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ters. Even here it may be attenuated in areas with strong religious and family controls.

Restriction of this analysis to a particular metropolitan area precludes generalization of the findings to the country as a whole. The findings point to the desirability, however, of giving increased attention to residence and status in investigating illegitimacy. It may well be that the generalizations based largely on studies of urban populations do not apply uniformly either to all segments of the urban social structure or to the suburbs.

THE CONSTANT COMPARATIVE METHOD
OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS*

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Research into social problems, problems of deviation, of control and of crisis, and the like—the general subject matter to which *Social Problems* is devoted—is still mainly feasible through methods which yield qualitative data. Because these areas raise problems of secrecy, sensitivity, taboo

topics, stigma, and legality, and because people in these situations are usually adept at covering the facts when necessary, often the only way a researcher can obtain any data, or data that is accurate, is some combination of observing what is going on, talking in rather loose, sharing, fashion with the people in the situation, and reading some form of document that they have written. These methods best allow the researcher either to gain the trust of the people in the situation or, if necessary, to accomplish clandestine research. In view of this *distinctive relevance* of qualitative data collection and analysis for many areas of social problems, the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis will in particular, I trust, increase the battery of alternative approaches useful to researchers in these areas.

My other purpose in presenting the constant comparative method may be stated by a direct quotation from Robert K. Merton—a statement he made in connection with his own qualitative analysis of locals and cosmopolitans as community influentials:

> This part of our report, then, is a bid to the sociological fraternity for the practice of incorporating in publications a detailed account of the ways in which

qualitative analyses *actually* developed. Only when a considerable body of such reports are available will it be possible to *codify* methods of qualitative analysis with something of the clarity with which quantitative methods have been articulated.[1]

SOME DIVERSE APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Two general current approaches to the analysis of qualitative data are as follows: (1) If the analyst wishes to convert qualitative data into crudely quantifiable form in order to test provisionally an hypothesis, he codes the data first and then analyzes it. An effort is made to code "all relevant data [that] can be brought to bear on a point," and then the assemblage, assessment, and analysis of this data is accomplished systematically in a fashion that will "constitute proof for a given proposition."[2]

(2) If the analyst wishes only to generate theoretical ideas—new concepts and their properties, hypotheses and interrelated hypotheses—the analysis cannot usefully be confined to the practice of coding first and then analyzing the data, since the analyst, in direct pursuit of his purpose, is constantly redesigning and reintegrating his theoretical notions as he reviews his material.[3] Not only would analysis after a coding operation unnecessarily delay and interfere with his purpose, but explicit coding itself often seems an unnecessary, burdensome task. As a result, the analyst merely inspects his data for new properties of his theoretical categories and writes memos on these properties.

In this paper, I wish to suggest a third approach to the analysis of qualitative data, combining, by an analytic procedure of constant comparison, the explicit coding procedure of the first approach and the style of theory development of the second. The purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory more systematically than allowed by the second approach by using the explicit coding and analytic procedures. At the same time, it does not forestall the development of theory by adhering completely to the first approach which is designed for provisional testing, not discovering, of hypotheses.

Systematizing the second approach by this method does not supplant the skills and sensitivities required in inspection. Rather the constant comparative method is designed to aid analysts with these abilities in generating a theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data, and in a form which is clear enough to be readily, if only partially, operation-

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 390. This is, of course, also the basic position of Paul F. Lazarsfeld. See Allen H. Barton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Some Functions of Qualitative Analysis in Social Research," in Seymour M. Lipset and Neil J. Smelser (eds.), *Sociology: The Progress of a Decade*, Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961. It is the position that has stimulated the work of Becker and Geer, and Berelson cited in footnote 2.

[2] Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, "The Analysis of Qualitative Field Data" in *Human Organization Research*, edited by Richard N. Adams and Jack J. Preiss, Homewood: Dorsey Press, Inc., 1960, pp. 279-289. See also Howard S. Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," *American Sociological Review*, Dec., 1958, pp. 652-660, and Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1952, Chapter III, and page 16.

