

## ARTICLE

# #ThanksForTyping ... and the fieldwork: the role of sociologists' wives in classic British studies

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## Abstract

This article explores the role of social researchers' wives in post-war British studies, in particular drawing on the diaries kept by the wives of two noted sociologists while their husbands, Peter Willmott and Dennis Marsden, were respectively undertaking studies in the working class communities of Bethnal Green and Salford. The wives – Phyllis Willmott and Pat Marsden, made contributions to the community studies in the mid 1950s/early 1960s, at the point where British sociology and social research was on the cusp of transition towards formalisation and professionalisation. The wives were co-opted into the academic endeavour. Their practices as part of their family lives became professionalised as they undertook knowledge gathering, bridging between community and scholarship for their husbands, and reflecting on their own practice. The paper enables contemporary social researchers to recognise the part played by the wives of major sociological figures in the establishment of the men's reputations and the disciplinary enterprise of sociology.

## Keywords

academic wives, British community studies, incorporated wives, Pat Marsden, Phyllis Willmott, wives' diaries

## INTRODUCTION

The hashtag #ThanksForTyping began trending on (what was then) Twitter in 2017. It was started by Bruce Holsinger, a Professor of English at the University of Virginia. Using Google Books, Holsinger had scanned the acknowledgement pages of books and started a thread, posting screenshots on Twitter with the ThanksForTyping hashtag. The hashtag subsequently gained traction internationally. The examples of screenshot acknowledgements posted under the hashtag stretch from the post-war WWII period to more recently, and overwhelmingly involve male authors thanking their wives.<sup>1</sup> For example, an acknowledgement from a book published in 1992 gives sincere

<sup>1</sup> Holsinger's tweet and the example tweet cited here were accessed on 22.12.23: <https://x.com/bruceholsinger/status/845637778251677697?s=20>, <https://x.com/AleSojka/status/847175184926887937?s=20>. Unfortunately as people leave X (formerly Twitter) their account content is deleted and the #thanksfortyping contributions are erased.

thanks to the first wife, who came up with the theory that forms the backbone of the author's book, followed by an expression of profound debt to the second wife, who seems to have written the book, and with mention of the merit of her never getting headaches. Examining the tweeted examples under the hashtag, it is clear that much more was going on than the typing contribution captured in the hashtag: wives were facilitating and instrumental to the entire research and publication process.

A whole field of women's effaced research and domestic labour coalesces into visibility under the hashtag. The tweets are a partial glimpse of the contributions of wives historically and into the contemporary period. They alert us to the significant implications of the invisible work of academic wives in the past for our contemporary concerns. Wives' contributions enabled the careers of some of the male academics who embedded disciplines such as sociology, social policy and anthropology in post-war British higher education. Further, their contributions helped to establish expectations around the amount of research, teaching and administrative work expected of academics today, with or without the contribution of wives or partners (see recent discussion in the Mumsnet 'Academic common room').<sup>2</sup> As John Goodwin and colleagues have noted in revisiting the work of sociologist Pearl Jephcott (2021), previous research connects the past, present and possible futures of sociology, an important part of what and how 'we' (sociologists and society) have been shaped.

In this article we explore the role of wives of social researchers in classic works of the 1950s and '60s that set foundations for how sociology conceived and sociologists enacted research investigations of social change in working class communities and family life. We draw in particular on cases involving the diaries kept by the wives of two noted sociologists of the period: Phyllis Willmott, wife of Peter Willmott, and Pat Marsden, wife of Dennis Marsden, while their husbands were undertaking intensive community studies in long-established (but no longer existing) poor working-class neighbourhoods. Multi-generational families lived side by side in sub-standard rented housing, respectively in the south and north of England: Bethnal Green, East London, with employment largely provided in manufacturing, docks and transport; and Salford, mainly serving the industrial/docks complex of Greater Manchester.

Phyllis Willmott kept two diaries during 1954 and 1955, during the period when Peter Willmott and Michael Young were undertaking their renowned *'Family and Kinship in East London'* study (Young and Willmott 1957). Phyllis wrote her diaries while she, her husband, and their children, lived in Bethnal Green. One journal was a handwritten personal diary, a sort of internal monologue, while the other was a typed daily set of observations about community life in Bethnal Green. Phyllis also wrote a retrospective commentary on her typed diary for the Institute of Community Studies in 2001. (Diaries and commentary housed in the Willmott Collection, Churchill Archives, Cambridge.) Pat Marsden's handwritten daily record of life for mothers and children on a slum clearance estate was kept while Dennis Marsden was undertaking his unpublished 'Salford Slum and Re-housing' ethnographic study. Pat, Dennis and their two young children lived on the estate during 1963. We interviewed Pat Marsden in 2009 about her memories of the time. (Diary transcript and interview held by authors.)<sup>3</sup> The wives and their husbands were from working class backgrounds in the north

