

No Place Like Home? Media Audience Research and Its Social Imaginaries

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When the first edition of *USA Today* appeared in September 1982, critics accused the newspaper's editors of peddling "fast-food news" by offering readers a daily menu of heavily processed news summaries, sports statistics, celebrity gossip, and trivia.¹ "*USA Today* gives its readers only what they want. No spinach, no bran, no cranberry juice, no liver," wrote Jonathan Yardley of the rival *Washington Post*.² But where guardians of journalistic integrity saw *USA Today* as representing a new "primacy of packagers and market analysts," few commentators at the time recognized just how appropriate their comparison to fast food might be.³ Where critics invoked the analogy to emphasize the packaged and processed nature of the newspaper's editorial content, as well as to raise questions about its "nutritional" value, what was truly revolutionary about *USA Today* was that it was the first newspaper expressly designed to be read outside of the home.

Allen H. Neuharth, the chief executive of the Gannett newspaper chain and the publisher of *USA Today*, underscored this point from the moment he announced his company had plans to produce a national daily. Neuharth and his management team faced an uphill battle in marketing their new enterprise. Media analysts and advertising experts seriously questioned whether a national daily newspaper could succeed.⁴ Publications directed to an undifferentiated mass audience had been failing since the late 1960s, in large part because of a lack of advertising revenues. By the early 1980s, the conventional wisdom among media experts was that advertisers were only interested in specialized and narrowly-defined target audiences. Facing an initial cost of more than \$40 million to launch *USA Today*, Neuharth worked tirelessly to publicize a vision of who would be reading it. He described a nation comprised of "millions of gypsies," people who were routinely away from home or who had recently moved, people who did not feel any special connection to their immediate surroundings. "*USA Today* is aimed at a mobile, interested, intellectual, upscale segment of society, but I think that mobile is the key word, whether it means people who have moved from Cincinnati to Atlanta, or people who are mobile in terms of their life styles and occupation."⁵

But Neuharth did not expect Madison Avenue to simply take him at his word. Gannett spent more than \$1 million on pre-launch marketing research, hiring pollsters from the Harris and Simmons firms to circulate prototypes and to solicit opinions from influential reviewers.⁶ Follow-up surveys emphasized that *USA Today* readers had more education and higher incomes than the readers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. "By its very nature, *USA Today* will put the national advertiser in touch with an audience that's sophisticated, vital and active," read a 1982 advertisement in the trade journal *Advertising Age*, "an audience as eager for quality goods and services as they are for the news itself."

Twenty years later, *USA Today* has surpassed the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to become the second-highest circulation daily newspaper in the United States, behind only the *Wall Street Journal*. Much of *USA Today*'s success can be attributed to its aggressive marketing in airports, train stations, hotels, and restaurant chains, a distribution plan that claimed to isolate the business traveler as distinct media audience. But during the first, critical, years of publication, *USA Today* had to create an image of that untapped audience in the minds of advertisers, a picture that depended on the results of research studies coupled with Al Neuharth's skills as a publicist.

To a great degree, the media landscape that we have inherited is a product of the interactions between these groups—advertisers and marketers on one side, audience researchers and media executives on the other. As the case of *USA Today* illustrates, historical change in the media industries has not been propelled in any simple way by technological innovation, nor has it depended on verifiable evidence about how people make use of the media in their lives. Alongside these factors, media and advertising professionals' evolving beliefs about the nature of personal identity, the significance of home, and the possibilities for shared social connections have figured dramatically in the shape of our present media environment. A brief history of audience research demonstrates that over the last twenty or thirty years, media and advertising decisionmakers believe they have witnessed a profound shift in all three of these areas.

A SOCIAL IMAGINARY

In 1889, the U.S. Census reported that the percentage of revenue that periodicals collected by selling advertising space had become roughly equivalent to the amounts collected through sales and subscriptions.⁷ From that point to the present day, advertising has continued to be, with rare exception, the means by which media firms meet costs and turn a profit. Because advertisers feel an obvious need to insure that their messages are being received and their dollars well spent, audience research has become a critical element in the business of media.

Media-sponsored audience research can be traced back to the first decades of the twentieth century, and historically, has served two principle purposes. First and foremost, it attempts to sell advertisers on a specific media outlet (*People* magazine, MTV, the Oxygen Channel) or on a particular medium (adult contemporary radio, city magazines, Spanish-language newspapers) through cooperative industry studies. In reality, what is being sold are the audiences who habitually consult and enjoy these media, a point that advertisers plainly understand. To a lesser extent, media-sponsored research is used to collect and retain an audience by offering editors, programmers, and web designers a means of estimating audience interest and fine-tuning the media "product." Historically, the latter has been a controversial application of audience research, in part because many media professionals defined their role not as "giving the audience what it wants," but giving the audience what they were believed to need in order to appreciate high culture or to be well-informed citizens.⁸

By their very nature, studies that attempt to count and describe media audiences produce an authoritative form of social imaginary. While not false in any simple sense, these studies suffer from the same limitation that afflicts all forms of audience research: that is, that "audience" in itself is an abstraction that attempts to order, categorize, and

make sense of a scattered and invisible group of people.⁹ The idea of an measurable “audience” suggests a certain cohesiveness to the group, even if in practice, it is the extraordinarily tenuous kind of cohesion that results from millions of viewers, from all walks of life, each with his or her own history of experiences, tuning in to watch a 30-second commercial during the Super Bowl. It is not unusual for media and advertising experts to debate the limitations of audience research, but these discussions almost invariably center on refining or expanding the available measurement instruments.

Defining these social imaginaries is not a frivolous matter. In the United States, media-sponsored audience research has historically been one of the most significant areas of inquiry for the applied social sciences. Research entrepreneurs such as Paul Lazarsfeld at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University were among the early pioneers of media studies, devising new methods of study in hopes of answering the elusive question of who was out there reading, listening, or watching.¹⁰ Today, opinion polls, focus groups, and Nielsen families are familiar to people who have no professional connection to the media. Audience measurement has become a lucrative business in its own right; when the Netherlands-based multinational VNU acquired the market research and television ratings company A.C. Nielsen in 1999, the sticker price was \$2.7 billion.¹¹

Communications historians have long argued that change is not simply a matter of new technologies arriving to transform the cultural landscape.¹² Beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, and established patterns of behavior all influence the uses and effects imagined for new technologies. Over time, technological innovations may in turn contribute to new ways of seeing and experiencing the social world. Audience measurements are bound up in a similar process. The design of measurement instruments is deeply marked by media professionals’ shared beliefs and practices; at the same time, the information about the audience produced by these instruments helps to reinforce, define, and occasionally challenge trade customs and conventional industry wisdoms. Methods of audience measurement and interpretations of the results are powerfully effected by researchers, media executives, and advertisers’ perceptions of the prevailing cultural trends. But measurement instruments and new forms of data also help to determine what these recognized trends will be.

Over the course of time, certain narratives about social change may gain credence through the “evidence” produced by audience research. In an environment of uncertainty, these are the shared stories that media producers and advertisers tell themselves to justify their decisions or explain their courses of action. For the past 30 years, the prevailing set of narratives circulating among media professionals has emphasized the accelerating pace of everyday life, the increasing savvy and skepticism of media consumers, and the fragmentation of American society into separate lifestyle enclaves. These stories have acquired much of their authority from audience researchers, whose approaches and conclusions have been profoundly influenced by shifting notions of home, personal identity, and community.

