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4 Worthwhileness

A researcher's decision to undertake a community study may be based on a variety of reasons. In the three exemplars discussed in the preceding chapter it is possible to identify quite a few of these potential groundings. Lassiter and his team were interested in giving voice to a community whose members had previously been unacknowledged, as a way of pursuing an agenda of change. Pahl's reasons for embarking on his study were less predetermined in what started out as a more open-ended project exploring the changing nature of work, but by the end of the book he had certainly given voice to Linda and Jim and people like them whose experience of downward social mobility bore little resemblance to popular stereotypes. In this way it could be regarded as putting into practice Elias's (1978: ch.2) description of sociologists as destroyers of myths. O'Reilly's investigation also engaged with mythology as it related to the idealization of community by her participants, but there is more of a sense in her work of understanding how myths contribute to the smooth operation of everyday life as people pursue the ideal of community as a type of quest (Thorns 1976). Her rationale is therefore that of exploratory social science, and this fits with her understanding that ethnographers do not set out to test theories but to make sense of both strange and ordinary phenomena that capture the researcher's imagination as interesting, including things that arise serendipitously. These three studies do not exhaust the range of rationales for community studies research, but they do show that several are available to researchers.

The underpinning rationale of a community study is a matter of interest to others besides researchers. The collaborative approach adopted in *The Other Side of Middletown* is based on the recognition that community members play an integral role in community research, since it could not proceed without them. This may lead to an instrumental focus on the potential usefulness of research to community members. Oscar Lewis recalled how at a meeting convened as part of his restudy of Tepoztlán in

Mexico, 'One dignified, elderly Tepoztecan rose and said, "Many people have come here to study us, but not one of them has helped us"' (1963: xv). The record of the benefits brought by being researched will be less bleak elsewhere, but the point remains salutary, that it is reasonable for community members to question why research that does not benefit them should proceed. Indeed, there are legitimate concerns that research could even be harmful to community members, for example through damage to individual or collective reputations, and cases of such adverse effects have contributed to the tightening of ethical regulation in recent decades. Funders of research will also be interested in ethical scrutiny of proposed projects that they are being asked to support. Such considerations extend beyond the avoidance of research participants suffering harm to include a desire to screen out projects that are adjudged a waste of participants' time or of funders' money. Research needs to have a point to be justified, and it also needs to be sufficiently rigorous and authentic to be taken seriously by its various intended audiences.

The rationale for doing community studies is that such research is useful through resulting in some practical beneficial outcome, or interesting for how it advances social scientific knowledge, and ideally both. There are numerous examples of community studies that have a practical rationale that in addition produce interesting findings and others that are framed primarily by social scientific puzzles that also have practical outcomes. Primarily useful research frequently arises out of concern with a social problem, of which there are many that have a community dimension, including education, housing, health, crime and welfare. This list is not identical with what the Lynds identified as the six 'main trunk activities' (1929: 5) by which life in *Middletown* (and elsewhere) might be analysed. The themes of work, home and education can readily be associated respectively with problems of unemployment and discrimination in the labour market, family poverty and insecure housing, or underachievement and bullying, but a research agenda driven by social problems would not necessarily direct as much attention to leisure, religion and community action. The distinction between social problems and sociological problems is helpful here, because it allows space to make the case for both types of research, so that investigators can produce monographs on *Redundancy and Recession* (Harris 1987) and also on *The Welsh In Patagonia* (Williams 1991). The title of the former flags up its relevance to the social problem of unemployment, while the latter is more in the tradition of titles indicating

a study of people in a place, and by these different routes both studies have useful and interesting things to say.