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mumsnet.com/talk/academics\\_corner/4884814-male-academics-with-wivespartners-who-dont-work-anyone-else-noticed-this](https://www.mumsnet.com/talk/academics_corner/4884814-male-academics-with-wivespartners-who-dont-work-anyone-else-noticed-this) [accessed 5.1.24]

<sup>3</sup> Copyright for the diaries and commentary are held by the Willmott and Marsden estates, and can be accessed upon request. Pat Marsden gave consent for use of her interview. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Southampton under ERGO ID 71948.

(the Marsdens) and south (the Willmotts) of England. As the husbands gained a higher education and progressed in their research careers, the couples became socially mobile.<sup>4</sup> The wives' ambiguous class location, encompassing earlier insider lived experience growing up as girls in working class communities, and recently acquired outsider status socially and culturally, combined with a taken-for-granted positioning as wives and mothers within the communities under study, provides a distinct form of gendered insight into the local working-class communities that their husbands were studying.

The 1950s and 1960s were a significant period for British sociology, where a post war generation of sociologists aimed to contribute to social renewal and laid the foundations for the subsequent development of the discipline (Scott 2020). It is important to note that we are not seeking to undermine the standing of major British sociologists; rather we aim to introduce the work of wives alongside their reputations. In an interview on the history of British sociology (Crow et al. 2023, discussing Scott 2020), John Scott asserts the importance of disciplinary history in giving contemporary sociologists a sense of their own position in the collective enterprise and on whose shoulders we/they stand. In this article, through our uncovering of the contributions made by sociologists' wives, illustrated with consideration of the cases of the Bethnal Green and Salford community studies, we provide contemporary social researchers with a sense of the importance of past wives in the collective disciplinary enterprise. We insert their research involvement into the envisaging of the shoulders that are stood upon.

## A SIGNIFICANT SILENCE

Male social researchers may include 'thanks for typing' type acknowledgements of a wife's supportive input in the front of their books, but this format camouflages the silence of their presence in the body of the text. Discussions of the trajectories of sociological knowledge about communities, families and class, and of sociology as a discipline generally also silence the presence of wives epistemologically and methodologically. Disciplinary reviews construct influential male sociologists as generating their classic studies unaided.

Silence concerning the details of the part that male sociologists' wives may have played in initiating, facilitating and generating foundational disciplinary knowledge and insight into community and family is significant in two respects. Firstly, post-war Britain saw the expansion and flourishing of sociology as a science of society regarded as essential within and outside the academy for understanding everyday lives and for a rebuilding of British society. The post-war generation of sociologists saw themselves as working towards social renewal and contributing politically to social reform (Scott 2020). In-depth studies of the implications of disruption in a shifting landscape of neighbourhood upheaval and family relocation were features of these efforts. Community studies in particular came to prominence in an effort to study new patterns of family, kinship and neighbouring in the face of anxiety about the state of marriage, the family and society. Sociologists utilised intensive ethnographic techniques of data gathering and participant observation that required extensive time and resource investment (Crow 2002). Community research of the 1950s and 1960s focused attention on the detailed habits and values of daily life, family and neighbourhood networks

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<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Willmott was on her own socially mobile trajectory too, having recently qualified as a medical social worker before having her children. Pat Marsden had to leave school at 16 and went to work as an assistant in a library.

and relationships. Work at the Institute of Community Studies in Bethnal Green, initiated and directed by the social innovator Michael Young, was a key element in this, had a strong focus on the implications of rehousing for family and community cohesion. Despite criticisms by some sociologists that the Institute was unsociological (e.g. Platt 1971), Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* study (1957) was highly influential conceptually and methodologically, spawning similar investigations such as Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris' study of family and kinship in Swansea (1965) and Salford College of Technology's 'Salford Slum and Rehousing Study' led by Dennis Marsden (1963, unpublished), as well as sociological studies of working class neighbourhoods internationally (Topalov 2003).