AUDIENCES BEFORE WORLD WAR II: THE SCIENCE OF IMPRESSIONS

Prior to the 1930s, knowledge of media audiences consisted of little more than anecdotal impressions coupled with basic demographics. The advertising sales departments at firms like the Chicago Tribune and the Curtis Publishing Company were

among the earliest pioneers in the field of marketing research, conducting door-to-door interviews and “pantry surveys” to collect data about household product purchases.¹³ But because the goal of this research was to encourage national manufacturers to spend more on print advertising or to allocate more of their budget in a particular geographic market, these surveys compiled data about neighborhoods, cities, or regions. There was little effort to describe or measure media audiences as distinct social groups.

In their own market evaluations, advertising firms adopted the custom of dividing cities and towns into neighborhoods, assigning each a grade (“A,” “B,” “C” or “D”) based on home values or the average family income of residents.¹⁴ Predictably, publishers tried to emphasize the number of their subscribers hailing from the more desirable “A” and “B” neighborhoods, suggesting that greater resources would translate into more active consumers who comprised a better audience for advertising. But publishers had little information about how their periodicals were actually used and no real insights about what persuaded readers to spend money. Advertising experts suspected that the answers to these questions might determine if their commercial messages were effective. In the absence of any credible information, advertisers fell back upon anecdotes, trade wisdom, and “professional instincts.”

Indeed, despite an avowed respect for new “scientific” methods, advertisers tended to rely on subjective impressions of media audiences in deciding where to place their messages and how to frame their pitch. Over time, those impressions were assembled into a more general vision of American society. Advertising historian Roland Marchand argues that in practice, advertisers conceived of the public in terms of two broad groups, the “mass” and the “class.” These working divisions, writes Marchand, were largely based on the audiences imagined for popular media.¹⁵ The sensationalism and excess of tabloid newspapers, confession magazines, and Hollywood romances did not hold up well against the cosmopolitan standards of Madison Avenue executives, and many harbored an image of the masses as uncultivated and impressionable. Yet, crucially, gender tended to trump all other characteristics when it came to imagining readers, since the trade wisdom during this era held that up to 80 percent of household purchases were made by women. The advice offered by advertising authorities and the trade press in the 1920s and 30s reveal that descriptions of the “masses” were highly feminized, sharing the qualities of irrationality, emotionalism, and susceptibility that were so often attributed to women.¹⁶

The complacency that media firms and advertisers displayed in distinguishing audience information from more general market data was upset by the rapid growth of radio as a medium. Hidden behind the walls of the home, radio audiences represented a mystery both in terms of their numbers and in terms of how listeners interacted with the new medium. From the beginning, Marchand suggests, advertisers believed that there was something special about the radio, an unique intimacy that newspapers or magazines could not begin to match.¹⁷ For a time, in fact, many advertisers were wary of commercializing radio, fearing that if product appeals entered the home by this means, a backlash might develop against their industry. As radio promoters struggled to resolve these questions—of how many were tuning in and what they were experiencing—media audience research witnessed its first major divide along qualitative and quantitative lines.

The first radio rating service, the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting, was formally launched in 1929.¹⁸ Inspired by George Gallup and other public opinion experts,

CAB researchers telephoned a selection of homes at set intervals during the day, asking the respondent what he or she had listened to in the preceding two hours. Some advertisers immediately raised doubts about the accuracy of these ratings, extending their low opinion of the masses to a distrust of audience recall. The first refinement in radio audience measurement was therefore the invention of “coincidental ratings” which polled household members about what they were listening to at the time of the call. The pursuit of a foolproof measure of radio audiences would continue throughout the 1930s and beyond, culminating in the A.C. Nielsen company’s introduction of its “audimeter” in 1942. By mechanically recording when a radio set was on and which channel it was tuned to, the audimeter eliminated the need for self-reporting from the unreliable masses.¹⁹

However foolproof the methods, ratings still only measured media exposure. Questions remained about how radio effected its listeners and whether the medium enjoyed a special relationship with its audience. Advertisers, network executives, and researchers shared a belief that radio might be a instrument of social uplift, a means of elevating popular tastes by bringing high culture to the masses. As Susan Douglas suggests, the research conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Research was strongly influenced by this vision.²⁰ From their offices on the fringes of Columbia University, these research entrepreneurs conducted studies for the government, private corporations, and media industry groups throughout the 1930s and 40s. In their studies of radio audiences, Bureau researchers pioneered the use of qualitative methods including focus groups, participant observation, and structured and unstructured interviews. Invariably, these studies frustrated hopes that radio would cultivate a taste for high culture, revealing, for example, that many listeners didn’t mind commercials and actually regarded them as educational.²¹ Fans of advice programs believed they were improving themselves by learning about manners or how to conduct themselves in public.²² Other researchers found that soap opera listeners regarded their favorite programs as teaching lessons in how to live a better and more moral life.²³

RESEARCH IN THE 1950s: ALFRED POLITZ AND LLOYD WARNER

As the United States emerged from World War II, the divide between qualitative and quantitative approaches to audience research widened. Among quantitative researchers, efforts to discover a foolproof method of enumerating the audience intensified. Consisting mainly of polling experts, this faction held the comparative advantage of not requiring an explanation of their purposes. At the end of the day, advertisers understood the importance of numbers. Throughout the 1950s, the most prominent and respected spokesperson for quantitative audience research was Alfred Politz, a former pollster and advertising research director who established his own firm in 1947. Politz built his career by challenging the assumptions that underwrote quantitative research, arguing tirelessly for refinements in enumeration methods. He insisted that merely gathering information about the audience was not enough; audience measures had to be meaningful and the results had to offer a sound basis for action.²⁴ In 1943, for example, Politz published an article in the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* that broke with market orthodoxy, proposing that households were a misleading and irrelevant measure of audiences.²⁵ What researchers should be counting, Politz argued, was the number of *housewives* who were exposed to a particular newspaper or magazine.

This willingness to argue over the finer points of measurement while leaving the trade wisdom about women intact was typical of media audience research in the 1950s. As the postwar boom continued, the belief that women did an overwhelming majority of the family purchasing began to be questioned in some quarters, but the assumption survived as a factor influencing how programs of audience research were conceived.²⁶ It was not simply that the “80 percent rule” was a stubborn article of faith for advertisers. Setting the trade wisdom against a larger historical backdrop, it is clear that the notion of the housewife as family purchasing agent acquired new meaning with the enshrinement of the nuclear family. Economists have estimated that almost the entire growth in the U.S. Gross National Product during the 1950s can be attributed to housing construction and consumer durables.²⁷ Stephanie Coontz observes that while food expenditures rose 33 percent after the war, and clothing 20 percent, spending on furniture and appliances rose 240 percent.²⁸ All of this spending was made possible by increasing wages, particularly among the nation’s unionized blue collar workers. The editors of *Fortune* magazine described this surge as the emergence of an “All-American market” composed of a burgeoning “middle-income class.”²⁹ But market and audience researchers, along with most journalists and intellectuals of the time, overlooked the true paradox of blue collar families joining the “All-American” class of home-owning nuclear families. As Coontz, Elaine Tyler May, and other historians have noted, membership in the middle-income group and participation in the consumer activity that it made possible was for many families, predicated on women taking employment outside of the home.³⁰

Meanwhile, despite a proliferation of books and magazine articles celebrating the “affluent society,” advertising experts predicted a business climate marked by uncertainty, as more products and more commercial messages equaled more competition for the consumer’s discretionary income. Radio, newspaper, and magazine executives faced increased competition as well—most visibly from television—and the result was a torrent of contradictory and conflicting claims. Within this environment, audience researchers like Politz made scrupulous methodology their selling point. The studies that Politz designed in the 1950s went to extraordinary lengths in the interest of “scientific” research. One study commissioned by *LIFE* magazine employed more than 200 interviewers for more than a year, eventually costing the publisher close to a half a million dollars.³¹ Doubting that fieldworkers could be relied upon to accurately count the number of housing units in a neighborhood, Politz used fire insurance maps to select the homes that would be sampled. Most remarkably, he devised an elaborate ruse to minimize questions about recall and the over-reporting of reading habits. When recruiting respondents, fieldworkers acted as if the purpose of the *LIFE* study was to measure reader interest in certain kinds of editorial content. Interviewers would sit down in the kitchen or living room and proceed through an entire issue of the magazine, asking respondents whether each individual item looked interesting or appealing. At the end of this arduous process, the interviewer asked the key question: “Have you actually seen this issue before?” Back at the offices of Alfred Politz Research, the responses to the final question were carefully tabulated to determine how many people were exposed to a typical issue of the magazine. The rest of the interview, including all the collected information about reader preferences, was then discarded.

