

My research this summer in Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library concerned the contents of three collections: the papers of Columbia University sociology professors Robert Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and the archive of Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research, which was associated with the University from 1939 to 1977. For six weeks in July and August, I worked in these manuscript collections during the day and supplemented this research in the evenings by consulting published sources in the Butler Library stacks. The research contributes to my Ph.D. dissertation in American studies, "Satisfying the 'Inner Jones': Market Segments and Consumer Subjects in Postwar America." The project concerns the role of market researchers, social scientists, and industrial designers in transforming marketing methods in a period of widespread prosperity, an expanding middle class, and a Keynesian political consensus that emphasized purchasing power as an economic and cultural value. Specifically, I am interested in the cohort of European émigré social researchers associated with Lazarsfeld and the Bureau, who applied their Continental academic training, political commitments, and critical perspective to American marketing problems. Through the interplay of American and European modes of social inquiry, these exiled scholars integrated qualitative and quantitative techniques, and they revolutionized marketing practices by exploring the unconscious, irrational motivations of consumers. Moreover, they introduced to American social science a heightened sensitivity to the problem of social stratification, a prime socialist concern that had practical applications in the field of marketing. Finally, their critique of mass culture—the so-called Frankfurt School of "critical theory" developed by Max Horkheimer's Institute of Social Research, a group of scholars exiled at Columbia University along with Lazarsfeld—ultimately had greater influence as it was channeled into techniques of market research than as an academic mode of inquiry.

Lazarsfeld's role as a methodological innovator, a builder of institutions, a synthesizer of ideas, and a leader of émigré intellectuals makes him a central figure in social science history. My research focused on Lazarsfeld's biography, including his experience as a socialist political activist in Vienna; his pioneering efforts to found and direct institutes of social research at the universities of Vienna, Newark, Princeton, and Columbia; his background in mathematics, psychology, and sociology, which produced a unique approach to social research that married qualitative and quantitative methods; and his relationship to and conflict with other émigré scholars like Theodor W. Adorno and Ernest Dichter, who rejected Lazarsfeld's tendency toward positivism but often relied on him for work and for guidance as they found their way in America. I also investigated Lazarsfeld's relationship with American scholars like Merton and Robert Lynd, and CBS executive Frank Stanton, who were colleagues and friends to Lazarsfeld. Beyond biography, I examined the work of the Bureau, particularly the studies it conducted for commercial clients. Though Lazarsfeld's institutes were always associated with universities, they relied mostly on outside sources of funding to sustain themselves, which they secured from foundations, government, non-profit groups, and, frequently, for-profit, corporate clients for whom they did market research and media studies. In general, Lazarsfeld had no qualms about such commercial projects—they gave his organizations money and provided an opportunity to test his methods—but some of his more politically-motivated colleagues, like Adorno, recoiled at the idea of the academic as a mere adjunct to capitalist enterprise. This conflict illuminates the dynamic relationship between socialism's understanding of class stratification and capitalism's fervor for exploitation of labor, resources, and knowledge. Lazarsfeld, in his willingness—even eagerness—to do market research for commercial clients, served as a witting agent for this kind of exploitation. Ultimately, his intellectual passions and pragmatic approach to institution-building trumped his socialist commitments.

Lazarsfeld's socialist background was fundamental to the development of his method of social research, and in many ways it provided the trajectory for his career, including the commercial applications of his work. Hans Zeisel—Lazarsfeld's longtime friend, colleague in social research, and

