticated methodology for keeping track of its subscribers, has discovered some tendencies among upper middle-age people to stop subscribing to the paper once their children leave home. *DN* is now exploring this new phenomenon in depth. It might have to do with a general change of life, perhaps moving out to the summer house, becoming less professionally concerned, etc.¹⁵ It’s still a small group, but it points to the possibility that the “baby boomers” may not remain as steady and permanently in their customs and life patterns as was previously believed.

On television, companies are willing to pay a higher price for advertising in programs that appeal to a younger audience than in programs intended for a mature audience, affecting the production costs for different types of TV programs. The foundation for this pricing seems to be set by stereotypes, expressed in sentences such as, “Get them to buy when they’re young, you’ll get them for life,” “The young will try new things,” and “The old are set in their ways.” These types of “truths” are abundant. A small example: the

Wall Street Journal reported on Oct. 24, 2000, in a page one story that NBC had lost ground in competition for “the coveted 18 to 49 age group.” “In the past three years, the median age of NBC’s audience has risen to 45 from 41, a bad omen for advertising revenues.”¹⁶ At a seminar at the Shorenstein Center on April 17, 2001, ABC Nightline Executive Producer Tom Bettag declared: “The biggest problem in television is that older people are so badly served. Advertisers believe that they are stuck in their values. Television is not interested in any person above 49, even when these people are getting so much larger as a group.”

An article with the headline “Senior Spending” in *American Advertising* (Winter 1999/2000), a publication of the American Advertising Federation, cites findings of a 1999 Princeton study. The study shows that seniors are “neither frugal nor set in their ways” and spend “more time considering new brands and products than other age groups.” Asked by *Aging Today* what might change the practice in television advertising of paying less for audiences consisting of older viewers, Landon Jones, who coined the term “baby boomer” and is a former vice president at Time, Inc., answered: “It’s just a question of getting certain attitudes turned around.”

The same could be said about management at newspapers: they have so far neglected or taken for granted an age group which they will be forced to reckon with.

5. Age and content

How much is written about “an aging society” and with what perspectives?

Diagram 7 gives the general picture over time. A full-text search of Lexus-Nexus shows the number of articles containing the word “aging” in combination with “population” or “society.”

See Diagram 4

Two main observations can be made:

- a) There is a tendency toward an increased number of articles in this field over the last decade, but the trend is not strong and, at best, it’s inconsistent. Seemingly arbitrary variations appear from year to year. Other studies have revealed that there is not a strong correlation between the size of a problem and its degree of coverage in the press.¹⁷ Media can pay considerable attention to crime or the environment or to people falling outside the current health care system when these problems have diminished, but neglect similar problems when they take a turn for the worse. This is partly due to a media tendency of living in a symbiotic relationship with political actors framing a problem in familiar terms, as well as variations on the more general “feel good” factor in society.
- b) There are at least three different types of morning newspapers. *The New York Times* is outstanding. It has produced approximately twice as many articles as any of the other papers through this period. The *San Francisco Chronicle* has been a newspaper guided by a lower level of ambition, writing less than half as many as *The Boston Globe*. This statement about the *San Francisco Chronicle* is also supported by other observations. It is all the more striking since San Francisco is

one of America's leading regions for research and organizations in the field of aging (the Buck Institute on Aging, the American Society on Aging, Age Wave, Geron Corporation, Cynthia Kenyon lab on aging at UCSF, Elisabeth Blackburn's and Leonard Hayflick's pioneering research on the Telomere mechanism at UCSF). Hardly any newspaper has a wider range of stories in its immediate proximity relating to the field of aging, if it only bothered to look. *The Boston Globe* and *Dagens Nyheter* form another category between *The New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*: they are not equally as ambitious as the *Times* and not as meager as the *Chronicle*.

What about perspective? Diagram 8 shows an "aging gloom index," constructed as the quota between articles combining "aging" with "cost or problem," and articles combining "aging" with "progress or opportunities."

