By Steven H. Chaffee and Sun Yuel Choe

Newspaper Reading in Longitudinal Perspective: Beyond Structural Constraints

Transitional constraints in lives of individuals and beyond control of the newspaper affect whether person becomes reader.

► Although newspaper reading is in a period of historical decline, readership studies still find that there are many more readers than non-readers among adult Americans.[1] Reading a daily newspaper is a stronger norm than, say, voting, although less universal than watching television or driving a car. The sizable (and growing) minority who have *not* adopted this norm have been the focus of continuous attention from social scientists as well as a concerned newspaper industry.[2] Readership surveys have consistently located non-readers at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder; lack of resources and cognitive skills due to low education, and lack of social contacts and leisure time are strong correlates of non-reading.[3]

Such static explanations, based on cross-sectional surveys, stress a conception of newspaper reading and non-reading as stable, habitual behaviors grounded in the social structure. There is indeed evidence that, for many adult Americans, media use patterns are stable habits to which they have been socialized from childhood.[4] Youngsters in families of high socio-economic status learn to use mass media quite differently from those in disadvantaged homes, in particular being less likely to adopt newspaper reading.[5]

But, for many, newspaper reading is not a persistent, stable behavior throughout one's lifetime. As Tipton points out, there are "chronic" non-readers who are unlikely ever to take up the newspaper, but there are also many people who "sometimes"

[1] John P. Robinson and Leo W. Jeffres, "The Changing Role of Newspapers in the Age of Television," *Journalism Monographs No. 63* (September, 1979), pp. 2-3.

[2] Among the earliest quantitative studies of mass communication phenomena were readership surveys, such as George Gallup, "A Scientific Method for Determining Reader Interest," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 7:1-13 (March, 1930); Ralph O. Nafziger, "A Reader-Interest Survey of Madison, Wisconsin," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 7:128-41 (June, 1930).

[3] In a comprehensive review of research since 1950, McCombs found more than fifty studies that specifically compare readers to non-readers. Maxwell McCombs, "Newspaper Readership and Circulation," *ANPA News Research Report No. 3* (May, 1977). Prominent studies include Wilbur Schramm and David Manning White, "Age, Education, Economic Status: Factors in Newspaper Reading," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 26:149-159 (June, 1949). Merrill Samuelson, Richard F. Carter and Lee Ruggels, "Education, Available Time, and Use of Mass Media," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 40:491-496, 617 (Autumn, 1963). Bruce H. Westley and Werner J. Severin, "A Profile of the Daily Newspaper Non-Reader," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 41:45-50, 156 (Winter, 1964). Jeanne Penrose, David H. Weaver, Richard R. Cole and Donald Lewis Shaw, "The Newspaper Nonreader 10 Years Later: A Partial Replication of Westley-Severin," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 51:631-638 (Winter, 1974). Subsequent research includes Paula M. Poindexter, "Non-Readers: Why They Don't Read," *ANPA News Research Report No. 9* (January, 1978). Jack M. McLeod and Sun Yuel Choe, "An Analysis of Five Factors Affecting Newspaper Circulation," *ANPA News Research Report No. 10* (March, 1978). John P. Robinson, "Daily News Habits of the American Public," *ANPA News Research Report No. 15* (September, 1978).

[4] Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle and Edwin B. Parker, "Patterns in Children's Reading of Newspapers," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 37:35-40 (Winter, 1960). Peter Clarke, "Parental Socialization Values and Children's Newspaper Reading," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY , 42:539-46 (Autumn, 1965). Steven H. Chaffee, Jack M. McLeod and Charles K. Atkin, "Parental Influences on Adolescent Media Use," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 14:323-340 (Jan./Feb., 1971). Mary Benedict, David H. Weaver and J. Herbert Altschull, "High School Students and the Newspaper: Educating Media Consumers," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 53:280-286 (Summer, 1976). Jack M. McLeod and Garrett J. O'Keefe Jr., "The Socialization Perspective and Communication Behavior," in F. Gerald Kline and Phillip J. Tichenor (eds.), *Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1972), pp. 121-168.

