

RETREADING RESEARCH MATERIALS:

The Use of Secondary Analysis by the Independent Researcher

by Barney G. Glaser

Analysis of existing data originally collected for other purposes is a remedy for many of the afflictions that beset the inquiring sociologist. It fills the research needs of persons with macro-interest and micro-resources, resolves the student's "all but finished dissertation" problem, palliates the research-team member's occasional ennui and alienation, and far from least can lend new strength to the body of fundamental social knowledge. The prescriptions of Dr. Glaser, of the University of California Medical Center at San Francisco, appear widely applicable.

THE use of secondary analysis for the investigation of theoretical and substantive problems is still only a "growing tendency."¹ We can strengthen this tendency by attempting to locate its most likely potential users in the social structure of sociology. To be sure, any sociologist may avail himself of this strategy. However, there are some sociologists with personal needs and career problems for whom the benefits of secondary analysis are particularly appropriate.

The research strategy of secondary analysis—the study of specific problems through analysis of existing data which were originally collected for other purposes—dates back to before the second world war. Its impetus came from the rapid accumulation of attitude surveys in which "many applied topics suggested secondary analysis for scientific purposes."² The first notable effort at secondary analysis from a theoretical and methodological standpoint was Stouffer's *American Soldier*.³

The history of secondary analysis may have curbed as well as stimulated its use, since all writers to date have focused on the importance of secondary analysis of survey data. To apply secondary analysis only to unintensively analyzed piles of survey data is limiting in two ways. First, these analyses "follow up the primary analyses for which the data were originally collected."⁴ Some see these "follow-ups" as guided "mopping-ups" of loose ends, obtained by a study director from students for a bare wage or a good grade. Whether or not the charge is valid, this image may conflict with the values of independent, original research and is liable to reduce the use of secondary analysis.

Second, the emphasis on survey data neglects other kinds of data, particularly field data, and hence limits the potential use of secondary analysis. This research strategy can be applied to almost any qualitative data however small its amount and whatever the degree of prior analysis.⁵ Survey data

may always remain the primary source of material for secondary analysis. However, with the current increase in all types of data collection, it is by no means the only possible source. Secondary analysis is something that the sociologist can do with data of his own choosing.

I begin this paper by discussing the *independent researcher*, the person for whom the use of secondary analysis is highly appropriate, and his position in the division of labor which contributes to knowledge. Then I consider how secondary analysis may help solve the personal needs and career problems, generated by their particular locations in the social structure of sociology, of four types of independent researchers: teacher, student, research team member, and "the otherwise employed."

The Independent Researcher

By independent researcher I refer to only one facet of a sociologist's work life, since in few cases does independence completely characterize his work life. As defined by Lee, an independent researcher is one who engages in research as a personal venture, often on free time, (1) to satisfy his own curiosity, (2) to fulfill a desire to contribute to sociological knowledge, and (3) to do both in conformity with his own conception of a scientist's standard.⁶ His research is free of influences and pressures from others' vested interests (he spends his own money or is modestly subsidized by a neutral agency), and he is free to pursue his own problems as far as he likes. He is the only person responsible for and to the research. In this sense he is what Merton has termed a "lone scholar,"⁷ but he may, of course, use an assistant, clerical help, or processing machines and may also have the interest and occasional help of his associates.

The importance of the independent researcher is indicated by the 80 per cent increase in sociologists during the last decade, the widening variation in their occupational activities, and the increasing diversity of their organization affiliations.⁸

More sociologists than ever are grappling with the typical problem of the independent researcher: *how to mobilize resources to accomplish some basic research.*

Secondary Analysis: A Link Between Individual and Team Research

Lee, in his comparison of independent and team research, develops points at which these two forms of mobilization of research resources are in opposition, from the point of view of contributing to sociological knowledge.⁹ Secondary analysis as a link between independent and team research can in some measure resolve these conflicts. Both independent and team research have distinct places in the division of labor which contributes to sociological knowledge. The basic cutting point in this division of labor is between *data collection* and *data analysis*.