4.1 Useful and interesting research

Community studies contribute to knowledge of social problems by locating them in context, and better understanding is a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for moving towards solutions to these problems. Unemployment provides a good example. Coincidentally, the point is made in each of the three exemplars considered in the previous chapter, including by Pahl's participant Linda, that an individual's access to job opportunities is mediated by the people known to them, and Linda's insight was echoed by Daniel Wight's Scottish participants: 'It's no' *what* ye ken, it's *who* ye ken' (1993: 93, emphases in original). Community studies highlight the variable connectedness of individuals, and this insight was developed by Chris Harris (1987) and his colleagues, exploring how the dense connections characteristic of occupational communities built around a dominant local employer can have the effect of limiting the flow of information about job opportunities elsewhere. When large-scale employers run down their operations, people made redundant are better placed to find alternative employment if they have connections beyond their immediate community, however tenuous these may be. In the language of social network analysis, this demonstrates 'the strength of weak ties' (Granovetter 1973) for those who have them; by contrast, people embedded in dense but geographically restricted networks of kinship, friendship and local religious, political and leisure-time associations are more constrained. The problem arises not only because it is the case that 'people's social fields are generally local' but also because 'attachment with locality is likely to increase with age' (Harris 1987: 101), so that out-migration is more typically associated with the young, while redundancy among older and less geographically mobile workers poses particularly acute challenges.

Dense social networks may be regarded as problematic to the extent that they discourage outward mobility, but they should not be cast as less valuable than weak ties crossing community boundaries that are drawn upon only periodically. It was a principal finding of Young and Willmott's (1957) study of East London that people who were moved to improved housing beyond the locality found that this came at the cost of lost community support, and this theme has been echoed many times

subsequently. Referring to the Netherlands cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, Talja Blokland and Flotis Noordhoff argue that, 'Everyday survival in poor urban communities frequently depends on close interaction with kin and friends in similar situations' (2008: 108), and that urban redevelopment that threatens these ties is at best a mixed blessing. These port cities have seen transformations of their employment bases, but patterns of community support and solidarity built up around local industries can survive the subsequent decline of those industries. Historical legacies endure, even as 'neighbourhood and work have grown apart' (Blokland 2003: 112). The same has been reported for London's East End (Foster 1999), areas formerly associated with mining (Warwick and Littlejohn 1992; Wight 1993), car production (Bryson and Winter 1999) and deindustrialization generally (Mah 2012; Pappas 1989); all echo Pahl's (1984) theme of the dockyard's influences on Sheppey long outlasting its closure.

Social problems can accompany not only the contraction of local employment but also its expansion. In *The Social Impact of Oil*, Robert Moore explored the consequences for the fishing town of Peterhead of the arrival in the 1970s of industries associated with the exploitation of North Sea oil. He found no shortage of expectations among local people that the development would bring a range of social problems but concluded that in practice the impact could be summarized as 'higher house prices, some unsightly camps and a few additional prostitutes'. Other problems that developed in the period such as 'increased teenage drinking [and] marital breakdown' were attributable to broader social change, and Moore commented that, 'The inhabitants of Peterhead are good enough sociologists not to call these simply "the effects of oil."' He also argued that his research revealed the presence of popular misconceptions of community which make evaluation of change difficult. He found many Peterheadians adhered to an image of the town as 'small, self-contained, relatively homogeneous with a shared oral history and a common culture' (1982: 151, 108, 79), but this idea of community autonomy flew in the face of its integration into the wider society, while images of togetherness were belied by the presence of hierarchical social distinctions and a long history of out-migration. Moore's initial focus on the disruptive effects of the arrival of a new industry expanded to encompass the broader issue of how people have a capacity to romanticize how their communities had been prior to recent changes, and in doing so he had much in common with Stacey's (1960) experience of studying of Banbury and George Giarchi's

(1984) of studying Dunoon following the arrival of new industries. Moore also shared with Stacey the experience of writing a book that did not please everyone locally, something Moore had also encountered previously in Sparkbrook in his work with Rex.

