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# The Women of Communication Studies and Foundation Funding

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## Introduction

The Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) at Columbia University was an important location where Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his researchers developed methods for the statistical analysis of audience interpretation of mass media messages. Although several studies exist of Lazarsfeld and the BASR,<sup>1</sup> no attention has been paid to the numerous women who worked there. In fact, the very history of Communication Studies, with a few exceptions,<sup>2</sup> overlooks the important role women's work played in the development of lasting theories of mediated communication, as well as methods for audience research. By 1949, seven women were listed as members of the BASR on the bureau's letterhead: Jeanette Green, Marie Jahoda, Babette Kass, Patricia L. Kendall, Rose Kohn, Louise Moses, and Patricia J. Salter.<sup>3</sup> The work histories of these women show that, during the 1940s and 1950s, female social scientists negotiated the pursuit of careers as social scientists with several important pressures. These pressures included gendered expectations regarding female employment, foreclosure of entrance into tenured academic positions, anti-communism of the early Cold War, and foundation-based funding opportunities for research. This research report outlines some of the work histories of the women conducting audience research in the 1940s vis-a-vis foundation-based funding opportunities.

## Archival Research on Hidden Figures

Histories of the origin and development of Communication Studies as an academic discipline have often lacked any acknowledgment women and people of color.<sup>4</sup> These histories tend to remember the figures that have left a written record of their existence and their work. In academic disciplines, these histories are also influenced by published research that has had lasting influence on the disciplinary development. Yet, when these histories are re-examined with the help of archival research, they reveal hidden figures and histories, which in turn push us to re-examine what we remember. In the case of my research, most of the BASR publications from the late 1940s, although rarely listing women as authors, materialized because of women's work as research assistants and head researchers. Therefore, the recovery of women's histories through archival

research often relies on noting the absence of documents as well as their presence; on noting the differences between how men and women are treated; and, at times, it requires the researcher to imagine the lives of the figures she writes about. The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) proved an important source of documentation of how women entered the field of social scientific research through fellowship support.<sup>5</sup>

## **Rockefeller Foundation Funding: Early Career Development**

Several of the women who became active social scientific researchers with the BASR and later in various advertising agencies, began their careers as research assistants with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation. In the summer of 1938, three women received six-month fellowships from the foundation to pay for work at the Office of Radio Research (ORR) at Princeton University. The project was headed by Paul F. Lazarsfeld and funded through a large Rockefeller Foundation grant.<sup>6</sup> Once the grant ran out, Lazarsfeld moved his cohort of researchers to Columbia University and established the BASR. On July 13, 1938, Marjorie Fleiss applied for a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship.<sup>7</sup> She had spent six months working as a research assistant at the ORR. Jeanette Sayre also received a fellowship in June 1938. She had worked at the ORR for eight months.<sup>8</sup> In May 1938, Alberta Curtis also applied for a fellowship. She, too, worked as a research assistant at the ORR while on leave from the New York Public Library.<sup>9</sup> Paul F. Lazarsfeld recommended the three women's fellowship applications and, in the case of Sayre, was even listed as her emergency contact. Each woman had either a master's degree or had taken graduate level classes. The level of education suggests that these were highly educated women; each sought employment that did not simply pay the bills but also allowed her to develop as a researcher and to put her high education to good use. Curtis wanted to bring back the experience she had gained at the Princeton ORR to her work at the New York Public Library to "study further the usefulness of radio on reading the use of libraries."<sup>10</sup> Sayre explained that the fellowship would enable her to continue researching and teaching in the social sciences.<sup>11</sup> Fleiss noted that the training she would receive at the Princeton ORR would enable her to continue work "in the field of educational broadcasting because I find such activity stimulating personally and useful socially."<sup>12</sup> These fellowship applications show that women working as research

assistants at the Princeton ORR took seriously the opportunities for social scientific research afforded by the Rockefeller Foundation fellowship. These were not jobs that women took to support the main income of their husbands; they were jobs that enabled them to develop lasting skills and build careers as social scientists.