Secondly, there is a significant silence about the role that wives played in those community studies in the face of arguments that social research investigation was on the cusp of intellectual and methodological transition. Mike Savage (2010) has argued that in the post-war period, social research shifted from a practice dominated by 'gentlemanly' moralistic judgements towards objective disciplinary undertakings by professionalised social researchers but at a time when research methods (and ethical protocols) had not yet become formalised as techniques distinct from the researcher practicing them. Fieldwork was on the verge of developing into a legitimate social research method, with the 'rules of the game' brought into being (Savage 2022) including through the practice of community studies. In this respect, post-war community and family research both studied social change and embodied it. Any sense that the lives of sociologists' wives may have been professionalised through the linking of methods techniques and researcher practice, and that wives may have played a role in the professionalisation of community study methodology of the time is absent however.

## INCORPORATED WIVES

The gender dynamics of 'incorporated' (Finch 1984) or 'forgotten' (Oakley 2021) wives who played or play a significant part in their husbands' employment is revealed in a strand of feminist literature about the ways that the wives are affected directly and indirectly by their husbands' work and become drawn into it across a range of occupations. For wives whose husbands have professional careers, their family lives become 'professionalised' – that is, wives' everyday activities become incorporated into professional research practice, and their productive labour is uncredited. In her 1983 book, *Married to the Job*, Janet Finch uses the term 'incorporation' to denote a two-way relationship between wives and their husbands' work. The husband's work imposes a set of structures on the wife's life; she is incorporated into the structures around which her husband's work is organised, which sets limits on what is possible for her. This then elicits the wife's contributions to the husband's work – the incorporation of her labour, whether enforced or chosen, into the work that men do. A decade earlier, Hanna Papanek (1973) developed the concept of a structurally and culturally generated 'two-person single career', which simultaneously requires a wife's participation and devalues it. Papanek points out that it also curtails opportunities for wives to build their own careers since they are so invested vicariously in advancing their husband's career. More recently in *Forgotten Wives* (2021), Ann Oakley argues that wifhood was, and remains, a political filter of gendered assumptions about what wives do -- a filter that makes a subterranean industry of wifely

labour so unremarkable that it is not recognised as there at all. Wives' contribution is forgotten, concealed behind their husbands.<sup>5</sup>

Looking specifically at research on the incorporated labour of faculty or academic wives, discussion tends to focus on the domestic and administrative support particularly evident in the mid-twentieth century, but continuing today as the ThanksForTyping hashtag has shown. Martha Fowlkes' (1980) work on wives of US-based doctors and faculty, for example, identifies three main ways in which a wife relates to and affects her husband's work life: being an adjunct who helps directly with her husband's work itself; providing emotional support that enables the husband to continue his work; and undertaking the 'double duty' of care of family life and protecting the husband from its demands. There is also some attention to academic wives' social contribution as well as the administrative and domestic support provided, hosting dinners and visiting academics, and nurturing and sustaining their husband's career and relationships by this means (e.g. Ardner 1984). Several studies refer to the University and Faculty Wives Clubs prevalent in North America (Prentice 2006). In the UK, there was a Sociology Wives Reading Group at Essex University in the 1960s (<https://essexsociologyalumni.com/timeline/>) for example, normalising the category of 'sociology wives'.<sup>6</sup> Such institutionalised forms of social labour make clear that it was not just academic husbands who benefitted from their wives' hidden administrative, domestic and social labour, but also the universities where their husbands were employed.

Jennifer Platt's book on *The Realities of Social Research* (1976) moves us beyond administrative, domestic and social incorporation to another form of professional incorporation of academics' family life. Focusing on the research practices of British sociologists, Platt indicates that wives were performing the role of research assistants, helping with typing, routine statistical tests, hand-counting of data prior to ubiquitous computers, and supporting husbands who were doing participant observation, smoothing relationships with key (male) informants and acquiring relevant information:

A number of spouses, however, gave more concrete [research] help; they actually did some of the work themselves. In community participant observation this could hardly be avoided, since simply by living there both spouses were participating; help, however, could go well beyond this, as when a very attractive wife [sic] smoothed relationships with key informants ... it seems evident that conjugal roles among sociologists are such that wives follow and support their husbands' careers in the conventional way (Platt 1976: 122-123).

What is missing in these analyses is a detailed engagement with the processes of wives' input and the skills they exercised beyond smoothing relationships for their husbands. Later in this article we show how Phyllis Willmott and Pat Marsden were in fact *doing* participant observation, exercising their articulating class and gender locations to give insights into aspects of community life where their husbands had limited access, and rigorously reflecting on fieldwork relations.

<sup>5</sup> See also Ann Funder's *Wifedom* (2023) on the invisibilising of the contributions to the writing of the novelist George Orwell by his wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy.

<sup>6</sup> The University of Bristol had a University Wives Club in the early 1970s. Personal discussion with Miriam David 29.11.23.

