

# The origin and success of qualitative research

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Qualitative research has at last achieved full respectability in the academic sphere, and the success of commercial qualitative market research is demonstrably substantial. This article traces the history of qualitative research back to the time when both strands meet, in an academic source aware of the commercial value of applied psychology, drawing upon techniques that seek to explore and explain human behaviour. It is argued that the modern understanding of qualitative research comprises a ‘package’ of component parts, and that the essential elements of these were first identifiable, beginning in 1925, in the work and advocacy of the psychologist, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld.

## Introduction

Qualitative market researchers reading the spring 2013 edition of the *QMIP<sup>1</sup> Bulletin* would probably have been astonished to discover that the American Psychological Association (APA) had recently conferred legitimacy upon the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (SQIP). That august professional organisation has granted SQIP official status as part of an APA Division (Gergen 2013). The amazement would not have been because the APA had seen fit to recognise a form of research so blatantly devoid of statistics, however, but would have followed the researcher’s internal question, ‘What took them so long?’

Qualitative approaches have been fully accepted in market research for several decades, proving their value in guiding the development of new products and services, in testing the communication of advertising, in exploring the meaning of consumer vocabulary, in gaining understanding of consumer motivation, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society (BPS).

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But perhaps a greater amazement should be reserved for discovering any qualitative market researchers who had read an article in the *QMIP Bulletin*. A high metaphorical garden wall exists between qualitative researchers based in the commercial world and those working within academia (LeedsMetUni: Bailey 2011). Not only would very few qualitative market researchers be aware of the activities of their academic cousins in the British Psychological Society (BPS), but equally few academic qualitative researchers would be aware of the existence and activities of the Association for Qualitative Research (AQR), founded by market researchers (as AQRP) in March 1981. This situation obtains despite occasional efforts by the few who visit both sides of the garden wall to establish a dialogue between people who do similar research, in differing contexts (Keegan 2006; Bailey 2007).

Whatever hopes may be held for future understanding between academic and commercial-world researchers, we seem at present to have arrived at a point where qualitative research has evolved into three distinct versions (Bailey 2002). Put simply, there is a version that is much exercised by how to establish a reliable 'audit' trail through the entire research process into the findings reported; a second that stresses the need for interviewer/moderator skills, and an ability to interpret findings; and a third that seeks confirmation of knowledge-based advice for the implementation of recommendations. These are broadly identifiable with academic psychology, market research, and management or marketing consultancy. For present purposes, the third version can safely be set aside as representing a commercial activity that does not necessarily require primary research at its core, although some authors foresee a convergence between consultancy and market research practice (Simmons & Lovejoy 2003; Keegan 2006).

We are left, on the one hand, with a version of qualitative research driven by a mild obsession to know *what exactly should we do?* (academic sphere) and another version suffering anxiety to know *what does it all mean?* (commercial world). And, yet, it seems patently obvious that, somewhere back in time, both strands must have sprung from an academic source aware of the commercial value of applied psychology, and drawing upon techniques that seek to explore and explain human behaviour.

### **Tracing back to the 'missing link'**

Stepping back into history may best be done from the market research side. David Morrison, an Emeritus Professor of the University of Leeds'

Institute of Communication Studies, who spent a few years of his career at Research International, finds that history gives an impression that focus groups, at least, went from academia into market research, then, much later, back again. This left many years in which the academic zeitgeist could not bear to recognise qualitative research, while there was a ‘flowering of focus group research within commercial research’. In consequence, ‘it is academics who ... lack rigour in how they apply (the focus group method), not market researchers’ (Morrison 1998). During the fallow years on the academic side, ‘so strong was the grip of 1930s philosophy of science, that ... such pejoratives as “unsubstantiated”, “crude”, “inconclusive” and “value laden” flowed felicitously across the discipline (of qualitative enquiry)’ (Gergen 2013): an important observation, which is relevant throughout the history of qualitative research, as we shall see below.

Much of what follows is written from a British perspective. Nevertheless, the international dimension is obvious, and the history of qualitative research is almost a ‘tale of three cities’: Vienna, New York and London.

### **From the 1990s to the present**

Some, essentially abstract, concepts resist formal definition, but remain recognisable via a ‘package’ of typical component parts. Qualitative research is normally recognisable via the use of methods that include, at least, in-depth interview and group-moderation techniques; researchers who offer expertise and knowledge to cover the procedures they use and the interpretations they derive; a particular objective to answer ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ questions; and an agency context (either commercial or academic) through which sundry clients can obtain such work and services.<sup>2</sup> This essence, understood widely today, has remained stable through several prior decades.