[3] Constantly redesigning the analysis is a well known normal tendency in qualitative research (no matter what the approach to analysis) which occurs throughout the whole research experience from initial data collection through coding to final analysis and writing. It has been noted in Becker and Geer, *op. cit.*, 270, Berelson, *op. cit.*, 125; and for an excellent example of how it goes on, see Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, New York: Free Press, 1957, pp. 390-392. However, this tendency may have to be suppressed in favor of the purpose of the first approach, but in the second approach and the approach to be presented here, it is used purposefully as an analytic strategy.

alized for testing in quantitative research. Depending as it still does on the skills and sensitivities of the analyst, the constant comparative method is *not* designed (as methods of quantitative analysis are) to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it *is* designed to allow, with discipline, for some of the vagueness and flexibility which aid the creative generation of theory.

If the person applying the first approach wishes to discover some or all of the hypotheses to be tested, his discoveries are typically made by using the second approach of inspection and memo-writing along with explicit coding. In contrast, the approach presented here *cannot* be used for provisional testing as well as discovering theory, since the collected data, as will be seen in the foregoing description, are not coded extensively enough to yield provisional tests, as they are in the first approach. The data are coded only enough to generate, hence, to suggest, theory. Partial testing of the theory, when necessary, is left to more rigorous, usually quantitative, approaches which come later in the scientific enterprise.

The first approach differs in another way from that presented here. The first approach is usually concerned with a few hypotheses at the same level of generality, while the constant comparative method is concerned with many hypotheses synthesized at different levels of generality. The reason for this difference is that the first approach must keep the theory tractable for provisional testing in the same presentation. Of course, the analyst using the first approach might, after either proving or disproving his hypotheses, attempt to explain his findings with some more general ideas suggested by his data, thus achieving some synthesis at different levels of generality.

Another approach to qualitative analysis is "analytic induction," which combines the first and second approaches in a manner different from the constant comparative method.[4] Analytic induction is concerned with generating and proving an integrated, limited, precise, universally applicable theory of causes accounting for a *specific* phenomenon, e.g., drug addiction or embezzlement. Thus, in line with the first approach, it tests a limited number of hypotheses with *all* available data, which are numbers of clearly defined and carefully selected cases of the phenomena. In line with the second approach, the theory is generated by the reformulation of hypotheses and redefinition of the phenomena forced by constantly confronting the theory with negative cases.

In contrast to analytic induction, the constant comparative method is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (not provisionally testing) many properties and hypotheses about a *general* phenomenon, e.g., the distribution of services according to the social value of clients. Some of these properties may be causes; but unlike analytic induction others are conditions, consequences, dimensions, types, processes, etc., and, like analytic induction, they should result in an integrated theory. Further, no attempt is made to ascertain either the universality or the proof of suggested causes or other properties. Since no proof is involved, the constant comparative method, in contrast to analytic induction, does not, as will be seen, require consideration of *all* available data, nor is the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined case. The constant comparative method may be applied for the same study to any kind of qualitative information, including observations, interviews, documents, articles, books, and so forth. As a consequence, the constant com-

[4] See Alfred R. Lindesmith, *Opiate Addiction*, Bloomington: Principia, 1947, pp. 12-14, and Donald R. Cressey, *Other People's Money*, New York: Free Press, 1953, p. 16 *et passim*.

TABLE I
USE OF APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

		Provisional Testing of Theory	
		Yes	No
Generating Theory	Yes	(2) Inspection for hypotheses along with (1) coding for test, then analyzing data (4) Analytic Induction	(2) Inspection for hypotheses (3) Constant Comparative Method
	No	(1) Coding for test, then analyzing data	Ethnographic Description

parisons required by both methods differ with respect to breadth of purpose, extent of comparing, and what data and ideas are compared.

Clearly the purposes of both these methods for generating theory supplement each other as well as the first and second approaches in providing diverse alternatives to qualitative analysis. Table I locates the uses of these approaches to qualitative analysis and provides a scheme for locating other approaches according to their purposes.

THE CONSTANT COMPARATIVE METHOD

The constant comparative method can be described in four stages: (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory. Although this method is a continuous growth process—each stage after a time transforms itself into the next—previous stages remain in operation throughout the analysis and provide continuous development to the following stage until the analysis is terminated.