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## POST-WAR SOCIOLOGISTS AND THEIR WIVES

There have also been biographies of individual academics that uncover wives' contribution to influential men's careers. In her biography of her father, Richard Titmuss, who founded the discipline of social administration and held a chair at the London School of Economics (LSE), and her mother, Kay Titmuss: *Man and Wife* (1996), Ann Oakley paints a portrait of the sort of wifely vicarious identification with her husband's career that Hanna Papanek noted as a feature of the two-person single career. Kay Titmuss did a great deal of support secretarial work and life management for Richard Titmuss, as Oakley relates, but there was an early book that the couple co-authored (Titmuss and Titmuss 1942). Oakley writes that her mother's contribution to this work was restricted to typing, referring to Kay's own characterisation of her input (1996: 158). Yet Kay Titmuss clearly downplayed her contribution in favour of her husband. In one of his letters, Richard Titmuss records his wife as 'sampling 3000 record cards in the M & CW [mother and child welfare] clinics' (op cit: 143). In other words, Kay Titmuss undertook research that formed the basis for the book on which she was acknowledged as a co-author. Inclusion as a book co-author, reflecting significant research input, was not often the case, as we will show below.

Richard Titmuss was part of an interconnected set of rising stars of post-war British sociology and social policy; a network that involved our case study wives Phyllis Willmott and Pat Marsden. It included Michael Young, whose PhD was supervised by Titmuss. Young instigated Peter Willmott and Dennis Marsden in their respective community research, as well as Dennis Marsden's collaboration with the educationalist Brian Jackson on *Education and the Working Class* (1962). Peter Townsend, a prominent sociologist and poverty campaigner, was also connected to this grouping. Initially working with Young at the Institute of Community Studies, Townsend joined Titmuss at the LSE, and then left for the University of Essex where he subsequently recruited Dennis Marsden to join his department. Others in this interconnected group serve to indicate how wives played a crucial enabling role in classic post-war social research studies. In the acknowledgements for Peter Townsend's *The Last Refuge* (1962: xiii), for example, as well as dedicating the book to his wife, Ruth Townsend, he refers to Ruth as part of 'the small team of research officers who undertook visits and interviews' for the study. In his research on Peter Townsend, the historian Chris Renwick (2023) has engaged with the under-appreciated but critical domestic, social and fieldwork contributions made by Ruth Townsend that undergirded her husband's early career. Renwick points out that the extent of Ruth's input was such that any sense of distinctions between the Townsend's home life, social research and political activities were dissolved.

Turning to Brian Jackson, his first wife, Sheila, carried out the pilot study of a working class community for the Institute of Community Studies that both stimulated the Jackson and Marsden *Education and the Working Class* study (see Hardwick 2003), and subsequently become a foundation for Jackson's *Working Class Community* book (1968). Jackson also dedicated his book to his wife, acknowledging:

I don't suppose I would have stuck at the project at all had I not only had initial help from Sheila Jackson with the fieldwork and writing up, but generous and selfless encouragement all the way through (1968: vii).

Dedicating books to wives often seems to have alleviated any need to recognise them as co-researchers deserving of co-authorship. Indeed, Sheila's contributions show how wives were not just research assistants; they could make crucial intellectual input. Subsequently, when she remarried to Philip Abrams, Professor of Sociology at Durham University, Sheila is credited with having had a

key role in some of his major work. She conceived and conducted research for the study of communes, *Communes, Sociology and Society* (Abrams and McCulloch 1976). The authorship of the book was at least attributed to 'Philip Abrams and Andrew McCulloch with Sheila Abrams and Pat Gore'. The 'with' of the authorship attribution, though, seems rather parsimonious given that the Preface to the book (1976: vii) states:

The work [was] ... carried out by the authors together with Sheila Abrams and Pat Gore. Andrew McCulloch, Pat Gore and Sheila Abrams did most of the work of visiting communities while Philip Abrams studied the literature ... Sheila (who had the idea for the research in the first place) spent a great deal of time making sense of the results of a questionnaire we had distributed to all members of the Commune Movement and keeping track of the actual organisation of that Movement ... it would have been very difficult for us to understand the groups we have written about in this book without this further work on the wider alternative society movements.

Sheila also was formative in Abrams' posthumously published work on neighbours (Bulmer 1985). Martin Bulmer notes in his introduction:

Sheila Abrams' influence is discernible throughout, reflecting participation in team meetings over five years, continuing involvement in fieldwork and the salience of neighbouring as a regular topic of conversation at the family dinner table ... This was followed by the ten detailed case studies reported in chapters 8 to 10, for which they [other research staff] and Sheila Abrams carried out all the fieldwork.

