Crow, Graham. "Three exemplars." *What are Community Studies?*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 21–44. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849665964.0007>>.

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3 Three exemplars

It is somewhat arbitrary to take 1980 as the start of a new period of community studies research, but not entirely. The need for a fresh beginning had been encapsulated in Philip Abrams's observation that the field was marked by the paradoxical 'coexistence of a body of theory which constantly predicts the collapse of community and a body of empirical studies which finds community alive and well' (1978: 12). Abrams himself was immersed in empirical research into community relationships involving neighbours as these words were being published (Bulmer 1986), and at the same time the fieldwork for the first exemplar to be considered in this chapter was commencing. Ray Pahl had been seeking a location to conduct his planned research into the informal economy, and in 1978 he resolved that the Isle of Sheppey in Kent met his and his funder's requirements. With that decision, a period of six years of intensive fieldwork began that resulted in *Divisions of Labour*. It has been selected partly because Pahl wanted to do something other than a traditional community study, and because in doing so he broke new ground in the combination of research methods employed by him and his team.

The chapter will then go on to consider Karen O'Reilly's *The British on the Costa del Sol*, which she undertook single-handedly as a PhD student. She later returned to the fieldwork site to conduct follow-up investigations. Her study takes further the investigation of the changing relationship between community and place in an age of unprecedented geographical mobility, and again is characterized by preparedness to innovate both conceptually and methodologically in the context of studying people's active pursuit of the dream of community. The third exemplar to be considered is Luke Eric Lassiter and his colleagues' *The Other Side of Middletown*, which is included because it facilitates a discussion of the issues raised in the conduct of a restudy – the Lynds' *Middletown* research being the original point of reference – and because it exemplifies the collaborative approach that was mentioned in Chapter 1. Together the

three studies considered in this chapter are intended to give a flavour of the many ways in which community researchers have responded to the challenges laid down by the critics of the community studies tradition.

3.1 *Divisions of Labour*

The genesis of Pahl's *Divisions of Labour* is worth noting, because the project became considerably more ambitious in scope than the original research design. Starting out with only a vague notion that 'work' in its broader sense was being transformed by the growth of informality in how things get done and how people 'get by', Pahl's interest in everyday life had a special twist in the context of levels of unemployment and inflation that were taking people into unfamiliar territory. He rightly appreciated that such changes would have a marked impact on male industrial workers made redundant by the accompanying process of deindustrialization, although he was seriously wide of the mark in his initial speculation that equivalent opportunities for informal economic activity would open up for them. Even had it not been erroneous, the idea that people could respond to changed economic circumstances by engaging in practices of questionable legality (such as working informally for 'cash in hand' payment) meant that the identifiability of study participants would be an ongoing challenge. Pahl had the option of anonymizing his study area, and was still doing so as late as 1982 when he spoke of 'a local labour market on the Kent side of the Thames estuary, which has a long tradition of seasonal unemployment' (1982: 91). As time went on and the distinctiveness of the location became ever more apparent, so did the impracticality of disguising it in the book. Naming Sheppey as the fieldwork site did naturally carry some risk of some community members who had participated in the study being identifiable, at least to other community members to whom they would be instantly recognizable, but the participants were either not named or given pseudonyms, and this afforded them more protection than in some cases they wished to have.

Being an island meant that Sheppey offered an apparently self-contained community of 33,000 people whose fortunes had been tied to the occupational community associated with the Admiralty dockyard over several centuries. The closure of this dockyard in 1960 and its impact on the people of the island was still a focal point of discussions two decades later, and Pahl described conversations that he had with local residents

as lay versions of the sociological perspective on social solidarity rooted in Durkheim's ideas. In these narratives the 'strong sense of social cohesion' (1984: 186) that the dockyard community had engendered became atrophied, and people's collective identity was undermined. Pahl had a long-standing interest in the way that connections to 'people like us' (1972: 83) play a pivotal role in shaping social life, as well as in community research more generally (Crow and Takeda 2011), and he was receptive to the argument that associated the weakening of collective identities with a loss of purpose and sense of direction at an individual level. As the research proceeded, he discovered unexpected things, such as that two-fifths of the island's households at the time of the study had moved there since 1960 (1984: 193), which meant that the local population was far more mobile than the imagery of 'islanders born and bred' suggested. The chapter devoted to 'myth and reality in Sheppey in the 1980s' (1984: ch.7) thus serves a useful purpose in the study, just as the myth/reality contrast has been useful in other community studies (see Berger 1968: ch.1; Keller 2003). Pahl's interest in the island was also related to the fact that it had both urban and rural characteristics, and so reinforced his scepticism (noted in Chapter 2) that places could be located on a rural–urban continuum.

An early part of Pahl's fieldwork on Sheppey involved the collection of essays written by young people in which they were invited to imagine their lives to come. Over 140 of these imagined futures essays were collected, and they sensitized Pahl to several things about the local community. These included the distinctive culture of individualism and self-reliance that instilled a degree of optimism that was arguably not warranted in the context of bleaker economic circumstances than those that had been faced by the young people's parents as they entered adulthood (Pahl 1978). Pahl certainly encountered this resilient culture among the adults with whom he spoke in his early ethnographic fieldwork, and was so struck by it that his initial speculation was that people were responding to unemployment by devising alternative ways of 'getting by'. This fitted with the broad historical sweep of his perspective which saw the reliance of households on a male breadwinner in full-time employment as a relatively recent and arguably unsustainable innovation. Informal conversations with Islanders appeared to support the argument that there were viable other ways of making a living and that the economic crisis was ushering in new patterns of working, including a revised division of labour between men and women, as part of a more general 'quiet revolution in everyday

life' (1984: 200). The fact that the people of Sheppey were not typical of the wider society did not matter in this respect; indeed, the opportunity that they presented of studying the effects of deindustrialization 'in a particularly extreme form' (1984: 195) added to the location's attraction. Sheppey could be regarded as a type of laboratory, or at least 'a test case' (1984: 145), because if the much-discussed development of informal work were to be found anywhere it would be here.