Large-scale inquiry, typical of social research, requires a team of experts skilled in specialized techniques and methods of data collection as well as large sums to finance the operation.¹⁰ This team effort yields data that is in good measure precise, reliable, and based on carefully chosen representative samples—data that give a sound basis for contributions to sociological knowledge. Collection of high-quality data is very often beyond the financial, specialized skill, physical, and temporal resources of the independent researcher. However, analysis of portions of the data collected is within the resources of the independent researcher, and it is here that he may step into the division of research labor. In providing this link between team research and independent research, secondary analysis has several benefits for the team, for the independent researcher, and for sociology.

The Original Idea: Insofar as "the conception of an original idea is essentially an individual effort," the research "task force" is at a disadvantage in contributing to sociological knowledge. Individual

efforts at originality made by team members can easily be influenced by "committee thinking" about research design, by a member of the team whose prestige is based on professional reputation, and/or on his ability to negotiate funds, by vested interests in personnel, methods, theories, and by operational imperatives "such as obligations, pressures, forces or controls rising out of the relation to sponsor, client, or supporter." Hyman suggests that one solution to these problems is secondary analysis.¹¹ I add to this suggestion the requirement that it be done by an independent researcher, *not a member of the team*, who has negotiated for the data in a manner that insures his complete freedom.

Secondary analysis by an independent, not of the team, is a significant way of severing collected data from research groups' commitments and pressures. Further, since the independent has not been indoctrinated with the original research design, his ability to engage in a fresh, intensive analysis of the data along different lines is greater than that of a team member. In short, the independent is free of both internal and external pressures. Secondary analysis by a team member is not often so free, in many cases I have observed. Though on his own resources, the team member still may be very much controlled by vested interests, committee thinking, and prestigious associate members and sponsors.

The Independent's Resources: The independent researcher is seen by many group researchers as "lone and primitively equipped." If the independent works with data collected by a research team, he works with data collected by well-equipped people. During the analysis the use of modern data-processing equipment at many university institutes and centers is usually obtainable for a modest fee by the sociologist, especially if he runs the machines himself during evenings and weekends. Thus, if the independent takes a reasonable portion of team-collected data for studying his theoretical or substantive problem, he needs but modest funds and time for using effective equipment. *It is the costs of data collection that are beyond the scope of the independent researcher, not the costs of data analysis.*

Merton has noted in a discussion of the high cost of research based on original data "how wasteful it is to neglect such available material."¹² It is wasteful of time, money, and data when the independent neglects possible secondary analysis of pertinent available material for the study of a sociological problem and instead spends his precious time and money on data collection. It is also wasteful of talent when a sociologist, who cannot

muster the resources for data collection, does nothing when he could be applying his analytical talents to available data. The independent researcher also provides an important link between applied and basic research.¹³ Lazarsfeld has noted that "A number of very important theoretical ideas grew out of research done for the purpose of solving a specific [applied] problem . . ."¹⁴ Secondary analysis of the applied research data by an independent provides the financial and temporal resources for a study of these ideas which otherwise might be doomed to oblivion because of lack of budget for theoretical analysis.

The Independent's Personality: Two principal criticisms leveled against independent researchers are: (1) They are "likely to be more intuitive, impressionistic and subject to the use of 'Verstehen' operation than group researchers." (2) They are "likely to be thought impudent, imprudent, repugnant, confusing or confused by the more socialized or bureaucratic group researcher: the individualists 'do not fit in.'" While these attributes may be thought of by some group researchers to be a disadvantage in reliable data collection, they are the very stuff from which comes an original contribution. This is substantiated by Anne Roe's compilation of findings on the personality patterns of productive scientists. Her list is too long to reproduce here; however, a few patterns are of direct relevance to our discussion. "Truly creative scientists seek experience and action and are independent and self-sufficient with regard to perception, cognition, and behavior. They have a preference for apparent but resolvable disorder and for an esthetic ordering of forms of experience. They have strong egos . . . which permits them to regress to preconscious states with the certainty that they will return from these states. Their interpersonal relations are generally of low intensity (ungregarious, not talkative, asocial)."¹⁵