Almost single-handedly, Politz touched off an intense competition among magazines to discover a form of audience measurement that would place them ahead of

their rivals.³² For *LIFE*, he created the idea of the pass-along audience, the number of people who would handle a magazine before it was set out with the trash. He devised studies to investigate which magazine was most popular among people who regularly read only one. He established which magazines ranked highest in terms of “Reader Days” or the number of repeat consultations. Although Politz continued to emphasize the scrupulous logic of his research methods, continual pressure from clients to invent new and favorable measures ultimately opened his studies to questions of interpretation. A Politz study for *Better Homes and Gardens*, for example, revealed that the magazine’s readers ranked high in terms of their “venturesomeness,” or the willingness to try new products. Though few dared to question Politz at the height of his power, the question that might well have been asked was whether “venturesomeness” might just as easily been termed “fickleness” or “difficulty to please.”

Researchers engaged in qualitative audience studies did not shrink before such questions. Indeed, the brief heyday of qualitative “motivations research” (or “MR”) in the 1950s was more a matter of anxious business leaders responding to the persuasive arguments of researchers than it was a case of demonstrated results. Captivated and occasionally appalled by what qualitative researchers were claiming to discover, the business press lavished attention on their attempts to expose the underlying motives that compelled people to buy.³³ The MR “movement” represented the first concerted and self-conscious effort to apply social science methods to the fields of marketing and consumer research. Vance Packard famously described its practitioners in his bestselling 1957 expose, *The Hidden Persuaders*, implying that there was something vaguely unsavory about these “depth probers” that reminded him of Soviet propaganda ministers.³⁴ While *The Hidden Persuaders* plunged advertisers and market researchers to a firestorm of controversy, it was the use of psychological and psychoanalytic methods to condition consumer response that captured the most publicity. More circumspect in their claims of control, a second group of “MR” practitioners believed that business enterprise had much to learn from sociology and anthropology. Of these, the social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner of Harvard and the University of Chicago was the most noteworthy.

Throughout the 1950s, Warner’s work was cited approvingly in advertising and marketing trade journals and many other quarters of the business press.³⁵ One of the earliest pioneers in tradition of community studies, Warner’s reputation was based on his “discovery” of social class as a structuring principle of American life.³⁶ During the 1930s and 40s, he and a team of fieldworkers assembled an extravagantly detailed study of a New England town which they called “Yankee City.” Setting out to examine “the social organism” in its entirety, the Yankee City researchers collected interviews and observations, devised surveys, drew maps, studied diaries and scrapbooks, constructed kinship charts, investigated club membership rolls, examined health and police records, obtained copies of box office receipts, and kept an extensive file of newspaper clippings. One intrepid fieldworker even read the scripts of the plays performed by the high school drama troupe.³⁷ In interpreting the results, Warner claimed that he and his co-workers had solved a fundamental mystery. Expecting to find that wealth and income provided the basis for Yankee City’s social order, he claimed to have found something else patterning everyday interactions. Warner called this patterning structure “social class” and the study of this concept would become synonymous with his work.

As a social scientist, Warner had his share of critics, most notably the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills.³⁸ To these professional detractors, Warner's offenses ranged from an ahistorical definition of class, to an over-reliance on self reporting and reputation, to a failure to recognize "class" as expression of power relationships.³⁹ But the business press of the 1950s clearly demonstrates that this criticism did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm marketers and advertisers had for Warner's work. In achieving this level of respect, Warner benefited from a dense and influential network of intermediaries, benefactors, and protégés with business credentials, a line that stretched back to his human relations work as an adjunct member of Elton Mayo's research team at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne Works.⁴⁰ In addition, Warner had energetic and well-positioned admirers who published widely and became "MR" celebrities in their own right.⁴¹

A final, crucial element to Warner's popularity was that he made sense of the "middle-income" market, offering advertisers and marketers images of these newly integrated consumers. From 1946 to 1965, his business involvements centered on Social Research, Inc., a Chicago consulting firm he co-founded with a former student, Burleigh Gardner.⁴² As a part-time business-school instructor, Gardner had become disenchanted with academic bureaucracy, and he shared Warner's desire to see more direct application of social science theories to business problems. With little capital and no office space, the pair relied extensively on University of Chicago graduate students as their staff. At first, SRI tried to attract clients by placing itself within the personnel management tradition, administering personality tests to executive recruits at companies like Sears Roebuck, General Foods, and International Harvester. But by the 1950s, the firm's most faithful clients were publishing companies, broadcast networks, and media industry groups.⁴³

In designing programs of audience research, the firm followed Warner's direction, extending the Yankee City model of social class to the study of media audiences. From 1949 on, SRI enjoyed a longstanding relationship with Macfadden Publications, publisher of *True Story*, *True Romance*, and other magazines with predominantly working-class audiences. Historically, Macfadden had struggled to attract advertising to the pages of these publications because advertisers held a generally low opinion of "confession" readers. Studies conducted by SRI offered alternative images of the "workingman's wife" who read *True Story*, emphasizing that her place in the American class system aligned her with other new members of "the middle majority" who craved counseling about how to spend discretionary income. Warner and Gardner also explored the manner in which readers described themselves as responding to the confession magazines' stories. At prompting from SRI, Macfadden reclassified its titles as "family behavior publications," claiming that readers used "true-life" melodramas as a instrument for furthering their moral development. SRI and Macfadden continued to collaborate on studies of working class audiences throughout the 1950s, and these themes would be continuously repeated.⁴⁴

Some of SRI's other media clients included the CBS radio broadcasting network, *Fortune* and *Good Housekeeping* magazines, and newspapers like the *Detroit Free Press*, *Miami Herald*, and *Chicago Tribune*. Gender continued to play a decisive role in the design of these audience studies. For example, SRI conducted a 1954 study entitled *Women and Advertising* which purported to investigate whether women had a measurably different response to advertising in "service magazines" (*Better Homes and Gardens*,

Good Housekeeping, *Ladies' Home Journal*) when compared to the most popular weeklies (*LIFE* and the *Saturday Evening Post*).⁴⁵ Like Politz's measurements of "reader days" and "venturesomeness," the SRI study offered its sponsor, *Good Housekeeping*, a way of competing for advertising dollars that did not depend on numbers alone.

Women and Advertising used social science methods including directed and undirected interviews, projective tests (sentence completion, cartoon dialogue, hypothetical situations), comparisons, and card pile sorts. SRI researchers conducted more than 900 interviews in Chicago, Monmouth, and Rockville, Illinois; Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio; Kalamazoo, Michigan; and St. Louis, Missouri.⁴⁶ The end product, much like the studies conducted for Macfadden, claimed to offer advertisers a glimpse into "the world of the middle majority housewife"⁴⁷ Predictably, the researchers found that women regarded service magazines more favorably, consulted them more carefully, and claimed their pages were a better reflection of their individual personality. In arriving at this conclusion, the SRI team described "upper lower class" and "lower middle class" housewives as having a characteristic set of outlooks, values, and behaviors that shaped their media responses. Surprisingly, what emerged was a disturbing portrait of isolation, made no less disturbing by the researchers' odd mixture of sympathy and detachment:

...she is likely to think about the outside world with considerable anxiety and apprehension. She does not understand it, she has been taught to stay away from it, she reads in the newspapers and hears over the radio the dreadful and dramatic things which go on in it, events over which she has no control. It seems to her to strike at her life without warning, and in a way in which she cannot fight back. One of her strongest desires is to keep this outside world at bay, to know in advance and have safeguards for anything which it may do to her own personal and family life.