a fellow émigré—in recalling their years together in Vienna, emphasized that while he and Lazarsfeld had diverse influences, including Alfred Adler and their psychology teachers at the University of Vienna, Karl and Charlotte Bühler, their most important local influence was the Austrian socialist party, a movement that was “messianic and enormously practical.”¹ “At the core of Paul’s endeavors,” wrote Zeisel, suggesting the commitment of a historical materialist, “was the enormous desire to understand human motivation...and how social structures, both present and past, grow, change, and disappear.”² Another friend and colleague, the American sociologist David Riesman, who cited Lazarsfeld and the work of the Bureau as a major influence on his famous studies of the American character, *The Lonely Crowd* and *Faces in the Crowd*, agreed: “[H]e had a lifelong nostalgia for socialism, Vienna style, disguised in what seemed the ultra-American regalia of an empirically minded institution-building, intellectually adventurous, and wide ranging social scientist.”³ Lazarsfeld himself, in his memoir, recalled his activity in the Socialist Student Movement in Vienna after the First World War, and its influence on his work: “We were concerned with why our propaganda was unsuccessful, and wanted to conduct psychological studies to explain it.”⁴

That Lazarsfeld was able to channel this desire into institutional forms with broad applications beyond the realm of socialist politics is partly the result of his ambition and fascination with the methods of social research, and partly because of the serendipity of circumstance. Born in Vienna in 1901 to secular-Jewish, socialist-intellectual parents—his father was a lawyer and his mother was a psychologist—Lazarsfeld came of age during the First World War and, in its wake, the birth of the new republic under the rule of the Social Democrats. Lazarsfeld was active politically as a young man, forming a league of socialist students and later organizing socialist summer and winter camps for youth. In 1923, while he was still a student at the University of Vienna, on the path to earning a doctorate in applied mathematics, the Böhlers were appointed to establish a department of psychology, and young Paul would sit in on their seminars. Paul Neurath, founder of the Lazarsfeld archive at the University of Vienna, observed: “It was part of the political climate of the time that young socialist intellectuals were much interested in psychology and psychoanalysis for the same reasons as Lazarsfeld himself: wanting to participate in the creation of the new man for the new socialist society.”⁵ Lazarsfeld impressed Charlotte Bühler when he presented her with a statistical analysis of some questionnaires filled out by proletarian youth, which he had acquired from a leader of the Socialist Young Workers who was using the responses merely as rhetorical support for his political program. This presentation led Bühler to appoint Lazarsfeld as her assistant, and later as a teacher of statistics and social psychology.⁶ Lazarsfeld, inspired by the physicist Friedrich Adler, a socialist antiwar hero, was attempting to merge social science and mathematics in the service of social progress.⁷ His political commitment as a socialist thus animated his academic commitment as a social researcher.

By 1927, when Lazarsfeld had completed his Ph.D. and was working as a teacher of mathematics and physics in a *Gymnasium*, he was inspired to create social research center associated with the Bühler’s Institute of Psychology. This became the *Oesterreichische Wirtschaftypsychologische Forschungsstelle*, the private research center run by Lazarsfeld over which Karl Bühler presided. The novel structure of the *Forschungsstelle*—which Lazarsfeld would reproduce in the U.S. at Newark, Princeton, and Columbia—was an institute affiliated with a university, but having the autonomy to perform “contract” research for outside clients, which were usually commercial interests, but also included political and scholarly groups like Max Horkheimer’s Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung*.⁸ Lazarsfeld retained his social-democratic commitments, but he needed a steady source of income to sustain his institute and give it the flexibility to work on projects of his choosing. Moreover, Lazarsfeld’s academic interest in the decision-making process and his fascination with methodology trumped whatever uneasiness he might have had with mercenary work, and commercial projects gave him the opportunity to develop his unique approach to social research through empirical

studies.⁹ Recalling an early commission from an American market research expert to study consumer motivations in soap buying, Lazarsfeld saw the potential to study decision-making in more manageable context, with fewer complications, than another study he wanted to do on voting: “Such is the origin of my Vienna market research studies: the result of the methodological equivalence of socialist voting and the buying of soap.”¹⁰ Lazarsfeld made the case to potential commercial clients that his method of investigating consumer motivations—which relied on a systematic tabulation of data derived from directed interviews—could reveal what simple questionnaires could not. He argued that the technological rationalizing of products admitted the “psychological rationalizing of sales.”¹¹ But the issue of social stratification, of particular concern to Lazarsfeld’s cohort of Viennese socialists, remained at the center of his work, and it turned out to be quite useful in the field of market research. For example, one study developed a profile of the proletarian consumer, whose tastes were different from those of the bourgeois consumer. Working-class consumers, who had access to a narrower range of goods and were ill-informed about them, generally preferred sweet chocolate (and other strong sensory experiences), whereas the upper-class consumer preferred bitter chocolate and generally blander things.¹² These studies allowed Lazarsfeld to hone his method for larger works with a more explicit socialist commitment, such as his book *Youth and Occupation*, a study of the motivations behind vocational decisions.¹³