See Diagram 5

In general, over time, approximately three articles of the first type are published for every article of the second type. Except for the totally arbitrary *San Francisco Chronicle*, we can discover a certain decrease of gloom. *The Boston Globe*, for example, has gone from a gloom ratio of about 3.5 in the early 1990s to 2.5 in recent years. For the *Globe*, as well as for *The New York Times* and *Dagens Nyheter*, 2000 was the least gloomy year in aging reporting during the 10-year period studied. As seen in Diagram 9, there is a marked increase in articles with a more positive perspective from the last five years.

See Diagram 6

This is interesting since it is, to some degree, counter-intuitive. The problems of trust funds for pensions and Medicare in America — and fears around the long-term funding for them — are coming closer as “baby boomers” approach retirement. Still, reporting has, on the whole, not become more gloomy. One explanation is probably that optimism about the nation’s economy, as well as budget surpluses, have affected the perception of an aging society. Perspectives in a particular field of journalism seem to be a side effect of the general societal climate of optimism or pessimism. The problem perspective of the fact that people live longer and healthier is still prevailing, but less so than a decade earlier.

This observation from the “aging gloom index” is supported by a detailed study of all articles combining “aging” and “society or population” in the *Globe*, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Dagens Nyheter* during the second half of 1992 and the second half of 2000. I have classified these articles into three categories of perspective. One is “*traditional*,” that is a traditional type of articles about the cost problem of an aging population, etc. The other is “*new*,” giving non-traditional perspectives of the types of dynamics in the labor market, education, volunteerism and biomedical research that I described in Chapter 1. The third category is “*neutral*,” such as articles supporting facts on census figures. I must emphasize that this classification does not in itself contain any value judgement. To describe the problem of financing long-term care and the funding

challenges of Medicare is a legitimate and even urgent journalistic task. The purpose of the classification is to review whether reporting on an aging society has raised new questions by the demographic transformation. As can be seen from Diagrams 10, 11 and 12, that is increasingly so. Articles marked by a “new” perspective are still not numerous, but they are more frequent in the year 2000 than in 1992.

See Diagram 7

The Boston Globe shows one interesting variation. Already in 1992, the number of articles marked by a “new” perspective exceeded those of a “traditional” perspective. The reason becomes clear upon reading the articles of Judy Foreman. As a pioneering reporter, with unusual knowledge and clear-sightedness, she started a new type of reporting as well as columns on aging, and she did so on her own initiative. Ms. Foreman wrote a long and interesting piece about “the stages of life,” starting with the work of Erik Erikson. She introduced the column “Aging”, appearing twice monthly; “a column geared to everyone from mid-life Baby Boomers through centenarians” which “will offer an authoritative view of medical, psychological and social issues.” She wrote a series of articles in three parts about the new research on longevity: “Longer Life, The Next Frontier”. She also inspired others. Dick Knox, one of America’s best medical reporters, made his mark. Others wrote about new ways of connecting generations, new types of living after retirement, new volunteerism, and new insights about nutrition and exercise. (“Ageism is a complicated form of discrimination, but it involves the assumption that the old simply can’t do certain tasks because of their advancing age. In study after study, Dr.

Evans proves that the more you move, the longer you're able to move. 'Outmoded ideas about aging and what it signifies still pervade our society. Aren't nursing homes often called rest homes? The name implies that older people are only capable of one thing — a long, leisurely snooze.' According to Evans, nothing could be further from the truth." As published in *The Boston Globe* Nov. 14, 1992.)

The "new" perspective articles in 2000 were about labor shortage (the importance of helping boomers keep working), new volunteerism, community programs for "computer rooms" and other activities, older people helping younger people in computing, progress in biotechnology, senior fine art shows, role models (interview with George F. Kennan: "He's a vibrant intellectual figure still. Kennan, 96, endures: as maker of history, scholar of history, American sage.")

Of the *San Francisco Chronicle* there is not much to be said. The number of articles with a "new" perspective increased from four to six from the second half of 1992 to the second half of 2000.