At this point it is wise to remember that the middle majority housewife lives in a world which is sociologically and economically highly vulnerable. She does not have occupational or personal skills sufficient to maintain her family if anything happens to her husband—divorce, death, prolonged illness, desertion, etc. If the family is struck a blow by any catastrophe, the only route the family is likely to take is down.⁴⁸

Such passages were a radical departure from the standard media promotions that offered the most "venturesome," "active," or "influential" readers, yet they were always designed to sell an audience and not to imply a social critique. Women who experienced loneliness or longed for greater control over their lives were ultimately expected to find those needs met within the pages of the service magazines. Indeed, there was a particular way in which the desperation and vulnerability depicted in *Women and Advertising* suggested a group of readers that would be particularly open to the "advice" of commercial messages.

The interpretations that SRI researchers gave to their findings were markedly influenced by Lloyd Warner's intellectual affinities, theoretical assumptions, and social philosophy. Not surprisingly, he and his colleagues—like other audience researchers of the 1950s—overlooked the means by which many "middle majority" families were making material gains. Again, fully 40 percent of American women were working outside the home by the end of the 1950s, and their participation in the workforce had

become an “essential prerequisite” to many families attaining middle income status.⁴⁹ But Warner’s underlying principles and prejudices influenced the recognizable results even when the subject was social class, his special area of expertise. From his earliest research, Warner regarded class as functional and necessary to a harmonious society and an efficient division of labor.⁵⁰ Throughout his career, he maintained that intellectuals, business leaders, and politicians needed to insure that lines of class mobility were open whenever possible; failing that goal, he argued that the responsibility of the engaged social scientist was to help people to better adjust to their place within the system. Media was especially important in this regard, serving an integrative function by circulating narratives and coordinating rituals that provided the basis for a shared identification with the local community, as well as American society more generally.⁵¹ Warner held to this tenet throughout all of his work on media audiences, and this it continued to influence the work of SRI researchers even after he withdrew from active participation in the consulting firm in 1965.

LIVING APART: AUDIENCES AFTER 1970

Ten years later, Warner’s belief in media circulating shared values and serving an integrative social function would seem hopelessly dated. For advertisers and media executives alike, the most visible sign that the existence of a shared “general interest” was in doubt was the spectacular demise of *LIFE*, *Look*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁵² At the time of their collective collapse, all three magazines were among the nation’s circulation leaders, but all were heavily dependant on advertising to maintain their profitability. Beginning in the mid-1960s, some advertisers began to complain that the massive circulations of these magazines included large numbers of “unproductive” low-income readers who did not consume the products on display. Alfred Politz tried to rescue the beleaguered *Saturday Evening Post* from these accusations as early as 1959, when he oversaw a survey that revealed the *Post* audience included the largest number of trend-setting “influentials” of any major magazine.⁵³ But despite the Politz name, the survey was met with suspicion. In an extraordinary six-page letter, Fairfax Cone, managing partner of the Chicago advertising firm of Foote, Cone, and Belding, wrote to the *Post*’s advertising director to express his misgivings about the research findings. Cone began his letter by rhetorically asking “Why is the Saturday EP, with its huge top of the mass circulation, not the favorite of all printed advertising media?” He continued:

Statistics in millions have neither the interest nor the impact, nor do they carry the conviction, of a half-dozen personal experiences illustrating the same point. And there simply are no personal experiences in any advertising man’s life to give credence to the statistics of *Post* influentiality (if there is such a word). The “Influential” study offered little that was tangible to make the new multiplication valid. Advertising effectiveness must come not from the proneness of people to advertising, but instead from the kind of audience the advertising reaches.

Most advertising people, with the exception of those in mail order, do not buy circulation. They may talk about this, and rationalize about it.

But most of them buy audiences. And whether all of them admit this or not, they choose these audiences from mental images.⁵⁴

All of the general interest magazines took drastic measures to alter the mental images that advertisers had of their audiences, but the damage had already been done. By 1972, all three magazines had expired or greatly reduced their frequency of publication.

As the general-interest periodicals floundered, the number of highly-specialized magazines rose sharply. Publishers learned that it was possible to attract enough advertising to turn a healthy profit by promising audiences that were smaller but more clearly defined. The momentum of change increased when advertising firms learned how to use computers to match demographics and circulation figures with information about product purchases, thereby generating a composite consumer profile with much less effort than before.⁵⁵ This was fundamentally a revolution of data analysis, as the means of collecting this data and the potential benefits of compiling it had been understood for some time. Now, the arduous process of crunching the numbers could be automated. Further reinforcing the trend, media and advertising companies that used data processing technology to define specialized audiences could point to the newest marketing textbooks, which strongly endorsed a strategy of “market segmentation.”⁵⁶

Specialized publications claimed to offer audiences predisposed to advertisements that better corresponded with their interests; at the same time, the editorial content of these publications provided copywriters and strategic planners an image of the group with whom they believed they were communicating. Even the success of magazines like *People*, initially believed to be insufficiently focused in its target audience, seemed to offer the exception that proved the trend. When *People* began to adopt trade advertising slogans like “Divide and Conquer” and “Meet the Tailored People” in the 1970s, it was evident that even the “general interest” now consisted of a segmented audience.

First debated by qualitative researchers in the 1950s, the notion of consumer “lifestyles” became inextricably bound to the tools and strategies of market segmentation in the 1970s. Market and audience researchers began to devise systems for categorizing consumers into “lifestyle groups,” using the processing power of computers to standardize what had been an inherently slippery means of describing identity. Around 1954, when SRI researchers had first begun to describe something they termed a “style of life,” the phrase connoted a pattern of tastes, behaviors, and priorities related to consumer preferences. The earliest uses of the term were in explicit reference to the habits of the upper middle class. “The upper-middle class person emphasizes very strongly his individuality – and the selection of a style of life that both expresses and reflects this individuality,” noted an SRI report entitled *The Function of Newspapers for Their Readers*. The report continued:

The ‘style of life’ may be observed in a number of ways—probably best in the things which are symbolic of ‘gracious’ living Whether this style of life is expressed in a large library, soft leather furniture in the study, subscription tickets to a concert series, antique furniture, or whatever—the central point is that people in the upper-middle class often spend a lifetime of earning power establishing and maintaining a particular individual style of life.⁵⁷

The emphasis was on an individual identity that was freely chosen and outwardly expressed through the application of wealth and disposable income. By the end of the 1950s, however, SRI researchers were convinced that even working-class consumers engaged in patterns of activity that expressed a particular lifestyle. In the introduction to studies like *Workingman's Wife: Her Personality, World, and Lifestyle* (1959), Warner and Gardner emphasized that effective communication with the working class housewife required advertisers to understand how her tastes, values, and “consuming styles” were significantly different from those of her upper-middle class counterpart.⁵⁸ From these early, somewhat confused uses, the notion of lifestyles caught on quickly among marketers, although there was no immediate consensus about how to define the concept. When the American Marketing Association’s “Task Force on Life-styles” presented its first report in 1964, the range of papers presented demonstrated a just how malleable the concept continued to be.⁵⁹

