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***English Life and Leisure* and its Auto/Biographical Significance**

Peer Reviewed Article

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Abstract

One of the very few important works systematically utilising auto/biographical accounts that has figured little in the auto/biographical literature is Seebohm Rowntree's and G. R. Lavers' *English Life and Leisure* of 1951. This unique study, employing some 220 extracts of auto/biographical case studies, provided descriptions of the attitudes of a significant section of the general public towards their free time and leisure activities. The accounts covered a wide range of varied pursuits and interests, including gambling, drinking, smoking, sexual promiscuity, visiting cinemas, attending theatres, listening to the wireless, dancing, reading, attending adult education classes and religious observance. On its publication the work aroused immense interest not only among social commentators and academics but also among an informed general readership. As well as notable admirers, the work had severe critics, not least concerning its methodology. The authorial perspective of *English Life and Leisure* was one of broadly welfarist, Christian-accented social concern. The work regretted people wasting worthwhile opportunities, of them relying on short-term hedonistic pleasures and of them showing little desire for self-examination. As a perceptive reviewer in the *American Sociological Review* remarked in relation to the leisure activities of the respondents, "In reality, these are some of the ways of killing time, of overcoming the tedium vitae, of escaping from fear and anxieties, and compensating for the austerities and frustrations of life".

Keywords

Indirect Interviewing, Leisure, Lives, Rowntree, Case-study

Background and Purpose

Seebom Rowntree (1871-1954), the principal author of *English Life and Leisure*, was a well-established and highly regarded social investigator, having in his *Poverty: A Study of town life* of 1901 produced one of the most important surveys of poverty yet produced and greatly advancing the practice of empirical sociology. This work and numerous others on social and economic issues established him as a major and influential figure in the world of social welfare and national life. It was in his *Poverty and Progress* of 1941 that he first expressed concern at the inadequate provision of recreational activities available to the adult population that was to be the immediate background to *English Life and Leisure*.¹ He had long been of the view that there was more to existence than toil and that for life to be properly meaningful, there had to be more than just the barest subsistence:

Do we want the workers always to spend only what is needed for purely physical efficiency [subsistence]? Are amusement and all luxuries to be taboo? Surely not! Those who, often thoughtlessly, speak of the inordinate thriftlessness of the working class, would not like to see their own households condemned to such an iron regime . . . (Briggs, 1961: 204).

Asa Briggs said of Rowntree that, "he refused to condemn without seeking to understand" and that he related "'spiritual' deficiencies not to individual deficiencies of character but to the weakness of the material environment" (Briggs, 1961: 301).

Nonetheless, Rowntree was very troubled that as surplus income increased and time for leisure grew that many people were increasingly drawn to gambling, drinking, smoking and other activities he considered inappropriate for real human flourishing.² Thus he formulated the idea for the *English Life and Leisure* study and decided that he needed a principal field worker who was young enough to take on demanding person-to-person investigations, have advanced administrative skills, have a knowledge of economics and social questions, and be able to mix well in varied social settings. He appointed for the role G. R. Lavers (1911-c.1980), a man with a distinguished naval background who was a good communicator and had a proven interest in and knowledge of welfare reform.³ It is of course not surprising that Rowntree, with his well-known Quaker background, should recruit a principal investigator whose views were sympathetic to his own. The value judgements to be found in *EL&L* are those of the socially-concerned Christian middle class with pronounced leanings towards non-conformism. They are quite unhidden and abundantly clear to even the most inattentive reader.⁴

In setting out to explore the issue of leisure, Rowntree and Lavers first of all sought to establish which existing recreational activities the population was drawn to and, further, whether those who followed these activities did so with any regard to their own moral welfare. As the introduction to *EL&L* puts it:

*It is not possible to ascertain what facilities should be provided to enable people to use their leisure happily and wisely, without first finding out just how they spend their leisure now, and why they spend it as they do. The task of finding out why people choose some activities and reject others, involves no less than a study of their philosophy of life, as well as an examination of the principal factors that affect behaviour and form character (*EL&L*, 1951: x).*