[5] Steven H. Chaffee, Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Jean Durall and

(Footnote continued on page 202)

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read newspapers.[6] Periodic fluctuation between reading and non-reading cannot be explained by stable individual differences growing out of socio-economic disadvantage. Understanding behavioral *changes* in newspaper reading requires more dynamic explanations than those implied by theories based on social stratification. The decline in the newspaper audience in recent decades has after all occurred despite the fact that educational levels in the U.S. population have steadily risen, effectively removing the principal structural constraint against reading for most people.[7] The decisive behavior at stake is the dynamic process of acquiring or discontinuing the habit of daily newspaper reading, not the static condition of maintaining a habit of reading or non-reading.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to go beyond stable structural factors in a search for explanations of changes in newspaper reading behavior. Our basic assumption is that reading a daily newspaper is a communication behavior that entails some costs and is limited by constraints operating within as well as upon the person. While we would not minimize systemic constraints, such as the relative unavailability of newspapers in developing countries,[8] we are mainly concerned here with individual-level factors that constrain a person from reading newspapers even in a country where they are highly available at very low cost. We also assume that the factors that explain change are different from those that explain the persistence of stable habits. Consequently, we will examine panel data, which will allow us to analyze newspaper reading in longitudinal perspective rather than simply in terms of static correlates.

Varieties of Constraint

We propose that there are three major types of constraints affecting newspaper reading. First and most pervasive are *structural constraints* such as we have discussed above. We call these "structural" because they are determined largely by the person's disadvantageous location in the social structure and are generally beyond his personal control. Many among the poor, the elderly, the isolated and the undereducated may never surpass these constraints and so should be expected to remain nonreaders across the years.

But, while structural constraints may be sufficient to explain non-reading, their absence is obviously not sufficient to account for reading. People who are free from structural constraints may nevertheless find that *transitional constraints* due to personal life-cycle changes disrupt their newspaper reading habits. Although they are well-educated, today's young adults are especially likely to undergo many transitions such as changes in residence, or in marital or parental status, occupational changes like completing schooling or losing a job, and other life-cycle passages. To the extent that newspaper reading is integrated into one's daily habits, we should expect it to be disrupted by at least some of these transitions.

The importance of transitional constraints has been stressed by studies that focus on mobile young adults as potential newspaper subscribers.[9] But, we assume here that, because newspaper subscription is especially sensitive to changes in residence and other basic elements of one's living situation, changes in personal status will be associated with change in two directions, both from non-reading to reading and vice versa. The emphasis in the research literature on structural correlates, and the general failure to distinguish theoretically between the different roles played by transitional and structural factors, are

Donna Wilson, "Mass Communication in Political Socialization," in Stanley Renshon (ed.), *Handbook of Political Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 223-258.

[6] Leonard P. Tipton, "ANPA Newspaper Readership Studies," *ANPA News Research Report No. 13* (July, 1978).

[7] From 1940 to 1970, the median education of adult Americans rose from 8.6 years to 12.2 years, and the percentage of high school graduates in the adult population grew from 57.4% to 75.6%. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975).

[8] Recent UNESCO figures list nine countries in Africa with no daily newspapers, and in ten Asian and Middle Eastern countries newspaper circulation is less than 20 per 1,000 population. In most Latin American countries the figure is below 100 circulation per 1,000 population, ranging from 27 in Guatemala to 269 in Uruguay. *World Communication* (New York: UNESCO, 1975).

[9] Keith R. Stamm, Kenneth M. Jackson and Lawrence Bowen, "Newspaper Use Among New Residents," *ANPA News Research Report No. 6* (October, 1977).

largely due to the lack of longitudinal studies in which changes could be examined separately from stable habits.

A third set of constraints can account for the direction of change, from or toward habitual newspaper reading. We will call these *self-constraints,* because they are to a considerable extent exercised by the person himself, on the basis of his interest in the services the newspaper provides. Newspapers publish a wide variety of content. A reader should presumably be attracted to at least some of that material; one who is not is a potential non-reader, who might well respond to a life-cycle transition by dropping the newspaper. Cross-sectional studies have found that interest and participation in community and political activities are rather strong correlates of newspaper reading.[10] Self-constraints are dispositional in nature, stable individual differences in interest that should become manifest at points of transition in one's life. That is, just as we find stable readers more interested in political and community news than stable non-readers, we should also find those who change from non-reading to reading at a transition point more interested than those who change in the opposite direction.