The arrival of the computer changed all this. In the words of consumer experts Michael Solomon and Basil Englis, the computer entered marketing practice “like a hammer looking for a nail to pound,” and promptly discovered the debate about how to identify lifestyles and sort the population into its constituent groups.⁶⁰ In the early 1970s, a government consultant named Jonathan Robbin parlayed lessons learned while working for the Department of Housing and Urban Development into his own marketing firm, which he called Claritas. Robbin’s firm offered clients marketing reports that sorted consumers into a typology of 40 different “lifestyle clusters,” ranging from “Executive Suites,” to “Furs and Station Wagons,” to “Shotguns and Pickups.”⁶¹ Mapping concentrations of these various consumers onto zipcodes, Robbin invented the slogan, “You Are Where You Live.” Today, Claritas earns in excess of \$100 million a year from customized reports, consulting services, software, and proprietary databases, and is part of the same marketing multinational that owns A.C. Nielsen. In 1994, Claritas expanded its catalog of “lifestyles” from 40 to 62, to more accurately reflect America’s “balkanizing” population. Michael Weiss, a journalist who has made his career as the unofficial press agent for Claritas, explains that, “In the clustered world, geographic communities united by PTAs, political clubs, and Sunday schools have given way to consumption communities defined by demographics, intellect, taste, and outlook.”⁶² Desktop versions of the Claritas system are customized to suit the special needs of newspapers, magazines, cable television, direct mail, and retail store locaters.⁶³

The appeal of the Claritas system and other lifestyle typologies is in the marriage of the computer’s number-crunching efficiency with a detailed imagining of a market segment. Significantly, more than one account suggests that the Claritas segmentation typology didn’t really begin to attract attention from marketers until a clever set of “lifestyle cluster” names was devised by a former advertising executive who was lending his skills to Robbin and his enterprise.⁶⁴ The important role that impressions play in the use of lifestyle data by media and advertising professionals is further illustrated by a remark made by an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* executive in 1991. Asked to explain why the newspaper employed a lifestyle typology to describe readers in its publicity materials, he responded simply, “Lifestyle research is most valuable in selling advertising. It helps advertisers picture their market better than when they use demographic statistics alone.”⁶⁵

Writing in 1978 as the only surviving founder of SRI, Burleigh Gardner lamented the uses to which the concept of lifestyles had been put by marketers:

I have long believed that the basic difference between our firm and most others is that we came from a background of trying to understand the dynamics of behavior and attitude and then, if appropriate, quantify them. Most other market researchers came from a background that assumes they already understand and only need quantification as the goal of research. This difference is important in our age of computers.

It is easy to be entranced by the beauties of statistical differences and masses of quantitative output and to lose sight of the need to understand what is going on. This is seen in the interest of many researchers in 'psychographics' and 'life style,' which are ways of setting up new classifications of people and showing complex relationships but often with no understanding of how people function.⁶⁶

Gardner's objections were voiced in the name of scientific inquiry. Within a few years, the larger question might well have been whether audience researchers, media executives, and advertisers, in their adoption of "lifestyle" databases and segmentation strategies, were acting on a particular image of where American society was headed.

UNIVERSAL FRAGMENTS: AUDIENCES IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

When today's working audience models are held up against those of the past, the lines of continuity that run throughout the history of audience research are marked by crucial differences. Multiplying media options and the ambient clutter of advertising have intensified the anxiety that media executives and advertisers feel at the prospect that people today lead increasingly diffuse lives. As a result, media and advertising professionals have increasingly focused attention on controlling the spaces of media interaction, in part to offset persistent fears about having lost control over the audience's time schedule. As early as the 1950s, Alfred Politz recognized that if radio was to survive alongside television and its national audiences, radio executives needed to establish in convincing terms what their medium could do better. He emphasized the ways in which radio "seeped into the crevices of peoples' lives," finding them at moments when the attention required of TV viewing was simply not feasible.⁶⁷ The widespread acceptance of this reasoning may well have allowed radio to survive as a commercial medium. Today, the most highly prized (and priced) time slot for radio advertising is during the 4 p.m.-7 p.m. "drive time." Reports by companies like Arbitron, which specializes in the measurement of radio audiences, now read like pop sociology investigating how listeners in markets like Los Angeles use the automobile to manage their challenging schedules.⁶⁸ Arbitron has good reason to expand its research program beyond program choices and the number of listeners; as commuters spend increasing amounts of time in their automobiles, hours spent with the radio have increased while overall time of exposure to most other forms of media have decreased.

Changes within the "Nielsen Family" system for calculating television ratings offer another example of how media executives, following prompts and an occasional

threat from advertisers, have responded to the perception that people lead increasingly frenetic lives. The last major advance in ratings technology was the launch of the Nielsen “People Meter” in 1987. As cable television, VCRs, and channel-changing remotes came into wide use, advertisers and television executives began to fear that existing methods of measuring the audience were inadequate.⁶⁹ Despite the installation of “audimeters” that recorded television use and channel selection, the Nielsen system still relied heavily on self-reported diaries to ascertain which family members were present in the audience. Advertisers had long been suspicious of this information source, doubting respondents’ commitment to recording their viewing behavior. Technology that allowed channel surfing, muting, and the “zapping” of commercials in recorded programs only intensified the feeling that diaries were a hopeless cause. In response to these grumblings, Nielsen introduced the People Meter, a remote control unit featuring a separate button for each member of the family. In theory, when a family member sits down to watch TV, he or she presses a button to log in and presses a second time when through viewing. In minimizing the active participation of respondents, the People Meter joins a long line of measurement innovations that have attempted to correct for the unreliable nature of the mass audience.

But by the late-1990s, advertisers and media executives had begun to worry that even the People Meter required too much of TV viewers. Moreover, researchers were increasingly aware that home was only one of the places where people came into contact with television, and was increasingly a place that represented a diminishing share of many people’s time. Efforts to improve and streamline the means of tracking viewing habits began. This spring, with financial support from A.C. Nielsen, Arbitron has embarked on a trial of the newest audience measurement technology, the Portable People Meter.⁷⁰ Costing upwards of \$20 million to develop and field-test, the system consists of small pager-sized personal recorders which each participating family member carries with them as they go about their day. The unit records inaudible coded signals from every radio, TV, or cable TV program that the wearer comes into contact with. At night, each portable unit is “docked” in a home console from which the collected data is transmitted to a central processing station. In an obvious concession to the distrust that has long characterized the interactions of researchers and media audiences, each Portable People Meters contains a built-in motion detector to insure that the unit is worn.