See Diagram 8

In 1992 the "new" type of articles included technology for helping elders, home design, myths about age and sex, and older women as models in advertising. At the same time, the *Chronicle* also contains some expressions of ageism. ("A large part of the population is aging, and so will naturally tend to eschew their energetic youthful pleasures in favor of more home-bound delights." "Baby boomers are a significant portion of the

population. I think they're pretty powerful. And I see them aging," says 24-year old Wendy Tanquary, on staff of the public information office of the University of California at Santa Cruz. "And I hope they'll age right out of the job market and it'll open up for us.")

In 2000, the "new" articles are about fitness in mid-life, the need for increased immigration in Europe because of labor shortage and the tendency toward a prolonged reproduction period. On Nov. 26, 2000, the *Chronicle* introduces a new columnist "on seniors and senior issues" in its Sunday paper, the 87-year-old David Steinberg. He starts off with the declaration, "The mission of every writer on aging is to defy ageist stereotypes, reject myths and delete damaging clichés about aging." Steinberg finishes his article by the following statement about the *Chronicle*: "The *Chronicle* over the years has covered aging only by covering survivors of the 1906 earthquake. More goes on in the field of aging in San Francisco than in any other city in the country except Washington, D.C."

See Diagram 9

Dagens Nyheter in 1992 had stories about elder people staying healthier and new types of living. In a series of articles, *DN* described new opportunities for "positive aging."

In 2000, the "new" articles were about progress in science, the postmodern patient and the distribution of time through life. A main focus was the new labor market, with the need to reorganize work life in order to make use of older people's resources. *DN* also initiated a debate about ageism in research, by publishing an article by a group of

professors over the age of 65. Arvid Carlsson, the Nobel Laureate still innovative in brain research, was presented as a role model.

I have concentrated on presenting the character of articles in the category of “new” perspectives. But I should add that articles in the category of “traditional” in the three newspapers contain no major effort of addressing other fields of importance, i.e. the crisis in long-term health care and the hard struggle of relatives to care for their loved ones. Bill Moyers’ important PBS documentary “On Dying,” aired in the fall of 2000, could have served as impetus for such an effort.

A comprehensive British study from 1999 on newspaper journalism on “older people”¹⁸ concluded:

“1. There are relevant stories in quantity. Older people and the big issues facing society are not neglected.

2. The British press is providing coverage for many of the main issues that affect older people (for example in relation to pensions and NHS).

3. It has not updated its concept of what stories are worth telling about older people themselves. They mostly depict older people as victims, especially victims of crime.

Excepting the odd bungee-jumping granny here and there, and the elder statesmen and women in the news (noble, tedious or villainous as the case may be) older people are frail objects of pity. The headlines and stories about them are typically expressed in tired and predictable words.... We are suggesting that news values need to be more imaginative

and diverse. The current image is an old-fashioned one, and the language in which it is expressed is frankly in need of a makeover.”

Much the same could be said of my content analysis. I would not express myself as positive on the coverage of relevant problems. On the other hand, the newspapers studied contained more of the new perspectives on aging than what was found in the British study.

In order to get a better feeling for the totality of the three newspapers studied and the context of articles referring to aging, I have also read all issues of *The Boston Globe*, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Dagens Nyheter* during one month: January 2001.

The first “correction” coming from that effort is the realization that little is published on the subject, in relation to the total mass of texts. One month of detailed reading of all issues of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, including Sunday editions, results in close to nothing. The new technology pages on Mondays, focusing on biotech, touch upon biomedical progress. Only one news article is about Medicare and prescription drugs. *Dagens Nyheter* initiates a debate about long-term care insurance, starting with an article by the director of the social insurance agency. *DN* also publishes a series of articles about relatively young people hit by dementia. “Insidan,” the special part in the paper on existential types of issues, writes a major story with strong reader response about the generation born in the 1930s. The housing section writes about “planning to live as elderly.” On the Sunday page for household economy, a columnist makes a peculiar analysis about the danger of people living longer, under the headline, “Increased life span

not only positive.” The theme is that people living longer will mean lower pensions.

“Let’s keep our fingers crossed that the large cohorts born in the 40s are wise enough to die in time.”

