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Secondary Analysis: A Strategy for the Use of Knowledge from Research Elsewhere

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out too much chance of the perpetrators being caught. The boys reacted accordingly.

Direct observation of the anti-Semitic children in the New York sample (not the youths over 16) indicated that, by and large, they were not arrogant, swashbuckling personalities. Even the most aggressively anti-Semitic among them tended rather to be beset with feelings of weakness and ineffectiveness, frustrated in their capacity to achieve and unable or unwilling to assert themselves openly. These children were inclined to be surreptitious in their behavior, expressing defiance but in covert ways.

Such attributes do not make their behavior unimportant. As they grow older, some of the children may engage in more extreme anti-Semitic violence and plotting, but it is very unlikely that many of them will become "ring-leaders" of adult hate groups. Nevertheless, if there is no educational, group work, psychological or other effective intervention, it is possible that they will retain their anti-

Semitism, and should an outlet in the form of anti-Semitic behavior sanctioned by aggressive leadership become available to them, they could become pawns.

It would be hazardous to equate the demographic distribution of the incidents with the actual distribution of anti-Semitic attitudes within American society. Groups unrepresented in such apprehensions, such as Negroes and Puerto Ricans, may nevertheless harbor strong anti-Semitic attitudes. Adults in the United States do not generally express anti-Semitism by daubing swastikas, but this hardly means that the proportion of anti-Semitic adults is any less than the proportion of anti-Semitic children and youths.

The summary generalization may be made, then, that the particular manifestations of swastika daubings and related activities among those swastika offenders designated as anti-Semitic, represent only one form of anti-Semitism evoked among those psychologically and socially disposed to such behavior.

## SECONDARY ANALYSIS: A STRATEGY FOR THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH ELSEWHERE

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In recent years there has been a "rapidly expanding demand for sociologists' services" by organizations and groups for aid in solving their operating problems.<sup>1</sup> When a prospective client approaches the social scientist with a problem and asks what research can do to help solve it, he will generally focus this question in one or two ways: 1) what research knowledge

already exists that may help and/or 2) what research can be done directly in the present situation?<sup>2</sup> This paper will discuss one strategy for applying existing research in the hope that it

<sup>1</sup> Talcott Parsons, "Some Problems Confronting Sociology as a Profession," *American Sociological Review*, 24 (1959), pp. 555-557.

<sup>2</sup> Rensis Likert and Roland Lippitt, "The Utilization of Social Science," in *Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences*, Leon Festinger and Daniel Katz (eds.), New York: Dryden Press, 1953, p. 583. All references to Likert and Lippitt are taken from their introduction to this article and their first section, "Using Knowledge and Theory Derived from Research Elsewhere," pp. 581-602.

may help social scientists cope more effectively with the expanding demand for applied social research.

In the application of scientific knowledge '*discovered elsewhere*' to the solution of an operating problem, the social scientist must face certain important questions of comparability between the past research and the present or operating situation. They are comparability of 1. populations, 2. situational dynamics, 3. problems under study, 4. variables or concepts, and 5. past findings with present hypotheses. If these questions are ignored, the social scientist may err in two ways. He may either prematurely reject important prior research because of glaring manifest differences or he may accept uncritically all findings and insights as relevant to the present situation.

In discussing ways of handling these questions of comparability, Likert and Lippitt focus only on strategies for obtaining data on the *present situation*. These are "budding off" conferences, research application conferences, research review conferences, focusing on a specific operating problem, direct consultation on a solution of an operating problem, in-service seminars, and a technique for quick analysis of the present situation.

Obtaining data from the *past research* for the necessary comparisons may equally be a problem. The social scientist may find, in returning to the original publication, that concepts are not clear; populations are not specified; situational dynamics have not been dealt with; the right variables have not been taken up or, if they were, relevant interrelations have not been done; and analysis of problems has taken too dissimilar a tack. He may ask: what would have happened if the author had done this or that with his data?

*If the social scientist is able to apply the strategy of secondary analysis, inability to make comparisons or ap-*

*parent noncomparability with the present situation may not be sufficient cause for discarding potentially applicable past research.* On the contrary, past research is just beginning to be tapped for its relevance to solving present problems. With this strategy one does not have to depend solely on the previous analyst's approach and bent of mind. Lipset and Bendix have defined secondary analysis as "the study of specific problems through analysis of existing data which were originally collected for other purposes."<sup>3</sup>

We suggest that through the use of secondary analysis the social scientist may be better enabled to serve his client. First, it widens the potential applicability of a past research by changing its limits from data presented to data collected. Second, with this strategy the social scientist can turn from printed sources to the vast reservoirs of existing data (published and unpublished from) that sit in the basements and files of institutes, bureaus and centers throughout the country. Thus he increases the amount of past research that can be brought to bear on the operating problem.