Although we are using the rather negative term "constraints" to refer to a person's lack of interest in news, it is obvious that there is also a positive, motivational element of attraction to newspaper content which is equally important in explaining reading.[11] Both the attraction and the constraint components of self-constraints can be traced to structural and transitional antecedents. A person who for structural reasons has not been well educated, for example, may lack the base of information necessary to comprehend current events in the press. Or, someone who has lived many years in one community may have built up a considerable interest in local activities and personalities; the absence of transitional constraint indirectly accounts for his attraction to the newspaper. But, self-constraints are to a degree under the person's control, whereas structural constraints are largely beyond the person's control and transitional constraints involve concerns that for the person overshadow the relatively minor matter of newspaper use.

We view self-constraint as tertiary in comparison with other factors. Whether a person is interested enough in press content to read a daily newspaper is a question that may never arise for people who are structurally constrained and is not the operative issue for those who find themselves temporarily beset with transitional constraints. Self-constraints should manifest themselves more strongly in relation to the amount of newspaper reading, to what is read, and to the attention given to similar content in other media, than to the simple question of whether or not one reads a daily newspaper at all.

Theoretical Relationships

Our theoretical structure, outlined in Figure 1, should not be mistaken for a simple linear model in which each constraint is an independent variable contributing to a unidimensional dependent variable, newspaper reading. The three types of constraint are inter-related, and their total effect is to differentiate the population into different groups of people in terms of readership status.

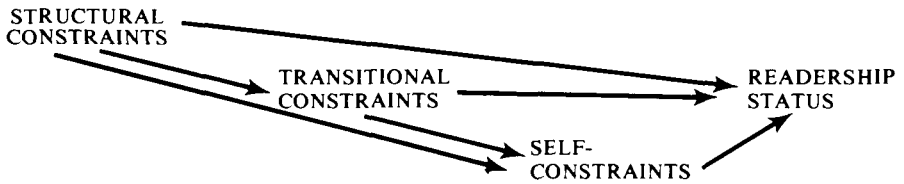
As Figure 1 suggests, structural constraints are considered prior to other factors in our model. Not only do they have direct effects on readership status, accounting for chronic non-reading, but also they affect the other types of constraint. For example, the economically and culturally disadvantaged are probably more subject than other people to such transitional constraints as changes in employment status. They are less able to

[10] Lowndes F. Stephens, "The Influence of Community Attachment on Newspaper Reading Habits," *ANPA News Research Report No. 17* (December, 1978). McLeod and Choe, *op. cit.*, fn. 3.

[11] Much recent motivational work has focused on positive attractions based on the "gratifications" provided by media "uses." These studies have frequently dealt with political topics, often in election settings. Examples are Jack M. McLeod and Lee B. Becker, "Testing the Validity of Gratifications Measures Through Political Effects Analysis," in Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz (eds.), *The Uses of Mass Communication* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974), pp. 137-164. Lee B. Becker, "Two Tests of Media Gratifications: Watergate and the 1974 Election," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY 53:28-33, 87 (Spring, 1976). Steven H. Chaffee and Fausto Izcaray, "Mass Communication Functions in a Media-Rich Developing Society," *Communication Research,* 2:367-395 (October, 1975).

FIGURE 1

Theoretical Relationships Among Constraints on Newspaper Reading



take an active role in politics and public affairs, which in turn ought to reduce their interest in political news.[12] Transitional disruptions can have a similar, if more temporary, negative impact on political activity. What might appear in correlational analyses to be direct effects of dispositional self-constraints could prove instead to be indirect effects of structural or transitional constraints. The pervasiveness of structural constraints, in terms of theoretical priority, should nevertheless not overshadow the independent conceptual significance of transitional and self-constraints in explaining newspaper readership status.

The main focus of this paper is on *changes* in readership status. Why, over time, do some people drop the newspaper reading habit while others take it up? In the terms of our model, do different kinds of constraints operate on people who exhibit these opposing patterns of change? To address such questions, we need to compare four different readership status groups.

The first group, which should be accounted for by structural constraints, would be stable non-readers, who over time persist in *not* reading a daily newspaper because of chronic deficits that can be traced to lack of education, income, and the like. Among the remainder who are not structurally constrained, stable readers need to be distinguished from groups that are unstable in readership status. Stable readers, *i.e.* those who over time continue to be habitual newspaper readers, should be relatively free of both transitional and self-constraints.