The Boston Globe contains a few dispersed news stories on Medicare and medicine, not more than two or three during a week. Two news stories of significant potential are treated as insignificant. The first is published in a one-column headline; “Officers sue State Police to limit age.” The first paragraph of the article says: “Complaining that they are being held back by aging Massachusetts State Police officers holding onto high-ranking jobs into their 60s, a group of younger officers yesterday filed a federal lawsuit urging a judge to resurrect a state law that would force officers to retire at age 55.” The *Globe* relegates this important story inside its City & Region section. The other story is about a 56-year-old woman giving birth to a child after in vitro fertilization. In a separate story the next day, it is mentioned that more women over the age of 40 have children in Massachusetts, but the wider implications of a longer reproductive period are not covered. This is a general impression, that the central news desk and editorial leadership seldom observe the great potential of stories in the field of aging.

At times, the *Globe* has published small stories by columnist Don Murray under the label, “Over 60”. They are well written, but focus on illness or melancholic reflections of times gone by (“I felt the passing melancholy the way you feel the shadow of a cloud that makes the sun seem brighter, warmer when the cloud is gone,” wrote Murray in the Jan. 23, 2001 issue of the *Globe*).

One observation from the *Globe* is that role models for active elder people are frequently and interestingly presented in the living arts section. This section overflows with positive

examples of mature artists and writers worth embracing. George McGovern has written a new important book at 78. Celia Cruz, the queen of salsa at 76, “keeps on moving.” Van Morrison presents “a fountain of youth” in his performance. “When 81-year-old Ruben Gonzales shuffled to the grand piano with the help of musical director Jesus Aguaje Ramos, the crowd gave the pianist an ovation before a single note was played....

Although she was given third billing on the marquee, Omara Portuondo easily stole the show. Emerging after Gonzalez’s set in a glittering purple pantsuit, the 70-year-old former Tropicana dancer showed she hasn’t forgotten any of her steps as she kicked up her heels on the lively ‘Donde Estabas Tu?’”

Another general observation from my reading is that few articles on an aging society focus directly on the issues. Aging and the generational transformation is not at the core of what the papers want readers to see. It pops up occasionally as an aspect of something else. “Walgreens target aging boomers in expansion strategy,” reports the Business section (*Globe* Jan. 21, 2001). “So as boomers age, and Ford works at one end of the spectrum to attract new young buyers, it also must attempt to lure to its auto lineup aging boomers, offering adventure and youthful appeal, even while considering factors like vision, dexterity, mobility and weight,” writes the Automotive section. The Boston Works section reports, under the headline “Extreme measures hiring, Managers are doing whatever it takes to snag recruits”: “It’s a market that hiring specialists — citing birth patterns and the aging baby boomer population — say will remain tight even if the economy slows.... It’s about doing what you have to do to find the best person for the job,” said Ryan who is vice president of human resources for the company, “Nothing is

really strange anymore.... I've seen more changes in the last three years than I've seen in 17 combined, and I think I'll continue to see more changes." This is an interesting trend in newspapers to create stories in order to establish an environment for important advertising markets, like housing and job recruitment. These sections, though basically motivated by ads, may also provide space for stories with interesting perspectives supplementing the traditional news stereotypes and increasing the diversity of journalism. A surprisingly large part of "new" perspective stories, in the *Globe* especially, make an inroad through the local weekly editions for the areas of greater Boston. It's obviously not part of any concerted effort from the editorial leadership; it just happens that the paper stands there in its local presence and cannot completely avoid to report on changes taking place in communities, although they are seldom placed in any wider context.

This impression is strongly supported by interviews at the newspapers. The general description given is that isolated articles have been published, but that no broader discussion has taken place at the papers studied on how to cover the demographic transformation. At *Dagens Nyheter*, the most experienced medical reporter, Kerstin Hellbom, who holds a strong interest in the field, was recently bought out at the age of 58. At the *Globe*, both the experienced special reporters in the field, Judy Foreman and Dick Knox, were encouraged to leave in the year 2000, causing an immediate negative effect on coverage. Judy Foreman is busy as a syndicated writer on the same issues, and Dick Knox has appeared as a respected medical reporter of National Public Radio. Neither of them has been replaced in their specific areas at the *Globe* (though Judy Foreman continues to write a regular health column). No one is currently assigned to

cover the field of aging, and the editorial interest in the topic is less than it was 10 years ago.