The most important of these works was a study of Marienthal, a depressed Austrian village of 1500 inhabitants, most of whom were chronically unemployed after the closure of a textile factory.¹⁴ Inspired by the 1929 *Middletown* study by the American sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, Lazarsfeld set out in 1930 to investigate the use of leisure time by workers, whose unions had recently won a shorter working day. But when he shared his plan with Otto Bauer, leader of the socialist party, Lazarsfeld was attacked: how could he study *leisure* time in a period of such high unemployment?¹⁵ Lazarsfeld changed course and, along with principal collaborators Zeisel and his first wife Marie Jahoda, and financial support from trade unions, set about the study. *Marienthal* employed diverse methods of empirical research, including field observation, analysis of diaries, examination of organizational archives, and the use of questionnaires and interviews.¹⁶ To the dismay of its socialist backers, the study revealed that the situation of persistent, widespread unemployment had produced not a revolutionary fervor, but rather a general feeling of resignation, apathy, and hopelessness. The depressed residents of Marienthal cared little about politics, did not engage each other in debate, and did not even bother to read the newspaper.¹⁷ According to Jahoda, the interest aroused by the Marienthal study was due to its demonstration of “how a major social problem could be illuminated by social science” in a way that public debate could not. “The public debate produced arguments for two incompatible outcomes of large-scale unemployment: it would create a revolutionary atmosphere or it would create public apathy,” wrote Jahoda. “*Marienthal* produced an answer: apathy.”¹⁸

Charlotte Bühler sent Lazarsfeld to the 1932 International Congress of Psychology in Hamburg, where he reported the results of the yet unfinished study, which attracted much attention among American psychologists like Gordon Allport and Goodwin Watson, who would later serve as important contacts for Lazarsfeld.¹⁹ The report also impressed the Paris representative of the Rockefeller Foundation, who would offer Lazarsfeld a traveling fellowship to the United States, which he began in September 1933.²⁰ Ironically, perhaps, it was not his work in market research, but rather his work on unemployment that brought Lazarsfeld to the U.S. during the Great Depression. The liberal terms of the fellowship granted Lazarsfeld the freedom to pursue whatever projects he wanted,²¹ wherever he wanted, and he immediately sought the guidance of Robert Lynd, who would become a lifelong friend, colleague, and mentor. Lazarsfeld volunteered his help to Lynd, who was studying the effects of unemployment on the middle class. Lynd declined, for fear he would exploit the young man, but he did offer to help him pursue his social research in the U.S.²² With the help of Lynd,²³ Lazarsfeld ended up

moving to Washington to begin working on research projects for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, where he met a cohort of empirical sociologists who worked mainly with census data and would go on to create the Sociological Research Association.²⁴