The past 20 years or so have seen the success of qualitative research established beyond doubt. On the academic side of the garden wall, the Scientific Affairs Board of the BPS commissioned a report (Nicolson 1991, cited in Henwood & Nicolson 1995), which pointed out that the further development of some important areas of psychology might positively depend on a wider use of qualitative research. Subsequently, the March 1995 issue of *The Psychologist* was devoted to qualitative research methods, including an article with a thorough account of verbal

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<sup>2</sup> There exists a long ‘tail’ of one-person agencies handling what is likely to be a relatively small volume of qualitative research (see, for example, the Independent Consultants Group).

protocol analysis (Green 1995). A further qualitative research ‘special’ was provided by the April 1997 issue of *The Psychologist*. By 2005, it was necessary to raise the alarm that ‘there is a growing demand for supervision of qualitative projects’, while many university departments of psychology could offer only one expert in qualitative methods (Madill *et al.* 2005).

There is now no shortage of academic textbooks on qualitative research; unfortunately, most of these fail to look over the garden wall at the work of market researchers – who had convincingly established the legitimacy of qualitative enquiry by the late 1970s. A rare ‘crossover’ text is Keegan (2009), writing from the commercial-world side of the garden wall. Qualitative market research practice had previously been thoroughly set out by Imms *et al.* (2002), with earlier practical guides by Gordon (1999), and Gordon and Langmaid (1988).

The volume of qualitative research work – under both ‘consumer’ and ‘social’ research labels – undertaken by market research companies nowadays is very substantial. According to the ESOMAR<sup>3</sup> Global Market Research Report (2012), the spend on qualitative market research in 2011 was approximately US\$318.9 million in the United Kingdom alone. Three countries dominate in terms of research spending, and the comparable figure for Germany was US\$420.2 million, and for the United States US\$2,405.8 million.<sup>4</sup> The world weighted proportion is 18% for qualitative research within a global research market worth US\$33.54 billion. Success indeed.

## The 1980s

This was a decade that saw a rapid expansion in qualitative market research, both in terms of volume and in the proliferation of small, ‘craft’ research companies. Some of the new companies majoring in qualitative research became, in sector terms, big business. Particularly notable financial turnover was achieved by The Research Business, headed by Wendy Gordon and Colleen Ryan, which, in the *Market Research Society (MRS) Yearbook* for 1988, was able to declare ‘The Research Business is the most successful of the new generation of research companies.’ Also of note was the Strategic Research Group, led by Roddy Glen and Barry Ross, with a strong line in the knowledgeable interpretation of advertising research.

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<sup>3</sup> Originally the European Social, Opinion and Market Research Association, ESOMAR is now the global Association for the promotion of market research.

<sup>4</sup> The per capita spend was: UK \$50.91; Germany \$39.69; US \$33.43.

The Research Business represented a culmination of success for Gordon and Ryan that began in the 1970s within the Schlackman Research Organisation with Quick-Search (later renamed Q-Search). Perhaps their genius was in identifying, and supplying, what clients most wanted from qualitative research: the efficient arrival at essential answers and explanations, delivered in engaging oral presentations, without assuming that a full written report was necessary.

This expansion in qualitative market research inevitably produced an increase in the number of researchers claiming the ability to carry out such work. A degree in psychology was no longer necessary, with many companies finding that an intelligent mind and a brief training in non-directive interviewing were most of what was needed to deliver an adequate product. (For some reason, ex-nurses, English Literature graduates and trained actors seemed to be particularly well represented in this new wave of researchers.) A steady flow of letters to the *MRS Newsletter* wondered whether all this qualitative research was *good* research; by 1987 it seemed impossible to avoid posing the question ‘What determines quality in qualitative research?’ (Bailey 1987). This seems to be a question that remains in want of a clear answer, with current moves by big client companies to fill the void by establishing their own accreditation of qualitative researchers.

## **The 1970s**

This pivotal decade saw the effective dismissal of the long-running ‘qual versus quant’ argument within market research, while academic psychologists became so preoccupied with the concept of human information processing that attempting to view product or other choice behaviour without reducing the person to the status of a computer would have been heresy (see much of the content in Tulving and Donaldson 1972; or, from a marketing perspective, the ‘EKB Model’ by Engel *et al.* 1968, revised 1973 and 1978).

