

Research and Publishing at the Bureau of Applied Social Research: The Gendering of Commercial and Academic Work

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Paul F. Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) at Columbia University was a well-known center for research into media and mass communication. Little known, however, are the lasting consequences of the engendering of different types of research at the bureau—academic as male and commercial as female. This forum contribution examines the Bureau of Applied Social Research Records, 1944–1977 collection guide, located online and at the Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collection, to produce a quantitative record of women's and men's publications. This record shows that women were tracked into and disproportionately worked on commercial studies, while men disproportionately worked on academic studies. The commercial studies kept the bureau financially afloat and subsidized the academic studies. This gendered split meant that women were more likely to be used as hired hands for commercial studies. As such, they have largely been erased from stories about the BASR, rather than be remembered as foundational figures in communication and media studies.

Keywords: women, gender disparity, commercial studies, academic research, publications, BASR

Paul F. Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) at Columbia University was a well-known center for research into media and mass communication. Little known, however, is how the research conducted at the bureau was gendered. The gendering of different types of research—academic as male and commercial as female—has had lasting consequence on who is remembered as foundational researchers and which key studies have formed the building blocks of our theories and research methods. This forum contribution is a small but important quantitative record of the gender disparity in research and publication at the BASR. It examines two data sets from the Bureau of Applied Social Research Records, 1944–1977 collection guide, located online and at Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collection. The first, Series VI Articles, entries dated from 1935 to 1977, is comprised of 768 entries overall, with a closer examination of a sample of 214 entries dated 1944–1955. The second, Series III Reports, entries dated from 1939 to 1977, comprises a sample numbering 310 entries dated 1941–1955. The time frames were chosen due to two intersecting issues: first, the end of World War II and the American Jewish Committee-

¹ Kind thanks to Jefferson Pooley and Hynek Jeřábek for their comments and suggestions, as well as for working with me from pregnancy through maternity leave. I am especially appreciative of this in light of the stories of multiple women who worked at the BASR, whose family and childcaring duties took them away from research, publication, and ultimately from pursuing academic careers on par with their male colleagues.

funded BASR research into antiprejudice propaganda; and second, the role women played in this research, including heading studies, interviewing, and developing interviewing methodologies and making insights about visual persuasion.² These women include those who worked at the BASR, studied at Columbia University and simultaneously conducted their master's or doctoral research at the BASR: Patricia Kendall, Patricia Salter/West, Genevive Knupfer, Jeanette Sayre, Marjorie Fleiss, Hazel Gaudet, Babette Kass, and Marjorie Fiske.

These records show that women were tracked into and disproportionately worked on commercial studies, while men disproportionately worked on much more highly regarded academic studies. The commercial studies kept the bureau financially afloat and subsidized the academic studies. This gendered split meant that the bureau's women were more likely to be used as hired hands for commercial and advertising industry studies. As such, they have largely been forgotten and erased from stories about the BASR, rather than be remembered as foundational figures in the study of communication and media.

Series VI Articles, Dated 1935–1977

The guide to Series VI Articles lists 768 entries (see Table 1). These were coded based on the author's name as an indication of their gender,³ using categories of individual male or female authorship, male or female team, and mixed-gender team with first author specifically listed as male or female.

Table 1. BASR Articles, 1935–1977 Gendered Authorship.

Author by gender	Single author male	Single author female	Multiple authors male	Multiple authors female	Multiple mixed-gender authors first author male	Multiple mixed-gender authors first author female	Total
Article count	461	96	133	5	49	24	768

² The data sets chosen are of course arbitrary: In my particular case, they reflect an interest in the World War II and early Cold War periods, and the work lives of women in the period operating at the intersection of and on the fringes of various antiprejudice campaigns of the Intergroup Relations Movement. Furthermore, the coding is somewhat speculative and based on my own assessment of the work based on its title. Jefferson Pooley has rightfully noted in his comments that the Bureau optimized commercial and government contracts to also produce academic research. One contract could therefore produce not only the required client report, but also MA dissertations and academic publications. A good example is the 1945 Mr. Biggott study on the effectiveness of visual antiprejudice propaganda on White, working-class men that produced the required client report for the funding body, the American Jewish Committee, as well as a bureau publication by Kendall and Wolf (1946), and a *Journal of Psychology* publication by Cooper and Jahoda (1947).