The next element in Pahl's study forced a fundamental reassessment of his initial take on Sheppey life. He had been well aware of the criticism that ethnographic researchers could be vulnerable to hearing rosier views of communities than the reality justified, and the survey of one in nine of Sheppey's households confirmed a harsher message than his pilot study's thirty interviews had suggested. There are two reasons for this discrepancy between the findings generated by the two methods. One is that surveys are more trustworthy as a means of accessing a representative sample than are connections made through ethnographic fieldwork; the latter has the potential to produce findings that are skewed in various ways in terms of who participates (Payne 1996). The second reason is that surveys like the one that Pahl commissioned on Sheppey are more structured in the format of questions put to research participants than are ethnographic conversations, and this structuring of the research encounter gives survey researchers confidence that they are getting at what people do in their lives rather than what they take to be socially acceptable answers that a researcher will want to hear or be impressed by. Once the quantitative data on households' divisions of labour had been analysed, a very different picture emerged to that of the bright post-industrial future full of new opportunities. The survey data led inescapably to the conclusion that deindustrialization was producing a process of social polarization. At one pole were households that were comfortably placed with several of their members in work, while at the other extreme were households with no work. These latter households had the compensation of having plenty of time available to them, but this was scant consolation for the fact that they were unable to access opportunities to work (either in the formal labour market or informally). Thus society was gravitating towards a comfortable 'middle mass' of 'work-rich' households and an emerging 'underclass' of 'work-poor' households. Claire Wallace's complementary research among young people on Sheppey echoed this finding as the fortunes of 'swimmers' and 'sinkers' (1987: 140) diverged in a similar fashion.

Once discovered, this pattern made perfect if unpalatable sense. The logic of their respective situations meant that employment makes people better connected than their unemployed counterparts, who by contrast are isolated by their lack of connection. Opportunities for work in all its forms tend to gravitate towards people already occupied and to enhance their position, while marginality is also self-perpetuating. This phenomenon of community members being subjected to centripetal and centrifugal forces had been noted by previous community researchers (Crow 2002a: ch.4). Pahl's analysis went further by tracing how this outcome was reinforced through the operation of the welfare benefits system. His decision to focus attention on the household as the unit of analysis drove home how unemployment blighted the prospects not only of individuals but also of others with whom they live where there is relatively little to be gained financially by their being in work when the income from that work is deducted from their unemployed partner's welfare benefits. What mattered, in other words, was that the approach to economic activity adopted by a household needs to be viable as a household work strategy (Crow 1989). Pahl used this concept to show how households with multiple earners were prospering while those in which members were unemployed could find themselves constrained in terms of options available to them, and in the extreme trapped and reduced to following a dour, anxiety-ridden survival strategy.

Pahl's key theme in *Divisions of Labour* of changing patterns of work generating a relentless process of social polarization needed the survey of Sheppey households to discover it, but the exposition of the argument came through most forcefully using case studies of two households with contrasting fortunes. Pahl (1980) had already used this technique of comparing two households in an early and very provisional report on his fieldwork and these sketches of the Parsons and Simpson households are reproduced as an appendix to *Divisions of Labour*. By the end of the fieldwork, however, it was apparent to Pahl that the stories of two other couples, Linda and Jim and Beryl and George, functioned far better as illustrations of how social polarization played itself out at the household level. The chapter devoted to the two households comprises a full tenth of the whole book. In particular, Linda and Jim spoke for downwardly mobile people, and they did so in a way that echoed Pahl's higher-level theorizing. In one passage discussing access to job opportunities, he notes that 'Linda demonstrated her natural capacity as a sociologist by remarking aphoristically, "It's true what they say: it's not what you know now but

who you know” (1984: 298). Beryl and George merit some attention as representatives of the affluent, upwardly mobile members of the ‘middle mass’ leading comfortable, home-centred lives with all the benefits of steady and secure incomes, but it is Linda and Jim that have the lion’s share of the chapter devoted to them. Even that could not do complete justice to their case since, in Pahl’s opinion, ‘in some ways they deserve a book to themselves’ (1984: 304). The powerful nature of Linda and Jim’s story is instantly apparent because it captures so effectively how much at variance their lives were from ‘the so-called “informal” or “black” economy of popular misconception’ (1984: 250). It is no surprise that Pahl continued visiting Linda and Jim for a further decade, for research purposes (Wilson and Pahl 1988) but also because of the depth of the personal connection that they achieved (Elliott and Lawrence, 2017).

Pahl’s study warrants consideration as a modern classic (Crow and Ellis, 2017) because of the way that it addresses core social scientific concerns. The maxims drawn from Charles Wright Mills’s (2000) manifesto for sociology about the discipline’s capacity to illuminate the intersection of biography and history are so well known that Pahl did not need to reference his driving concern to ‘focus on the connections between public issues and private troubles’ (1984: 7). It is through the depth of attention given to Linda and Jim’s story that Pahl’s points hit home about downward mobility happening to people despite their best efforts to secure their economic position. It is a compelling story that provides a powerful indictment of popular perceptions of welfare ‘scroungers’ idling their time away supported by unemployment benefit, and of government policies founded on those perceptions. Durkheim may have been on methodologically sound ground when arguing that a single example does not prove a general rule, but Pahl was nevertheless correct in opting to use the case study to follow the extensive but dense statistical analysis of the survey data in a way that ‘brought them alive’ (1984: 277). The interpretation of the facts and figures derived from the survey about how households function was unarguable in the case made for needing to rethink the work done by individuals in different gender and social class positions, but there is also value in using the persuasive capacity of making an abstract idea embodied (Crow 2005: 45).