Papanek states that the benefits wives might gain from a two-person single career could be mitigated by long term material losses (1973). On the death of Abrams, Sheila was left needing to find paid work and experienced the consequences of a serial two-person single career. In the interview in 2009, Pat Marsden recalled:

Sheila came to see me about her CV and she said, 'Oh Pat I don't know how to put this together!' It was all about, 'when I lived with Brian we did this, and when I lived with Philip we did that'. And she was really worried because she didn't have any formal educational qualifications.

There has, then, been some feminist attention, most notably during its 'second wave' (c. 1960s and '70s), to conceptualising academic wives' contributions as incorporated and as a two-person single career. Additionally, as noted above, there is a trail of clues to the involvement of sociologists' wives in classic British social studies for those who look for it. There has, however, been little attention paid to in-depth tracking the specificities of wives' involvement in the generation of knowledge. There has been no revelation of how the wives' insight is a silent presence in the detail of arguments in the work upon which their husbands built their scholarly reputations. Phyllis Willmott's and Pat Marsden's fieldwork diaries enable us to uncover this presence.

## THE BETHNAL GREEN AND SALFORD DIARIES

As social research was becoming professionalised, the everyday activities of the wives and families of social researchers become incorporated into these professionalised methods. Researchers undertaking community and family studies often lived temporarily in the location that they were studying, and they could be accompanied wives and children. Peter Willmott (1985) argued that community studies would lack 'immediacy' if researchers were not located in the area (although for

a critique of their actual involvement, see Frankenberg 1979 ).<sup>7</sup> The relocation involved for wives could be willingly, as in the case of the Bethnal Green community study, where Phyllis Willmott moved with Peter and their two little sons, from living in what she describes as ‘a jerry-built house with peeling walls’ in Hackney, North London, to a bright, refurbished flat on the top floor of what she calls the ‘gracious house’ at 18 Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green, East London, which contained the Institute of Community Studies (personal diary 1.6.54). Or it could be less willingly, as Pat Marsden moved with Dennis and their small son and daughter, from what she termed their ‘nice flat’ in the northern town of Huddersfield, Yorkshire, to 2 Davenham House – a maisonette with a broken toilet, in need of redecoration, in the area of slum clearance and rebuilding in Salford, Lancashire, that was the focus of Dennis Marsden’s ethnography (reflective interview 20.8.09).

Each wife kept diaries in the expectation that the entries would help inform their husbands’ analyses, as evidenced in our case discussions below. The wives were incorporated into their husband’s work structures, which then elicited their contribution – that is, ethnographic living in community and knowledge gathering. These diaries show how the wives were co-opted into the academic endeavour, bridging between community and scholarship for their husbands’ research through becoming embedded in the everyday life of the community under study. They settled into community life in their gendered position as a mother of small children and a wife of a social researcher, drawing on their social class backgrounds, and making friends with other local wives and mothers. From this positioning, Phyllis and Pat were able to record accounts of everyday community life that were not accessible to their sociologist husbands. They were also participant observers operating on the cusp of the professionalisation of research methods.

We now build on our review of the acknowledgements of male sociologists concerning their wives in classic British studies, to throw light on the overlooked input of wives through consideration of Phyllis’ and Pat’s Bethnal Green and Salford diaries and reflections. While we may glimpse wives’ input to their husbands’ sociological knowledge generation through book acknowledgements and traces of them in fieldwork notes, Phyllis’ and Pat’s diaries enable us to directly demonstrate the shaping of the accounts of working class community and family life on which their husbands built their reputations and careers. Drawing on these unique diaries – we are not aware of the existence of any other wives’ fieldwork diaries from the post-war period – we progress from the general substantiation of the role of sociologists’ wives in classic British studies, as above, into the detail of how wives have made substantive and methodological contributions to the generation of disciplinary knowledge through their incorporation as wives in their husband’s endeavours.