1. *Comparing incidents applicable to each category.* The analyst starts by coding each incident in his data in as many categories of analysis as possible.[5] To this procedure I add the basic, defining rule for the constant compara-

tive method: *while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents coded in the same category.* For example, as the analyst codes an incident in which a nurse responds to the potential "social loss" —loss to family and occupation—of a dying patient, he compares this incident with others previously coded in the same category before further coding.[6] Since coding qualitative data takes some study of each incident, this comparison can often be based on memory. There is usually no need to turn back to every previous incident for each comparison.

This constant comparison of the incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category. One starts thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, the relation of the category to other categories, and other properties of the category. For example, in constantly comparing incidents on how nurses respond to the social loss of dying patients, we saw that some patients are perceived as a high social loss and some as a low social loss and that patient care tended to vary positively with degree of social loss. It was also apparent that some of the social attributes which nurses combine to establish a degree of social loss are seen

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[5] I follow the procedure for selection and coding of categories given in Becker and Geer, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-82.

[6] Illustrations in the paper will refer to "The Social Loss of Dying Patients," *op. cit.*

immediately (age, ethnic, social class) and some are learned after a time with the patient (occupational worth, marital status, education). This further led us to the realization that perceived social loss can change as new attributes of the patients are learned. It also became apparent under what conditions (types of wards and hospitals) we would find clusters of patients with different degrees of social loss.

After coding for a category perhaps three or four times, the analyst will experience a conflict in emphasis of thought. He will both muse over these theoretical notions and try to concentrate on the study of the next incident to determine the alternate ways in which it should be coded and compared. At this point, the second rule of the constant comparative method is: *stop coding and record a memo on ideas.* This rule is designed to tap the initial freshness of the analyst's theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in thought. In doing so, the analyst should take as much time as necessary for reflecting and taking his thinking to its most logical (grounded in the data, not speculative) conclusions. If one is working on a team, it is also a good idea to sit down with a teammate and discuss theoretical notions with him. The teammate can help bring out points missed, add points he has run across in his own coding and data collection, and cross-check points. He, too, begins to compare the analyst's notions with his own ideas and knowledge of the data, which generates more theoretical ideas. With clearer ideas on the emerging theory systematically recorded, the analyst then returns to the data for more coding and constant comparison.

2. *Integrating categories and their properties.* This process starts out in a small way; memos and possible conferences are short. But as the coding continues the constant comparative units change *from* comparison of incident with incident *to* incident with

properties of the category which resulted from initial comparison of incidents. For example, in comparing incident with incident we discovered the property that nurses are constantly recalculating a patient's social loss as they learn more about him. From then on each incident on calculation was compared to accumulated knowledge on calculating, not to all other incidents of calculation. Thus, once we found that age was the most important characteristic in calculating social loss, we could discern how age affected the recalculation of social loss as the nurses found out more about the patient's education. We found that education was most important in calculating the social loss of a middle year adult, since at this time in life education was likely to be of most social worth. This example also shows that the accumulated knowledge on a property of the category—because of constant comparison—readily starts to become integrated; that is, related in many diverse ways, resulting in a unified whole.

In addition, the diverse properties of the category start to become integrated. We soon found that calculating and recalculating social loss was related to the development of a social loss "story" about the patient. When asked about a patient, nurses would tell what amounted to a story about a dying patient, the ingredients of which were her continual balancing out of social loss factors as she learned more about the patient. We also found that the calculus of social loss and the social loss story were related to her strategies for coping with the upsetting impact on her professional composure of, say, a dying patient with a high social loss (e.g., a mother with two children). This example further shows that the category becomes integrated with other categories of analysis: the social loss of the dying patient is related to nurses' maintaining their *professional composure* while attending his dying. Thus the theory devel-

ops as different categories and their properties tend to become integrated through constant comparisons which force the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison.

3. *Delimiting the theory*. As the theory develops, various delimiting features of the constant comparative method set in to curb what could otherwise become an overwhelming task. This delimiting occurs at two levels: (1) the theory and (2) the original list of categories proposed for coding. First, the theory solidifies in the sense that major modifications become fewer and fewer as one compares the next incidents of a category to properties of it. Later modifications are mainly on the order of logical clarity; paring off non-relevant properties; integrating elaborating details of properties into the major outline of interrelated categories; and most important, reduction. By reduction I mean that a higher level, *smaller* set of concepts, based on discovering underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties, might occur to the analyst by which to write the theory, hence, delimiting its terminology and text. An illustration showing both integration of more details into the theory and some consequent reduction is the following. We decided to elaborate the theory by adding detailed strategies which the nurses used to maintain their professional composure while taking care of patients with varying degrees of social loss. We discovered that the rationales which they used among themselves could all be considered "loss rationales." The underlying uniformity was that all rationales indicated why the patient, given his degree of social loss, would, if he lived, now be socially worthless; in spite of the social loss, he would be better off dead. (For example, he would have brain damage, be in constant, unendurable pain, or have no chance for a normal life.)