³ Of course, this is a problematic assumption; however, for the purposes of this data, it is currently the best approach. It is probable that future queer narratives of the BASR will require a reexamination of the data.

Overall, during the period between 1935 until 1977, male- and female-authored articles were published at vastly different levels: Of a total count of 768 articles, 594 were male-only authored publications, with just 101 female-only publications and even fewer—73 publications—in mixed-gender teams.

Whether as single authors or as part of a group, 174 articles had a female author, in comparison to 668 with a male author. Publications by single male authors were almost five times as many as publications by their female colleagues, with men publishing 461 articles to women's 96. When publishing with colleagues, male teams published more than 33 times the number of articles that their female colleagues did, or 133 articles by male-only teams to only five articles from female-only teams. Finally, when publishing in mixed-gender groups, there were twice as many male first authors as female first authors, in a ratio of 49 to 24.

To compare the publication record of articles, a sample was coded from Series VI Articles. The sample spans 1944 to 1955 with a total of 214 articles, with 69 distinct male authors and 24 distinct female authors (see Table 2). The articles were coded based on the author's name as an indication of their gender with the following categories: individual male or female authorship, male or female team authorship, and mixed-gender authorship with first author specifically listed as male or female.

Table 2. Authorship Type of BASR Articles Published Between 1944 and 1955 (Series VI Articles).

Authorship type	Total
Male individual author	125
Male team authorship	37
Mixed-gender authorship, male author first	22
Female individual author	20
Female team authorship	1
Mixed-gender authorship, female author first	9
Total male authorship	184
Total female authorship	30

Articles published by individual men, teams of men, or mixed-gender teams with first male author numbered 184, with an average publication per individual male author of 2.66 articles. In the same time-period, the publications of individual women, teams of women, and mixed-gender teams with first female author numbered 30, with an average of 1.25 article publications per woman. These numbers are skewed by the larger-than-average publication records of Paul F. Lazarsfeld on the male author side, and Patricia Kendall, Hazel Gaudet, and Herta Herzog, on the female author side.⁴ The record of article publications between 1944 and 1955 suggests that, had the women published at a similar rate to their male colleagues, or 2.66 articles per individual, the total number of women's publications would have been close to 64, or more than double the actual publications they produced.

⁴ In fact, 43 women who published an article while at the BASR did so only once, and the work was most often a reworking of their MA dissertation. Some select women were prolific in their publication record: Patricia Kendall published 15 articles, Marjorie Fiske nine articles, Hazel Gaudet five articles, and Herta Herzog four articles (Hristova, 2020).

Series III Reports, Dated 1939–1977

The gender imbalance is also present in the number of reports BASR staff and affiliated academics produced. The sample, coded from the guide to Series III Reports, spans 1941 to 1955 with a total of 310 reports. Reports were coded based on the author's name as an indication of their gender, with 31 reports not coded, because they either lacked a named author or the author's name was initialed and therefore the author's gender was indeterminate. The other 279 reports were coded using categories of individual male or female authorship, male or female team, and mixed-gender team, with first author specifically listed as male or female. The reports were also coded for type: A *commercial* study report includes reports that clearly indicated funding for a product study, or a study that would be useful for a product promotion; and *academic* study report for the rest, further noting studies that focused on methods.

Individual male authors numbered 77 and published a total of 195 reports—49 commercial and 146 academic, with an average of 2.5 reports per author (see Table 3). Individual male authors published the most academic reports—70 in total.

Table 3. Reports, 1941–1955: Male Authorship (Series III Reports).