Nonetheless, the gendered expectations of work derailed some careers. Marjorie Fleiss produced promising work for the ORR, but by 1943 she had married an army man and moved out of New York.<sup>13</sup> In November 1950, twelve years after receiving a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation and working with Lazarsfeld, she was living on West 190<sup>th</sup> Street in the Bronx, a lower middle-class area at the time, and was not employed.<sup>14</sup> Alberta Curtis joined the Federal Communications Commission in 1946 and continued working at the New York Public Library. After marriage, she moved to a white middle-class neighbourhood and lived on Bard Ave on Staten Island. She began working as a part-time researcher and writing for the U.S. State Department's production of the *Voice of America* radio station.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, some careers failed to progress and these women made decisions to prioritise family, despite the promise of social scientific research and even publications. Others found a way to negotiate the gendered expectations of marriage with a passion for public service. Whatever their choices, the fellowship applications and the recorder cards that the Rockefeller Archive Center has preserved show the work histories and the lived realities of several women trained as social researchers. Pursuit of career was never enough, when one had to account for gendered expectations in marriage and for the limited resources available to women who wanted to proceed in their training.

Patricia Kendall was one of the few women who succeeded in climbing the BASR's career ladder. In 1943, at age twenty-two, Kendall received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship in the field of social research. She was single, writing her M.A. thesis at Columbia University and working as an assistant at the ORR, receiving a yearly salary of \$1,700. She had earned a B.A. from Smith College and was planning to work for the Office of War Information and the Rockefeller Foundation under the supervision of Lazarsfeld. As for her career plans, she explained: "My plans for the future are indefinite, but I am anxious to do social research which will contribute to the war effort now, and, following the war, to the period of reconstruction."<sup>16</sup> Despite her future career uncertainty, Kendall would become one of the most important BASR researchers heading numerous studies. After six months on a fellowship, Lazarsfeld wrote a glowing report of her work:

All of us who have worked with K. feel that she has fulfilled [sic] all of our expectations. As a matter of fact, it is quite surprising how such a young person does so balanced and reliable work on quite difficult subject matters. I think she is one of the best fellowship cases we ever had. Things move slowly because of so many people involved, but without K. they wouldn't move at all.<sup>17</sup>

Lazarsfeld recommended that her fellowship be extended by another six months. Kendall received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Columbia University in 1954, more than twelve years after beginning her graduate studies at the institution. In 1966 she was a housewife, having married Lazarsfeld, and living near Barnard College on Riverside Drive.<sup>18</sup> Although the fellowship application and the recorder cards provide limited information about Kendall's career progression, through her publications we know that she remained a researcher, working for the BASR from 1943 until 1965 when she joined the faculty of Queens College, City University of New York.<sup>19</sup> Access to the Rockefeller Foundation fellowship ensured that she received social scientific training that allowed her to devise complex questionnaires and interview techniques to be used at the BASR and in her own research for years to come.

## **Cross-Foundational Support**

Although not a member of the BASR, Mae Dena Huettig's work in the study of communication was significant and benefitted from cross-foundational support. On May 29, 1939, Huettig applied for a fellowship in the humanities with a field of interest in short and documentary films.<sup>20</sup> She had completed all coursework for a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, including courses in her major of economics, and minors in sociology and psychology. Her research was focused on the financial structure and operations of the motion picture industry and the mechanisms and problems of distribution with a view to producing documentary films as educational tools after the completion of her Ph.D.<sup>21</sup> Despite previous scholarships and fellowships in economics, as well as employment in the motion picture industry and various research appointments, her financial situation was precarious enough for her to note that her "salary is wholly contingent on [the] grant."<sup>22</sup> Huettig's completed dissertation project

was the first political economy study of Hollywood, and was published by Oxford University Press in 1944 as *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry; A Study in Industrial Organization*. By July 1950 she had married for the second time and become Mrs. Churchill, taking care of two children at home. Records show that in 1953 she briefly worked for the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>23</sup> Marriage and children were, however, only an intermission in her career. After the Watts Uprising of 1965, Churchill headed the Urban Policy Research Institute to train youth of color from Los Angeles on how to report abuses and irregularities by the police and other public agencies.<sup>24</sup> In response to Churchill's idea for the publication of a guide to California public records, Jean Firstenberg, an executive at the Markle Foundation, praised her work and public service: "Mae, it is a good thing there are people like you pushing the LAPD and other governmental bodies to be more responsive."<sup>25</sup> Mae Dena Huettig/Churchill's work life shows the difficulty women had in gaining funding for research, as well as how gendered labor expectations required intermissions in one's career. Nonetheless, her study of the organization of the Hollywood industry proved to be an important contribution to the study of the political economy of communication, while her public service with the Urban Policy Research Institute exemplified a commitment to social betterment.