By further reduction of terminology

we were also discovering that our theory could be generalized to one which concerns the care of all, not just dying, patients by all staff, not just nurses. Even more generally, it could be a theory of how social values of professionals will affect the distribution of their services to clients: for example, how they decide who among many waiting clients should next receive a service and what calibre of the service to give him. Thus, with reduction of terminology and consequent generalizing which are forced by constant comparisons—some of which can now be based on incidents found in the literature of other professional areas—the analyst starts to achieve two foremost requirements of theory: (1) *parsimony* of variables and formulation and (2) *scope* in the applicability of the theory to a wide range of situations,[7] while keeping a close correspondence of the theory to data.

Second, delimiting the theory results in a delimiting of the original list of proposed categories for coding. As the theory grows, reduces, and increasingly works better in ordering a mass of qualitative data, the analyst becomes committed to it. This commitment now allows him to delimit the original list of categories for coding according to the boundaries of his theory. In turn, his consideration, coding, and analyzing of incidents become more select and focused. He can devote more time to the constant comparison of incidents clearly applicable to a smaller set of categories.

Another factor, which then further delimits the list of categories for coding, is that categories become *theoretically saturated*. After one has coded incidents for the same category a number of times, it becomes a quick operation to see whether or not the next applicable incident points to a new aspect of the category. If yes, then the incident is coded and compared.

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[7] Merton, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

If no, the incident is not coded, since it only adds bulk to the coded data and nothing to the theory.[8] For example, once we had established age as the base line for calculating social loss, it was no longer necessary to code incidents referring to age in calculating social loss. However, if we came across a case where age did not appear to be the baseline (a negative case), it was coded and then compared. In the case of an 85-year-old, dying woman who was considered a great social loss, we discovered her "wonderful personality" outweighed her age as the most important factor in calculating her social loss.

The fact that categories become theoretically saturated can be employed as a strategy in coping with another problem: new categories will emerge after hundreds of pages of coding. The question is whether or not to go back and re-code all previously coded pages. The answer for large studies is "no," not until starting to code for the new category at the page when it occurs, and waiting for a few hundred pages of coding, or when the remaining data have been coded to see whether or not the new category has become theoretically saturated. If yes, then it is not necessary to go back because theoretical saturation suggests that what has been missed will in all probability have little modifying effect on theory. If the category does not saturate, then it is necessary to go back and try to

saturate it, if the category is central to the theory.

Theoretical saturation helps solve another problem concerning categories. If the analyst has also collected the data, then he will be remembering from time to time other incidents he observed or heard that were not recorded. What does he do? If the unrecorded incident applies to an established category, it can, after comparison, either be neglected as a saturated point or, if it is a new property of the category, it can be added into the next memo and thus integrated into the theory. If the remembered incident generates a new category, both incident and category can be included in a memo bearing on their place in the theory. This may be enough data if the category is minor. However, if the category becomes a central part of the theory, the memo becomes a directive either for returning to the notes for more coding, or for returning to the field or library for more data or for future research.

The universe of data used in the constant comparative method is based on the reduction of the theory and the delimination and saturation of categories. Thus, the collected universe of data is theoretically delimited and, if necessary, carefully extended by a return to data collection according to theoretical requirements. This theoretical delimiting of the universe economizes research resources, since it forces the analyst to spend his time and effort on data relevant only to his categories. For large field studies with long lists of possibly useful categories and thousands of pages of notes embodying thousands of incidents, each of which could be coded a multitude of ways, theoretical criteria are of great necessity in paring down an otherwise monstrous task to the resources of the people and the project's allotted time and money. Without these criteria the delimiting of a

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[8] If the purpose of the analyst, besides developing theory, is also to count incidents for a category to establish provisional proofs, then he must code the incident. Furthermore, Professor Merton has made the additional point in correspondence that counting for establishing provisional proofs may also feed back to the development of theory, since frequency and cross-tabulation of frequencies can also generate new theoretical ideas. See Berelson on conditions under which one can justify time consuming, careful counting, op. cit., pp. 128-134. See Becker and Geer for a new method of counting frequency of incidents, op. cit., pp. 283-287.

universe of collected data, if done at all, can become very arbitrary, less likely to yield an integrated product; and the analyst is more likely to waste time on what might later prove to be irrelevant incidents and categories.