A third example of a study of a social problem leading on to the re-examination of broader social scientific themes is provided by informal care and social support. Preparedness of neighbours, friends and kin beyond households to contribute to a person's welfare is central to 'community'; interest in the topic reflects ongoing concerns about its perceived decline and the resultant social isolation of groups such as older people. Nickie Charles and her colleagues' (2008) restudy of Swansea was particularly well-placed to shed light on this issue because comparisons could be made with Rosser and Harris's research in the city four decades previously. The broad conclusion was that there has been a degree of change in perceptions of preparedness to provide mutual aid, but that strong continuities were also present, and the thesis of community involvement giving way to individualized lifestyles was not confirmed. People helping each other in community contexts still matters. The research design's sophistication allowed Charles and her colleagues to do better than paint a misleadingly uniform picture. Data collected from four contrasting areas of the city enabled more nuanced arguments to be developed, for example that middle-class areas had looser and more open social networks compared to the more closed character of mutual support found in working-class areas and also among the city's Bangladeshi-origin ethnic minority. The study also highlights the importance of gender: 'It is largely women's networks which hold families and communities together' (2008: 209); conversely it is among men that cases of social isolation are more likely to be found. These findings are remarkably in line with those of Fred St Leger and Norman Gillespie (1991) who explored similar issues in three communities in Belfast. Community relationships have a gendered character, and overly general language about 'communities' may lead to this being overlooked.

Practical interest in arrangements that promote informal care and social support is connected to questions about the research methods and concepts used to understand these phenomena. Charles and her colleagues make the point that working with research participants to complete network diagrams allowed them to recognize the extent to which choice is exercised in the construction of contemporary support networks. Kinship

featured prominently, especially in the more working-class neighbourhoods, but friends were subject to greater discretion, with a tendency to include those people judged to be 'like family', understood as being reliable in times of crisis. Personal networks were not restricted to people living in the same neighbourhood, and not all of a person's neighbours were part of their 'personal communities' (2008: 210, 211). This concept has been used in other studies. For Chris Phillipson and his colleagues, who used personal network diagrams to investigate the changing position of older people, personal communities reflect people's greater choice about those with whom connections are cultivated. One of their principal findings was that 'friendships of different kinds ... have become of greater significance', and this had made their community horizons less geographically bound. This finding mattered particularly in their Bethnal Green fieldwork site, where white and Bengali residents could be neighbours yet have only shallow contact with each other, coexisting as separate, 'encapsulated' (2001: 132, 255) communities.

4.2 Interesting and useful research

Many other instances of policy-relevant research producing not only practical, useful findings but also interesting advances in the methodological and conceptual approaches adopted by social scientists could be given. For example, criminological research also problematizes the notion of communities as spatially bounded entities characterized by integrated, mutually supportive populations (Foster 1990; Mooney and Neal 2009; Sparks, Girling and Loader 1999). In the extreme case of hackers in cyberspace, they can be conceived of as 'a community even when the links between the members of the community are as free of physical space as it is possible to be' (Jordan 2002: 252). The study in its community context of any number of topics (such as crime, care, health, disability, education, unemployment, ethnicity, housing or regeneration) revisits the issue that exercised an earlier generation of critics of community studies for whom Pahl (1968) spoke through his critique of geographical determinism: where a person lives does not dictate how they live. It is instructive that Pahl continued to grapple with this problem throughout his career, well beyond his time on Sheppey. His final book, co-written with Liz Spencer (Spencer and Pahl 2006), drew on the idea of personal communities comprised of friendships that modern conditions of geographical mobility and mobile

communications have allowed to be freed from the constraints of residential proximity. Friends do not have to be local.

Various threads have fed into the related notions of personal communities and communities of choice. These include research involving lesbian and gay respondents who have found themselves excluded from conventional understandings of community yet wanting to assert the supportive, affirming, community-like character of their networks (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001). Spencer and Pahl's motivation to research friendship was not primarily one of seeking to better understand a social problem, as friendship in itself is a social good, but the results of the study turned out to be useful as well as interesting. This was in much the same way that the Sheppey project was curiosity-driven but nevertheless allowed Pahl to contribute to a book with the policy-relevant title *Is It Worth Working?* (Bryson and McKay 1994). Thus the finding that people whose friendships were more geographically dispersed were not necessarily 'more isolated', nor more vulnerable to having 'fewer intimate or supportive relationships' was instructive, and taken further by the observation that the personal communities considered most robust 'usually contain local as well as dispersed sources of sociability and support' (Spencer and Pahl 2006: 195, 206). The ideal is to have both local and non-local network members.