## **Funding for Late Career Researchers**

My research at the RAC also led me to another group of women: established researchers of communication who still failed to achieve the name recognition and prestige accorded to their male colleagues. One such researcher was the cultural anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, who had received a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1928. Her anthropological studies validated human experiences rather than produce disinterested observations of objectified subjects.<sup>26</sup> As a woman working in anthropology and communication – both male-dominated disciplines – Powdermaker struggled to secure funding for research, as well as time to write. By the late 1950s, Powdermaker was a visiting professor at Columbia, teaching part-time at Queens College, CUNY, and teaching a course at New York Medical College all at once; all the while, she was keeping up with her rigorous grant-writing schedule.<sup>27</sup> In March 1963, she wrote to John Maier, Chairman of the Program Committee of Villa Serbelloni

(Rockefeller Foundation) to request to spend June through August 1964 as a resident scholar in the foundation's villa in Bellagio, Italy.<sup>28</sup> At the time, Powdermaker was in the process of trying to "find places suitable for concentrated writing and inexpensive for living" in order to write a book on "the scientific and human aspects of [the] participant-observation method" used in anthropology; an area in which she had experience in four different cultures.<sup>29</sup> Despite her five published monographs, numerous academic articles, membership in scientific societies,<sup>30</sup> and even a Guggenheim fellowship, initially, John Maier had reservations. A hand-written note explains: "While this is not one of the outstanding anthropologists I think she is respectable and possibly reaches the standard now being employed for invitations to the Villa. P.S. She has had a Guggenheim. She is a good bet to finish a book. Perhaps she's [indecipherable word] in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quartile of U.S. anthropologists."<sup>31</sup> Maier's assumptions were corrected by an inquiry to the Guggenheim fellowship program, where an informant stressed to him that Powdermaker was under serious consideration for a second fellowship, and that "she is a serious scholar, is highly thought of professionally, and is regarded as a leading figure in social anthropology."<sup>32</sup> On April 4, 1963, through the foundation and fellowship networks, John Maier found out that Powdermaker would not receive a second Guggenheim fellowship. The note identified Powdermaker as the "grand old lady of American anthropology;" yet age did not accord her prestige or the fellowship, in fact, it was a detriment. Maier recorded that the decision was made based on her being "rather old" – she was sixty-seven at the time – and due to her having previously received one.<sup>33</sup>

Maier invited Powdermaker to spend March 1 until May 28, 1964 at Villa Serbelloni. Upon her departure, Powdermaker penned a letter to Maier about her stay: "I made excellent progress on my book, and even wrote something else which I had not planned to do. The sense of leisure and total absence of cares and duties gave me a feeling of freedom, which was conducive to doing my best work."<sup>34</sup> John Marshall, Director of the Villa Serbelloni, noted that Powdermaker's presence helped to create a "society of residents:" her stay overlapped with three conferences, and with each, she was drawn into discussion and conversation with various participants. Powdermaker and Keith Hancock – an Australian Professor of History – read and commented on each other's writing. After a UNICEF conference, Powdermaker fell ill and Sir George Pickering – Professor of Medicine at Oxford University and a resident scholar at the Villa – helped nurse her back to health.<sup>35</sup>



## Conclusion

Although the above are preliminary findings from my research at the RAC, they make clear that access to financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation was instrumental to developing women's expertise in social scientific methods and careers in Communication research. Financial support served a different function at a different stage of a female researcher's career. For women such as Marjorie Fleiss, Jeanette Sayre, Alberta Curtis, and Patricia Kendall, a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship enabled them to develop analytic skills as social scientific researchers by working with Paul F. Lazarsfeld at the Princeton ORR and the BASR. Some could continue their careers by negotiating gendered work expectations after marriage, while others chose to leave the profession and become housewives. For women such as Mae Dena Huettig/Churchill, developing connections with foundations was essential: the initial support of the Rockefeller Foundation enabled her to complete the research for her Ph.D. dissertation and the book that developed from the dissertation; later, the support of the Markle Foundation proved important not just financially but also as a recognition of her work against the abuse of minority groups by police and other public agencies. Finding financial support was difficult even for established scholars, such as Hortense Powdermaker, who had to combat sexism and ageism; yet even small foundation support such as the provision of a place to write was of the utmost importance in establishing a cross-pollination of ideas with other scholars and completing writing projects.