The two unstable groups should be differentiated from the two stable groups mainly by transitional constraints. That is, we expect transitional constraints to be associated with changes both to and away from newspaper reading. The difference between the two unstable groups should reside in self-constraints. When the person experiences a life-cycle transition that disrupts his daily habits in general, we should expect change in readership status; change from reading to non-reading ("dropping" the newspaper) should be associated with self-constraints, while those who change in the opposite direction ("adders") should not be self-constrained people.

Design and Measures

Our study is a secondary analysis of data from a national panel survey by the Center for Political Studies (CPS) of the University of Michigan during the election campaigns of 1974 and 1976.[13] In each year, large representative cross-sectional samples of adult Americans were interviewed: 1,575 persons in 1974, and 2,248 in 1976. Of those, 1,201 were interviewed in both years; it is this subset that comprises the panel for our study.

Reading groups. Breakdown of the sample into the four readership status groups was based on a single question, asked in both 1974 and 1976: "Do you read a daily newspaper?" Those who answered "yes" at

[12] Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). Richard L. Allen and Steven H. Chaffee, "Mass Communication and the Political Participation of Black Americans," *Communication Yearbook 3* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979), pp. 507-522.

[13] Warren E. Miller, Arthur H. Miller and F. Gerald Kline, *The CPS 1974 American National Election Study* (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1975). Warren E. Miller and Arthur H. Miller, *The CPS 1976 American National Election Study* (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1977).

TABLE 1

Reading Daily Newspaper, 1974 vs. 1976

1976	1974 Don't Read	1974 Read
Don't Read	19.5%	6.0%
Read	8.2%	66.3%

N=1,096

both times were classified as stable readers, and those who answered "no" both times as stable non-readers. The droppers were people who said "yes" in 1974 but "no" in 1976, while adders answered "no" in 1974 but "yes" in 1976. Approximately 91% of the panel respondents were asked this question and answered it yes or no, in both years; only these cases are classifiable for our analysis (N=1,096).

Over the two-year period, the unstable adder and dropper groups are much smaller than the stable groups (Table 1); because of the large total sample, even the smallest group (droppers, N=66) is large enough to provide reasonably reliable statistical estimates. This panel probably underestimates the incidence of droppers in the total population.[14] Separating adders from droppers is essential to testing our model.

Structural constraints. Operational indicators of structural constraints are education and income. Education is the highest year the respondent completed in school (converted to a 10-point scale). Income is total income of the respondent's family (on a 20-point scale).

Transitional constraints. To locate life-cycle changes and instabilities, we created a number of dummy variables. Three of these represented change from 1974 to 1976 in residential, marital and occupational status. All three were scored 0 if there was no change and 1 if there was change in any direction. For example, change from married to divorced or vice-versa would both be scored 1. This follows our theoretical assumption that it is change itself, not the direction of change, that accounts for unstable newspaper reading.

Our other indicator of transitional constraints was the person's stage in the life cycle. In general we assume (see above) that younger adults experience more life-cycle transitions than older people, even aside from the three specific types of transition we could measure with these data (see previous paragraph). But we also assume that the functions of age are not linear across the entire life-span.[15] So we created two dummy variables, one representing age under 35 years and the second, age 65 or older (in 1976). This in effect trichotomizes the sample into three life-cycle groups that should be progressively less likely to experience transitional constraints

Self-constraints. Optimally, in a thorough study of self-constraints, we would have a wide range of measures of newspaper reading motivations, the absence of which would function as self-constraints. These would include the many kinds of involvement in political and community affairs that previous research has indicated correlate strongly with newspaper use. In secondary analysis of the CPS election studies, however, we are mostly limited to measures of political involvement, with an emphasis on the immediate election campaign.[16] While these measures represent

[14] The CPS 1974-1976 panel is not as accurate a representation of the U.S. adult population as would be either of the cross-sectional samples drawn in 1974 and 1976. Attrition from a panel over time is non-random, with people who move from one residence to another being particularly likely to drop out. One consequence of this is that the percentage of newspaper readers would appear from Table 1 to have increased, from 72% in 1974 to 74% in 1976. The more representative cross-sectional data indicate otherwise, however; in the full 1974 sample 73% were newspaper readers, but in 1976 this figure had dropped to 71%. These figures are similar to those reported by other national survey agencies, cited in Robinson and Jeffres, *op. cit.*, fn. 1. To judge from the care with which CPS sampling and interviewing are conducted, and from the small deviation (+2%) of the panel data from the cross-sectional waves, the droppers and adders in this panel can probably be taken as reasonably representative of the much larger populations of newspaper droppers and adders nationwide.