Remarkably, Lazarsfeld did not consider himself a sociologist at the time, but rather—given his work for the Bühlers and his interest in human motivations and decision-making—a kind of social psychologist. This disposition lent itself well to market research, though Lazarsfeld was drawn to such studies not because he had a particular interest in marketing problems, but mainly because this field could provide him with the opportunity—and, importantly, the money—to practice his empirical methods of investigating motivations. Lazarsfeld seized one such opportunity early on in his fellowship when he learned of a non-profit market research group called the Psychological Corporation (PSC). Lazarsfeld secured a position for himself at PSC, but soon became disillusioned by the banal surveys that the group conducted, mainly to compete with other commercial marketing agencies. He proposed a number of projects that would employ his method of motivational research, but they were met with resistance by his behaviorist supervisor.²⁵ Eventually, though, Lazarsfeld went to work on a number of consumer studies with David Craig of the Retail Research Institute at the University of Pittsburgh, and he conducted a study for the Market Research Corporation of America on the public's attitude toward advertising. In October of 1934 he published a well-received article in *The Harvard Business Review* on “The Psychological Aspect of Market Research,” in which he explained his method of using the statistical analysis of data drawn from interviews to develop a generic profile of the psychological motivations of the typical buyer of a particular commodity.²⁶ By November of that year—only one year after his arrival in the States—the “portly, bespectacled Dr. Paul F. Lazarsfeld” had caused such a stir that he was profiled in the marketing periodical *Tide*.²⁷ Lazarsfeld's celebrity in the world of market research was confirmed when he was commissioned to write four chapters for a textbook produced by the American Marketing Association, *The Techniques of Marketing Research*. One of the chapters considered the practice of “depth psychology,” which Lazarsfeld cites as the beginning of “motivation research.”²⁸

Lazarsfeld's subsequent decision to emigrate permanently to the U.S., his establishment of the University of Newark Research Center in 1936 and work for the National Youth Administration, his role as director of the Rockefeller-funded Princeton Office of Radio Research, the very interesting tenure of Theodor W. Adorno at the Office, and its later move to Columbia, where it became the Bureau of Applied Social Research in 1944, are all important parts of this narrative, but they are generally well covered in Lazarsfeld's memoir, the two volumes of *Radio Research* studies,²⁹ and in other published, secondary accounts. For that reason, I would like to briefly consider, in the remainder of this report, a number of themes that emerged from my examination of the Bureau's unpublished market research reports, mainly from the 1940s and 1950s, which were a focus of my research at the RBML. The reports are valuable to the historian as documents of the dynamic interplay of business, markets, and culture in the postwar years, but I am particularly interested in discerning to what degree the Lazarsfeld cohort's European background, socialist politics, and methodological proclivities contributed to the substance of these commercial studies and their ultimate use as marketing guides. Beyond this biographical concern, the market research reports—only one part of the Bureau's diverse activities, it should be emphasized—reveal an institutional attention to the folklore and psychological aspects of commodities, the importance of the various media in reaching and understanding the “mass,” the role of market research in identifying and exploiting social groups, the central role of consumption in American life, and, finally, the importance of branding and product identity in the consumer's motivations and relation to commodities.

Perhaps the clearest lineage from the social-democratic heritage of much of the Lazarsfeld cohort to the concerns of the Bureau's reports may be found in the attention given to market segments,

a capitalistic reflection of the socialism's critique of class stratification. For example, an undated report from the early 1940s, completed as part a broad study of daytime radio serials directed by Herta Herzog—Lazarsfeld's second wife and a fellow émigré—that was ultimately recorded in the second *Radio Research* volume, looked at the reaction of respondents to a series of radio commercials. It found that women on lower socio-economic levels generally preferred highly dramatized, narrative commercials, whereas college-educated women tended to favor descriptive commercials.³⁰ A 1944 study of wine-drinking habits found that, while both upper-class and working-class consumers enjoyed wine as an "escape," their psychological motivations were entirely different. Working-class drinkers desired wine for its "pep and stimulation," as an exciting diversion from monotony, whereas high-income drinkers enjoyed it as an aid to relaxation.³¹ A cover letter from Lazarsfeld to the company that had commissioned the report noted that higher income groups tend to prefer more subdued sensations, like dry rather than sweet wines. "Sweet rather than bitter chocolate, strongly smelling flower perfumes, louder colors are better liked in the lower income groups," observed Lazarsfeld. "This should give leads as to what one should stress in advertising in magazines which are known to reach different social strata."³² Social stratification was important not only in terms of the qualitative attributes of commodities, but the various media in which they were advertised. A 1949 study that employed the depth-interview technique compared the effectiveness of newspaper and radio advertisements on different groups. It found that less educated women, for whom *presentation* was important, were more responsive to radio ads; whereas better educated women, for whom the *content* of the ad copy was key, were more responsive to newspaper ads.³³