In a similar way, *Divisions of Labour* engaged readers by using Sheppey as a case study of how high-level processes like deindustrialization and globalization are expressed in a particular place. This is a strength of

community studies generally, their capacity to make abstract notions more tangible, accessible and understandable (Crow 2000). Pahl's treatment of deindustrialization is a good example. The historical contextualization that he provides of Sheppey's development as an 'industrial island' serves to maximize the impact of the narrative that follows it of the loss of the dockyard as a major employer and the changed nature of industrial production in the factories and steelworks brought in to provide alternative employment. Woven into this narrative are further observations about how the world of work would have changed even without the closure of the Admiralty dockyard as the feminization of the workforce, the changing power of trade unions, and the modernization of employer attitudes and practices worked themselves through. These were national and global forces, but Pahl's analysis succeeds in portraying their local expression. The inclusion of ten contemporary photographs taken locally (1984: 182–3) aids readers' ability to grasp the realities of Sheppey and its people, to whom the book is dedicated.

Photographs thus added another dimension to Pahl's efforts to express 'the reality of ordinary people's lives' (1984: 8). They reflected his awareness that 'contemporary studies of local labour markets need to be seen in context' (1984: 155), because no two places are identical, and local distinctiveness is lost in macro-level analyses that overgeneralize. The behaviour of Sheppey people made more sense once the peculiarities of the place were appreciated, and so *Divisions of Labour* is at pains to convey the distinctiveness of the community's history, its housing and labour markets, and its culture. Pahl's longstanding interest in housing led him to attach particular significance to the fact that rates of owner-occupation were considerably higher on the island than the average for the UK overall (1984: 175–6). This was all the more remarkable given the fact that the wages paid to those islanders in work 'were not high' (1984: 171); owner-occupation did not necessarily signify affluent lifestyles. Pahl gained insights into the local labour market through visiting workplaces and speaking to employers; such elite interviews complemented conversations conducted with workers, and the book's narrative gives no sense of privileging accounts from either side of the employment relationship (although Pahl did incur a degree of displeasure locally by reporting some employers' opinions more frankly than may have been judicious).

The methodological message that comes through from the Sheppey study is the value of employing a wide range of different research

methods in order to capture the multifaceted phenomenon that is 'community'. This research required contributions from numerous people with diverse but complementary skills. In addition to the specialist researchers brought in from Social and Community Planning Research to undertake the island-wide survey, Pahl also benefitted from the archival work undertaken by Nick Buck looking into the history of the dockyard, from research undertaken by Jane Dennett into the more recent history of industry, employment and housing development, and from the contributions of Claire Wallace to interviewing and to ethnographic and photographic elements of the project. Jim Styles also contributed to the photography, and the book also contains a map of the island. And at the heart of the varied activities, the 'large-scale, multi-faceted research project' (1984: 11) was Pahl himself, interviewing, conversing, observing, consulting records, keeping up with events through the local newspaper (which is quoted extensively in the book), and generally absorbing the various facets of community life on Sheppey. He remarked that, 'A perceptive observer visiting the Island would see and understand much by travelling about' (1984: 155), and Pahl was such an observer. He was also speaking from first-hand experience when noting that, 'Doing empirical research in sociology involves more cold waits in the rain, and more cups of tea or coffee when one really wants a solid meal, than is perhaps recognized' (1984: viii). He did, however, purchase a property in Sheerness so that his team had a base on Sheppey, and over a six-year period of fieldwork Pahl became much more than simply a visiting observer. He also did not cut his connections with Sheppey once the book was published, but continued to undertake research there and to keep up relationships, thereby highlighting that fieldwork connections can last for many years, sometimes decades (Crow 2012).

3.2 *The British on the Costa del Sol*

Karen O'Reilly's ethnographic research among expatriates in Spain led her to spend a much lengthier period in her fieldwork location than she had originally intended. On the basis of her own experience and that of others, she has commented that 'an ethnographer needs time' (2012: 16). A traditional model of ethnographic fieldwork involves researchers spending at least a year immersing themselves in the culture of the people whom they have chosen to investigate (Goffman 2002), but just as Pahl found

himself going back to Sheppey more often than he had anticipated, the same is true for O'Reilly and her research location, Fuengirola. In her book, she reports that, 'I spent fifteen months in Spain with my family during 1993 and 1994 and have returned to the area many times over the years since then' (2000a: 10). Later on, this pattern of return visits was further extended in a process that she calls 'ethnographic returning' (O'Reilly 2012). She found, like Pahl, that the focus of the research evolved over the course of the time spent in the field, extending from the initial interest in how British migrants to Spain had managed that process to embrace much broader aspects of the practice of social life. Spain's British migrants were a focus of media attention, and so a public issue aspect to the research was present alongside the personal problems that people reported encountering. Indeed, individual stories of disappointment at the failure to realize the anticipated 'dream' lifestyle that migration had been expected to deliver were common enough to warrant, through the examination of myths, consideration of the puzzle of how people routinely come to be 'falsely conscious of their social positions' (Mills 2000: 5). Like Pahl, O'Reilly experienced one question leading to another which made it 'difficult to know when to stop' (2012: 532). Furthermore, ethnographers make the decision to leave the field influenced by many other factors besides the amount of material that they have collected, including ethical concerns about leaving study participants feeling that they have been exploited and then abandoned (Pole and Hillyard 2016: ch.6). Generating such disappointment is not only undesirable in itself, but also to be avoided because it makes things difficult for future researchers (Crow 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 94–6).