#### COMPARABILITY

The first phase in secondary analysis is to face the questions of comparability. If the *populations* of the past research and present situation are somewhat similar but the social scientist is not sure how similar, he can find out the characteristics of the past population and make specific comparisons. If the past population is inappropriate as is, he can carve out of it a comparable sub-group. The latter is a powerful operation afforded by secondary analysis. By using it one can take a past study of a seemingly incomparable population and end up with a sub-

<sup>3</sup> Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959, Preface, p. x.

population that is comparable.<sup>4</sup> For example, if the social scientist is asked by a group of science-oriented pathologists how best to defend their place in both science and medicine which is being challenged by Ph.D.'s and clinical pathologists respectively,<sup>5</sup> he can turn to national samples of college graduates or to surveys of research organizations and take out of the total group the sub-group of pathologists for study. In this sense the base of selection of past research is broadened considerably. The social scientist need not be content with or constrained by the population units designed by the primary analyst, hence left with a limited number of useful past researches. This strategy will alert him to the use of data that normally would not be considered or thought of as applicable to present problems.

When he turns to *situational dynamics* the social scientist can again do the necessary secondary analysis for making comparisons. If the science oriented pathologists who have come for his help are under siege in an affiliated hospital, he might want to sort out of his past populations those pathologists who are safe at basic research in a government subsidized, non-profit, medical research organization. Of course, these comparisons overlap with population comparisons to some extent, and both are limited by the amount of data collected in the past research. But in using secondary analy-

sis social scientists are not limited by the amount of data presented in the past research publication.

As to *concepts or variables*, again the social scientist is not limited by the level of thinking of the primary analyst. Likert and Lippitt suggest that the primary analyst try "to move to a level of theorizing . . . which makes it possible for a wide range of practitioners to see how generalizations apply to analysis of their problems." To be sure the social scientist can raise the level of abstraction or reconceptualize the past research without resorting to secondary analysis. But suppose the variables in the past research do not come close enough to his conceptualization of the present situation. By secondary analysis he can take up variables that were not presented in publication, he can clarify unclear variables that were presented, and most important of all he can construct variables (indexes) which indicate the present concepts. For example, if his hypothesis is that science-oriented pathologists who are losing their identity will tend not to defend their place in medicine and science, and if he has no measure of identity, it may be a simple matter to combine a few items to obtain this measure.

When it comes to comparisons of *past problems and findings to present problems and hypotheses*, the social scientist is even freer of the primary analyst's purposes. It does not matter if the problem analyzed in the past research resembles the present problem. If the data are comparable with respect to population, situation, and variables, then the social scientist merely analyzes it according to the specific operating problem. This is the very essence of secondary analysis. He may, of course, use existing findings, but he is quite free to take the data to its limits for his own purposes. Thus he may look at all possible relations between variables to search for findings

<sup>4</sup> If this sub-group is taken from a large survey or a field project that has gone on for years and is, itself, too large to handle conveniently for the purpose of application to a situation elsewhere, it is a simple matter to take some kind of systematic sample (e.g., random, stratified, etc.) of the sub-group of IBM cards or field notes. Thus, it can be reduced to a more manageable size for faster results and smaller cost of processing.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of this problem see Mary Rue Bucher, "Conflicts and Transformations of Identity, A Study of Medical Specialists," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1961.

that are needed for application to the present problem. Here most of all secondary analysis changes the limits of application of past research from data published to data collected.

It has been suggested to me that in some instances one need not even be content with the limits of the data collected. If the data come from an organization, the social scientist may be able to return to it. By interviewing people who were there in the past or studying pertinent documents he may be able to fill in for the present analysis gaps in the past data.<sup>6</sup> This may even be accomplished, though perhaps less effectively, by letters of inquiry and by requests for document copies.