Barry Wellman's writings have done much to popularize the idea of personal communities. His writing on social networks mediated via the internet builds on his earlier investigations into how people's social lives were being freed from dependence on neighbourhoods through the development of pre-internet technologies (such as cars and telephones). The residents of the East York area of Toronto were found to have thriving patterns of sociability and reciprocity, just not necessarily with each other. People's ties were no longer 'organised into densely knit, tightly bounded solidarities' (1979: 1206) within the confines of neighbourhoods, from which they had been liberated by active engagement with the opportunities opening up to them. Internet communities have made it possible to explore the issue of whether people can use virtual connection to leave further behind place-based connectedness, as some speculative narratives have suggested might be the case. The situation in practice is less dramatic, Wellman concludes: 'Despite the dazzling portrayals of virtual worlds whose denizens only meet online, in reality, most ties combine in-person with computer-mediated contact' (1999a: xx). The coming of the internet has not fundamentally changed the pattern whereby connections

between people are made using other media in between episodes of face-to-face interaction. Nor, it seems, is the content of interactions between people all that different even in more exclusively internet based communities whose members do not meet in the same physical space. The exchange of information may figure more prominently in internet communities as a proportion of what happens, but 'companionship, emotional support, services, and a sense of belonging are abundant in cyberspace' (Wellman and Gulia 1999: 353). With reference back to the discussion about the policy-relevant research on the caring capacities of communities, and the sources of personal well-being, this finding indicates that research into internet communities has useful applications as well as being interesting in and of itself.

Related research by Rich Ling into mobile communication can be used to make similar points about social research not needing to be designed to address social problems in order to be useful. The spread of mobile phones has meant that small groups of friends are 'contacting one another with more frequency and the family is better able to monitor one another's needs. We are in continual, if brief and topical contact' (2008: 186). Ling's interpretation of these developments is that they do not fit neatly into classical sociological models of the transition from Tönnies's *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, or Durkheim's mechanical-to-organic solidarity, and he turns instead to ideas developed by Erving Goffman about the contribution of everyday ritual to social cohesion. Frequent contact between friends and family members by mobile phone conversations and texting 'has resulted in tighter integration of the group', and the possibility of such connections at any time has further reinforced this. Moreover, Ling argues, it has taken only a very short period of time for this medium of communication to have become not only normalized but for the shift to be so commonplace as to be unrecognized; mobile communication has become 'in the literal sense, not remarkable' (2008: 173). This observation is pertinent to the question of how best to research virtual communities. In contrast to Wellman's (1999b) reliance on survey techniques to explore the strong ties in the ego-centred networks that make up personal communities of which people were aware, Ling's approach involved both quantitative and qualitative elements including ethnographic observations and "'gonzo" experiments' (2008: 20) to get at unrecorded norms of behaviour. His study included field notes about strangers' use of mobile phones in public places and their responses when Ling placed himself in

unusually close physical proximity to them. This is useful knowledge in the same way that Goffman's analysis of the need to maintain and repair civility in public encounters is good to know.