Authorship	Total
Commercial report—single male author	30
Commercial report—two or more male authors	6
Commercial report—mixed-gender authorship, male first author	13
Academic report—single male author	70
Academic report—two or more male authors	32
Academic report—mixed-gender authorship, male first author	24
Academic report—single male author (methods specific)	16
Academic report—two or more male authors (methods specific)	1
Academic report—mixed-gender authorship, male first author (methods specific)	3
Total commercial reports	49
Total academic reports	146
Total reports	195
Number of individual names listed	77
Average number of reports per male author	2.5

Individually named female authors numbered 31 and published a total of 84 reports, with 60 commercial and 24 academic, an average of 2.7 reports per author. Individual female authors published the most commercial reports—51 in total (see Table 4).

Table 4. Reports, 1941–1955: Female Authorship (Series III Reports).

Authorship	Total
Commercial report—single female author	51
Commercial report—two or more female authors	5
Commercial report—mixed-gender authorship, female first author	4
Academic report—single female author	9
Academic report—two or more female authors	2
Academic report—mixed-gender authorship, female first author	6
Academic report—single female author (methods specific)	5
Academic report—two or more female authors (methods specific)	1
Academic report—mixed-gender authorship, female first author (methods specific)	1
Total commercial reports	60
Total academic reports	24
Total reports	84
Number of individual names listed	31
Average number of reports per male author	2.7

Overall, male-authored reports numbered 195, while female-authored numbered 84. Thus, close to 63% of the reports in the data set were authored by men. *Academic* reports numbered 170, of which 146 reports were authored by men, as compared to 24 reports by women. There were fewer *commercial* reports (109), with female authors outnumbering male 60 to 49. In other words, in the period of 1941–1955, male authors were responsible for 86% of *academic* reports, while female authors accounted for 55% of *commercial* reports (see Table 5).

Table 5. Reports, 1941–1955: Gendered and Type Authorship Comparison (Series III Reports).

Report description by authorship	Number	Percentage
Not coded due to lack of name or an indeterminate name	31	10%
Male authorship	195	62.9%
Female authorship	84	27.09%
Total	310	100%
Report description by type	Number	Percentage
Not coded due to lack of name or an indeterminate name	31	10%
Academic	170	54.83%
Commercial	109	35.16%
Total	310	100%
Report type & authorship	Number	Percentage
Commercial male	49	44.95%
Commercial female	60	55.04%
Total	109	100%
Report type & authorship	Number	Percentage
Academic male	146	85.88%
Academic female	24	14.11%
Totals	170	100%

Although on average women authored 0.2 more reports than men, the reports they authored were predominantly *commercial*. If *commercial* reports were *proportionally* distributed, 31 would have been female authored (or half of what women actually authored), with the remainder, 77, written by men. Meanwhile, if *academic* reports were *proportionally* distributed, 49 would have been female authored (or almost double what women actually authored), as against 121 male authored.

In other words, in a 15-year period, women at the BASR undertook twice as many commercial studies in proportional terms—and half as many academic studies as their male colleagues. In line with the Matilda effect in the sciences—“the more woman worked the more the men around her profited and the less credit she got” (Rossiter, 1993, pp. 336–337)—while the women of the BASR worked on commercial studies, the men around them published academic works receiving credit, academic prestige, and long-term recognition.

Conclusions

Although women conducted research and published articles, their work was unequal in type and measure to that of their male colleagues. Between 1944 and 1955, had women had the opportunity to publish articles at the same rate as their male colleagues, the sample of Series VI Articles would have *doubled* the actual number of female-authored articles.

Between 1941 and 1955, women appear to have been streamed into conducting commercial studies and authoring reports about them. The lack of gender parity in the work means that female-authored academic reports are proportionally half of those authored by men, and that female authored commercial reports are proportionally double those authored by men.