### **PHYLLIS WILLMOTT: BETHNAL GREEN COMMUNITY LIFE AND RECIPROCAL FIELDWORK RELATIONS**

As noted earlier, Phyllis Willmott kept two diaries. One was her personal diary kept in a ledger, and running from May 1954 to November 1954. It is a barely legible handwritten account, a spilling out of thoughts about herself, jottings and plans, but with mention of life in the Institute and of the community study that Peter Willmott had embarked upon with Michael Young. She also kept a typed Bethnal Green Journal, running from October 1954 to March 1955. The journal diary entries contain

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<sup>7</sup> In a critical piece on the gender politics of British community studies, Ronald Frankenberg remarks: ‘A major weakness of all the studies I have discussed was the lack of commitment of their godlike authors. They observed, they commented, occasionally they advised; never did they participate in a real active sense’ (1979: 119). This accusation of aloofness cannot be levelled at Phyllis Willmott and Pat Marsden.



detailed descriptions of life in the working class neighbourhood and friendships with local mothers. While Peter Willmott organised a general survey of Bethnal Green adults and a sub-sample of semi-structured interviews with 45 married parents with dependent children (see Appendix 1 of Young and Willmott 1957), Phyllis went shopping in the local market and waited at the school gates with the other mothers – and then wrote it all down in the Journal. As well as recording her interactions with other mothers (e.g. with Mrs C. below), Phyllis casts an eye over aspects of local living, such as this commentary concerning large families and poverty, which was a topic of policy interest (e.g. Land 1969):

*Friday 24 December (1954)*

At the end of the road we parked for a moment. Peter got out to get something and we watched the world go by. We were outside a butchers. A big well made woman pulled up her pram outside. She was shabbily dressed. Two children were walking with her, a boy of about 9 or ten, in long trousers, a girl of 6 – thin white legs, cotton socks, a coat with the hem let down badly. She had her hands in pockets, she looked cold in the sharp wind. “You stay outside” said the mother. The girl obeyed, still holding the pram. The boy followed his mother into the shop. At first I thought there were two children in the pram. Another look showed three. A boy of four, a girl of three, with a dummy in her mouth and looking rosy and bonny, a baby – hidden behind the girl and in the hood – of perhaps a year or eighteen months. The girl standing stared in at us; she didn’t smile. I felt how unfair life is, more so now, perhaps, than ever. They are becoming a such a minority group the large ‘poor’ families.

There is confirmation that the Journal observations were kept at the instigation of and for Michael Young and the Institute of Community Studies. In her personal diary entry for 15 November 1955, Phyllis writes:

Michael pleased me the other day when returning the B.G. journal by saying ‘I like your book very much. It ought to be published in some form one day’. The second sentence I do not, cannot take seriously. *It was just a job for the Institute & I did it [sic]* [emphasis added].

When parts of the journal were indeed issued by the Institute of Community Studies, in the form of Phyllis’ retrospective reflection in 2001 (only the archived typescript remains available), Michael Young wrote in his foreword to the publication:

Phyllis found out, and recorded in her journal, so much more than we did ... Although we had Phyllis’ journal at the time of Family and Kinship we clearly did not appreciate fully its underlying message.<sup>8</sup>

One of the underlying messages for contemporary social researchers is contained in the journal entry for the 22nd October 1954:

So many things one doesn’t – and in this casual conversation can’t – follow up. Is Mrs. C. rather jealous of her sister who goes so often to Mum? Where does each sibling come in the family group? Why is Mrs. C. so hopeful of her brother’s help? Did she help get him the place in the next turning? *At the moment I am so anxious to try out my angle of leaning towards*

<sup>8</sup> Puzzlingly, given the Institute published the diary in 2001 with a foreword in which he acknowledges having access to Phyllis’ diary at the time of the study, when interviewed by Paul Thompson in the same year (2001), Michael Young seems to pass over the diary as a job that Phyllis did ‘for the Institute’ and imply that he had not read it, saying ‘I knew she kept a journal, but I didn’t know she kept a detailed journal of that period’ (Thompson 2019).

*participator rather than observer. It seems essential to give as well as get. We swap opinions and experiences, and this way it runs true between us. I think that Mrs. C. is aware of the fact that the Institute's work is on B.G. family life and that she wants to help. But she doesn't want to be "interviewed", rather to give us large casual lumps of her knowledge and opinions. If I asked "Did you worry over B. when you first had her?" she would probably answer "Well yes, you do over the first, don't you". But when I say "When I had Lewis, for the first year my stomach turned over every time he cried" (full stop) [original underline], she replies "Oh I didn't worry like that. What worried me was getting my work done. But she was always so good I did manage. But I couldn't stand all those nights again. Waking up at two and all that etc. etc." [emphasis added].*

In other words, Phyllis Willmott was pioneering recognition of relationships and reciprocity in social research a quarter of a century before Ann Oakley (1981) wrote her influential piece about interviewing from a feminist perspective. Oakley challenged traditional, mechanistic methods textbook prescriptions about interviewers only eliciting, not giving, information to interviewees, remaining objective and neutral, and not interacting with interviewees beyond the information gathering exercise. Instead, Oakley emphasised the reciprocity involved in interviewing, where the interviewer is invested in the social relationship – echoing Phyllis Willmott's well illustrated point and her participant observation practice in the service of the Institute.