O'Reilly was aware that community studies had been criticized for assuming an unproblematic relationship between communities and places. Focussing on a community of British migrants in Spain held great potential to explore this issue afresh. The book has the subtitle 'transnational identities and local communities'. Her research participants constituted a recognizable community in a particular locality, but they were quite different from the people who populated conventional community studies because they were still outsiders in many respects, such as not always being fluent in Spanish, the local language. In consequence they were not particularly well-integrated into the host society, and remained distinctly British. As a social group whose members did not readily blend in with their new surroundings, the British in Spain found

their way regularly into the news, and not only because of the size of the migrant population (although that was in itself remarkable, running as it did into hundreds of thousands of people). The familiar community studies theme of 'us' and 'them' consciousness was prominent among research participants, but as migrants they could not construct a common identity around lifelong associations with a place or each other and so had to build a more complex narrative about what brought and held them together.

The situation was thus fertile ground for the study of how myths function in the construction of community identities. Myth and reality served as a useful analytical framework for exploring how there can be discrepancies between what migrants expect to find in their new environment and the situation that they encounter upon arrival. Pahl's early study of people moving to commuter villages taking with them idealized notions of what their new lives would be like, what he called 'villages in the mind' (Pahl 2005), was echoed in O'Reilly's transnational migrants not necessarily having realistic expectations about what awaited them. One of her participants complained of her compatriots that 'they all just want to live a fantasy life. It's not real!' (2000b: 243) In particular, many of them were not prepared for the social segregation that they would encounter. Thus O'Reilly reports that 'several men told me that they find it difficult to make friends in Spain' and adds that while women tended to be less forthcoming on the subject of isolation, she did nevertheless have conversations with them that conveyed 'that they sometimes feel terribly lonely and wish they could go home' (2000a: 82), having discovered that the downside of 'trading intimacy for liberty' (2000b) was a loss of depth to their friendships.

Immersion in ethnographic fieldwork has the great benefit of generating extensive field notes, and an extract from these allows the point to be illustrated far better than a quotation from an interview would:

Later on that morning Joan and Beryl sat chatting over a cup of coffee. I heard Beryl say that she is much less bored here now that she has something to do with herself. She said that she used to get very bored and lonely, and people never really understood because they don't think you should. Joan seemed relieved to hear her say these things and started to tell how lonely and bored she gets, how she misses her family and how she feels she must not admit this to anyone. They said that people do not talk about things like

that here, they do not admit that they are lonely. ... They talked about how visitors are always jealous of them but don't realise that everything is not always perfect. (2000a: 83)

The key point here is that there can be significant discrepancies between people's 'public accounts' and their 'private accounts' (Cornwell 1984), and that unless a researcher can access the latter they are destined to remain in the restricted sphere of the public face that people present.

There are several good reasons why the public accounts presented by the British in Spain were positive. The active pursuit of migration to Spain represented an investment in the project, both financially and emotionally. The case for having made the move is something that they needed to be persuasive, and the people that they needed to convince that it was producing the desired outcomes were not only others but also themselves. There was therefore a readiness to subscribe to the belief that moving to Spain offers access to a desirable lifestyle; migrants to whom O'Reilly spoke 'seemed concerned to stress the benefits of life in Spain', and most 'wanted me to know that they had not made a mistake in moving to Spain' (2000a: 70, 13). The concept derived from Durkheim via Michael Crick of 'collective representations' is useful in conveying how a positive picture of the migrants' way of life was reproduced through reinforcement of the idea that it involves 'a healthy, happy lifestyle where elderly people are more active and more included than they would be back home' (O'Reilly 2000a: 2, 69). Thus alongside the compelling collective representation of Spain as somewhere that offered a good quality of life was a corresponding collective representation of Britain as problematic because of its weather and its social problems expressed in high rates of crime and the social marginalization of older people. Within this view of the world, the pull of Spain and the push from Britain combined to make migration a sensible course of action to take.

The ideal of community lies at the heart of this narrative about the case for moving to Spain. In contrast to the attractive, relaxed lifestyle in Spain that offered freedom, enjoyment and the opportunity to be yourself, migrants were 'continually constructing and reconstructing a negative image of Britain and a "bad Britain" discourse' that features, variously, 'routine; dullness; monotony; greyness; cold; no hope for the future; a miserable old age; misery; modern life; rushing around; no time for pleasure; crime; selfishness; lack of caring; loss of community; lack of trust;

poor health; poor education; and a poor welfare state' (2000a: 99). What is being expressed here is the 'loss of community' theme that has been a familiar feature of thinking about community change in a host of cases (Lee and Newby 1983: ch.4), but with the consolation that the lost social arrangements have been rediscovered in another context. Traditional values may have been subject to prolonged erosion in contemporary Britain, but longed-for community could be found instead in Spain. A British bar owner to whom O'Reilly spoke described his new home as 'like Britain was in the fifties – like turning the clocks back. Like the time that people knew their neighbours and cared about them, and you could go out and leave your door unlocked, and it was safe to walk the streets at night ... and families were close' (2000a: 115). The nostalgic tone of this description is instructive, revealing a longing for a past that is felt to be no longer available in Britain. It is more that Britain has changed than that the migrants have changed, although the idea that they have had to make no adjustment to their new environment is an oversimplification. Rather, it is that Spain had provided them with a setting in which they have been able to re-establish many valued patterns of community relationships, or at least to believe that they had done so.