In a joint interview with Yole Sills (2007), her husband, David Sills—who headed the BASR from 1957 until 1960—explained that the BASR took up commercial studies “to keep alive” financially. These studies were “not terribly, terribly stimulating,” noted Yole Sills (2007, p. 14), yet the burden of providing financial support fell on women. It appears that if a woman was involved in a particular study, that study was likely to be commercial. Were she to publish a study, that study was also more likely to be commercial. Women’s labor on commercial studies, in other words, kept the Bureau afloat financially and subsidized its academic research conducted mostly by men. As a result, commercial studies became feminized, while academic studies became masculinized.

One of Lazarsfeld’s important BASR contributions is, therefore, the gendering of commercial and academic research. Having gender parity in conducting studies, writing commercial and academic reports, and academic publication—as well as having accurate accounting of women’s contribution in authorship—would have potentially made women’s names and work more recognizable in the formation of media and communication theories and methods for research. There are the notable examples of Lazarsfeld engaging in a “heated argument” with Hadley Cantril to defend Herta Herzog’s “imaginative work” on the study on the effects of *The Invasion from Mars* program (Lazarsfeld, 1968, p. 13), and even accusing Cantril of “monopolizing the authorship at Herta Herzog’s expense” (Fleck, 2011, p. 187). In another example, Robert K. Merton received the credit and academic prestige for developing the focus group method, despite Herzog using in-depth interviews since the early 1930s and interviewing groups since the late 1930s as part of her work with the Lazarsfeld-Stanton Program Analyzer (Levy, 1982).⁵ Due to the way studies were authored, women who placed higher on the BASR career ladder also hoarded credit: Patricia Kendall and Katherine Wolf’s (1946) study of the effectiveness of American Jewish Committee’s antiprejudice visual propaganda relied on interviewees whose daily experiences of searching for appropriate subjects, interviewing them, and then transcribing the interview were instrumental in changing the study’s methodology, informing its findings, and constructing the prejudiced working-class, White male as a subject of social scientific research (Hristova, 2020). These examples show that, unlike the named authors of studies, articles, and reports suggest, BASR research was collective work and that this collective work was often done by women (Birdsall & Carmi, 2021).

The redistribution of academic publication credentials and prestige was further coupled with the lack of academic prospects and low pay.⁶ In this context, once trained, women took their abilities to the advertising industry (Rowland & Simonson, 2014) at much higher salaries than the Bureau could, or maybe even would, pay (Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1946). Office of Radio Research and BASR alumnae crossed paths and hired each other in the advertising industry. Herzog, most notably, joined McCann Erikson in 1943 and at one point shared an office with Joan Doris Goldhamer. Helen Dinerman helped Thelma Ehrlich

⁵ See, also, the cases of Marjorie Fiske, Robert Merton and *Mass Persuasion: The Social Psychology of a War Bond Drive*, and Marjorie Fiske, Patricia Kendall, Robert Merton and *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures* (Dorsten, 2021); or the case of Robert Merton, *Mass Persuasion*, Lillian Mintz, Joan Doris (Goldhamer), Jeanette Green, Helen Kaufman, Carol Coan, Patricia Salter and Alfred Etcheverry (Simonson, 2010).

⁶ At the Princeton Radio Research Project, Herta Herzog reportedly earned \$1.39 per page while Hadley Cantril and Theodor Adorno collected almost \$42.00 per page (Fleck, 2011).

Anderson got a job at Wilson and Roper's International Public Opinion. In the late 1960s, Rena Ross Bartos hired Anderson to work at J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. Bartos, in turn, had worked as a secretary to Herzog at McCann Erikson.

In the advertising industry, women developed an intellectual and career support network, yet, in a double attack on women's intellectual labor, nonacademic work then became both *feminized* and undermined as *for profit*, thus lacking in male intellectual pursuits (Hristova, 2020). Anderson's husband objected to commercial sociological studies because they failed to make "any great contribution to the mind, to the world of the mind" (Anderson, 2007, p. 18). If BASR's commercial studies failed to make a great contribution to the world of the mind, by extension, so did the people who worked on those studies. At first, commercial studies and the women who worked on them appear to be unnecessary and disposable. Yet, it was precisely this feminized for-profit work that financially and methodologically subsidized men's contributions to the mind.

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