The establishment of qualitative research legitimacy, and thus the trigger for the 1980s expansion, owes much, if not most, to the Schlackman Research Organisation. Bill Schlackman thoroughly enjoyed ideas, creativity and the analysis of both clients’ problems and qualitative data – activities that he shared with colleagues. He liked to employ psychologists, or people who at least knew something about psychotherapy or psychoanalysis (Bailey & Patterson 2013), and frequently used concepts from these fields to arrive at explanations for respondent desires and

anxieties, with which to derive advice for clients. Bill's employees at this time read like a who's who of those who influenced the development of qualitative research over the subsequent three decades, including Wendy Gordon, Pat Cockett, Colleen Ryan, Roddy Glen, Lawrence Bailey, Susie Fisher, Freda Bear, Peter Lovett and more. Bill Schlackman's importance in the history of UK qualitative research could hardly be overestimated (Patterson 2013).

Establishing this legitimacy through valuable and actionable research work effectively also gave legitimacy to the 'package' of qualitative research component parts that slowly gained coherent understanding during this decade. The informal understanding of what was meant by 'qualitative research' in its commercial-world context was particularly shaped by the views of Bill Schlackman, his colleagues and Peter Cooper, a former freelance researcher for Schlackman who had founded Cooper Research And Marketing (CRAM) in 1969. Cooper is particularly noteworthy for his development of long group discussions (for which Schlackman also had a penchant) into the highly marketable Extended Creativity Groups (ECGs) product (Branthwaite & Patterson 2012).

The move towards 'qualitative research' as a standard term was a move away from 'motivational' (or 'motivation') research. Motivational research, as introduced into the UK in the preceding decade, depended heavily on procedures and interpretations rooted in psychoanalysis and post-Freudian psychotherapy. Projective techniques featured heavily, and it had always been argued that these should be entrusted only to trained psychologists: 'some competent users of projective techniques say all interviewing in connection with these methods must be done by experienced clinical psychologists' (Lucas 1954). As late as 1977, commercial research proposals were telling the client what *the psychologist* would do in the group discussion, rather than what *the moderator* would do.

Tapering out the term 'motivational research' extended freedom to researchers in two important areas. First, it became possible to conduct interviews that tended to be more time-effective in uncovering subconscious emotions, by setting aside the toolkit of what the therapist could *do* to the patient in favour of eliciting insights *from* the respondents, within a supportive and encouraging environment. This was essentially a change of emphasis rather than a switch, which has remained with qualitative market research to the present day. Most modern qualitative researchers are unaware of the debt owed to Carl Rogers for his development of 'client centred', non-directive therapy (Rogers 1951), which transferred so well to qualitative market research.

Second, and perhaps even more importantly, qualitative research could allow a wide range of interpretative models to be applied. This is not to say that Freudian concepts could no longer be used, but rather that analysis in the vocabulary of marketing theory, transactional analysis (TA), personal constructs, etc. could be brought to bear instead – or an integrative approach could be followed, to reach for the best interpretative models for the project in hand. Over subsequent decades, qualitative researchers who value good interpretation have added several more tools, including neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), semiotics and sundry concepts from social psychology and sociology.

Qualitative market research also enjoyed growth in the US during the 1970s, perhaps with less emphasis on methodological diversity and a greater emphasis on improving the delivery of the product to clients. Sophisticated facilities for group discussion work began to appear, with interview rooms wired for video recording; and with one-way mirrors, and viewing rooms to accommodate clients (Harris 2013).

## **The 1960s**

On 12 October 1960, Ernest Dichter, the great populariser of motivational research, gave a lecture in London, sponsored by the MRS, entitled ‘The use of projective techniques’. For most of those present this must have been their first exposure to motivational research ideas. Dichter argued that ‘quantifying studies cannot be used to establish attitudes: they should only be used literally to quantify attitudes already established (from motivational research)’ (Dichter 1960a). The discussion that followed was ‘not uncritical’. In particular, Dichter was required to deal with the question ‘Why must we ask *why?*’ – a question that appears to resurface from time to time, and seems currently to be troubling enthusiasts for ‘big data’.

In the same year, Dichter published his definitive credo, *The Strategy of Desire*, a remarkable book that boldly sets out his field of interest, and tells us ‘these are my tools’ and ‘this is what I do’ (Dichter 1960b). It is no exaggeration to say that motivational research could no longer be dismissed.