Fieldwork encounters threw up much familiar community-related rhetoric. One British migrant claimed to be well-integrated with both Spanish and British neighbours, reporting it to be 'like a village here; one sneeze and we've all got a cold' (2000a: 101). Commitment to the move was reinforced by the absence of plans to return to Britain, and indeed antipathy to the idea, because of the 'unidealised view of home' (2000a: 98) that was held. Whereas other migrant groups such as Pakistanis in Britain have been found to operate with a 'myth of return' (Anwar 1985) that kept open the possibility of going back to a country of origin, O'Reilly interpreted the many statements along the lines of 'I've got no desire to go back there' to constitute a 'myth of (no) return' (2000a: 97, 96). The language of myth is appropriate here, because over time evidence emerged that returning to the UK was a common occurrence. First impressions of a permanently settled British community in Spain were misleading. During the initial phase of fieldwork O'Reilly was 'unaware of the various comings and goings in what turned out to be an important season for the community: the period of a huge temporary summer re-migration to the home country' (2000a: 13). As O'Reilly's awareness of this pattern of people going back and forth grew, so she came to appreciate the heterogeneity of her

study population. As a result, the simple distinction between tourists and settlers proved unworkable, and a more sophisticated typology evolved in which 'full residents', 'returning residents', 'seasonal visitors' and 'peripatetic visitors' (2000a: 52) were differentiated, all distinguishable from tourists. Several paragraph-long descriptions of individuals or couples are provided for each of the types, and this serves to further emphasize the heterogeneity of the British in Spain, with important differences being noted within as well as between the types.

The British on the Costa del Sol does not seek to cover everything. One of the six core topics of community research in the classic 'Middletown' tradition, youth, would have been unproductive to pursue in Fuengirola, because teenagers are uncommon among the British in Spain. Given that people over the age of fifty are a prominent part of the migrant population, there would have been plenty of reasons to justify a focus on retirement migration, as other researchers have done (Ahmed 2015; King, Warnes and Williams 2000; Oliver 2008). Previous research into retirement migration in the UK such as that by Valerie Karn (1977) was clearly being superseded by the opening up of opportunities for international mobility, and O'Reilly's findings do much to reveal the extent of this change, but she is at pains to confront 'the assumption that the British in Spain are mainly elderly and retired' (2000a: 9). Among the 259 people living in and around Fuengirola from whom she collected data, more than three-fifths were under the age of sixty, and although this was not a representative sample of British people living in Spain, it did enough to convey that there are 'large numbers of migrants who do not fit neatly into typologies or stereotypes formed by other authors and commentators' (2000a: 60). Not only was there variation in the ages at which people migrated, there was also diversity introduced by the presence of opportunities to combine drawing a pension with undertaking different kinds of work. Ostensibly retired people were to be found among those 'working informally ... involved in all sorts of activities from home maintenance, decorating and ironing, to taxying, pool maintenance and car mechanics' (2000a: 122). This finding would not necessarily have emerged had the study adopted a more conventional focus and categorization.

O'Reilly's primary concern was not with numerical data. The approach that she adopted of participant observation was justified by her belief that 'people and actions cannot simply be observed, logged and counted but require interpretation, understanding and empathy' (2000a: 10).

Suspensions about the problematic status of statistics on migration were soon confirmed. Statistical data on British migrants to Spain were sparse, and those that were available were prone to significant variation; some were little better than educated guesswork. The reasons for this were not hard to find. Not only was it the case that people who settled permanently were just one of several types of migrants alongside others who travelled back and forth between Spain and the UK, it was also apparent that by no means all migrants had gone through the formalities of acquiring appropriate legal documentation. In some quarters it had the reputation of being 'an expensive, time-consuming and bureaucratic nightmare'. British migration to Spain is both fluid and quite often not recorded officially and as a result is 'very difficult to quantify' (2000a: 46, 41). A further character of the migrant population that presents a challenge to attempts to quantify its dimensions relates to the fact that 'for the British themselves the identity as permanent or temporary migrant does not always seem to depend on clear, objective criteria'. Some participants' narratives suggested that an important part of migrants' expectations being fulfilled could be expressed by reference to involvement in an active social life, and O'Reilly found there to be 'numerous British-run clubs and social groups' (2000a: 104, 120). It would have been possible for her to follow Robert Putnam's (2000) influential methodological strategy of taking voluntary organization membership as a quantitative indicator of social capital, but she did not. The community networks that have grown up among the British migrants are characterized by informality, and that makes participation in them hard to measure. Her emphasis on 'the informal construction of social and community life' (2000a: 124), as well as her discussion of how such informality shades into illegality (2000b: 237), highlights parallels between these social networks of exchange and the informal economy studied by researchers like Pahl.

The penultimate chapter in O'Reilly's book is entitled 'The construction of community'. The way in which the individuals being studied constitute a 'community' is instructive because the people involved are far from static; they 'are changing all the time'. Put another way, it is a community whose members' mobility makes it vulnerable to 'the threat of transience' (2000a: 133, 132). The question of what members of a community have in common is raised particularly starkly in this case. Of the three possible answers of place, interests and identity delineated by Peter Willmott (1986), it is shared identity that comes out most strongly in the analysis.