Other research into virtual communities has drawn on the idea of 'imagined communities', which Benedict Anderson (1991) developed to analyse nationalism (see Blackshaw 2010: 118–24). This idea does not fit readily into the community studies genre of empirical research, however, since Anderson's purpose was to explore people's preparedness to identify with an abstract collectivity whose members could not possibly have face-to-face connections, except with a very small minority. As Vered Amit notes, 'Anderson's work deliberately decoupled the idea of community from an actual base of interaction' (2002: 6), and Anderson is less concerned with communities being either genuine or false than with 'the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson 1991: 6). However, Anderson's concept does remind us that communities are social constructions, and the role of imagination in community construction deserves attention. It is an element in Glyn Williams's (1991) *The Welsh In Patagonia*, in which the story of the settlement founded in a part of Argentina by Welsh-speaking immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century and its development as an ethnic community is told. Williams's justification of his research 'in the name of knowledge' (1991: x) is offered because more practical rationales for such historical research may not be ready to hand in the field, but there are grounds for treating this study as both interesting and useful. Fieldwork requiring fluency in three languages that took over a decade and involved archival research, the study of diaries, oral histories and participant observation, produced a wealth of detailed findings. As a study in population movement, it has particularly interesting characteristics as a case of collective migration organized with the purpose of socio-economic improvement and cultural continuity and preservation. The establishment and reproduction of the Welsh ethnic community in Patagonia is argued by Williams to be a 'creation', forged by its members through 'kinship, neighbourliness and mutual aid' (1991: 259, 273–4) in their ongoing struggles with the local and national state. Important among these struggles are those required to maintain the economic viability of their settler community.

Williams's study demonstrates the value of a focus on the links between abstract notions of community and the concrete social relations that underpin them. Imagined by its founders as an ethnic community in which

the Welsh language and culture could be re-established and renewed in a new geographical context, the Welsh in Chubut province discovered over time that they were not immune to forces of economic and political change that were putting pressures on rural communities the world over. Agricultural producers became subject to adverse economic forces and this meant that many farmers found themselves unable to run their farms profitably, clinging to the land not for financial reasons but because of 'a preference for "security" or "independence,"' that is, a reluctance to take up work as a waged worker, a desire to resist proletarianization. With declining economic power comes greater difficulty in resisting the encroachment of state regulation and control, so the maintenance of Welsh culture came under strain. Over time, 'The language ceased to be the medium of local administration, it was of minimal value for employment, while the agencies of its reproduction were undermined' (1991: 272, 273). Welsh speaking declined among younger generations, and was further marginalized by non-Welsh in-migration into the area. Thus economic, political and demographic forces all played a part in forcing the community to struggle and actively to contest in order to preserve its distinctiveness, in the general context of a sense of loss and decline. This analysis bears closer scrutiny than the misleading stereotypical understandings of the community held by outsiders, and that in itself is a useful corrective. James Hunter's book *The Making of the Crofting Community*, described as 'an attempt to write the modern history of the Gaelic Highlands from the crofting community's point of view' (1976: 5), offers a similar rationale for the detailed study of the centuries-long processes by which contemporary communities have been forged, often in adversity.

4.3 The capacity to surprise

Drawing on the phrase of Claude Lévi-Strauss, David Morgan has written that 'community studies are still "good to think with"' (2005: 655). Like all research, community studies are intended to produce findings that are useful and interesting, and in the process they influence our perception of the world, sometimes in surprising ways (rather than simply confirming our previous understanding). Studies of suburbia provide a good example, revealing that the popular stereotype of dull conformity is wide of the mark. Keller's account of Twin Rivers notes that the development 'promised to recapture something of the traditional sense of community that

would have an appeal to residents beyond immediate practical interests'. Expectations of people moving in as pioneers in the 1970s were not necessarily met, especially for those who were disappointed when the reality fell short of their 'dreams of unparalleled family togetherness, opportunities for the children, the promise of new friendships, and an exciting social life'. Over time, however, patterns of sociability developed, between people who shared interests (including shared interests brought about through children, described as 'great social magnets'), religious affiliations or places of origin. Keller argues that these ties generate a sense of shared identity sufficiently strong to withstand the familiar corrosive effects on community endeavours of 'free riders' and 'factional disputes'. That said, she also observes that once a community has emerged 'there is pressure to conform to group norms' (2003: 58, 77, 129, 287, 262), and that the balance between sociability and privacy was not achieved to everyone's satisfaction. Overall, the surprising finding remains that the residents of the suburb sustain greater depth to their social lives than conventional portrayals of suburbia suggest, and by challenging stereotypes researchers can take readers into surprising new understandings.