English Life and Leisure is comprised of four principal parts. The first part records some 220 individual case studies (selected from a collection of 975). The second part is composed of chapter-length discussions relating to the topics of gambling, alcohol consumption, smoking, sexual promiscuity, honesty, the cinema, the theatre, broadcasting, dancing, reading habits, adult education and religion. The interview material is contextualised by the provision of a comprehensive survey of available statistical, documentary and social policy material relating to each topic. The third part of *EL&L* is a detailed examination of leisure-time activities in a single location, High Wycombe. The fourth part is a survey of leisure-time pursuits in Scandinavia.

English Life and Leisure, therefore, provides a comprehensive study of leisure pursuits during the late 1940s and early 1950s and may be adjudged of relevance from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Its significance for current work in the area of auto/biographical studies is twofold. Firstly, it brings to the fore a major study that has been largely forgotten in the auto/biographical literature that has emerged since the 1980s and that, as such, has been insufficiently recognised as an important milestone in the employment of autobiographical accounts for the making of social policy recommendations. Secondly, it represents a significant example of an attempt to relate autobiographical accounts to general historical processes and as such is significant for any review of literature for current researchers working in complementary fields. These auto/biographical accounts of ordinary people about their leisure time and attitudes towards it form a valuable resource for researchers in understanding the lived experiences of ordinary people within their social and historical context. It is also highly relevant as a comparative text for current auto/biographical work on leisure.

It is the first part of Rowntree's and Lavers' study that is the primary focus of this article, namely, the case-study 'interviews' that comprise 25% of the 482 pages of the study. In doing so, it will set *English Life and Leisure* in its historical context, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and above all, recognise the study as a significant, interesting and important work in the auto/biographical canon.

The Reception of *English Life and Leisure* and the Interviews

Rejecting the idea of formal interviews or questionnaires on the grounds that they would not provide the individual stories and the living pictures they were after Rowntree and Lavers decided upon what they call 'indirect interviewing'. Indirect interviewing, they characterise as follows:

This method consists of making the acquaintance of an individual (the excuses for doing so are immaterial) and developing the acquaintance until his or her confidence is gained and information required can be obtained in ordinary conversation, without the person concerned ever knowing that there has been an interview or that any specific information was being sought. Such a method is laborious but effective. (EL&L: xii).

This indirect interviewing, or more accurately interviewing by subterfuge, was mainly carried out by G. R. Lavers with the assistance of four others – one male and three female.⁵ At the time of *EL&L*'s publication, most reviewers did not show undue concern about indirect interviewing. As a method, it was used in America and in Britain was employed in several Mass-Observation studies. It is worth quoting from the preface by Tom Harrisson to the Mass-Observation study *The Pub and the People*: "For guidance as regards techniques of investigation, we have turned principally, when puzzled ourselves, to field work that has been done in America . . . Here we should like to acknowledge our indebtedness particularly to Prof. E. W. Burgess and the Faculty of Sociology in the University of Chicago, which has published several fundamental studies in the field; . . ." (Mass-Observation, 1943: 13). However, it is unlikely that the indirect interviews of *English Life and Leisure* would pass muster with a modern Research Ethics Committee. Such approaches have been regarded as ethically and morally dubious and have gained a negative reputation within the academic community (Marzano, 2022). Paradoxically, many notable research projects, e.g. those of Erving Goffman, Laud Humphreys and Stanley Milgram, would have been impossible to conduct if they had been subject to scrutiny by research ethics committees. It is an important approach utilised in ethnographic and narrative studies, including what Rogers (2020) describes as high-risk research. More recently, these committees have been comprehensively criticised for having enervating and hobbling effects on a wide variety of ethnographic research – e.g. Iphofen and O'Mathúna, eds (2022) *Ethical Issues in Covert, Security and Surveillance Research*; Iphofen, and Tolich, eds (2018) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics*. With respect to *EL&L*, such vivid and authentic accounts of the participants' lives

and leisure pursuits could not have been obtained by any other means. The loss of these rich accounts would have been detrimental to the value of the publication that followed.