But the nature of the distrust researchers have of the audience has assumed new forms as well. Where in the past, researchers had questioned the memory of audience members or suspected that irrational drives often motivated behavior, the latest fears center, ironically enough, on the audience’s self-conscious participation in a highly mediated world. This is evident in the growing reservations that researchers have about the use of focus groups, which had been perhaps the single most popular information gathering method of the 1980s and 1990s.⁷¹ Recently, experts in qualitative market research have raised the discouraging possibility that some focus group participants are not responding in a spontaneous manner, but rather, are acting according to media-generated ideas about how focus group participants are supposed to act. In what some regarded as the beginning of the end for focus groups, a mail-order book entitled *The Focus Group and Mystery Shopper’s Participant Information Manual and Directory* was published in 2000; the book helpfully instructs people on how to be a professional focus group respondent.⁷²

Qualitative research still offers a means of investigating trends like the accelerating pace of daily activity and the audience's increased awareness of their media involvements. But when compared to the work that Lloyd Warner and his protégés were conducting in the 1950s, today's qualitative research contains an important difference. Researchers today emphasize the "fragmented" and "contradictory" nature of identity. While this perception poses a challenge to reductive computer "lifestyle" catalogs, it also undercuts further any remaining belief in media as an instrument of social integration. Since the mid-1980s, a group of consumer theorists based in business schools have promoted an "interpretive turn" in consumer research.⁷³ Adopting the principle that all truth is socially-constructed, these theorists propose that the goal of consumer research is not to uncover the universal laws of the market, but rather, to understand the multiple, overlapping, and contradictory identities of consumers. These self-described "postmodern" consumer experts embrace methods like ethnographies, close readings, discourse analysis, and personal introspection.⁷⁴ Their articles and papers have come to resemble presentations listed in the MLA convention program, with titles like "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption," "Deconstructive Strategy and Consumer Research," "Post-structuralism and the Dialectics of Advertising: Discourse, Ideology, Resistance."⁷⁵

Although consumer research is not synonymous with audience research, it is important to note that the domains of media and marketing have steadily converged over the past three decades. Beyond the familiar warnings that commerce and culture have become increasingly indistinguishable, it is worth asking what the implications may be when media and marketing share—and mutually act upon—a vision of the fragmented public. Communications scholar Joseph Turow has suggested that "narrowcasting" and other, more subtle ways of tailoring the audience for radio, TV, cable, and the web have created the equivalent of "electronic gated communities."⁷⁶ Though expressly designed for an audience reading outside of the home, a newspaper like *USA Today* shares in this exclusivity; the imagined settings that help to define its audience are privatized spaces like hotel lobbies, sky malls, college campuses, and the business class section of the New York-to-Washington shuttle. In the past, media designed for specific segments of society (ethnic newspapers, women's magazines, Christian radio stations) have co-existed alongside other forms of media that at least paid service to the ideal of being all-inclusive. Turow suggests it has become increasingly difficult to find examples of such "society making" media, as there are fewer media enterprises that do not self-consciously target particular audiences. Insofar as heightened media segmentation has opened up new possibilities for groups like gays and lesbians, African Americans, and Latinos who have been historically underserved by the media, this is a trend with some undeniably positive results.⁷⁷ But the segmentation of media audiences into "lifestyle" groups defined by consumer researchers, advertisers, and marketers also threatens to pose a particular, class-bound perspective of social life as a universal.

While the accelerating pace of life, a more self-conscious relationship with the media, and the fragmented and fluid nature of identity are understood as socially-pervasive trends, the management strategies practiced by many media firms demonstrate that certain audiences—and their corresponding ways of seeing and experiencing the world—receive a disproportionate share of the attention. Even newspapers, once the medium that claimed to have "something for everyone" (and historically, the form of

published material with the highest number of working-class readers) actively court affluent members of the professional middle class through their lifestyle, consumer, and personal finance coverage. The content of these pages is used, in turn, to present advertisers with “upscale” images of who their messages will be reaching. The danger in accepting the notions about social change that are circulated in much of today’s media is that these cultural drifts and “trends” are increasingly reported from the perspective of an audience that is imagined in greatly limited terms—especially in their class positioning.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, media management strategies of “controlled circulation” in publishing, or “signalling” and “tailoring” in cable television, take tangible steps to use distribution and content to exclude those populations who are deemed less desirable by advertisers.⁷⁹

Of course, the tangled, perhaps inextricable, relationship between marketing and the media predates our present era of “synergy” and media conglomerates. Moreover, as the examples of Paul Lazarsfeld and W. Lloyd Warner demonstrate, academics have a long tradition of contributing ideas to both spheres, especially within the area of audience research. The difference today is not that the circle between media, marketing, and the academy has closed, but rather how tightly the circle is now drawn. Marketers learn about emerging “lifestyle” trends by closely monitoring the media, who often call upon academics as authoritative sources. The media report the results of academic studies that are thought most likely to interest their target audience as it has been defined for them by marketers. Attempting to explain the proliferation of media choices, academics offer theories about how community and identity are fragmenting—theories that a new breed of “postmodern” marketers find beguiling.

History demonstrates the despite the million-dollar investments in audience research, media executives and advertisers often fall back on their conventional wisdoms and subjective imaginaries in attempting to understand their social world. Without a sense of how drastically market segmentation has limited the class perspective of the media, and an awareness of how we—as academics—have often contributed to that process, those imaginaries might easily become our own.

NOTES

¹ Jonathan Yardley, "A Paper for a U.S.A. On the Go," *Washington Post* (20 September, 1982), C1; Ben H. Bagdikian, "Fast-food news: a week's diet," *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April 1983), 32-33.

² Yardley, "A Paper for a U.S.A. On the Go," C4.

³ Bagdikian, "Fast-food news," 33.

⁴ See, for example, "Experts wonder who will read USA Today," *Marketing & Media Decisions* (August 1981), 50; "Ad industry skeptical on national daily," *Advertising Age* (21 December 1981), 1; Bernice Kanner, "Does America Want A National Daily?" *New York* (1 March 1982), 23; B.G. Yovovich, "Tomorrow arrives for Today," *Advertising Age* (19 July 1982), M-12.

⁵ Yovovich, "Tomorrow arrives for Today," M3.

⁶ "Gannett issues prototype of it's [sic] national daily," *Editor & Publisher* (27 June 1981), 13; Joseph M. Winski, "Gannett tests national daily prototype," *Advertising Age* (29 June 1981), 80; Katharine Seelye, "Al Neuharth's technicolor baby," *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April 1983), 35.

⁷ Alfred McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973 [1937]), 172, 748-749.

⁸ For an analysis of the hostility that rank-and-file journalists, public-service broadcasters, and other media professionals display towards audience research see Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), especially chapter 7; David Shumway, "Objectivity, Bias, Censorship" in *Making and Selling Culture*, Richard Ohmann, ed. (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan/University Press of New England, 1996), 239-254.

⁹ On the institutional process of "making" or imagining the audience, see Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience*; James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney, "The Money Arrow: An Introduction to Audiencesmaking," in *Audiencesmaking: How the Media Create the Audience*, James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1994); Joseph Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁰ On Paul Lazarsfeld and the Bureau of Applied Social Research, see Jean Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence, 1890-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999), especially chapter 6; Paul Lazarsfeld, "An Episode in the History of Social Research: A Memoir," in Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, eds., *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). For a critique of Lazarsfeld and the "media effects" school of research, see Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society, and the Media*, Peter Gurevitch, et. al., eds. (New York: Routledge, 1982).

¹¹ Steven Battaglio, "Rating Game: VNU will buy Nielsen Media for \$2.7 bil.," *Hollywood Reporter* (August 17, 1999), 3; "VNU Agrees to Acquire Nielsen Media," *Business Publisher* (August 17, 1999), 2.

¹² See, for example, Warren I. Susman, "Culture and Communications," in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984 [1973]); Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974); John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Penguin, 1977); Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Communications in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford, 1988); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹³ Chicago Tribune Merchandising Service Department, *Winning A Great Market on Facts* (Chicago: The Chicago Tribune Company, 1916); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House, 1973); James R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 63-66.

¹⁵ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 63-66. Marchand notes that the term "mass" was rather misleading as in practice, as advertisers disregarded as much as forty percent of the U.S. population on the basis of their low incomes, their race, their location, or their use of a language other than English.

¹⁶ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 66-69.