Researchers at the Bureau—which employed many native Americans as well as émigrés—were attentive to class stratification, but they also exhibited a keen awareness of the cultural heritage and horizontal divisions among American consumers, as well as the pressures to conform. A 1949 study for a men's clothing retailer, for example, also used the technique of psychoanalytic "depth interviews," aimed at revealing the sub-conscious motivations of respondents, to discern four "cultural determinants" of men's dressing behavior. These included "ascetic capitalism" that led to "Brummelphobia," or a fear of dressing conspicuously or frivolously; the Anglo-Saxon concept of dress, which disdained the colorful styles of more recent immigrants; and the "noblesse oblige," a type that avoids conspicuous dress as a way to emphasize security in social position and interest in "higher things." At the same time, however, the authors of the report identified a contradictory trend—the desire to express individuality.³⁴ Bureau researchers were adept at identifying such cultural trends that could be exploited by business interests. A pair of studies from 1951 on the the readers of *Quick* magazine—a digest similar to *Reader's Digest*—revealed that they valued it for providing concise information on current events that they needed to be conversant with their friends, neighbors, and colleagues.³⁵ The magazine's brevity and superficiality, far from being a detriment, was a virtue, as its main value to the consumer was to provide the basic substance of small talk: it was ephemeral knowledge commodified. The Bureau could also enlighten its clients on the potential of untapped market groups, as it did in a 1962 study on "The Negro Consumer" for a life insurance company, which acknowledged the social restrictions that excluded many middle-class blacks from status venues and thus made them more inclined to certain modes of conspicuous consumption to express status.³⁶

In most of the Bureau's prodigious work for commercial clients, merely sampled above, research data were tabulated and quantified in the manner perfected by its mathematician director. Lazarsfeld's attention to social stratification, combined with his mathematical mind and obsession with the methodology of social science, sustained the Bureau's work for nearly forty years, though its work in market research declined considerably in the 1960s as its sources of funding shifted.³⁷ Still, the political commitments and unique insight of a Viennese, socialist émigré may be found in the influential products of his social research institutes.