Dichter installed Bill Schlackman at his UK operation, the Motivational Research Centre (then headed by David Collins), at the start of the decade. Schlackman had previously worked very harmoniously for Dichter at his Institute for Motivational Research in Croton, New York. (Acquiring a British wife in 1959 no doubt added to Schlackman’s qualifications for the new job.) The UK business grew rapidly, and led to the establishment

of William Schlackman Limited, and when partners such as David Drazin came in, to the Schlackman Research Organisation.

Inevitably, perhaps, the ‘qual versus quant’ debate became a feature of the 1960s and early 1970s – before the legitimacy of qualitative market research had been fully established, both through proven utility and the accumulation of exposure, to buyers and users of research, of researchers particularly associated with these methods. Psychology, qualitative methods and research interests notably came together in the form of influential speakers at the MRS Conferences of the 1960s: Schlackman in 1960, 1964 and 1968; Peter Cooper in 1964, and with David Collins in 1965; Elizabeth Nelson (with Florence Skelly) in 1966; Tony Lunn in 1966 and 1969; and, in 1962, H. Gwynne-Jones, who became head of the Psychology Department at the University of Leeds at the end of the decade.

### **1946–1959**

The Ernest Dichter age. Dichter (1907–1991) founded his Institute for Motivational Research in 1946; soon, ‘industry leaders would queue up like desperate patients for a miracle medical doctor’ (*The Economist* 2011). Dichter’s genius ‘was in seeing the opportunity that irrational buying offered for smart selling’ (*The Economist* 2011). ‘The remark is often heard in marketing circles that Dichter is in reality a brilliant copywriter in disguise,’ offered Schwerin and Newell (1981). Bill Schlackman’s view is that Dichter is ‘the most brilliant man I’ve ever met in the marketing and advertising field’ (Bailey & Patterson 2013).

Good biographies of Dichter are available elsewhere. A concise summary is provided in the preface to Schwarzkopf and Gries (2010); for a focus on his contribution to advertising, particularly in the American context, see Stern (2004); a broader view of the implications upon marketing of his work is given in *The Economist* (2011). For the present purposes, it is important to recognise three aspects of Dichter’s output: first, that it is rooted in (Freudian) psychoanalysis, and the post-Freudian psychotherapy of Alfred Adler and the Gestaltists, such as Karl Bühler; second, that motivational research relies on insightful interpretation (for which Freud and Adler had provided the core interpretative model); and, third, that an end objective of marketing success is intended. At this remove into history, psychology is evidently reunited with market research, and the behavioural aspects of marketing. The mix was certainly successful. Dichter achieved fame by ‘transforming the fates of businesses such as Procter & Gamble, Exxon, Chrysler, General Mills and DuPont’ (*The Economist* 2011).

So successful was Dichter that the journalist Vance Packard was prompted to write *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), a best-selling book that was, at its core, an extended fulmination against Dichter, motivational research and the apparently sinister tools that such work provided for advertisers. It propelled Dichter's success to stratospheric levels. As Dichter's colleague, Bill Schlackman, puts it: 'It made Dichter very famous. This book showed the people what was happening, and a lot of people didn't like what they were reading. It had a seminal influence and advertising agencies who were not in the [motivational research] business, as it were – to them, this was something that they had to take cognisance of. "You can really help us" – that's what the advertising agencies were thinking, and the effect of this was to build a business for Ernest, and other people – including myself. In a sense, we, for better or worse, benefited by Vance Packard' (Bailey & Patterson 2013).

It is understandable that, through such spectacular success (and, some would say, elevation to 'guru' status), Dichter's ready self-confidence appeared to grow, and perhaps acquire a measure of hubris. When he published his definitive exposition of motivational research method and practice (Dichter 1960b) he gave no citations to previous publications; he did not describe how he had developed his approach from the work of others; he offered no acknowledgement to a mentor or advisor. It was as if this 'new' kind of research had been created by himself. In a late interview, Dichter declared 'I started it all. A couple of years ago in London we had a celebration where I had all my disciples. There were quite a few, several hundred. They sort of celebrated me as the guru, who really opened up this whole field that didn't exist' (DePaulo 1990). Others urge caution: 'historians are ... in danger of granting posthumous PR victories to the most relentless self-marketer of them all' (Schwarzkopf & Gries 2010, Conclusion).