Secondary analysis locates the independent researcher with these attributes in an ideal position in the scientific division of labor—a position benefiting group research, sociological knowledge, and himself. In the analysis of group research data he is free to apply his intuitiveness at will, and since he is not a member of the team, whether or not he can "fit in" is irrelevant. It is a solution for some independents to a growing problem of research organizations—"toleration of the 'oddball'" in teamwork. In a very few (usually richer) organizations the "oddball" is encouraged; in most he is readily sacrificed for the "greater good" of the team.¹⁶

Types of Independent Researchers

Four types of independent researchers

are these: teacher, student, team research member, and the otherwise employed sociologist. Many points about one can be applied to others.

The Teacher: The typical career problem of many teachers, particularly those in universities and major colleges, is that they "are hired to teach . . . with no specifications of research duties. When they are evaluated, however, either as candidates for a vacant position, or as candidates for promotion, the evaluation is made principally in terms of their research contributions to their disciplines."¹⁷ One solution to this "publish or perish" problem is team research. The teacher who works on a team captained by a strong idea man is usually assured of a worthwhile joint publication. Another solution is secondary analysis, which is particularly suited to the independent-oriented teacher who finds the team solution undesirable.

The economics of secondary analysis go far beyond those of time and money saved in data collection. First, there is an *economy of interest*. The typical teacher is probably more adept in analysis of his substantive field than in techniques of data collection—which have become very specialized. To spend time on learning and relearning these techniques can require a partial displacement of interest. A teacher of high reputation can possibly secure enough funds to employ experts, organizations, or students for his data collection, thereby being free, presumably, to work on whatever interests him in the analysis. However, he will be involved then as an administrator of an operation, possibly having to sacrifice precious time allotted for his major interest. A teacher may have the time and funds sufficient only to collect data on a social unit that is either different or much smaller than the social unit of his interest. Thus, his research interests must be changed and/or curbed. Since creativity generally rises with ability to work on problems of deep interest,¹⁸ secondary analysis may provide a strategy for keeping at the analysis of one's cherished problem area. Secondary analysis of high quality data also provides an alternative to studying a pet problem on lower quality data which, while within the independent's means to collect, can result in a low research yield for himself, his career, and sociological knowledge.

Second, the economics of time, money, interest, and data combine to *increase research output and conserve both research and teaching talent*. Secondary analysis may allow the talented teacher to work on more than one project at a time and more projects over time. This strategy may also help him offset some consequences on teaching of the pressure to publish such as "neglect of teaching, the devaluation of

instructional tasks and, perhaps most serious, the gradual erosions of the teaching responsibilities of the senior faculty."¹⁹

Secondary analysis also implies some responsibilities for the teacher. The theorist who writes theory with no data on the pretext of not having time and/or money for data collection can no longer plead this excuse. He must either live explicitly in a world of speculation or make the effort to find some available material on which to base his theory. And the teacher who escapes from data analysis into pseudo-data collection by making unrealizable research plans and pleading no resources is similarly confronted with the fact that he could be attempting a contribution with available data.

The Student: As an independent scholar, the graduate student is perhaps the most stymied of all by the difficulties of data collection. He typically has little money saved or a job that allows only a small margin of money for research. Even with well-sponsored support, his reputation at best commands little more than a fellowship to live on while he does some inexpensive kind of research. To get his Ph.D. he is supposed to make a substantial contribution to his field. This task is harder the poorer the data that he must work with; and poor data is often associated with lack of resources for data collection. Poor data may also preclude excellent training in both collection and analysis. Time spent on research is of utmost importance because only with the degree in hand is his professional career in hand. The time factor may also force him to postpone either family life or a sound life for his family, unless he postpones the degree.²⁰

Typical solutions to the problem of collecting data are to take a job on a research team or to do a project for a funded professor or a client through a professor's sponsorship. The proviso involved in these solutions is that the student can have a portion of the data for a dissertation. But these approaches still take *time*, even though the money problem may be solved, and they all leave the student somewhat less than independent given his financial, evaluational, and, perhaps, emotional vulnerabilities coupled with his connection with power figures of the initial study.