In the extract from her diary from 22nd October 1954 quoted above, Phyllis writes of Mrs C. giving 'us' lumps of knowledge; an 'us' that indicates she felt part of the research team endeavour. There are traces of the contribution of her observational insights in the published version of *Family and Kinship in East London*. Phyllis is thanked alongside a string of influential academic figures, for her 'valuable advice' towards the end of the Acknowledgements of the book (Young and Willmott 1957: xiv) – lost in a list of names. Far more directly, Young and Willmott could not have demonstrated their argument that 'Bethnal Greeners' are surrounded by dense and extensive networks of relatives and acquaintances without her contribution. Young and Willmott write: 'let us accompany one of our informants on an ordinary morning's shopping trip', followed by a list of all the people the informant, Mrs. Landon, nodded and chatted to, and provide her account of their connections to her and people she knows in reported speech (1957: 82). There is a footnote: 'We are indebted for this account to Phyllis Willmott'. Phyllis' shopping trips were professionalised as fieldwork, not only domestic.

### **PAT MARSDEN: SALFORD LIVES AND INSIDER/OUTSIDER FIELDWORK**

Pat Marsden kept her handwritten diary in two exercise books, starting shortly after she, Dennis and family arrived in Salford in August 1963, and ending in an abrupt fashion six months later at the start of January 1964. The diary material involves lively descriptions of life on a local estate, with discussions of family life, parenting and childhood. Dennis Marsden's detailed notes and research diary contain labour mobility survey data, local authority Planning Department discussions, observations of the Tenants' Association, and so on, while Pat recorded the everyday life in the flats occurring in the square outside the window of her maisonette at number 2 Davenham House, Salford 3. The diary entries include engaged accounts of her exchanges and friendships with other mothers on the estate, as well as detailed descriptions of poor, working class children's life, presaging late 20th century ethnographies of childhood that feature aspects of the minutiae of children's cultures (e.g. Jenkins 1998).

*Friday Aug 30th*

David came round with a 'sweep' – tiny pieces of paper with numbers written on them in a Boots 'Glycerine Suppositories' cardboard box. Selling them for 1/2 d each. I hadn't a 1/2 d so gave him 1d and said he'd have to give me two. 'What are you going to do with the money' I said. David didn't know. Mark said, 'We're going to save 'em and then we'll have thousands of ha'pennies! Mark was distracted elsewhere when I gave D the penny and when he met up with D again I heard D telling him that 'Daniel's mam had bought two for a penny. A minute or two later Mark and John raced up with some of the bits of paper borrowed from D. and asked me to buy them. I didn't. Later they came back from the sweet shop with 1/2d chews. David gave Daniel one but I told him to keep it. 'Nobody'll buy any of 'em. I been round the block? Do you want 'em. You can have 'em for nowt if you like. Do you fink I ought to throw them away!' I said it might be best and he did ...

John, Mark and co. playing with the frame of an old car seat. Little boys with sticks in their belts whooping past – one with a table leg. More children playing with a pram-frame – rocking on it.

As with Phyllis Willmott, Pat Marsden's diary was kept for research purposes, as a contribution to the ethnographic slum rehousing study, and she was acting as an embedded and reflective participant observer. Her and her family's presence caused some puzzlement among the local families as to what they 'were' and how they lived:

*Sunday 10th August*

Christine asked if Dennis was a school teacher – a girl had said he was. I said 'No' ... She also said 'Y'know when you first came – well all the children round here – when they bought that box of toys out they all said "Ooh look at them"! ...

*Tuesday Nov. 19th*

Jean knocked on the door about one -clock to ask where we bought some stuff called 'Guard' which is brushed on to wallpaper to protect it and make it washable. We gave her what was left of our bottle ... Liked our decorations very much – showed her upstairs. 'You've given me some new ideas'. Thinks that a patterned paper doesn't show dirt and fingerprints as much. Was surprised at how clean our off white painted walls were. Explained it was emulsion paint – could wipe marks off.

When we interviewed Pat in 2009, she reflected:

It [the diary] was part of the research. So everyday I just jotted things down ... I mean I did get really involved. If you read the diaries you can see how involved I am and people were coming around to see me and I was going round to see them. But there was always a difference because they were living in such extreme poverty.