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<sup>1</sup> See: David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley, ed., *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); David E. Morrison, *The Search for a Method: Focus Groups and the Development of Mass Communication Research* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998); Jefferson D. Pooley, "Mnemonic Multiples: The Case of the Columbia Panel Studies," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 10-30; Jefferson D. Pooley and Michael J. Socolow, "Checking Up on The Invasion from Mars: Hadley Cantril, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and the Making of a Misremembered Classic," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 1920-1948.

<sup>2</sup> See: Aimee-Marie Dorsten, "'Thinking Dirty': Digging Up Three Founding 'Matriarchs' of Communication Studies," *Communication Theory* 22, no. 1 (January 13, 2012): 25-47; Lana F. Rakow, "Feminist Historiography and the Field: Writing New Histories," *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, ed. David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 113-139; Susan J. Douglas, "Notes Toward a History of Media Audiences," *Radical History Review* 52 (1992): 127-138; Susan J. Douglas, "Personal Influence

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- and the Bracketing of Women's History,” *The Annals of the American Academy* 608 (2006): 41-50.
- <sup>3</sup> Dean Manheimer to Leland DeVinney, 7 September 1949. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Record Group 1.1 Projects, Series 200 United States, Box 317, Folder 3777.
- <sup>4</sup> For Black pioneers in Communication research see: Donald L. Jackson and Sonja M. Brown Givens, ed., *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* (London: Sage, 2006).
- <sup>5</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E.
- <sup>6</sup> See: William J. Buxton, “The Political Economy of Communications Research,” *Information and Communication in Economics*, ed. Robert E. Babe (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 147-175; J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 53-91.
- <sup>7</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 8, Folder 252.
- <sup>8</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 18, Folder 642.
- <sup>9</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 7, Folder 179.
- <sup>10</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 7, Folder 179.
- <sup>11</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 18, Folder 642.
- <sup>12</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 8, Folder 252.
- <sup>13</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10, Subgroup 2: Fellowship Recorder Cards, 1917-1970s, Discipline 5, Box 6.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; for area statistics see: “1943 Profile of Fordham Heights, Bronx area,” *New York City Marker Analysis* (New York, 1943), CUNY Center for Urban Research, available at: <http://www.1940snewyork.com/#>.
- <sup>15</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowships, RG 10, Subgroup 2: Fellowship Recorder Cards, 1917-1970s, Discipline 5, Box 6.
- <sup>16</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 13, Folder 414.
- <sup>17</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowships, RG 10, Subgroup 2: Fellowship Recorder Cards, 1917-1970s, Discipline 5, Box 6.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> “Patricia Kendall, 68, Professor of Sociology,” March 7, 1990, *The New York Times*, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/07/obituaries/patricia-kendall-68-professor-of-sociology.html>.
- <sup>20</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowship Files, RG 10.1, Series 200E, Box 12, Folder 374.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Rockefeller Foundation Records, Fellowships, RG 10, Subgroup 2: Fellowship Recorder Cards 1917-1970s, Discipline 5, Box 6.
- <sup>24</sup> “Mae Churchill; Activist for Privacy and Other Civil Rights,” 10 February 1996, *Los Angeles Times*, available at: [http://articles.latimes.com/1996-02-10/news/mn-34342\\_1\\_civil-rights](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-02-10/news/mn-34342_1_civil-rights).
- <sup>25</sup> Jean Firstenberg to Mae Dena Churchill, 31 October 1977. Markle Foundation, RG IV B6 2.2, Series 2 general Files/Telicomcommunity, Inc. Jun 1976, Box 8, Folder 444.
- <sup>26</sup> Dorsten, “Thinking Dirty,” 38.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>28</sup> Hortense Powdermaker to John Maier, March 4, 1963. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Hortense Powdermaker Vita. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.
- <sup>31</sup> Undated note. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.
- <sup>32</sup> JZM to MEN note, 13 March 1963. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.
- <sup>33</sup> JKS to JZM note, 4 April 1963. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.

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<sup>34</sup> Hortense Powdermaker to John Maier, 27 May 1964. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.

<sup>35</sup> John Marshall to Jack Maier, 17 May 1964. Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 3.2 Administration, Program & Policy, Series 900 General Program & Policy, Box 93, Folder 571 Villa Serbelloni Scholars.