This is not to say that all the evidence points uniformly in this direction. In some research, suburbs appear to have little conflict because it is easier to acquiesce to the prevailing 'moral order', or to move out (Baumgartner 1988), or because physical presence in suburbs has declined as women's employment has grown (Richards 1990). Prompted by these contradictory findings generated by different studies of individual places, Mary Corcoran and her colleagues developed a multi-method research design incorporating four locations in the Greater Dublin area that captures 'suburban variation'; suburbs are not all the same, and nor are they the exclusive preserve of the middle classes. The study was conceived as being 'of relevance not only to social scientists, but also to architects, planners, policymakers, and the general public', and the timing of the research during an unprecedentedly buoyant housing market makes it a particularly instructive study in comparative perspective. Another unusual feature of the study is its concern to give voice to the children of the suburbs, and there is much to be learned about how eleven- and twelve-year-olds regard the suburban world. Alongside the intriguing finding that the presence of children promotes sociability among adults is the preference expressed by the children for suburban life over urban life. The study's general conclusion is that 'what matters to people is not intimacy with known others in their locality,

but loose connections or affiliations' (2010: 257, xvii, xx), within the overall context of an attachment to place that is surprisingly high when set against the prevailing disdain for suburban life that is found in commonplace commentaries. People make positive decisions to move to the suburbs despite the negative stereotypes of social and cultural life there, and sufficient differentiation exists between suburbs to allow scope for people to seek out the particular suburban location most suited to their aspirations.

The finding of people making a positive decision to move to the suburbs has its counterpart in other research showing younger adults moving in the opposite direction for the purpose of escaping suburbia. Tim Butler and Garry Robson's investigation into inner-city gentrification in six areas of London traces the journeys of the grown-up children of middle-class suburbanites to inner-city neighbourhoods that 'provided the excitement and cultural buzz that had been so lacking in many of their childhoods and had been awakened by the experience of being at university'. This is more than a life-stage phenomenon, because these middle-class gentrifiers of inner London stay on when they themselves become parents, preferring to raise their families there than to follow the norm of moving to more sedate suburban surroundings. Butler and Robson show that they do this within communities made up of people with whom they identify, referred to extensively as 'people like us', contexts that allow them to live 'distinctively in ordinary settings' (2003: 163, 108, 18). This desire to locate themselves in neighbourhoods populated by others sharing similar cultural tastes touches on the paradoxical feature of community life whereby it is at once ordinary to the people who are inside it and distinctive from the ways of life of outsiders, including former inner-city residents whose more limited resources make them vulnerable to being displaced by gentrification. Like Mike Savage and his colleagues' (2005) study of four suburban areas in the Greater Manchester area, Butler and Robson note that the processes of globalization and associated geographical mobility have disrupted older patterns of relating to localities, but with the surprising result that people have found new ways of developing a 'narrative of belonging' (2003: 190) to frame accounts of their lives in their chosen surroundings. Purely functional relationships to place do not figure in people's stories of living in contemporary suburbia nor in gentrified inner-city settings.