Results from the national survey of journalists on “the age beat” is also interesting in this respect. Paul Kleyman, coordinator of this network of journalists and of the survey, has tabulated the results for newspaper journalists in America for my study. The final results of the survey will appear in the Fall 2001 issue of *Age Beat*, the newsletter of the network. Thirty-eight daily newspaper staff reporters and editors engaged in aging coverage have answered the survey, in September or November 2000. Seventy-two percent report that they initiated coverage of aging at their news organization (just like Judy Foreman did at the *Globe*), and 92 percent said they have experienced issues on aging themselves through their families, and nearly all said this personal experience affected their journalistic perspective.

The total of 152 responses (including respondents from television, radio and magazines) show that journalists in this field are, as Paul Kleyman puts it, “seasoned and sensitized to issues of growing older.” The typical American reporter covering issues on aging is a woman (61 percent of responses) who has been a professional journalist for more than 22 years and has produced stories on aging during the past 8.5 years for at least part of her editorial work. When asked to list their most important stories in the field of aging, around half say it is related to health (health care, family care-giving, health delivery, health finance, health policy) while the other half is not. Journalism on aging “is wide ranging and cannot be easily lumped into set expectations,” concludes Paul Kleyman.

Four out of 10 of the respondents answer “no” to the question of whether they feel “most other reporting you see/hear on these issues is accurate and balanced.”

Coverage of aging is still highly driven by individual journalists of seniority and experience, on occasions indirectly supported by editors with some personal experiences of a sensitizing nature.

Reporters and columnists in this field are rewarded mainly by the strong response from their readers, which compensates for a lack of understanding at the editorial staff level.

Listening to reports from approximately 60 journalists in the field at the National Conference on Aging in New Orleans in March 2001, I found one worry to be shared by many: that an economic downturn in the advertising market, combined with more severe demands for profit in times of recession, will lead to further cuts in the available space for aging coverage. Maureen West of the *Arizona Republic*, speaking for many, said, “Space is getting shorter. The newspaper formats are getting smaller. In the past a lot of my stories were 45 inches, now 30 inches is a long story, and probably 20 inches is becoming normal. Everything has to have a news peg.”¹⁹

As one reporter on aging put it in New Orleans, “I have such great stories to tell, and so little and shrinking space in which to tell them.”

6. Conclusions

Newspapers live in intense interaction with different circles of life. There is the *news* arena (how much is happening of significance to report, to a public finding stories worth their attention?), the *media* arena (what are competitors doing and what new media forms are making their way?), the *economic* arena (what happens to consumption and

advertising and what can readers afford?) and the *demographic* arena (are the number of households increasing or decreasing, are people steady or on the move, what are the regular habits of the mornings when it comes to everything from breakfast to computing, what are the ages of people, where and how do they live and what are their personal identities?). The demographic transformation labeled “an aging society” is important, not least because it affects the press through all these arenas. It presents news as well as the potential to change news values. It affects the use of different media forms through the day. It will have an enormous impact, in various ways, on the economy. It changes living patterns and the most basic family interactions in ways that strongly affect patterns of media consumption. As mentioned in the introduction, it is, in itself, perhaps the most important transition to cover during the course of this century.

Against this background it has been surprising to find that almost no attention has been given to the demographic transformation at the newspapers studied. That is the case in spite of the fact that newspapers of this size are managed with a high degree of professionalism, marked for example by intense use of market studies.

- In their *internal* organization, the main objective has been to dispose of upper-middle-age employees, irrespective of their expertise, in order to be able to recruit younger people.
- In their *market strategies*, focus has been on meeting threats from the Web and from new generations. Core readers in their middlescence have been taken for granted and viewed as not worth paying attention to. Their dramatic increase in numbers as readers in the coming years, and what those numbers mean for the

character of journalism in possible weekend events supplements, has not been considered at all. Media believing that baby boomers can be taken for granted in their habits and choices, no matter what value journalism adds to their use of time, could be in for a rude awakening.