[15] Steven H. Chaffee and Donna Wilson, "Adult Life-Cycle Changes in Mass Media Use," presented to Association for Education in Journalism, Ottawa, Canada, August 1975.

[16] Some questions were asked in 1974 only of those who first said they read a daily newspaper, whereas in 1976 these questions were asked of all respondents. Other questions were asked in only one year, or were asked with different wording or in different questionnaire contexts. These variations introduce some minor elements of non-comparability into our data analysis.

only a subset of the potential bases for self-constraint, they are strong correlates not only of reading vs. non-reading but also of adding vs. dropping the newspaper.[17] We created four scales to represent campaign interest, campaign activity, attention to public affairs, and political activity outside the campaign context.

Campaign interest was the sum of two five-point scales, indicating how much the person cared about the election (1974) and how interested the person was in the campaign (1976). Campaign activity was a sum score for 1974 and 1976 combined, based on the person's report of four kinds of participation in the fall election campaign. Attention to public affairs was the sum of 1974 and 1976 self-reported general attention scores.[18] Political activity was a sum of scores based on reports in 1976 of six local and five national-level forms of political participation that were not specific to the election campaign context.[19]

Newspaper content use. Respondents who said they read a daily newspaper, which included the droppers in 1974 and the adders in 1976, were then asked the frequency with which they read various types of articles. To test our hypothesis that content preferences within a medium would be a function of self-constraints, we created separate summed indices of the frequency of reading of "hard news" and "soft news."[20]

Plan for Analysis

On the basis of our theoretical model, we would expect the four readership groups to differ systematically in structural, transitional and self-constraints. The most demanding test of this overall model would be a single multivariate analysis that examines differences among all four groups on all our indicators of constraint. For this purpose we will use a multiple discriminant analysis.[21]

The indicators of self-constraint based on reading of "hard news" and "soft news" cannot be entered in this four-group analysis, because questions about newspaper reading were not asked of those who said they did not read a daily paper. Specific analyses of these measures will be performed separately from the main analysis for those groups that were asked questions about different kinds of newspaper content.

Operationally, our hypotheses predict that stable non-readers will be much more constrained than other groups by the structural factors, education and income. The two unstable groups should be more subject than the two stable groups are to transitional constraints, including changes in residential, occupational and marital status as well as the more global indicator of being in the youthful phase of the life cycle.

Self-constraints should, following our model in Figure 1, be empirically associated with structural constraints, to which they are partially attributable. Theoretically, however, we view self-constraints as determining use of the newspaper among those who are not structurally constrained. Measures of political involvement, and associated reading of "hard" news, should be important factors among people who are readers at a given time, differentiating the self-constrained droppers from stable readers and adders. We would not predict differences among these three groups in consumption of "soft" news, to which politically oriented self-constraints would

[17] Steven H. Chaffee, "Political Involvement and Newspaper Reading," presented to Association for Education in Journalism, Houston, Texas, August 1979.

[18] Campaign activity items were attending a political rally or meeting; working for a candidate or party; displaying a campaign button or bumper sticker; and trying to influence someone else to vote for a candidate. The attention measure was, "Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?"

[19] The items included writing a letter to the editor on a local, or national, problem; joining an organization working on a local, or national, problem; joining in a demonstration regarding a local, or national, problem; signing a petition on a local, or national problem; contacting a local or national public official; and attending a city council or school board meeting.

[20] "Hard news" consisted of stories about international news, national politics, and state and local politics. "Soft news" consisted of stories about people in the community, home and garden, and crime and accidents. Responses were scored 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes and 4=frequently, in response to the question, "How often do you read newspaper stories about...?" The means in Tables 5 and 6 represent the summed scores across the three items for each index.

[21] Although Figure 1 may appear to lend itself to testing by path analysis or other multiple regression models, the dependent variable (readership status) is a typology rather than a single dimension of variation.