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- ¹⁷ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 89-94.
- ¹⁸ Douglas, *Listening In*, 136-137; 158-160.
- ¹⁹ Douglas, *Listening In*, 158-160.
- ²⁰ Douglas, *Listening In*, 125-160.
- ²¹ Bureau of Applied Social Research, *The People Look at Radio* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 13-37.
- ²² Herta Herzog, "Professor Quiz—A Gratification Study," in *Radio and the Printed Page: An Introduction to the Study of Radio and Its Role in the Communication of Ideas*, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, ed. (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), 64-93. A thoughtful analysis of Herzog's study and its relationship the broader goals of the Bureau researchers appears in Douglas, *Listening In*, 144-148.
- ²³ See W. Lloyd Warner and William E. Henry, "Radio Day Time Serial: A Symbolic Analysis," *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, vol. 37 (1948), 3-71. A summary of Warner's work on soap operas appears in his *American Life: Dream and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 210-234.
- ²⁴ See Martin Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958); 182-191; 248-256. For further biographical details, see Hugh S. Hardy, "Alfred Politz—The Man," in *The Politz Papers: Science and Truth in Marketing Research*, Hugh S. Hardy, ed. (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1990), 1-14.
- ²⁵ Alfred Politz, "Family Versus Individual in Measurement of Audiences," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 38 (June 1943), 233-237.
- ²⁶ In 1956, Gilbert Burck, a writer for *Fortune* magazine, referred to the 80 percent rule as "an arrant exaggeration," and noted that the myth had been repeatedly challenged by audience researchers working for men's magazines. Still, the writer described marketers' pursuit of women as "now accelerating...both in force and sophistication." Burck, "What Makes Women Buy," *Fortune* (August 1956), 92-95+.
- ²⁷ Economist George Katona cited in Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 167.
- ²⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 25.
- ²⁹ Editors of *Fortune*, *The Changing American Market* (Garden City, NJ: Hanover House, 1955).
- ³⁰ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123-128; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 21-41; May, *Homeward Bound*, 162-182.
- ³¹ Alfred Politz Research, Inc. for LIFE, *A Study of Four Media: Their Accumulative and Repeat Audiences* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1953). Additional details about the conduct of the study can be found in Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.*, 183-191.
- ³² Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.*, 188-191.
- ³³ See, for example, Mason Haire, "Projective Techniques in Marketing Research," *Journal of Marketing* 14, 5 (April 1950), 649-656; Steuart Henderson Britt, "The Strategy of Consumer Motivation," *Journal of Marketing* 14, 5 (April 1950), 666-67; Joseph W. Newman, "Looking Around: Motivations Research," *Harvard Business Review* (January-February, 1955), 135-144; Perrin Styker, "Motivation Research," *Fortune* (June 1956), 144-147+.
- ³⁴ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: David McKay Company, 1957).
- ³⁵ Some approving mentions of Warner by marketing and advertising experts include Britt, "The Strategy of Consumer Motivation," 673; Newman, "Looking Around," 143; Pierre Martineau, *Motivation in Advertising: Motives That Make People Buy* (New York: Mc-Graw-Hill, 1957), ix; "Boom-city of Marketing: Chicago Report" *Printers' Ink* (August 15, 1958), 26. Occasional references to Warner continue to appear in recent reviews of consumer research; see for example, Richard P. Coleman, "The Continuing Significance of Social Class to Marketing," *Journal of Consumer Research* 10 (December 1983), 265-280; Michael R. Solomon, *Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, and Being*, 3rd edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 434-435.
- ³⁶ For an overview and attempt to synthesize the "community studies" tradition, see Maurice R. Stein, *The Eclipse of Community: An Interpretation of American Studies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964 [1960]). See also Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers: An Exploration of Class Behavior in America and the Hidden Barriers that Affect You, Your Community, Your Future* (New York, D. McKay Company, 1959). Packard's travel guide to social classes of the 1950s draws upon two decades of community studies.

- ³⁷ W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community: The Yankee City Series, Volume 1* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941), 45-68.
- ³⁸ C. Wright Mills, review of *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, in the *American Sociological Review* 7 (April 1942), 264-265.
- ³⁹ The most comprehensive review of Warner's critics is made by Ruth Rosner Kornhauser, "The Warner Approach to Social Stratification," in *Class, Status, and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification*, Richard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds. (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1953), 223-255.
- ⁴⁰ Mildred Warner, *W. Lloyd Warner: Social Anthropologist* (New York: Publishing Center for Cultural Resources, 1988), 42-47; Loren Baritz, *The Servants of Power: A History of the Use of Social Science in American Industry* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1960); William A. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), 33-35; Richard Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge: A History of the Hawthorne Experiments* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 154-157.
- ⁴¹ Most noteworthy were Pierre Martineau, advertising research director for the *Chicago Tribune*, and Sidney Levy, an SRI researcher who wrote a number of *Harvard Business Review* articles now considered marketing "classics." See Martineau, *Motivation in Advertising*; Pierre Martineau, "It's Time to Research the Consumer," *Harvard Business Review* 33 (July 1955), 53; Pierre Martineau, "Social Classes and Spending Behavior," *Journal of Marketing* (October, 1958), 121-130; Pierre Martineau, "Here's Look [sic] at Tomorrow's Consumer," *Nation's Business* (December 1958), 31-33; Burleigh B. Gardner and Sidney J. Levy, "The Product and the Brand," *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1955), 33-39; Sidney J. Levy, "Symbols for Sale," *Harvard Business Review* 37 (July 1959), 117-124.
- ⁴² "Burleigh Gardner: Selling the U.S. by class," *Printer's Ink* (March 25, 1960), 77-80;
- ⁴³ Details about SRI and its clients from Burleigh Gardner, "Human Relations in Industry and Social Research, 1940-1960," draft manuscript from W. Lloyd Warner Biography and Addenda collection, box 3, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago; Mildred Warner, *W. Lloyd Warner*, 155-160.
- ⁴⁴ Gardner, "Human Relations in Industry and Social Research, 1940-1960," 25-26.
- ⁴⁵ Social Research, Inc. for Good Housekeeping, *Women and Advertising: A Motivational Study of the Attitudes of Women Towards Eight Magazines* (New York: Hearst Corporation, 1954).
- ⁴⁶ Social Research, Inc., *Women and Advertising*, 64-69; 76.
- ⁴⁷ Social Research, Inc., *Women and Advertising*, 38.
- ⁴⁸ Social Research, Inc., *Women and Advertising*, 43.
- ⁴⁹ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 127.
- ⁵⁰ See W. Lloyd Warner, Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eells, *Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for the Measurement of Social Status* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1949), 9-11; Warner, *American Life*, 103-123.
- ⁵¹ See Warner, *American Life*, 210-234; W. Lloyd Warner, "Preface" to Ira O. Glick and Sidney J. Levy, *Living With Television* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962), 5-10. This belief clearly informs other SRI reports prepared for media clients. See, for example, the report prepared for the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, *A Study of the Functions of Newspapers for Their Readers* (Chicago: Social Research, Inc., 1954).
- ⁵² The demise of the "general interest" magazine is one of the most noted and debated episodes in recent publishing history. See Joseph C. Goulden, *The Curtis Caper* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1965); Otto Friedrich, *Decline and Fall* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Chris Welles, "Can Mass Magazines Survive?" *Columbia Journalism Review* (July-August, 1971); A.J. van Zuilen, *The Life Cycle of Magazines: A Historical Study of the Decline and Fall of the General Interest Magazine in the United States during the Period 1946-1972* (Uithoorn, Netherlands: Graduate Press, 1977). For more recent analysis, see Thomas Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming-of-Age with the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. chapter 6; David Abrahamson, *Magazine-Made America: The Cultural Transformation of the Postwar Periodical* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996).
- ⁵³ See Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.*, 189-191.
- ⁵⁴ Fairfax M. Cone, letter to Peter E. Schruth, 7 April 1959, 3-4. Box 62, folder 4, Fairfax M. Cone Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.
- ⁵⁵ For an account of the computer's impact on magazine audiences, see Beth E. Barnes and Lynne M. Thompson, "Power to the People (Meter): Audience Measurement Technology and Media Specialization," in *Audiencemaking: How the Media Create the Audience*, eds. James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1994), 75-94.