Within the 1946–1959 period, there were others who were developing methodological threads that became woven into motivational research – with a much closer connection to academic endeavour than was evident in the following 30 years. In the early 1950s, little distinction was made between social research and market research: 'the term "social research" has come to identify a great deal of work in advertising, also known as motivation research, and is often intended to designate research using projective techniques' (Lucas 1954). Lucas reports that 'scores of clinical psychologists ... have moved into this area' and, according to Packard (1957) commenting on a company run by Burleigh Gardner, known as Social Research, 'all his fifty field people are majors in psychology'.

By 1954, the New York Academy of Sciences had spawned a ‘Society for Projective Techniques’, which had already discussed word associations, sentence completions, role playing, cartoons with speech balloons and/or captions to fill, Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) picture materials and Rorschach ink blots, in the context of research of this kind. Of course, the prevailing orthodoxy – the firm and heavy hand of quantified respectability – was evident. One clinical psychologist said: ‘projective techniques have promise, but the most optimistic claim I can make is that they may predict with a correlation of about plus 0.3’ (Lucas 1954).

Influential marketing textbooks had also begun to introduce ideas from psychology. In the third edition of *Marketing and Distribution Research*, Brown (1955) credits psychology as making a contribution to marketing research ‘in the provision of techniques for analysing the basic and more fundamental motives which lie behind marketing behaviour’.<sup>5</sup> In the second edition (Brown 1949), depth interviewing is described; even in the first edition (Brown 1937), there is mention of ‘the observational method’, though the first edition overall presents market research as (almost) exclusively a quantitative endeavour.

The term ‘focus group’ seems to have been resurrected in the late 20th century, though with a different meaning from the original ‘core idea’, which was to have respondents focus on stimulus materials (Morrison 1998, p. xiii). For most of qualitative market research history, the simple term ‘group discussion’ has sufficed. In another textbook of the early 1950s, Luck and Wales (1952) describe group discussions, using the term ‘snowball interview’, in a way that would be entirely familiar to qualitative researchers of today – noting the use of tape recording, small-group composition, and a ‘natural setting’. ‘The comments which each [respondent] makes serves to stimulate comments from the others, thus “snowballing” the cumulative response.’ Luck and Wales note also the advantage of having tone of voice as well as exact words in the recording.<sup>6</sup>

## **Pre-1946**

Although somewhat peripheral to the development of motivational/qualitative research (at least until several decades later), another ‘thread’

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<sup>5</sup> Brown expands on this via a lengthy quotation, not from Dichter, but from the seminal Kornhauser and Lazarsfeld paper of 1935, referenced below.

<sup>6</sup> Self-taught from these textbooks, Elizabeth Nelson reports that she carried out what was probably the UK’s first group discussion market research, in 1953 (Bailey 2012).

arises from the early work of the Mass-Observation<sup>7</sup> movement in Britain, founded by Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings in 1937. These researchers pioneered an anthropological approach that is echoed today in the use of various ethnographic techniques. It is tantalising to wonder what might have developed from their work had the war years of 1939–1945 not intervened. Perhaps Mass-Observation might have been registered as a market research company earlier than it was, in 1949.

If the pro-quantitative orthodoxy, still evident today, was dominant until (at least) the 1980s, it was positively beyond question in the 1930s and 1940s. This was the age in which behaviourism was sweeping aside ‘non-scientific’ explanations of behaviour; with hard numerical data, generated through empirical research striving for natural-science status, subjected to a battery of statistical tests. Clark Hull and others applied measurements of classical conditioning to verbal learning (Hull *et al.* 1940); serial-position curves were drawn up for distributed and massed practice (Hovland 1938), and so on: incidentally providing an apparent prescription for advertising practice that had nothing to do with emotion or the unconscious. Fortunately, there was at least one remarkable man who was equipped to play the establishment at its own game: Paul Felix Lazarsfeld (1901–1976).

Lazarsfeld’s late-career celebrity as a sociologist seems to have overshadowed his early career achievements as a psychologist. However, ‘in an autobiographical fragment ... Lazarsfeld notes that he did not officially become a sociologist until relatively late, when he was named to a chair in sociology at Columbia University, which he occupied until his retirement’<sup>8</sup> (Boudon 1970).