4. *Writing theory.* At the end of this process the analyst has coded data, a series of memos, and a theory. The discussions in the memos provide the content behind the categories, which are the major themes of the theory as written in papers or books. For example, the major themes (section titles) for our paper on social loss are "calculating social loss," "the patient's social loss story," and "the impact of social loss on the nurse's professional composure." To start writing one's theory, it is first necessary to collate the memos on each category, which is easy since the memos have been written according to categories. Thus, all memos on calculating social loss were brought together for summarizing and, perhaps, further analyzing before writing about it. The coded data is the resource to return to when necessary for validating a suggested point, "pinpointing" data behind an hypothesis or gaps in the theory,[9] and providing illustrations.

DISCUSSION

Conveying credibility. A perennial problem with qualitative analysis is conveying the credibility of a theory.[10] The standard approach to this problem is presenting data as evidence for conclusions, thus indicating the way by which the analyst obtained the theory from his data. However, since qualitative data do not lend themselves to ready summary, the analyst usually presents characteristic illustrations and, if

also attempting provisional proofs, accompanying crude tables. If the theory encompasses a multitude of ideas, it becomes too cumbersome to illustrate each idea and, even if space were allowed, too burdensome to read many illustrations which interrupt the flow of general ideas.[11] Thus qualitative analysts will usually present only enough material to facilitate comprehension, which is typically not enough data to use in evaluating all suggestions.

Another way to convey credibility of the theory along with the use of illustrations is to use a codified procedure for analyzing data, such as presented here, which allows readers to understand how the analyst obtained his theory from the data. In qualitative analyses the transition from data to theory is hard, if not impossible, to grasp when no codified procedure is used.[12] And in his turn the reader is likely to feel that the theory is somewhat impressionistic, even if the analyst strongly asserts he has based it on hard study of data gathered during months or years of field or library research.

Even such codified procedures as a search for negative cases or a consideration of alternative hypotheses[13] will leave a reader at a loss, since these analytic procedures are not linked with procedures for using qualitative data.

[9] On "pinpointing" see Anselm Strauss, Leonard Schatzman, Rue Bucher, Danuta Ehrlich and Melvin Shabshin, *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions,* New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, Chapter 2, "Logic, Techniques and Strategies of Team Fieldwork."

[10] Becker, *op. cit.,* p. 659.

[11] See detailed discussion on this point in Strauss, et al., *op. cit.*

[12] Following Merton's quotation (page 437), we need more descriptions of methods of transition from qualitative data to qualitative analysis. Barton and Lazarsfeld (*op. cit.*) delimiting the various functions of qualitative analysis indicate a full range of purposes for which other methods of transition can be developed. In focusing discussion on these purposes they hit upon what might be considered elements of possible such methods. To analyze a purpose and the analytic operations involved in its final achievement is *not,* however, to be construed as a method of transition that guides one the full route from raw qualitative data to accomplished purpose.

[13] Becker, *op. cit.,* p. 290.

They do not specify how and how long to search for negative cases or how to find alternative hypotheses given a specified body of qualitative data. Thus the analyst can still be suspect in making his theory appear credible by biasing his search for negative cases or his reasonable alternative hypotheses. The constant comparative method joins standard analytic procedures with directives for using the data systematically.

In addition, keeping track of one's ideas, as required by the constant comparative method, raises the probability that the theory will be well integrated and clear, since the analyst is forced to make theoretical sense of each comparison. Making sure the categories and their properties of the theory are meaningfully interrelated is difficult enough; keeping all the interrelations clearly delineated is an added difficulty. The integration and clarity of the theory will in turn raise the probability that it will be understood and believed credible by colleagues.