#### OTHER BENEFITS FROM SECONDARY ANALYSIS

*Economies:* This strategy has many other useful consequences for the application of research done elsewhere. If the people with the operating problem do not have enough money for an adequate study of their situation, secondary analysis is a much less expensive process and can, through use of a number of past researches, potentially provide a sufficient amount of data. If the present situation requires action in a short time, secondary analysis can usually be done more quickly than collecting and analyzing new data. If the operating problem is of such a nature that a study of the situation would be inadvisable, secondary analysis provides a way to study the problem elsewhere.

*Readiness:* Likert and Lippitt state that clients will utilize social science only if they are ready for its help. This readiness depends on (1) a problem sensitivity, (2) an image of potentiality and (3) a general experimental attitude toward innovation. In order to

create this readiness for utilization of research the social scientist should try to develop these elements in his clients. New research is not feasible if the clients are not ready for it; and past research as published may be too barren from the point of view of comparability to be used for creating readiness. However, a secondary analysis which shows clients that what was done elsewhere can be done for them may be a very useful device in developing a problem sensitivity, an image of potentiality and a feel for research, hence readiness. At the same time, it also may provide an empirically based design for guiding future research in the present situation, both by suggesting gaps to be filled in and providing findings to validate and to further analyze.

*Application Testing:* Application of social research provides some unique problems that secondary analysis may help solve. If past research meets the criteria of comparability and a particular finding seems applicable to the present situation the client may be eager to apply it. This may put the social scientist in the awkward position of having to challenge the application in some measure. He must suggest limits of generalization, he must warn against over-simplification; he must explain how findings need considerable testing before application. He must stress, as Hyman suggests, that findings to be applied should first be analyzed as much as possible in terms of the realities of the present situation in order to judge their potential consequences.<sup>7</sup> At this point it is likely that the past research will let the social scientist down. The previous finding may not have been tested or tested

<sup>6</sup> Suggestion made to author by Robert K. Merton.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert H. Hyman, *Survey Design and Analysis*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1955, p. 336.

enough in a manner appropriate to the present situation. The social scientist is faced with the conflict of wanting to apply a fact to ready clients which his expertise says he cannot do. Secondary analysis is a potential way out of this dilemma. With this strategy the social scientist can do the necessary sub-group comparisons and characterizations. He can bring out the associated norms, beliefs, values and sentiments. He can look at the variations that strategic contextual variables make in the finding. He can analyze the potential side-effects of implementing policy based on the finding.

*Application Variables:* Another problem is that variables which have theoretical importance do not necessarily have practical importance. Using secondary analysis, the social scientist can take comparable past research, particularly that which is theoretically oriented, and search for strategic application variables. He can develop their importance by looking at their distribution in various sub-groups, showing their relation to other acknowledged strategic variables, and looking for crucial cutting points. He can also look for the controllable variables in the study which are more important for application than the non-controllable ones, even though the latter may be stronger determinants of the phenomena under study and therefore more emphasized in a theoretical approach. Gouldner has indicated other properties of variables useful in applied social science:<sup>8</sup> they are easily translated into lay concepts; they will not impede intended change when collected, studied or implemented; they

are accessible, reliable and efficient; they provide preferential entry to the situation and they are latent to the client with the operating problem. Returning to original data will allow scanning for variables with these properties, hence their potential use in solving the operating problem.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has been written to suggest a strategy for practice that is also being used for theory development.<sup>9</sup> The social scientist will be guided in its implementation by the requirements of the operative situation and the controls surrounding the past research data. In some cases he may obtain the data easily; in others he may find it more appropriate to ask the primary analyst or custodian of the existing data to have a few tables run. Sometimes the data may not be relinquished, but if code books or schedules can be obtained he can send in orders for the necessary machine work. To be sure, secondary analysis is not limited to quantitative data. Observation notes, unstructured interviews, and documents can also be usefully reanalyzed. In fact, some field workers may be delighted to have their notes, long buried in their files, reanalyzed from another point of view. Lastly, secondary analysis of past research for application purposes need never hinder the researcher from writing up the theoretical side. Man is a data gathering animal. This paper suggests a strategy for using the data he gathers.

<sup>8</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner, "Theoretical Requirements of the Applied Social Sciences," *American Sociological Review*, 22 (1957), pp. 92-102.

<sup>9</sup> On the traditional use of secondary analysis for theory development see Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Sydney S. Spivak, "Observations on the Organization of Empirical Social Research in the United States," *Information Bulletin of the International Social Science Council*, XXIX (December, 1961), pp. 5, 6, 27 and 30.