Lazarsfeld was born and raised in Vienna, where his mother, Sofie Lazarsfeld, a noted psychoanalyst, kept a kind of open house for socialist intellectuals and pioneers in psychotherapy, and there seems to be no doubt that Paul was much influenced by frequent visitors such as Alfred Adler, and his ‘depth’ approach to individual psychology. Adler was an early colleague of Sigmund Freud, before a somewhat acrimonious ideological split developed between them. Freud may not have frequented the Sofie Lazarsfeld salon, but Adler would certainly have met frequently with Freud and Carl Jung at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and discussed Freud’s theories of unconscious motivation. While at the University of

<sup>7</sup> Originally always written with the hyphen, to emphasise that it was concerned to garner observations *by* the masses.

<sup>8</sup> Boudon probably refers to the appointment of Lazarsfeld as Quetelet Professor of Social Sciences in 1962 (Sills 1987).

Vienna, Paul Lazarsfeld became a tutor for Ernst (Ernest) Dichter – the start of a relationship that continued into at least the mid-1950s, and which proved to be of vital importance to Dichter.

Achieving qualifications both in psychology and mathematics gave Lazarsfeld respectability in establishment circles, which enabled him to publish a series of important articles, first in Austria and later in America, which advocated research methods outside of the mainstream quantitative orthodoxy. An immediate benefit was the opportunity to work as a statistician for Charlotte and Karl Bühler at the University's Institute of Psychology. Working with the Böhlers, but pursuing private contracts, Lazarsfeld set up the Austrian *Forschungsstelle* (Research Agency) in 1925, arguably the world's first market research company (Pollak 1980; Morrison 1998).

Lazarsfeld arrived in New York from Vienna in September 1933, with a Rockefeller Foundation Scholarship and a brief to contribute a psychological perspective to economic research (Fleck & Stehr 2011). He immediately set about creating an agency for applied 'social psychology' and market research. This agency was to be a much grander version of the *Forschungsstelle*. First (1935) came the Research Center at the University of Newark, where the market research contracts covered such topics as 'How do women decide where to buy their clothes?' (Pollak 1980). Major contracts from radio broadcasters enabled a transfer to Columbia University, and the establishment of the Bureau of Applied Social Research (1939). Meanwhile, Ernst Dichter needed to escape from Austria. Lazarsfeld recommended Dichter for his first job in America, at Market Analysts, Inc., which Dichter took up three days after his arrival in 1937.

Throughout this period, a series of publications and lectures showed that Lazarsfeld was decidedly thinking 'outside the box', especially urging a new focus on motivation. In a particularly important paper, he wrote: 'our actual buying behaviour is largely an expression of specific attitudes ... reflecting the varied directions of motivation. These attitudes are the form in which motives immediately enter into people's conduct and speech. They directly determine market behaviour [and] hence lie at the very heart of market research problems' (Kornhauser & Lazarsfeld 1935).

While usually being careful to point out that interviews conducted in an exploratory style could be subject to subsequent quantification, Lazarsfeld also managed to advise in favour of depth interviewing, probing for answers to 'why?' questions, and psychological interpretation, and even hinted at the value of developing a topic guide, at a time when 'questionnaire' was the only term available:

The questioning process would produce solid data only if it proceeds in the least constrained way possible, in the form of a relaxed and impartial conversation.

(Lazarsfeld 1933)

We never get useful explanations merely by 'collecting the facts'. Interpretations are indispensable in addition – interpretations in terms of the motives and the mental mechanisms which determine conduct in given situations.

(Kornhauser & Lazarsfeld 1935)

There is a branch of psychology which basically proceeds along the lines we suggest. I am speaking of the so-called depth psychology; more particularly Freud's psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler's individual psychology.

(Lazarsfeld 1931)

Remembering the details of any purchase, we find that some of the happenings bear what we shall call from now on an *accent of motivation* ... a fundamental feature of our inner experience.

(Lazarsfeld 1934)

We cannot leave it up to the respondents to tell us whatever they are inclined. The average consumer ... usually has a very hazy understanding of the *why* question.

(Lazarsfeld 1935)

We can't ask the consumer ... a hundred questions. The answer is: you don't need to; ... the explorer must know far more of the country than the spot where he pitches his tent. You may end up with an interview schedule of five questions, but those five questions will be vastly different from the ordinary ones.

(Kornhauser & Lazarsfeld 1935)

In motivational research, we change our focus to sub-surface phenomena.