Properties of the theory. The constant comparative method raises the probability of achieving a complex theory which corresponds closely to the data, since the constant comparisons force consideration of much diversity in the data. By diversity, I mean that each incident is compared to other incidents or to properties of a category by as many of its similar and diverse aspects as possible. This way of comparing may be seen in contrast to coding for crude proofs, which only establishes whether or not an incident indicates the few properties of the category which are being counted.

The constant comparisons of incidents on the basis of as many of their similarities and differences as possible tend to result in the analyst's creating a developmental theory.[14] In comparing

incidents, the analyst learns to see his categories as having both an internal development and changing relations to other categories. For example, as the nurse learns more about the patient, her calculations of social loss change; and recalculations change her social loss stories, her loss rationales and her care of the patient. Thus, while this method can be used to generate static theories, it especially facilitates the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change which pertain to organizations, positions, and social interaction.

This is an inductive method of theory development. In making theoretical sense of much diversity in his data, the analyst is forced to develop ideas on a level of generality which is higher than the qualitative material being analyzed. He is forced to bring out underlying uniformities and diversities and to account for differences with single, higher level concepts. He is forced to engage in reduction of terminology, as discussed above, to achieve mastery of his data. If the analyst starts with raw data, he will at first end up with a substantive theory: a theory for the substantive area on which he has done research— for example, patient care or gang behavior. If the analyst starts with the findings from many studies which pertain to an abstract sociological category, he will end up with a formal theory for a conceptual area such as stigma, deviance, lower class, status congruency, or reference groups. To be sure, the level of generality of a substantive theory can be raised to a formal theory (our theory of social loss of dying patients could be raised to the level of how professional people give service to clients according to their social value). This requires additional analy-

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14 Recent calls for more developmental, as opposed to static, theories have been made by Wilbert Moore, "Predicting Discontinuities in Social Change," *American*

Sociological Review, June, 1964, p. 332; Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders,* New York: Free Press, 1962, pp. 22-25; and Barney G. Glaser and Strauss, Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction, *op. cit.*

sis of one's substantive theory, and the analyst should include material from other studies with the same formal theoretical import, however diverse the substantive content.[15] The analyst should be aware of the level of generality at which he starts in relation to the level at which he wishes to end up.

The constant comparative method can yield either property or propositional theory. The analyst may wish to proliferate many properties of a category or he may wish to write propositions about a category. Property theory is often sufficient at the exploratory stage of theory development and can easily be translated into propositions if the work of the reader requires a formal hypothesis. For example, two related properties of a dying patient are his social loss and the amount of attention he receives from nurses. This can easily be restated as a proposition: patients considered a high social loss compared to those considered a low social loss will tend to receive more attention from nurses.

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[15] ". . . the development of any one of these coherent analytic perspectives is not likely to come from those who restrict their interest exclusively to one substantive area," Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity,* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963, p. 147. See also Reinhard Bendix, "Concepts and Generalizations in Comparative Sociological Studies," *American Sociological Review,* August, 1963, pp. 532-539.

THE TEXTBOOK WORLD OF FAMILY SOCIOLOGY

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Many things have been much said about family sociology: it deals with sensitive issues and therefore the objectivity of researchers and the acceptability of research by the public have come slowly; everybody is an expert in family sociology, having lived most of his life in families, and therefore much of family sociology is trivial and commonsensical; many groups have a vested interest in "the family" and therefore family sociology is either subserviently conservative or insolently radical; family sociology boasts of many diverse studies but few binding theories; it has low status, unless sprinkled with terms like "kinship" or "comparative" or "structural-functional"; it is popular with students (either because of intrinsic interest or easy grading) and therefore suspect. Despite this rather gloomy picture, families of one form or another are universally found, and universally perform important functions for individuals and society, and as a consequence family sociology is an important area of research and has produced some of the most important studies in the social sciences.

The above issues have been dealt with many times, and I shall therefore not elaborate. Nor shall I go into a general review of family research, because the family area has perhaps had more than its fair share of such reviews and critiques. Textbooks, however, have seldom been looked at critically, except in the course of reviews about a single text at a time. I shall therefore, in a critical vein, concentrate upon family sociology textbooks, to the relative neglect of readers, and of texts that are primarily practical (family life) or cross-cultural (anthropological) in orientation. I have made no attempt to rank the texts in order of their excellence; all of those that I