Spain in general and the Costa del Sol in particular are necessarily reference points in the constructed community, but this is not a population with rootedness in the place over generations. Shared interests feature in people's accounts of how exchange and reciprocity are integral to community members' lives, but O'Reilly's argument is that such exchanges are more important for their symbolic value than they are for their monetary value. What drives the making of this community is a shared commitment to particular values, or at least the quest to achieve them. Among these values, egalitarianism featured prominently, with the claim asserted frequently that past lives in Britain had no bearing on a person's status in Spain. People were said to be accepted as equals, provided that they showed commitment to the community's slow pace of life, its informality and its endorsement of responsibility, caring and supportiveness; these are all familiar elements of thinking about 'community', and it is unsurprising to find them deployed in this context.

It is also unsurprising to find the reality not always living up to these ideals. In this community, as in many others, higher status was accorded to people who had lived there longer. Newcomers were necessarily at a disadvantage compared to those who 'have more to bring to the exchange in the way of knowledge, contacts and goods.... Knowledge of the area, of the pitfalls of settling there, of laws and regulations, and of where to go or who to ask to get what, is highly valued.' O'Reilly also found 'a definite class divide' (2000a: 127, 131) present in people's patterns of sociability, while reference to shared Britishness did not always transcend Scots, Welsh, English and Irish backgrounds. Even more importantly, there were marked discrepancies between claims to involvement with the host society and the realities of the largely separate lives led by many Britons in Spain. Migrants were 'constructing an isolated community yet pretending that they were integrated ... acting ethnically but denying that' (2000a: 153). Observing that people say one thing but do something quite different is of course a social science commonplace, and so the discovery of a 'gloss of commonality' is at one level unremarkable. Its wider significance is twofold. Methodologically it means that researchers face the challenge of getting beyond the public face that people present, to penetrate the realm of 'private discourse' and to attach credibility to what is said privately, even if the participant goes on to 'vehemently deny it in public' (2000a: 130, 134). The second point is theoretical. O'Reilly draws on the work of Cohen (1985) to approach community's appeal as a route through which

individuals can reinforce their sense of self. Community is symbolically important, providing individuals with a sense of who they are and how they are different from other people whose lives lie beyond the boundaries of the familiar way of life of fellow community members. O'Reilly's participant who recounted her search for 'like-minded people' (2000b: 234) spoke unwittingly for many others beside herself.

3.3 *The Other Side of Middletown*

Community studies can be produced by lone scholars or by teams. O'Reilly's research was undertaken single-handedly for her PhD, and is a testament to what can be achieved in that format. Diverse studies have come out of individuals' doctoral theses including Allan (1979), Bell (1994), Benson (2011), Brent (2009), Charlesworth (2000), Cornwell (1984), Devine (1992), Eade (1989), Farrar (2002), Foster (1990), Frankenberg (1990), Gallaher (1961), Littlejohn (1963), Lummis (1985), Mah (2012), Pahl (1965), Pryce (1979), Rapport (1993), Roberts (1993), Rosenlund (2009), Scheper-Hughes (2001), Shaw (1988), Tunstall (1969) and Wight (1993). *Divisions of Labour*, although single-authored, is by contrast an example of what can be achieved by a research team. The third exemplar of community studies that this chapter focuses on is also the product of teamwork, but teamwork of a different kind that requires the active involvement of members of the community as participants in a collaborative project. *The Other Side of Middletown* is a remarkable book in several respects. First, it offers proof positive that collaborative ethnography can be successful; at the time of its publication, this case still needed to be made (Lassiter 2005). Secondly, it demonstrates that a large group of collaborators who from the outside might look too heterogeneous to work together effectively can function not only productively but also efficiently; the book's publication date of 2004 makes the reader double check the Introduction's opening sentence which reports that the project began only in January of the previous year, 2003 (Lassiter et al. 2004: 1). Thirdly, it stands as confirmation of the justification for restudies, making the case that there is plenty to be discovered by going back; even in a community with such a long and celebrated history of being researched as Muncie (Caccamo 2000), there are new sides to local social life yet to be uncovered, or 'missing pieces' of puzzles to be located (Lassiter 2012).

Awareness of the fact that there was an unrecorded side of the city's story featured in the gestation of the project. Despite the local African

American population constituting a significant element of the city's composition, they had surprisingly been virtually invisible in the various research reports on Muncie from the original *Middletown* studies of the Lynds onwards. There was thus a record to be put straight and justice to be done for a group that, in the face of this track record of academic neglect, might understandably have been suspicious of researchers' intentions. Researchers who use collaborative methods are able to offer some reassurance in situations where trust has to be established, and Lassiter and his academic colleagues could make a convincing pitch that involvement of community members would proceed according to 'a collaborative vision for the ethnography's goals and purposes' (Lassiter 2005: xi). Emphasis was placed on the responsibility of people involved to be respectful and accountable, and to see the project through. The project team comprised the collaborative ethnographer Lassiter, the local civil rights activist Hurley Goodall and his wife Fredine, the folklorist and ethnographer Elizabeth Campbell, the graduate assistant Michelle Johnson, fourteen undergraduate student researchers (comprising both black and white students) studying a range of disciplines, twelve community 'advisors', a further fifty-eight contributors from Muncie's African American community, along with numerous others in supporting and facilitative roles who are acknowledged in the book's Introduction. Lassiter describes the students' achievement of collecting over 150 hours of recorded material from a total of more than 60 people in the space of four months as 'an amazing feat' (Lassiter et al. 2004: 13), not only because of the amount of data amassed but also because the process was managed within the ethos of the collaborative approach.