The point about belonging continuing to be important in the age of globalization applies at least as much to poorer people as it does to the middle-class participants in Butler and Robson's and Savage and his colleagues'

studies. Foster's research in London's *Docklands*, coincidentally one of Butler and Robson's research locations, found it 'understandable that not all Isle of Dogs residents were rushing to embrace change' (1999: 306), and suggested that notions of belonging are contested between established residents and newcomers. Geoff Dench and his colleagues developed this theme in their restudy of East London, and in broaching the vexed issue of racial hostility of the white working class to the Bangladeshi in-migrants who had arrived since Young and Willmott's original research they found to their surprise that it was 'the local granny – the archetypal East End "Mum" and heroine of Family and Kinship in East London' who was the most hostile. Perhaps more surprising still to readers is the argument advanced that in-migration by young professionals has exacerbated social divisions, representing a 'class gap' that 'may be even more significant than the cultural divide between the Bangladeshi newcomers and the old white working-class residents in the area, most of whom are the offspring of previous immigrants'. Dench and his colleagues suggest that resentment of gentrification taps into a long-standing inversion of conventional ranking of occupations in which working-class residents of East London 'treated middle-class professions as unimportant or parasitical' (2006: 187, 24, 189), as a way of maintaining self-respect. A history of hostility to the arrival of groups designated 'outsiders' is a recognized feature of many communities including this one (Crow and Allan 1994: ch.4; Mumford and Power 2003: 24), attributable at least in part to competing claims to scarce resources such as housing and employment.

Researchers who set out to investigate communities of which they are not members have to negotiate their status as 'outsiders'. They need to be mindful of potential insensitivity to the 'subtle discriminations' (Cohen 1987: 14) that are found in any culture but that may not be immediately apparent. Cohen's study of the Shetland island of *Whalsay* acknowledges the insights derived from Erving Goffman's (1969: 25) observations on the nearby island of Unst about how people presented themselves to others, drawing out the significance of encounters in which embarrassment occurs. The story recounted by Pahl about how he was 'shown on a number of occasions how a crude drawing of East Anglia and the Thames Estuary could demonstrate that "Sheppey was a piece of shit in the arse 'ole of England"' serves to make the point that Islanders were aware of how outsiders might look down on them, to which they responded by adopting 'a mocking, self-deprecating tone often hiding fierce pride' (1984: 189).

The opening sentence of *The New East End*, 'The East End of London is the backside of the City' (Dench, Gavron and Young 2006: 1), conveys a similar message. Care needs to be taken with apparently derogatory statements that people make about their communities. The original study of the mining community of 'Ashton' reproduced the common assessment by outsiders of the town as 'that dirty hole' (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter 1969: 12), but in the restudy Dennis Warwick and Gary Littlejohn comment that several participants found fault with the first book because 'outsiders continually get the place and its people all wrong' (1992: 33). As they note, this raises in acute form the question of how community researchers go about their task, and what it is appropriate to conclude when their reports are contested by the very members of the communities being described.

Restudies have the capacity to shed light on how community studies have been received by the participants. Art Gallaher returned to 'Plainville', Missouri, which had previously been studied by James West. West told Gallaher that 'to the best of his knowledge, with one outstanding exception most Plainvillers had taken his report "with relative composure,"' but Gallaher had people saying to him, 'I certainly hope you are not here to do the same thing that feller West did a few years ago. ... Folks here are mighty unhappy with him. ... Some would like to lynch him.' Even the more favourably disposed residents were unsure: 'A nice guy, *but he asked a hell of a lot of questions*' (Gallaher 1971: 286, 288–9, emphasis in original). The feelings of some townspeople that their trust had been betrayed have been echoed in other studies, such as 'Ashton' (Warwick and Littlejohn 1992: 32) and 'Springdale' (Vidich and Bensman 2000: xxxii). Nancy Scheper-Hughes discovered on a return visit to her fieldwork site in Ireland that several locals had not taken kindly to her study, *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics*, which offered a sympathetic yet critical analysis of mental illness in the context of rural community decline. Her return was prompted in part by a sense that her approach may have led her to 'an overly critical view of village life in the mid-1970s' (2001: 320), but more than two decades on from the book's original publication a feeling of hurt remained. Critical social science is not always welcome, although it may be, as *The Other Side of Middletown* demonstrates; on yet other occasions people appear 'supremely unaffected' (Bryson and Winter 1999: 69) by the experience of having been studied. The evaluation of community studies' worthwhileness is a complicated matter.