The case studies are a combination of recollected direct quotations and third-person commentary. In addition to the research team, the authors sought advice from some 200 persons of widely differing walks of life familiar with the topics being investigated. Below, as an example, is a representative case-study interview:

Mr X. aged 28, is a salesman who hawks a patent electrical device from house to house in well-to-do neighbourhoods. He has a small salary and commission, and to do well he has to average one sale a day.

As he visits sixteen or eighteen houses a day, and seldom averages more than four sales a week, it is understandable that he is depressed.

His salesman's manner is effusive and respectful but in private he is embittered and unhappy. He went straight from a minor public school in 1939 into the Army, stayed on in the Control Commission, and was finally returned to civilian life in 1948 with no qualifications of any kind.

He says he is fed up with religion, and says any religious person who had been through 1944 to 1948 in Germany would either have gone mad or cursed God.

He does a football coupon every week but has no real hope of winning although he says he clings on to the hope. Does not bet on horses or dogs.

He has been sexually promiscuous since 1940. Sees no prospect of being able to afford to marry even if he found the right girl.

Says it's all very well for the moralists to talk about what chaps like him ought to do and believe, but what chance has he had? "From school right into a bloody war that wasn't my asking. Frightened to death half the time, so bored the other half that there was nothing to do but go to bed with a pretty girl. Then back to civvy street, peddling these **** machines and walking ten miles a day for fat old women to shut their doors in my face".

A number of early reviewers of the work were quick to criticise what they saw as the methodological deficiencies of the work.⁶ These were on fairly basic grounds and a single sample will speak for others - John S. Morgan in the *Social Service Review* writes:

... instead of selecting a sample city for intensive study or constructing a verifiable and valid sample of some kind, they drifted into conversations with some 950 individuals in eleven English cities and some unspecified small towns and rural areas. No explanations are given for the choice of places, nor were any criteria used in the selection of individuals interviewed. There are many obvious objections to this casual process, ... There is no evidence of the use of deep insights into human behaviour . . . ; and the results are too two-dimensional . . . [further] There is no evidence that either of the authors or their assistants had, or attempted to equip themselves with any special skills or understanding of the practice and pitfalls of interviewing. . . . Some of the recorded case histories are redolent of moral disapprobation, and many of them are sufficiently biased for the alert reader to be able, by the time he reaches page 121, to make a fairly accurate estimate of the authors' attitudes on sex, drink, gambling, cultural values, and other matters (Morgan, 1951: 510).

And yet after several pages of such criticism, Morgan writes:

In spite of the facts that for a good part of the time the authors seem to be out of their depth, that their research methods are open to question, and that many of the conclusions can be invalidated, this study deserves to be read and used, . . . Its great virtue is that, in a time when so much research is confined to precise examination of small pieces without any beneficial

results for the whole, the authors have been courageous enough to bring a wide, though by no means comprehensive, area under review. The book represents the considered attitudes of a thoughtful and reasonable group of people with a common [if out of date] point of view (Morgan, 1951: 514).

The highly regarded sociologist David Riesman (author of *The Lonely Crowd* published in 1950) in a more intellectually expansive review than Morgan's, after making a methodological critique, goes on to praise the value of the case studies or "vignettes" as supplying more interesting information than many a traditional survey and saying he would use it with his students (Riesman 1952: 602). Other commentators, too, found more in *EL&L* than its severest critics because they recognised that it did give a vivid picture of considerable sections of the population and that the case histories were full of recognisable (but usually unrecorded) people telling their own tales within the social world they occupied. Prior to *EL&L*, Rowntree had published some of the most statistically rigorous studies of poverty and working-class living conditions to date, not least *Poverty: study of town life* (1901), *How the Labourer Lives*, with May Kendall (1913) and *Poverty and Progress* (1941). He has a place in what A. H. Halsey has referred to as "the distinctive English tradition of political arithmetic which runs from Sir Thomas More to R. H. Tawney, and bears a literature down the centuries of responsible social criticism based on private numerical enquiry into public issues" (Halsey, 2004: 848).