- In *journalism*, changes emanating from the demographic transformation have made a certain inroad, but on the whole, not as a result of conscious initiatives from the top. Those initiatives have gone in different directions. There are two other major signs of lack of awareness at the top. The first is the obvious inability to see the news value for the front-page stories related to aging and research. The other is the lack of effort on the editorial pages to bring the new agenda of the demographic transformation to the forefront of public discussion.

The absence of initiatives seems to be related to other obsessions: to reach the young; to attract the early career people in high tech; to secure threatened advertising markets; and to be better anchored in certain geographical areas.

The lack of front page interest and opinion page focus seem to be more related to a phenomenon on which a distinction developed by the British sociologist Steven Lukes could cast light (Steven Lukes: "Power: A Radical View," 1974). Lukes points to three dimensions of power:

1. Power of *decision making by political actors*; how are the issues handled that are already in the political process?
2. Power over *non-decisions*, what reaches the political agenda (what is called "agenda setting?")

3. Power over *thinking*. How are perceptions framed and perspectives created?

There is a strong tendency in both news selection and editorial agenda to stay at the number one level. That's where the most visible actors are, the obvious struggles and conflicts. That's also where "events" are taking place, easy to define because they have a clear start and finish during a limited time period and thereby can be described as a "story" in news terms. They are not gradual processes like global warming or an aging society.

What we would demand from quality journalism is to consciously consider the remaining levels two and three, rather independently from the daily activities at the most visible news scenes. What societal changes of fundamental long-term importance are going on? What stereotypes in perspectives should be analyzed or challenged? What is not observed but should be brought up for public discussion? What goes on in people's lives, below the surface? Relevant newspaper journalism of this sort could also help the press to stay in a crucial position in the wider media system, since it would be less sensitive for time competition from media like radio, television and the Web.

In this lies the main deficiency: in conscious agenda setting based on good analysis; and in discovering and describing important realities in need of being presented with some fresh perspectives. These types of efforts demand more. But in the field of the new demography, it should be easy since numerous factors combine to create an attraction for ambitious journalism:

- Readers are interested and it's close to their lives.

- Markets are huge and constantly growing.
- Citizens and officials should be helped to consider the challenges and opportunities coming from transformed realities.

Most of all, the field is filled with exciting stories for journalism to discover.

What could be done? The field of an “aging society” might suffer from a lack of institutional bias in its favor in the newsroom. Few newspapers have special reporters on “aging” or “demography” or “generations” as they have on “economy,” “crime,” “environment” and “city hall.” Evidence shows that one or two engaged reporters could make a tremendous difference; the more they learn and the more they widen their circles of contacts, the better stories they discover and bring into awareness at their paper. This points to the importance for editorial leaders to think through what biases they want to promote in the newsroom.

At the same time, it must be said that other identity perspectives, like race and gender, have found their way into the media without much of an institutional editorial bias. The reason may be that those perspectives are more coupled to definitions and divisions on the political scene and, consequently, more easily fed by impetus from actors at that scene. But “aging” is not without its organizations either, and it may be that journalism on the demographic transformation is an idea whose time has come.

Still, the analysis in this paper points to a wider problem, which could be given the label “narrow perspectives.” Front page editors and others sitting in the newsroom, making crucial decisions on selection and presentation, may easily get caught in certain stereotypes of what is “news,” leading to a tendency of overestimating the importance of

“being first with the obvious” instead of presenting new types of important stories. Editorial leaders are — as Nieman Fellows Director Bob Giles observed in a speech in April 2001 — more and more drawn into management at their papers, and increasingly selected because of their perceived management skills more than their intellectual background. People from business schools make their inroads, at the expense of writers and broader intellectuals. This is part of a process of “professionalization” at newspapers, increased cost pressure and the merger of cultures.