An alternative solution to the data collection problem is the secondary analysis of data from elsewhere—data which is released completely to the student for his own purpose. He can speed up the time for getting a degree. If he must take full or part time employment, he can work on the data during off hours. He may even be able to start his dissertation while still engaged in course work or studying for

qualifying examinations, weaving his analysis into his studies, thereby adding to the meaning of both study and research. Lastly, secondary analysis is an inexpensive strategy for solving the "serious" ABD degree ("All But Dissertation") problem in sociology, "which is primarily one of dollars." An ABD degree is given to "those doctoral candidates who have completed everything for the degree except the dissertation and who are away from the campus on a full-time job."²¹ In suggesting secondary analysis as a way of doing a dissertation I have assumed that the original contribution of most students comes from problem development, analysis, and presentation, not from data collection. How and where the student obtains the data should not affect the calibre of his training in research analysis by the professor whose data he has elected *not* to use.

Of course, the student can continue his training in team research while engaging in an independent secondary analysis for his dissertation. Concomitant training in data collection and analysis may provide one solution to an important student problem noted by Lee: "But the primary problem is this: Group research has now so absorbed the interests, aspirations and resources of graduate departments of sociology that the training of individual well-rounded journeymen in sociological research is being eclipsed. The situation has thus arisen that it is becoming fairly difficult to locate young staff members for a college or university who are trained to be liberal arts college and graduate school professors and to carry on the independent research that needs to go therewith."²² This concomitant training may raise the chances of balancing off the absorbing effect of group research on the student, thereby producing a "well-rounded journeyman" steeped in research technology out of the person who might otherwise become simply a "technique peddler."²³

This strategy is also an excellent way for the student to do term papers and M.A. theses and to attempt aside (not required) contributions on problems that interest him. The meaningfulness of doing papers, whether required or not, is immeasurably enhanced by analysis of high quality data that are respected by other sociologists. In this sense, the facilitating nature of secondary analysis encourages the student to try more research than is requisite for his program.

The Team Member: In response to the familiar charges that research organizations "stultify the independent thought of, deny autonomy to," and cause displacement of the scientific values and motives of its members, Merton has recently noted that "close inspection of how these institutes

actually work will find that many of them consist of individual scholars with associates and assistants, each group engaged in pursuing its own research bent."²⁴ If group researchers are free to pursue their own research problems, they are mostly, if not only, the senior research associate or director of the team. For it has also been noted that the imagination of the junior members of the team is liable to be stifled to the extent that they "no longer consider it their responsibility and duty to think out problems for themselves but expect problems to be handed out to them by their superior."²⁵ Insofar as junior researchers are liable to this danger, an independent secondary analysis can help fend off any tendency to lose independence of thought and action and to become buried in and by group research.

The director of a group research is, of course also liable to stultification of thought and autonomy. As one who is responsible for the group he must see that its research commitment is fulfilled and that the sources of income do not dry up before the project is finished, so that his own and team members' jobs are not in jeopardy. As Bennis has noted, in his study of a social research organization, this takes much time and effort away from the director's own research—in essence he is forced to become a "research entrepreneur."²⁶ This responsibility also means that if the research loses interest for the director, he cannot simply terminate the project or give up his position. Loss of both research time and substantive interest may result in stultification with and alienation from the project, with an attendant loss of sensitivity to relevant problems and increased difficulties in finishing the final report. The probability of stultification and alienation for some directors is increased by the fact that some "social scientists have been more or less permanently diverted from their original research interests, simply because they did not resist the temptation of funds which were available for other projects."²⁷

Two ways of handling the problems of stultification and alienation are the use of secondary analysis for "bridging" and "mopping-up" operations. The director initiates a series of small studies on the group's data by students to fulfill course requirements or for low wages. One function of these studies is "bridging;" that is, a widespread hunting for relevant problems and discrete analyses that may rejuvenate the director's interest and sense of relevance, thus providing for him a bridge back to the data. Another function is "mopping-ups"; that is, getting the study done faster with little stress on the budget, picking up loose and tangential ends for a feeling of closure, and mollifying

any guilt the director may feel over his lack of involvement in what he is supposed to be involved.