- 1 Hans Zeisel, "The Vienna Years," in Robert K. Merton, et al., eds., *Qualitative and Quantitative Social Research: Papers in Honor of Paul F. Lazarsfeld* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 10.
- 2 Merton, *Qualitative*, 14.
- 3 David Riesman, "Ethical and Practical Dilemmas of Fieldwork in Academic Settings: A Personal Memoir," in Merton, *Qualitative*, 226-7. Riesman's argument in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) concerning the shift in the American character from "inner-direction" to "other-direction" is substantially similar to Leo Lowenthal's argument in "Biographies in Popular Magazines," which appeared in Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton, eds., *Radio Research 1942-1943* (New York: Essential Books, 1944).
- 4 Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "An Episode in the History of Social Research: A Memoir" in Donald Flemming and Bernard Bailyn, eds. *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U. Press, 1969), 272.
- 5 Paul Neurath, "Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the institutionalization of empirical social research," paper given before a joint session of the Columbia University Seminars on Content and Method of the Social Sciences and Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences, Nov. 11, 1981, 6. (Robert K. Merton Papers [RKM], 1923-2003, Rare Book and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, Box 185, folder 7, "PFL – Paul F. Lazarsfeld Archive, Univ. of Vienna, 1980-1984")
- 6 Neurath, 6.
- 7 David Morrison, "The Transference of Experience and the Impact of Ideas: Paul Lazarsfeld and Mass Communications Research," *Communications*, Vol. 10, 185-209. (RKM, Box 444, folder 5, "PFL – General, 1941, 1957-1972, 1986-1996, (2/2)") Also Merton, *Qualitative*, 10.
- 8 Flemming, 274-5.
- 9 Nico Stehr, "Conversation with P. F. Lazarsfeld" [transcript of interview], n.d. [ca. 1975], 1. (Robert K. Merton Papers, Box 185, folder 7, "PFL – Paul F. Lazarsfeld Archive, Univ. of Vienna, 1980-1984")
- 10 Flemming, 279.
- 11 Paul Lazarsfeld, "New Ways of Investigating Markets" [translation of Neue Wege der Marktforschung], presentation to the meeting of the "Mercantile Advertising Committee" at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Berlin, Oct. 1932, 11. (Paul Felix Lazarsfeld Collection, Rare Book and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, Box 175, folder 175/9, "Printed Material by PFL – With Annotations in His Hand")
- 12 Flemming, 281; Neurath, 10.
- 13 Merton, *Qualitative*, 12.
- 14 Paul Lazarsfeld, "An Unemployed Village," n.d. (PFL, Box 175, folder 175/9, "Printed Material by PFL – With Annotations in His Hand")
- 15 Merton, *Qualitative*, 13.
- 16 Allen H. Barton, "Paul Lazarsfeld and the Invention of the University-Based Applied Social Research Institute," March 13, 1979, 8. (RKM, Box 185, folder 6, "PFL – General, 1979")
- 17 Lazarsfeld, "Unemployed," 149-50.
- 18 Marie Jahoda, "PFL: Hedgehog or Fox?" Merton, *Qualitative*, 5.
- 19 Neurath, 13-14.
- 20 Flemming, 275.
- 21 Stehr, 2.
- 22 Neurath, 13-14.
- 23 A Dec. 16, 1933 letter to Lynd, from Hazel K. Stiebeling of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Home Economics, offers to give Lazarsfeld work on a food consumption study. (PFL, Box 2B, folder, 002/10, "Correspondence, Lynd, Robert")
- 24 Flemming, 294.
- 25 Flemming, 295.
- 26 Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "The Psychological Aspect of Market Research," *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, Oct. 1934, 54-71.
- 27 "Doctor in America," *Tide*, Nov. 1934, 58-62. (PFL, Box 175, folder 175/3, "Printed Material by Others – About PFL")
- 28 Flemming, 297.
- 29 Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton, eds., *Radio Research 1941* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941); Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton, eds., *Radio Research 1942-1943* (New York: Essential Books, 1944).
- 30 "Preliminary Test of Six Kolynos Commercials," n.d. [ca. 1942] (Bureau of Applied Social Research Archive [BASR], Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 2)
- 31 Goodwin Watson, "A Socio-Psychological Study of Wine Drinking: Final Summary Report," Office of Radio Research (A Division of the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Director), Consulting Division, April 7, 1944. (BASR, Box 113)
- 32 "Wine Drinking – Motives, Kinds and Conditions: Interim Report Number III," BASR, March 27, 1944. (BASR, Box 113)
- 33 Leo Srole and Jeanette Green, "Psychological Impact of Newspaper and Radio Advertisements," BASR [B0331], Mass

Communications Division, Feb. 1949. (BASR, Box 115)

- 34 "A Conceptual Analysis of Motivation in Men's Clothing Behavior: Volume 1," presented to Robbin, Barber & Baar (New York) by the Advertising and Marketing Division, BASR, Oct. 1949. (BASR, Box 116)
- 35 Jeannette Green, "What Subscribers Think about Quick Magazine," prepared for the editors of Quick Magazine by BASR [#149], April 1951. (BASR, Box 120); Rolf Meyersohn, "The Role of Quick Magazine in the Lives of Its Syracuse Subscribers," BASR [#175, B0423-3], prepared for the Editors of Quick Magazine, July 1952. (BASR, Box 120).
- 36 Julian H. Nixon, "The Negro Consumer: A Review of the Economic Position and Consumer Behavior of American Negroes Outside the South," BASR [B0814], prepared for the Life Insurance Agency Management Association, Aug. 1962. (BASR, Box 127)
- 37 Barton, Table 1, p. 14.