It seems to be important for newspapers to reverse this tendency of narrowness, during years when simply being “first with news” could not be the main competitive advantage, nor the crucial societal contribution, of the printed press. People in strategic positions in selection and presentation in the newsroom should be stimulated to broaden their perspectives by conscious programs for visiting research institutions, as well as widening their repertoire of concepts and perceptions. One small, but not insignificant, factor would be to physically bring back newspapers to city centers from the isolated suburbs where they now often dwell (that goes for both *The Boston Globe* and *Dagens Nyheter*.) With all the information on the screen, it is now dangerously easy to spend day after day as a journalist without seeing anything outside the newsroom.

A conscious effort should also be made to create links between the three levels of Steven Lukes. My reading, especially of *The Boston Globe*, shows that there are stories with a great potential in the paper — such as the petition from younger State Police officers to push out the older; the 56-year-old woman having a baby; great new examples of volunteerism in neighborhoods; new methods of rehiring mature people in a labor market shortage — if newsroom decision makers were just able to see them. A deliberate effort

could be made to carefully read even small stories in regional supplements and, in an imaginative way, discuss what follow-up of a deeper nature could be made. Inversely, one could find great news stories by starting on level 2 or 3. Through seminars and bringing in interesting academics to newspapers, even the editorial leaders could try to consider what neglected areas deserve increased attention, level 2, or what stereotyped perceptions to change, level 3. Once starting to take a fresh look at levels 2 and 3, newspapers will also discover many great news stories to present at level 1, which was previously not observed. They will also affect the political process by bringing up new and underestimated realities and issues, increasing the important role of newspapers in society.

Is this an overly idealistic view of what could be done? Perhaps. But the difference in quality shown in this study between newspapers in similar preconditions, like *The Boston Globe* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, implies that editorial leadership can make a difference. There are newspapers of higher and lower standards in the real world, and there must be room for improvement, especially when a new type of journalism clearly would be met with vivid interest from its readers.

The crucial point seems to be that newspapers, and owners of newspapers, must discover that good newspapers need people with a deep interest in and broad perspectives on *content*, not only process. Good newspapers also require intellectuals, not simply managers. Sooner or later, that has to be acknowledged if newspapers will be able to keep their reputation and role in the wider media system, as well as make an indispensable contribution to society.

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- ¹ Science 29 September 2000
- ² Longevity Center, New York
- ³ Lagergren and Batjan, Report from the Department of Social Affairs, Stockholm 2000
- ⁴ See for example S Jay Olshansky and Bruce A Carnes: “The Quest for Immortality – Science at the Frontiers of Aging” (2001)
- ⁵ UN Population Studies
- ⁶ See for example Marc Freedman: “Prime Time – How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America” (1999) and Ken Dychtwald: “Age Power” (1999).
- ⁷ Boston *Globe* February 25, 2001
- ⁸ Nancy Hicks Maynard: “Mega Media”, 2000.
- ⁹ Anne H Gauthier and Timothy M Smeeding: “Time use at older ages: cross-national differences”, paper presented for the International Longevity Center, New York, December 2000
- ¹⁰ “Seniors and The Webb”, Age Wave Research Report Series, July 2000, supported by Media Metrix figures presented for January 2001 at the national conference on aging, New Orleans March 2001
- ¹¹ Interview with Carl Djerassi, the inventor of the Pill, about these technologies. See also his presentation of them in Science, 2000
- ¹² See for example analysis of these phenomena in Broome et als: “Aldringschocken” (1988)
- ¹³ Boston *Globe* Gallup Poll on Media Usage and Consumer Behavior 2000, Orvesto Konsument Stockholm 2000.
- ¹⁴ “Demographic Profile of Loyalty Groups”, The Boston *Globe* 2000.
- ¹⁵ Interview with the marketing director at Dagens Nyheter.
- ¹⁶ Examples compiled for me by Paul Kleyman at “Aging Today”.
- ¹⁷ See for example Jorgen Westerstahl/Folke Johansson: “Bildn av Sverige” (1985), on news and news ideologies
- ¹⁸ “Older generations in print”, UK Secretariat for the UN International Year of Older Persons, 1999.
- ¹⁹ Reported in Age Beat, Fall issue 2000. On the shortening of articles in newspapers, see also Tom Patterson: “Out of Order”, 1993.