⁵⁶ See Philip Kotler, *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, and Control* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), especially pages 43-65 on "Market Segmentation." Kotler's *Marketing Management* has become the most widely used textbook in the teaching of marketing. Two pioneering articles on the subject were Wendall R. Smith, "Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies," *Journal of Marketing* 21 (1956), 3-8; and Daniel Yankelovich, "New Criteria for Market Segmentation," *Harvard Business Review* 42 (March/April 1964), 83-90.

⁵⁷ Social Research, Inc. for the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, *A Study of the Functions of Newspapers for their Readers*, (Chicago, Social Research, Inc.: 1954), 57-58.

⁵⁸ W. Lloyd Warner, "Preface," and Burleigh B. Gardner, "Introduction," to Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *Workingman's Wife: Her Personality, World, and Life Style* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1959), v-viii; ix-xiii.

⁵⁹ See John M. Rathmell, "Life Style Influences and Market Behavior—An Introduction;" William Lazer, "Life Style Concepts and Marketing;" Sidney J. Levy, "Symbolism and Life Style;" and David G. Moore, "Life Styles in Mobile Suburbia;" all in *Toward Scientific Marketing: Proceedings of the Winter Conference of the American Marketing Association*, Stephen A. Greysner, ed. (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1964), 129-169.

⁶⁰ Michael R. Solomon and Basil G. Englis, "Breaking out of the box: Is lifestyle a construct or a construction?," in *Consumer Research: Postcards from the Edge*, Stephen Brown and Darach Turley, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 324.

⁶¹ On the Claritas PRIZM typographies of "lifestyle clusters" see "Clusters," *The New Yorker* (February 1, 1982), 32-34; Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustering of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Erik Larson, *The Naked Consumer: How Our Private Lives Become Public Commodities* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992); Christina Del Valle, "They Know Who You Live—And How You Buy," *Business Week* (February 7, 1994), 89; Susan Mitchell, "Birds of a Feather," *American Demographics* (February 1995), 40-48; Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustered World* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000).

⁶² Weiss, *The Clustered World*, 14.

⁶³ Dan Fost, "Newspapers Are Teaching Targeting," *American Demographics* (May 1991), 18; Eric Weissenstein, "Cherry-picking by Computer," *Advertising Age* (August 12, 1991), S-8; "Arbitron, Claritas Join Forces to Offer Ratings Data Enhanced by Market Segmentation and Software Systems," *PR Newswire*, May 17, 1990; Richard K. Thomas and Russell J. Kirchner, *Desktop Marketing: Lessons from America's Best* (Ithaca, NY: American Demographics Books, 1991), 34-36; Larson, *The Naked Consumer*, 48-49; "Warren Cable Data in New Mappable Databases," *Television Digest* (June 7, 1993), 7; Rachel X. Weissman, "Who Are Those Netizens?," *American Demographics* (February 1999), 34.

⁶⁴ "Clusters," *The New Yorker*, 32; Weiss, *The Clustered World*, 8.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Barbara Everitt Bryant, "Marketing Newspapers with Lifestyle Research," *American Demographics* (January, 1981), 24.

⁶⁶ Burleigh B. Gardner, "Doing Business with Management," in *Applied Anthropology in America*, Elizabeth M. Eddy and William L. Partridge, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 255-256.

⁶⁷ Hardy, *The Politz Papers*, 221. See also Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.*, 167-169.

⁶⁸ Arbitron for the Southern California Broadcaster's Association, *The Los Angeles Lifestyles Study: Where Can You Find Your Customer in 2002*, at http://www.arbitron.com/radio_stations/studies1.htm#lifestyles

⁶⁹ For a comprehensive analysis of how broadcasters, programmers, and advertisers adopted the People Meter to alleviate their anxieties, see Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, 55-97; see also Barnes and Thompson, "Power to the People (Meter)," 83-92.

⁷⁰ Linda Moss, "Does Arbitron Have a Better Mousetrap?," *Broadcasting and Cable* (11 February 2002), 16-20. See also the information and press releases available on the Arbitron website at http://www.arbitron.com/portable_people_meters/home.htm

⁷¹ See, for example, Charles Layton, "What Do Readers Really Want?," *American Journalism Review* (March 1999), 47-63, for an extensive analysis of the use of focus groups in newspaper market research. The advent of "public journalism" has witnessed the use of focus groups in the fine-tuning of newspaper editorial content, an application that would have been anathema to most editors three decades ago. But as Douglas Underwood and numerous articles in the journalism reviews have noted, many senior editors and news executives now have a background in business, or have received marketing training at specialized newspaper management programs. See Underwood, *When M.B.A.s Rule the Newsroom: How the Managers and Marketers are Reshaping Today's Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)

⁷² Hazel Kahan, "A Professional Opinion," *Marketing Tools* (October 1, 1996). See also, Melanie Wells, "New Ways to Get Into Our Heads: Marketers Ditch Old Focus Groups for Video Cameras, Beepers, Chats over Coffee," *USA Today* (March 3, 1999), B1; Lynn Smith, "What Do Consumers Want? Whatever You Do, Don't Just Ask," *Los Angeles Times* (March 21, 1996).

⁷³ Russell W. Belk, "Studies in the New Consumer Behavior" in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. Daniel Miller, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995): 58-95; John F. Sherry, Jr. "Postmodern Alternatives: The Interpretive Turn in Consumer Research," in *Handbook of Consumer Behavior*. Thomas S. Robertson and Harold H. Kassarian, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 199): 548-591.

⁷⁴ See for example, Barbara B. Stern, "Literary Criticism and Consumer Research: Overview and Illustrative Analysis," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16 (December 1989): 322-334; Morris B. Holbrook, *Consumer Research: Introspective Essays on the Study of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995); *Consumer Research: Postcards from the Edge*, Stephen Brown and Darach Turley, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997); Stephen Brown, *Postmodern Marketing Two: Telling Tales*. (Boston: International Thomson Business Press, [1995] 1998).

⁷⁵ A. Fuat Firat and Alladi Venkatesh. "Libratory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research* 22 (December 1995): 239-267; Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising: Text-Interpretive, Experimental, and Reader-Response Analyses," *Journal of Consumer Research* 26 (June 1999): 37-54; Barbara B. Stern, "Deconstructive Strategy and Consumer Research: Concepts and Illustrative Exemplar," *Journal of Consumer Research* 23 (September 1996): 136-147.

⁷⁶ Turow, *Breaking Up America*, 2.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the positive and negative aspects of audience segmentation for historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, see Clint C. Wilson and Félix Gutiérrez, *Minorities and Media: Diversity and the End of Mass Communication* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1985).

⁷⁸ This leaves aside the news media's often questionable ideas about what constitutes "evidence." A recent National Public Radio report noted that for many media lifestyle experts, the working definition of a "trend" was any development of which they could locate three examples. Bob Garfield, "Media Preoccupation with identifying behaviors as trends," *All Things Considered*, 22 March 2002.

⁷⁹ Some media critics have likened "controlled circulation" policies to "redlining" practices in real estate sales. See Félix Gutiérrez and Clint C. Wilson II, "The demographic dilemma," *Columbia Journalism Review* (January/February 1979), 53-55. See also William S. Blankenburg, "Newspaper Ownership and Control of Circulation to Increase Profits," *Journalism Quarterly* 59 (1982), 390-398. On "signalling" and "tailoring," see Joseph Turow, "Segmenting, Signalling and Tailoring: Probing the Dark Side of Target Marketing," in *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*, Robin Andersen and Lance Strate, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 239-249.