

A Market Researcher's Roots in Psychology: George Gallup's Education at Iowa

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George Gallup's contributions to the fields of advertising history are well known and have been fairly well documented. As Director of Research at Young & Rubicam for 15 years (1932-1947), Gallup developed and implemented innovative ways to measure the responses and interests of radio audiences and newspaper and magazine readers. As I detailed in my presentation at the 2001 CHARM conference, during his time at Young & Rubicam Gallup pioneered more precise ways to measure the exact features of advertising texts that stimulated reactions from the public and methods for linking these reactions to specific demographic characteristics.

It is also well known that Gallup first gained recognition in the advertising field as a result of the dissertation he completed at the University of Iowa in 1928. His thesis presented a new method for measuring reader interest in a newspaper that was meant to be more reliable and accurate than methods in use at that time. Most reader surveys of the period asked people to recall what sections or columns of the newspaper they had read, thus relying on the subject's memory and willingness to admit his or her preferences. Gallup and his colleagues asked respondents to go through the paper with them, and marked in red every headline, column or ad they said they had noticed or read. His results turned the advertising world on its head: whereas in earlier studies participants had said they read news of current events and foreign affairs religiously, Gallup found that the most popular feature in the paper was the comics, followed closely by advice columns (Gallup 1928; 1930a; 1930b; 1932). This research spurred the introduction of ads that used comic strip formats and characters during the early 1930s. Critics at the time and since have noted that the comic strip format worked to circumvent conscious resistance to the sales message on the part of the reader, and established a new model of psychology for advertisers in the early years of the Depression ("Comic Pages" 1931; Pease 1958).

Though Gallup's contemporaries praised his insights into the psychology of advertising, there has been little analysis of how his work relates to broader movements in psychology during the 1920s, and how his training at Iowa influenced his later thinking. Though he is often associated with journalism, Gallup earned both his undergraduate and

graduate degrees in psychology. I propose to examine his academic training and research for my presentation at the 2003 CHARM conference. Drawing on material from the Special Collections Department at the University of Iowa library, columns in the student newspaper *The Daily Iowan*, and the writings of his advisor and mentor Carl Seashore, I will analyze Gallup's roots in the fields of scientific management and behaviorist psychology, and most importantly, discuss how his later advertising research can be linked to the growth of standardized testing in the 1910s and 1920s. Seashore was a prominent advocate and practitioner of standardized testing, and his student George Gallup forms a bridge between this work and advertising.

Gallup attended the University of Iowa from 1919 through 1928, earning his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees there. He majored in psychology as an undergraduate and then earned both graduate degrees in the field. His training occurred during a period of intense change in the field. As Dorothy Ross and Donald Napoli note, psychology became a profession in the 1920s, and researchers in the field increasingly focused their attention on applied or industrial psychology (Napoli 1981; Ross 1991). In part this change was due to the increased attention to psychology during World War I, when the government employed such organizations as the Psychological Corporation to assess the intelligence and talents of men who had been drafted for the military. In the 1920s movements developed to apply standardized tests to children and students, to gain useful information about their interests and aptitudes.

Carl Seashore was one of the leaders in the field of standardized testing. He earned his Ph.D. at Yale in 1895 and was among the first graduates of that university's psychology program. Seashore spent his entire career at Iowa, from 1897-1936, and was even called back from retirement during World War II to teach. He retired finally in 1948, at the age of 80. He led a group of colleagues who made the University a center for standardized tests that eventually became what is now the ACT (Dahlstrom 1985). Fortunately for researchers today, Seashore wrote a number of books about his training, research, and views on psychology, books that even include syllabi that were used in his courses at Iowa when Gallup was his student. In

interviews later in his life Gallup said that Seashore was one of the most important influences on his work at Iowa, so an assessment of his contribution is long overdue.

In describing his approach to research, Seashore wrote that he chose to concentrate "upon problems in which exact measurement of a psychological nature...could be made and analyzed to give a quantitative insight into the structure of the mental processes involved" (Seashore 1942: 25). He was interested in studying the differences among individuals and in findings more precise ways of measuring them. While at Iowa, as professor and chair of the psychology department, Seashore worked with the National Research Council to identify young people who showed an aptitude for scientific work. He was among the first to advocate placement exams for college students, and favored tracking students into different sections of a course based on their intellectual abilities. (Seashore 1927). Seashore also worked with businesses to develop tests to measure employees' interests and aptitude for different kinds of work. It was this area that formed the basis for Gallup's master's thesis, which presented a new method for measuring job performance. Later published as an essay entitled "Traits of Successful Retail Salespeople," the thesis clearly illustrates how trends in psychology during the 1920s, and Seashore's own work, influenced Gallup. (Gallup 1925; 1926).

Seashore also drew his students' attention to new theories of the subconscious that were emerging in the 1920s. Syllabi for his courses indicate that Gallup would have known the work of Walter Dill Scott and William James, and would have been aware of new theories of the subconscious (1942). Scott's work in particular, and his attention to advertising, affected Gallup's approach to his newspaper research and structured his later views on advertising. Looking at Gallup's work at Iowa, then, allows us to formulate an intellectual history of this crucial marketing pioneer.

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