TABLE 2

Indicators of Constraint, by Reading Group
(Entries are means, with standard deviations in parentheses)

Measure (year measured)	Non-readers	Droppers	Adders	Readers
Education (1976)	3.74	5.23	5.00	5.79
	(2.69)	(2.22)	(2.44)	(2.54)
Income (1976)	8.21	11.00	10.89	12.66
	(5.71)	(5.56)	(5.44)	(5.58)
Age (1976)	50.05	41.26	40.64	50.22
	(18.29)	(19.05)	(17.83)	(16.35)
Changed residence (1974 to 1976)	.08	.11	.13	.07
	(.27)	(.31)	(.34)	(.26)
Changed marital status (1974 to 1976)	.09	.21	.11	.07
	(.29)	(.41)	(.32)	(.26)
Changed employment status (1974 to 1976)	.22	.35	.24	.21
	(.41)	(.48)	(.43)	(.40)
Attention to public affairs (1974 + 1976)	5.37	5.39	5.77	6.55
	(1.92)	(1.83)	(1.70)	(1.49)
Political activity (1976)	.76	1.15	1.42	1.65
	(1.32)	(1.68)	(1.79)	(1.97)
Campaign interest (1974 + 1976)	5.46	5.29	5.82	6.55
	(2.20)	(1.97)	(2.14)	(1.84)
Campaign activity (1974 + 1976)	.65	.59	1.13	1.37
	(1.34)	(.98)	(1.66)	(1.76)
(Group N)	(N=214)	(N=90)	(N=66)	(N=726)

not apply. More generally, we see self-constraints as determining the amount and kinds of newspaper content one reads, whereas structural and transitional constraints have more to do with whether one reads a newspaper at all.

Our emphasis on constraints that limit newspaper reading implies that we do not assume that competition from other mass media is a major explanatory factor. This accords with recent research that stresses the complementary, rather than competitive, role of media in people's lives.[22] We do assume, though, that constraints of the types we have outlined could operate on use of other media besides the newspaper.

[22] Robinson and Jeffres, *op. cit.*, fn. 1, pp. 18-20. Tipton, *op. cit.*, fn. 6.

[23] These functions are derived by a procedure in which the first function separates the four groups as much as possible; given this separation, the second function separates them as much as possible in a direction orthogonal to the first function; then the third function provides maximal separation in another orthogonal direction. This makes the four groups as distinct as possible, in terms of the original discriminating variables entered.

Results

Descriptive statistics for each of the indicators of constraints are shown for the four groups in Table 2. No univariate tests of group differences are reported in Table 2, because our hypotheses predict complex multivariate patterns of group differences rather than simply predicting that the groups will differ on a particular variable. Because of the large sample size, the groups do indeed differ significantly on almost all of the variables shown in Table 2.

Multiple discriminant analysis. All the variables that appear in Table 2 have been entered in the multiple discriminant analysis (Table 3). Of the three possible functions that could discriminate among the four groups, two are statistically significant.[23] Table 3 describes each function in terms of two different coefficients. The first is the zero-order correlation between

TABLE 3

Summary of Discriminant Function Analysis of Reading Groups

	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Rotated correlations with function for each discriminating variable:			
Education	.84	.16	-.21
Attention to public affairs	.63	-.10	.38
Political activity	.48	.25	.17
Campaign interest	.46	-.06	.45
Income	.28	.03	-.06
Age under 35 (dummy variable)	.02	.92	-.22
Age 65 and older (dummy variable)	-.21	-.38	.13
Changed residence	.01	.36	.07
Changed marital status	.04	.07	-.60
Campaign activity	.37	.23	.47
Changed employment status	.05	.06	-.42
Rotated standardized discriminant function coefficients:			
Education	.72	-.23	-.44
Attention to public affairs	.36	-.10	.20
Political activity	.09	.16	.00
Campaign interest	.11	.04	.23
Income	.26	.08	.05
Age under 35 (dummy variable)	-.13	.89	-.01
Age 65 and older (dummy variable)	-.04	-.12	.01
Changed residence	-.01	.20	.21
Changed marital status	.03	-.04	-.58
Campaign activity	-.00	.24	.45
Changed employment status	.09	-.02	-.37
Canonical Correlation	.41 ($p<.001$)	.20 ($p<.001$)	.11 (n.s.)
Eigenvalue	.20	.04	.01

each variable and each function, rotated using a varimax criterion. Variables are listed in the table according to the function with which each correlates most strongly, and the strength of that correlation. The second set of coefficients shows standardized discriminant functions (also varimax rotation), the interpretation of which is analogous to that of beta weights in multiple regression. The largest correlation for each variable by function has been outlined by a box to facilitate interpretation.