Pat was grappling with her insider/outsider status as a participant observer, as have so many researchers since (e.g. Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

Pat Marsden also viewed herself as contributing to the Salford ethnography as a researcher, making similar collective references to Phyllis Willmott's use of 'us' in her diary: 'All our children nowhere in sight today although half term holiday' [original emphasis], 'Discovered the little boy called Malcolm who sometimes plays with our group – is the grandson of the middle shop across the road'. It is not possible to see traces of Pat's observations in a published version of the Salford Slum and Rehousing Study. The research was never written up in an academic form because Peter Townsend recruited Dennis Marsden to take up a position at the University of Essex before the study was

completed, and the Marsden family moved to the South of England. Nonetheless, the restrictions and hazards of the built environment faced by Pat and other mothers on the estate that were recorded in her diary found their way into Dennis' report and his recommendations to Salford Housing Department: a lack of outdoor play, drying and pram spaces, sharp gravel pathways, etc..<sup>9</sup> His own fieldnotes have ('see Pat's diary') inserted at several points, and it is evident that Dennis intended to draw on Pat's diary in his analysis and writing up from the careful logging he made about its contents. In the diary itself, using a red pen, he numbered the pages and inserted codes next to most of the people, adults and children, that Pat mentioned in her entries. These codes relate to an index that he typed up, listing names and relationships. In rigorous thoroughness, DII is the Marsden family, listing Dennis, Pat and the children, family visitors who came to see them and friends who came to stay, and who are mentioned in Pat's diary. Again using red pen, on a separate document he numbered and listed in order the main topics covered in Pat's diary. Pat's spatial location, able to look out on the communal square, and social positioning as a wife and mother, were incorporated.

## CONCLUSION

This article has provided an in-depth analytic focus on wives' role in classic British community studies, from their own perspective, drawing on two unique sets of diaries and reflections, and wives' contributions through scrutiny of acknowledgments, prefaces and so on in their husbands' books.<sup>10</sup> We are though, working with traces of the past of British community studies; that is, what sociologists decided to record in their acknowledgements, and what the wives selected for recording in their diaries and remembered to relay in their later reflections. It is we who are writing that past, rather than having direct access to it through the materials (Stanley 2017). Nonetheless it is clear that the wives of male academics made both substantive and methodological contributions to the classic community studies at a significant point for British sociology, on the cusp of an intellectual and methodological transition towards formalisation and professionalisation. The wives were co-opted into the academic endeavour, their activities in their family lives were professionalised as methodology as they initiated and undertook knowledge gathering for their husbands' research, and reflected on their own practice.

Uncovering the contributions made by sociologists' wives, illustrated with the cases of the Bethnal Green and Salford community studies, enables contemporary social researchers to understand the importance of the part played by the wives of major sociological figures in the collective disciplinary enterprise. As case examples, Phyllis Willmott's and Pat Marsden's family lives were professionalised as methodology. Their articulating class and gender positions as wives and mothers provided located epistemologies that generated substantive and methodological sociological insights that were not easily available to their husbands. For all the sociologists' wives we refer to (and others no doubt) their incorporation on many levels helped to build the reputations and careers of their

<sup>9</sup> *Salford Royal College of Advanced Technology – Work and Housing Project: A second report prepared for SALFORD HOUSING COMMITTEE by the Research Fellow of the Liberal Studies Department at the Royal College* (Marsden Box 1, Alfred Sloman Archive, University of Essex)

<sup>10</sup> We are not the first to work with diaries kept by a wife in the husband's fieldwork location. Robert Smith (1990) has written about his own 'appropriation' and writing up of the diary that Ella Embree kept to assist her anthropologist husband, John Embree, in a community study of a rural village in Japan in the mid-1930s. Under the terms of John Embree's research grant, Ella Embree was charged with studying the village women and children, and progress reports to the funding body were submitted jointly from John and Ella. Ella Embree's work was neither acknowledged nor used in John Embree's book publication, however – another silencing of an incorporated wife albeit in another discipline.

husbands. The wives also helped to build post-war British sociology. The male sociologists would not have been able to access gendered features of the British working class community life that they were pronouncing upon without their wives providing them with material and insights to write about these issues. The men appeared to produce foundational sociological insights and achieve academic recognition on their own or with other (usually male) academic colleagues. In actual practice however, all this was propped up by incorporated input from wives on so many fronts: domestic, research, publication, administrative, social, etc. Accounts of the development of sociological knowledge generally, and specifically about communities, families and class, need to rectify the silence about the presence of the wives of key sociological figures in classic British studies, epistemologically, substantively and methodologically.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme small grants scheme. Our thanks to Joanna Bornat for her comments on drafts of this article, and the anonymous reviewers.

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