Commentators less concerned with methodological issues but more concerned with social standards and moral welfare regarded the work as important and as a cause for worry. The pioneer of the welfare state Lord Beveridge writes:

The case-histories . . . are far from cheerful reading. Through them the reader is introduced in print to a number of people very few of whom most readers would care to meet in the flesh. There are of course some pleasant characters, but the general picture varies, in most cases from mere time-wasting in the use of leisure to much that is depressingly dull or positively hateful, with reference to any form of intellectual activity as rare as diamond (Beveridge, 1951: 755).⁷

However, on the other side, Beveridge and others also point out that sections of the population are engaged in socially productive endeavours whether these be voluntary social work or constructive leisure activities. However, here is the rub for Rowntree and Lavers - while acknowledging these worthwhile activities they too observe that growing numbers of the population even as living standards rise and working hours shorten, are increasingly spending their free time on activities such as gambling, drinking, smoking, acts of dishonesty, recreational sex and trite forms of entertainment (*EL&L*: 123).⁸ It is this 'condition of England' matter that concerned a number of those assessments of *EL&L* that were less perturbed by the methodological niceties of survey research and more interested in the work's examination of the philosophies of life of the population contained in the case-studies.⁹ This group recognised that times were changing. In such a vein, a lead review by H. F. Carhill in the *Times Literary Supplement* made the perceptive observation that, "We are beginning to realise that what to do with one's [leisure] time may well become in the foreseeable future a major social and indeed, moral problem" and spoke of *EL&L* "as a sociological study of the first importance, full, vivid, at once serious and entertaining, supported wherever possible by scrupulous statistical investigation and enriched by close personal enquiry into individual cases" (Carhill, 1951: 349). While noting, as did others, the tendency towards puritanism (especially when discoursing on sexual activity), the review regarded the work as providing, in a unique way for the times, insight into the way life was lived. It is not a surprise that the reading public made *EL&L* a best seller for, as Carhill says of the case-studies:

They are in general quite astonishingly vivid, and the impression that each makes is so striking that the reader pauses and wonders, trying to see the individual before him. Here is

the whole tragi-comedy of life . . . It is impossible in a review to do justice to the brilliant diversity of these portraits (Carhill, 1951: 350).

As Briggs noted of Rowntree - he was keenly aware that hard times beget specific hopes (Briggs, 1961: 301):

As a rule, it is the people with the least money who gamble the most. They do it to introduce a little excitement into their own lives, which are dull and monotonous. One inveterate gambler told an investigator that he'd rather 'have six penn'orth of hope than six penn'orth of electricity' (Rowntree, 1941: 403).

However, in the case-studies it is not difficult to recognise the moral disapproval and general distance by the authors towards numbers of their respondents. As Barbara Wootton in *The Political Quarterly* put it, "one cannot help wondering if both investigators might not have found things less distressing if they had not set out from a point so immensely remote from the world of their explorations" (Wootton, 1951: 507).¹⁰

This gathering of such impressionistic data is not unreminiscent of the Chicago School of Sociology, in which the individual actions and dispositions of subjects in given social settings are explored without attempting to make them confirm an explicit sociological hypothesis.

Examples of the case studies

Rather than attempt a complete appraisal of the case-studies in *EL&L*, it is the intention here to look at a few extracts or vignettes that stand for the observations of many in the full sample. The topics for focus will be shortage of money, smoking, gambling and sexual promiscuity.