The significant first two functions lend rather strong support to our conceptual distinction between structural and transitional constraints. Function 1 can be interpreted as a combined structural/self-constraints dimension, with education a very important factor and income a secondary one. The political involvement measures indicating self-constraints also correlate with Function 1, although they are not so specific to that function as are education and income. This correlation of self-constraints with the antecedent structural constraints was expected (Figure 1). The standardized discriminant function coefficients for the political involvement measures are not nearly so strong for Function 1 as are the correlations; this indicates that much of the commonality between Function 1 and self-constraints is accounted for by education and income. As one might expect of a factor so pervasive as we have suggested structural constraints are, Function 1 explains the largest proportion of

TABLE 4

Canonical Discriminant Function Centroids of the Four Groups

	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Non-readers	-.75	+.02	-.08
Droppers	-.28	+.41	-.71
Adders	-.27	+.55	-.09
Readers	+.28	-.11	+.10

TABLE 5

Reading of Soft and Hard News, Stable Readers vs. Droppers 1974
(Cell entries are means)

	Droppers	Stable readers	Unweighted Row mean
Soft news reading	9.06	9.68	9.37
Hard news reading	8.26	9.81	9.04
Column mean	8.66	9.75	9.20

Droppers vs. Readers, F=33.02 (df=1,790), p<.001
Soft vs. Hard News Reading, F=5.11 (df=1,790), p<.02
Interaction, Groups by Content, F=10.01 (df=1,790), p<.002

the total variance (16%) among the four groups.

The second significant function seems to represent transitional constraints, or at least those associated with youth and mobility. The strongest component in Function 2 is the dummy variable representing the early years of the adult life cycle (age under 35). Change in residence, a transition that almost inevitably disrupts newspaper subscription, is a factor of secondary importance in Function 2. This function accounts for 4% of the total variance among groups.

Although not statistically significant, Function 3 suggests that two other transitional factors, change in marital or employment status, could have distinctive effects on newspaper reading. These two life-cycle transitions, while strongly associated with the third function, are virtually unrelated to the first two functions. Self-constraint indicators specific to the election campaign are also associated with Function 3. This might mean that changes in employment and marital status are transitional constraints that lead immediately to self-constraints such as depressed political involvement. These transitions, which often involve *leaving* married or employed status, are not especially associated with any one age group. Such interpretations are quite speculative, however; we should not make much of a non-significant dimension.

The mean for each reading group on each function (group centroids) is shown in Table 4; the entries in this table are standard scores. As predicted, the first function, representing structural and self-constraints, mainly discriminates between the non-readers and the other three groups. The stable readers are also somewhat higher on Function 1 than are the two unstable groups, adders and droppers. The second function, which mainly involves life-cycle transitional constraints, discriminates as hypothesized between the unstable groups (adders and droppers) and the stable ones (readers and non-readers).

The operation of self-constraints, which are associated empirically with the prior structural and transitional constraints, does not emerge clearly from the multiple

TABLE 6

Reading of Soft and Hard News, Stable, Readers vs. Adders 1976
(Cell entries are means)

	Adders	Stable readers	Unweighted Row mean
Soft news reading	8.60	9.42	9.01
Hard news reading	8.73	9.56	9.15
Column mean	8.66	9.49	9.08

Adders vs. Readers, F=24.95 (df=1,814), p<.001)
Soft vs. Hard News Reading, F=1.00 (df=1,814), n.s.
Interaction, Group by Contents, F=0 (df=1,814), n.s.

discriminant analysis. To examine self-constraints separately, we turn to consideration of the groups that were reading newspapers at a given time and can therefore be assumed not to have been especially constrained either structurally or transitionally.

Reading soft vs. hard news. Central to consideration of self-constraints as determinants of newspaper use is the question of what kinds of news the person reads. To the extent that self-constraints operate on news selection within the newspaper, they should reduce the frequency of reading "hard news" stories, but should not affect reading of other kinds of content, which for simplicity here we lump together as "soft news." The net effect of self-constraints overall, then, would be to reduce a person's total use of the newspaper.