(Lazarsfeld 1943)

Schwarzkopf and Gries (2010) conclude that motivation research in the United States began with the publication of Lazarsfeld's article on psychology in market research in the influential *Harvard Business Review*, in 1934. It was fortunate for the development of motivation research that Lazarsfeld was the mediator 'conversant in realms usually kept separate, but needing to be joined for progress in social research' (Pollak 1980).

Lazarsfeld edited the *Journal of Applied Psychology* in February 1939 (an issue devoted to radio research) and noted in his editorial that the

studies contained in that issue ‘fulfil very well the definition of “applied psychology”’. He commented that the advertiser wants to convey a message, and (although the papers within were all essentially quantitative in style) suggested that there is ‘an indirect way to find out about people’s “needs” as far as a radio message is concerned’ – to discover what accounts for the success or failure of the communication.

By 1941, Robert Merton (some nine years Lazarsfeld’s junior) was working for Lazarsfeld at the Bureau. It was a harmonious partnership, and although the details are not now clear, it would seem that Merton was able to take Lazarsfeld’s idea of group interview to arrive at a prescription for the original form of focus groups (Merton & Kendall 1946). The complete qualitative research ‘package’ was in place.

It seems likely that Lazarsfeld would have further developed and expanded his product of motivational research had Columbia not recruited Theodor Adorno to work with him at the Bureau. Adorno was an extreme advocate for quantitatively reliable research, and not (to use the vernacular) ‘good with clients’. He had no compunction against declaring research as worthless if it did not meet his statistical standards. Adorno’s working relationship with Lazarsfeld was not a happy one (Morrison 1998).

‘Dichter’s debt to Lazarsfeld was considerable’ (Horowitz 2010), including training in depth interviewing at Lazarsfeld’s Institute in Vienna (Fullerton 2010); and although written evidence appears unavailable, the suggestion is that Lazarsfeld and Dichter remained in touch well into the 1950s, at least. Bill Schlackman provides an anecdote that is both amusing and revealing:

Paul was a very good friend of Ernest’s, and a supporter of Ernest. The funny story is that Ernest was supposed to go and give part of Lazarsfeld’s course on the qualitative side of motivation, and Ernest was too embarrassed; he was too frightened: being – well, Lazarsfeld was a kind of a mentor or a supervisor in Vienna. And Ernest was very insecure in his way: and so he said ‘no, I’m not gonna go – you go’. And I was sent to do a class in one of Lazarsfeld’s group – his students. And believe me, I was terrified! How could I deal with this?! It was on the nature of non-directive interviewing and ... depth interviews.

(Schlackman, quoted in Bailey & Patterson 2013)

‘During the late 1950s ... Lazarsfeld remained friendly but increasingly sought to distance himself from ... the research interpretations produced by Dichter’ (Schwarzkopf & Gries 2010, p. 18). Nevertheless, in his seventies, Lazarsfeld still acknowledged the value of Dichter’s work:

Derivative from my early approach is the work ... of some of my Austrian collaborators. I refer especially to Herta Herzog and Ernst [*sic.*] Dichter who, like me, belonged to the Karl and Charlotte Bühler group.

(Lazarsfeld 1972)

## Conclusions

Although ‘fragments’ of qualitative research can be identified from the beginning of the 20th century, and possibly earlier (see, e.g., Keegan 2006; Balzer 2011), we now know that the complete ‘package’ of component parts forming what we recognise today was being assembled in the period 1925–1934. By 1945, Lazarsfeld had given the world (including Ernest Dichter) a new perspective – motivational research; had advocated the methods of depth interviewing; had (with Merton) suggested group discussion methods; had advised the use of expert practitioners; had stressed the importance of interpretation, and shown how ideas from psychology could be used to provide an interpretative model; had identified the importance of ‘why?’ questions; and had shown how this kind of research could be offered through an agency context. He had also given Ernest Dichter training in research methods, and found him a job in market research.

The clearest conclusion would seem to be that we should at last give full recognition to the true ‘father of qualitative research’, the psychologist, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld.

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Lawrence F. Bailey is a Chartered Psychologist and Fellow of the Market Research Society. After a period of work in the telecommunications industry, and postgraduate research in psychology, he began his market research career at the Schlackman Organisation in 1977. Specialising in qualitative work, Lawrence spent 33 years in market research, overlapping a late-career decade in lecturing at Leeds Business School, ending in August 2012. He now pursues an active retirement, in offering training and coaching on an ad hoc basis.

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