The reported rapidity with which the project was completed is potentially misleading. This is not to take anything away from the intensity with which the various people involved worked to collect, analyse, discuss and write up material on the same six themes that had been the focus of the Lynds' original reports. It is important to note, however, that the project team assembled at the beginning of 2003 were not starting from scratch: they were able to draw extensively on two things, a sizeable grant from the Virginia Ball Center (Campbell and Lassiter 2014: 15–19), and local knowledge that was already available. Pivotal in this latter respect was the fact that Hurley Goodall's career as a community activist had led him to collect 'community photographs, church histories, newspaper clippings, and individual narratives for well over three decades'. It also located him

and Fredine at the heart of the city's community, ideally placed to 'spread the word throughout Muncie' (2004: 3, 7). Lassiter and Campbell's collaboration with the Goodalls had been developing around other activities for several years by the time that *The Other Side of Middletown* project took shape, and without this foundation it is doubtful that the positive working relationships that characterized the project would have emerged quite as readily. Nevertheless, projects can develop momentum to carry them along at speed, and the students' field notes conveyed how quickly immersion in a community can be achieved. Sarah Bricker, working on the 'using leisure' theme, attended a church service in only the second month of the project and noted being reassured by just how many of the congregation she recognized and who welcomed her; as her fieldnotes recorded, 'Everyone waved or said hello.' Johnson's observation in her role of graduate assistant that 'collaboration did not happen overnight. ... It progressed slowly during the first three to four weeks of the project' (2004: 14, 274) gives an indication of the tight schedule that the participants were on; year-long fieldwork was an unaffordable luxury in a semester-long project.

Among those working on the project, the students in particular found themselves on a steep learning curve. Of the fourteen undergraduates, eight had either anthropology or sociology as part of their degree, but others came from subjects at greater remove from the community studies tradition, such as journalism, English, philosophy and telecommunications. Whatever their disciplinary background, they all had to realize that while collaborating on a project with other students can be hard, collaborating with members of a community who are outside of academia has the potential to take challenges to another level. The commitment made to 'establish good rapport with the community so that future collaborative studies can be undertaken' includes collaborative writing, so that the chapters produced by the six groups allocated to produce accounts of work, home, youth, leisure, religion and community action went through many iterations and much scrutiny. Comments from community advisers on drafts produced by students could on occasion be expressed robustly, although in general they were typically more hesitant than the critique given by Lassiter, Campbell, Johnson and another academic, Robert Nowatzki, which made some of the students 'angry and hurt' about how far short of publishable standard their drafts had been adjudged, including by the eventual publisher. Johnson uses the word 'negotiation' (2004: 20, 18, 276) to describe the process of repeated redrafting following

comments. This conveys that there are several different points of view to be accommodated in collaborative ethnography.

The situation in which researchers confront competing and possibly conflicting agendas and sets of expectations about the outcomes of their efforts is not new. Robert Lynd's 1939 book *Knowledge for What?* was inevitably influenced by his experience of years of researching 'Middletown', and his conclusion about the need to work according to 'the spirit of science' reflected the emphasis that he placed on researchers being prepared to pose difficult questions and pursue 'dangerous hypotheses'. As an illustration he gave the example of social class inequalities, and found the work of his contemporaries wanting: 'Current social science plays down the omnipresent fact of class antagonisms and conflicts in the living all about us' (1939: 249, 227). *Middletown in Transition* had broached the subject of social class much more explicitly than the Lynds had done in the original *Middletown*, and in the process alienated some readers. For the authors of *The Other Side of Middletown*, the issues of race and racism were the central ones that had to be confronted; these also are not comfortable topics. The research team were mindful of the need to avoid reproduction and reinforcement of popular stereotypes of African Americans. This issue came up when the group allocated the topic of the home discovered that they had unintentionally given misleading impressions about the prevalence of households headed by single parents. Having been prompted by community advisers to solicit the stories of lone mothers, who opened up opportunities to interview other lone parents, some advisers then 'encouraged the students to focus, as well, on dual-parent homes lest the students stereotype the community in their writings and forego the actual diversity of families'. The section of the book that presents the stories of single parents prefaces these with the comment that 'strong families do not necessarily consist of two parents and a certain number of children' (Lassiter et al. 2004: 10, 105). In addition, a valuable lesson had been learned about the risk of 'snowball' sampling, leading to an overconcentration on one particular part of a community.

Racism as a theme runs strongly through the other five topics considered in the book as well as making a home. It is there in accounts of getting a living, training the young, using leisure, engaging in religious practices and engaging in community activities. This demonstrates the capacity of the community study approach to bring out the connectedness of different aspects of people's everyday life, for example the importance of social

networks for the way in which the range of people that someone knows affects their chances of getting a job. With black people having fewer personal connections than white people to those in positions to recruit employees, Hurley Goodall opined that they 'have to jump twice as high to even get the opportunity because there is no relationship between our community and the people running these institutions. That makes it doubly hard' (2004: 237). Chapter 2 describes Muncie as 'a city apart' and charts the history of the black community's experience of exclusion, including segregation into distinct neighbourhoods. For the Lynds, writing in the 1930s, African Americans were the city's 'most marginal population' (1937: 465), and the map inside the book's front and back covers shows the geographical expression of this. The continuing separateness of the black community as a particular 'place on the ground' is expressed in statistics relating to the two predominantly black neighbourhoods of Whitely and Industry, which were respectively 71 per cent and 84 per cent African American in their composition (2004: 232, 233). Spatial separation in housing feeds in to other forms of apartness, as Hurley Goodall observes, 'Community here in Muncie consists of two totally different communities. One white, with distinct geographic, economic, and religious boundaries; and another black, with the same structures that meet and interact when mutual survival requires it' (2004: 232). Physical separateness inevitably shapes people's home life, their education, their work, their religious association, their leisure and their involvement in community activities.