These specific investigations are offered by the director as good training for students, whereas in some quarters they are seen as abuses of secondary analysis. The "bridging" and "mopping-up" implications of these investigations indicate on the director's part a lack of honesty to group members, client or sponsor, and students about his relation to the data and appear as exploitation of free or inexpensive labor to solve his problem.

One way that the director may forestall a sense of stultification with and alienation from the group project is to engage himself in a secondary analysis of his other current sociological interests with data from elsewhere. This may keep him vitalized as a researcher. In addition, trying to contribute to sociological knowledge may also forestall others from leveling at him the annoying but typical criticism of group researchers: he is merely a "technique peddler."²⁸

The Otherwise Employed: As an economical and independent way of keeping a hand in research, secondary analysis provides a solution to two problems of the otherwise employed sociologist. This is the person who is in neither teaching nor research but in a staff or administrative position. Such people may be employed in university or research organizations, of course, but it is important to note their considerable increase in many kinds of government, professional, and welfare institutions.²⁹

First, accomplishing some basic research may have consequences for this person—who is somewhat removed from the direct activity of his discipline—that are similar to those associated with belonging to a professional association and receiving its journal. Engaging in a secondary analysis would maintain his professional self-image as a scientist participating in the prestigious world of social research, his feeling of unity with his profession, and his communication with, to forestall isolation from, the sources of sociological knowledge: fellow researchers and their research.³⁰

Second, this feasible way of accomplishing contributions to knowledge can potentially provide a path back into teaching or research from other types of employment. That the otherwise employed sociologist has a problem in doing some research is forcefully brought out by two of Caplow and McGee's respondents: "Yes, he's getting involved with administration there, and that's the kiss of death for any research." "She hasn't been in positions where productivity was demanded or even permitted, . . . in her current job there's no time for research."³¹ Keeping a second-

ary analysis going on the side can help reduce some of the loss of those potentially talented contributors to sociology, who take full time jobs that do not require, emphasize, or even permit research.

Conclusion

In this paper I have explored an alternative strategy for accomplishing basic sociological research.³² I suggest secondary analysis as only one possible aspect (not a complete style) of a sociologist's research career. In doing this I have tried to locate its very appropriate use in the social structure of sociology, in the sense that it can be used to solve some typical problems faced by different types of independent researchers—again, usually only one aspect of a sociologist's career. Insofar as secondary analysis allows some people to mobilize their meager resources to tempt a sociological contribution, it can help save time, money, careers, degrees, research interest, vitality, and talent, self-images and myriads of data from untimely, unnecessary, and unfortunate loss.

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- ⁴ Lipset and Bendix, *op.cit.*, p. x.
- ⁵ Obtaining data may be difficult when the amount of available material is small and/or the desired data is seemingly well analyzed. However, given the nature of sociological analysis on the same data one can make very different inferences, conceptualizations, indexes and cross-tabulations, study very different problems, use very different pivotal classifications, methods, and models of analysis. In short, analyzed data potentially can be re-analyzed for different problems with little or no relevant overlap.
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- ³¹ Caplow and McGee, *op.cit.*, pp. 83-84.
- ³² In a forthcoming paper, "The Logic and Legitimacy of Secondary Analysis," I take up the problems of searching for data, dealing with the primary analyst, using old data in contemporary settings (the escape from time and place) and developing new research models afforded by secondary analysis. See also B. G. Glaser, "Secondary Analysis: A Strategy for the Use of Knowledge from Research Elsewhere," *Social Problems*, Summer 1962, for a discussion of the applied research potential of secondary analysis.