Our main interest is in the interaction between type of reader and type of news read. The model predicts such an interaction when comparing droppers to readers but not when comparing adders to readers, because only droppers should be self-constrained. Treating hard vs. soft news content as repeated measures in analysis of variance provides us a sensitive test of this interaction.

Table 5 compares the hard and soft news reading in 1974 of the two groups that reported daily newspaper reading at that time, the stable readers and the droppers. The group-by-content interaction is significant and consistent with our prediction in that the hard news score for droppers is much lower than any other cell means. There is also a significant group difference, the stable readers reporting more frequent reading of both types of news. Table 5 further shows a significant main effect of content, the mean for soft news being somewhat higher than for hard news due to low hard-news reading among the droppers. This content "effect" should be considered an artifact of the significant interaction.

By contrast, there is no group-by-content interaction in Table 6, where the 1976 figures for the same measures are analyzed for the two groups who reported reading newspapers in 1976, adders and stable readers. The stable readers are significantly more frequent readers of all types of news stories than are the adders, as was the case for the reader-dropper comparison in Table 5. But, as we hypothesized, there is no tendency for either group to exhibit self-constraints that would specifically reduce hard-news reading. Table 6 shows no difference between hard and soft news reading overall, nor within either group.

The adders and droppers cannot be compared directly in hard vs. soft news reading, because their content-specific measures had to be taken in different years. The droppers, whose discontinuance of newspaper reading was hypothesized to be a function of self-constraints, clearly diverge from the other groups by their low consumption of hard news content.

Summary

Overall, our constraints model has held up quite well under empirical test. As we predicted, structural constraints account

for stable non-reading. Transitional constraints, particularly those associated with youth and mobility, predict changes in readership status, non-directionally. Directional changes, as represented by the adders and droppers, are associated mainly with indicators of self-constraint, based on lack of interest and involvement in the kinds of political affairs that are heavily covered by newspapers. The data are also consistent with our expectation that self-constraints would be a function of structural factors, which are the most pervasive constraints determining readership status.

Discussion

A major implication of this study is the conclusion that lost newspaper readership, the industry's most vexing long-term problem, is not directly attributable to deficiencies in the newspaper itself. Newspapers of superior reportorial quality may earn somewhat higher net circulation figures.[24] But, for many people, readership status is heavily constrained by factors beyond the control of the individual—or of the newspaper. Social change, such as increased mobility or marital instability, may well be as important in determining the future of the newspaper in American life as will the press's performance in the media marketplace.

Attempts to maintain readership by making the newspaper more like television and other entertainment media seem misdirected. To judge from other research, television has improved its competitive edge versus the press by upgrading its public affairs programming, which is to say by becoming more like the newspaper.[25]

[24] Leo Bogart, "How the Challenge of Television News Affects the Prosperity of Daily Newspapers," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 52:403-410 (Autumn 1975).

[25] Robinson and Jeffres, *op. cit.*, fn. 1.

[26] Arthur H. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-1970," *American Political Science Review*, 68: 951-972 (1974). Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 47-73.

The main individual self-constraint on newspaper use that we have identified here has been a lack of interest in politics and public affairs. Ironically, the newspaper's traditional "watchdog" stance, which stresses the negative side of politics and government, may be inadvertently self-defeating by breeding a general cynicism toward the world of politics. It is noteworthy that the recent era of declining newspaper readership has seen a parallel decline in public confidence in political leaders and parties, governmental institutions and democratic processes.[26]

We have attempted in this paper to establish a framework for more comprehensive studies designed to examine a wider range of structural, transitional and self-constraint factors. We have focused on public affairs and politics, plus a few simple demographic variables, because those were the measures available from the national election studies. Research directed toward systematic analysis of newspaper reading in the context of structural barriers, life-cycle transitions and personal motivations would obviously go well beyond these few indicators. The attractions of different kinds of newspaper content for specific sub-audiences, the role of other media and the place of the newspaper in changing lifestyles can all be approached from a constraints perspective. A fuller understanding of transitional constraints would require more longitudinal studies over longer periods with more than two waves of measurement.

Although a simple media-competition model does not appear to account for declining newspaper readership, new generations of young people coming of age in a world of expanding media choice are distinctly less likely than their predecessors to adopt newspaper reading as a part of daily life. Socialization to media habits deserves much more careful research attention as new communication technologies proliferate and structural constraints recede.