The point about the connectedness of the various elements of a community is a universal one. For a minority community, a further observation can be made about how the specifics of their situation are not equally appreciated. Hurley Goodall frames this issue by asking, 'Why does Middletown's African-American population have such an obsession with racism in Middletown? Because black people will talk to you about it just about anytime you want to talk to them about it. The white community is just the opposite. They have so much difficulty admitting racism is a serious problem in the community' (2004: 233–4). Part of the answer to this question is that white people can be unaware of the phenomenon, or at least be disengaged from it, in a way that black people cannot be because it is a different experience to be on the receiving end of racism, as many of the personal narratives contained in the book bear out. A further point is the astute observation of one of the white students on the project, Eric Efaw, who noted, 'As many of my advisors have expressed to me,

minorities have to interact with the Euro-American majority community on a daily basis, but whites are able to more or less isolate themselves from other ethnicities if they so choose' (2004: 257). He went on to comment that understanding of other cultures requires people to be prepared to put themselves in situations where they might feel out of place. He and the other students on the project had been required to do this, most obviously in the case of the white students who were going into the black community, but also for the black students whose experiences of everyday racism sometimes differed from those told to them by the consultants, particularly those narratives that related to earlier periods of history when discrimination included forms that have in the meantime been outlawed.

No claims are made for *The Other Side of Middletown* to be definitive in what it says about Muncie. One of the consequences of the pace at which the project had to be conducted is that the members of the city's African American community who were involved are not representative of the wider population; they were 'primarily, although not exclusively, ... older (often retired) middle-class collaborators (who had the time to work intensively with us within this short time-frame)' (2004: 22). In this sense the book marks the beginning of a new conversation which others may join and add different dimensions of experience through future projects. Any such future conversations will be informed by what the project has revealed about typicality. The omission of Muncie's African American inhabitants from previous '*Middletown*' studies had come about partly because researchers in pursuit of a 'typical' community had ended up working with notions of the average American that screened out difference and diversity (Igo 2007). The key lesson here is that the heterogeneity of populations can be overlooked by methods that deal with averages and representativeness, and by concepts of 'community' that focus only on commonalities. In the process the object under investigation is reduced to a misleadingly idealized construction.

Sarah Igo's characterization of Lynds' study as the work of 'social scientific amateurs' (2007: 31) may be somewhat harsh, but her more general point about the need to be mindful of how research findings will be received and used is undoubtedly correct: presentation matters for the messages that audiences take away with them.

The authors of *The Other Side of Middletown* wanted to present an authentic and engaging portrayal of Muncie's African Americans that they had co-operated in making and in which they would recognize themselves.

The project had set out 'to fully embrace the experiences of our consultants, their memories, and their stories' (Lassiter et al. 2004: 21), and the feel of the place and its people is conveyed effectively through collaborators' contributions that are extensively reproduced. People's educational histories, accounts of working careers, stories of making family life in the home, and narratives of engagement in religious and leisure activities and community politics form the core of the book. The details of these stories and the way in which they are expressed are compelling, as in Dolores Rhinehart's conviction expressed in the discussion of getting a living about the importance of budgeting on a low income: 'It's not what you make, it's what you do with what you make' (2004: 95). Supplementing the text are thirty-six photographs taken by one of the students, Danny Gawlowski (whose degree included photojournalism), and a further fourteen historical photographs. Gawlowski took many more photographs than were finally selected for inclusion, because the images required changed on each occasion that the text was rewritten. The ethnographic method of participant observation is more adequately reported where textual description is supplemented by images, but the observations made by the students as participants continued to expand in line with their attendance at the 'numerous family gatherings, school meetings, sporting events, church services, political rallies' (2004: 13) to which they found themselves invited. As a result, the photographer was left feeling that his work could have gone on indefinitely, but there is no question that the photographs add a valuable dimension to the book.

Lassiter suggests that the term 'participant observation' does not fully capture the nature of the fieldwork undertaken by the students, arguing that there was also a process of 'observant participation' going on. Students were encouraged 'to observe their own participation just as closely as they were observing others', and to include in their field notes a record of how their understanding evolved as their experience of being in the field proceeded. Research changes the researcher. The student authors of the 'training the young' chapter recorded how they had grown in confidence after only a short while: 'We felt comfortable now, showing up at events as outsiders and talking to strangers, trying to find out the stories that belonged to these people and places.' On occasion the researchers had to deal with potentially stereotyping representations of the African American community, that they were careful to report had been presented to them rather than being their own observations, such as 'Selling

drugs has become the preferred way to make a living for some young people, according to some of our consultants' (2004: 94, 152). The fact that the project was able to broach such social problems and arrive at accounts of them that were acceptable to everyone involved stands as evidence of what collaborative working can achieve. For Lassiter, the book reflects the trend in the field of community research whereby 'both community study scholars and the people with whom we work are more regularly looking to collaborative research frameworks to close the gap between academically situated and community-based discourse'. The case for this approach is not only that the resultant research outputs have more resonance with and acceptability to community members, but also that it can contribute to making a difference in the world through the action that it prompts: 'An engaged social science can work toward change' (2012: 428, 435), and collaborative ethnography is one way of pursuing that agenda. In the process the rationales available for undertaking a community study are added to, and these rationales are the subject of the next chapter.