Shortage of Money

Not everyone who was interviewed was poor, but money, particularly the shortage of it, featured in a high proportion of the case-studies. Mr. R. (case-study 50) is a typical example where the lack of money pervaded every aspect of his life. He was an unskilled worker supporting a wife and four children. The economies the Rs were obliged to make were constant to the extent that, "his whole life is dominated by an acute shortage of money".

Others were even more negatively affected:

Mr. C. . . . is nearly destitute (he had 14s. 6d at the first meeting) and homeless. He carries all his possessions around with him in two brown paper carriers and spends the night in one of the cheap restaurants that remain open all night. (case-study 22)

Mr. C. represents an extreme case, and such destitution was rare in the sample, although many respondents, and their families, were living close to the poverty line. The reasons for a shortage of money varied, however, two broad categories can be identified in the whole sample. The first group of respondents simply had a low income with no prospects of improving their fortunes. The second group were the cause of their own poor economic circumstances by overspending on their leisure pursuits.

In the former group, many respondents found that their low income was, unsurprisingly, a constraint on expenditure for their pleasure:

Mrs. N. says that her whole life is "scraping and pinching to make do". She can afford no recreations for herself - no smoking or drinking. . . . She cannot afford to go to the cinema except as a very rare treat. (case-study 156)

In contrast, the impecunious state of some respondents resulted from spending rashly on their leisure pursuits, and in extreme cases caused the individual or family concerned to live in highly impoverished circumstances, often without the basic necessities such as food or fuel:

Mr. A. . . . is a labourer . . . In the week before the investigator met him he had lost 50 per cent of his net wages on the greyhounds and for the last couple of days of the week he had to go without food. (case-study 198)

Taken against the backdrop of post-war Britain, when there were fuel shortages during the bitter winter of 1947, where prices of basic commodities had rocketed and where rationing had increased, it is understandable that many spent money on some form of leisure in order to escape the grim realities of day-to-day living, whether they could afford to do so or not. Cigarettes or pipe tobacco were convenient pleasures that made smoking universally popular with men and women of all classes and age groups.

Smoking

The chapter on smoking focuses almost entirely on the addictive nature of tobacco and the financial harm it caused to the individual and their families, as well as to the nation. The real danger of smoking was only becoming known with Doll's and Hill's initial paper connecting the risk of lung cancer to the number of cigarettes smoked per day (Doll and Hill, 1950). It would be many decades before the dangers of smoking were generally accepted, even amongst some of the medical profession, and smoking continued to be as popular as ever. Some respondents were reported to "smoke a good deal" or were "chain smokers". According to *EL&L*, this seems to be somewhere between 20 or 30 cigarettes a day and, in some cases, substantially more:

Mr X. is a clerk in a Government office. . . . Earns £8 per week. Smokes fairly heavily (30 cigarettes per day, but is trying to reduce). (case-study 17)

Some respondents were so addicted to tobacco that they would forgo everyday necessities such as food rather than a cigarette:

Mr. L. is a taxi-driver . . . is almost a chain smoker – he would smoke 60-70 cigarettes a day if he could afford it. As it is, he keeps himself down to 40 of the cheapest brands. He sometimes goes without his dinner to have more money for cigarettes. (case-study 44)

The amount of money individual respondents spent on smoking varied greatly, and in some cases, this caused financial problems that had a deleterious impact on their personal lives and career prospects:

Mr.S. . . . is the proprietor of a provincial taxi business. . . . his business suffers . . . because money that ought to be spent on the upkeep of his cars is spent on beer and cigarettes . . . it is a fair estimate that his beer and tobacco bill for the month cannot be less than £25. (case-study 181)

However, the majority of respondents who smoked did so occasionally or in moderation, and the amount they smoked was regulated by the level of their income:

Mr. N. is an unskilled worker in a factory. . . [the N's] joint cigarette consumption amounts to 200 per week of the cheaper kind (2s.7d. for 20). This represents a [beer] and tobacco cost of over £4 per week and is only possible because Mrs. N. works. (case-study 57)

As Rowntree and Lavers note, the expenditure on smoking represents a moderate consumption by a large number of people rather than heavy smoking by a minority, although they do not elaborate on the reasons why predominantly cigarette smoking had become such a ubiquitous activity. By 1948, the majority of the nation was 'hooked' on smoking; 82 per cent of males and 41 per cent of females were smokers (Forey et al, 2002). Someone could 'light up' anywhere - on buses, trains and trams, in factories, and offices, and by combining smoking with other leisure activities such as watching a film, having a drink, or a meal in a restaurant, the pleasure of smoking was enhanced (Hilton, 2000).

Smoking had become an acceptable and uncontentious part of everyday life for men and women across all social classes and all age groups, and often a 'rite of passage' into adulthood (Hilton, 2000). The two world wars also helped to increase the popularity of smoking, particularly for

women, where attitudes towards respectable femininity were changing. Smoking was no longer regarded as morally reprehensible. In women's magazines, advertising and short stories associated smoking with the respectability and refinement of middle and upper-class women (Tinkler, 2003).

An enormous influence on the preponderance of smoking during the 1930s and 1940s was the cinema, and the films of the period celebrated and glamorised the cigarette. Cigarettes were imbued with a range of meanings, including friendship, sophistication, sexual tension and desirability (Brandt, 2007). Many respondents indicated that the cinema was a regular, sometimes obsessive, leisure activity, and the alluring images of smoking no doubt encouraged the audience to follow suit.

Nevertheless, away from the silver screen, the mundane, everyday smoker, as Rowntree and Lavers show, needed no extra stimulus to continue with their chosen habit. In short, smoking was a popular, widespread and largely undiscouraged leisure activity. The increase in the prevalence of smoking during the first half of the 20th century is concomitant with a similar increase in the amount of gambling during the same period as a way for people to spend their leisure time.

Gambling

The prevalence of gambling had been rising since late Victorian times and included betting on dog races, horse races, football matches, pigeon races, and games of bowls (Clapson, 1992)¹¹. Despite most cash-gambling activities being illegal in 1948, the Mass Observation report for the National Anti-Gambling League (NAGL) found the level of gambling had risen, with twice as many people betting on three or more types of gambling than in the previous generation (MO, 1948).¹¹ The case-studies generally reflect the findings of the Mass Observation report with just over 60% of the sample stating they gambled and that most did so in more than one form. This increase was a cause for concern for those opposed to gambling, and unsurprisingly the chapter in *EL&L* on commercialized gambling adopts a critical view of the activity – Rowntree and Lavers were both members of the NAGL. It was argued (as it still convincingly is) that gambling can encourage irrational behaviour as well as not infrequently promoting greed, crime and social disorder. As the *EL&L* case-studies make clear, respondents in most cases could keep their gambling under control. However, the fact remains that, no matter what the accompanying interpretations of the activity, gambling, as Rowntree and Lavers found out, was a popular leisure activity. Which is not to say that all the *EL&L* respondents chose to indulge, and not a few were strongly opposed to the activity:

Mrs. E. . . . Does not gamble as she thinks it is "a mug's game". (case-study 18)

Even those who profited from the industry did not consider most forms of gambling a worthwhile endeavour:

Mr. Q. . . . acts as a bookmaker's runner . . . He gets a percentage of the stakes and, over the course of years, has saved "hundreds of pounds". . . He is "not such a mug" as to gamble himself but does a football coupon because everyone has a fair chance. (case-study 200)

The risks involved in losing money by gambling were considered too great for some respondents and they took a reserved and pragmatic attitude towards their earnings in deciding not to gamble:

Mr. D. . . . does not gamble. He says, "I work too hard for my brass, and I'd be right daft to give it to a chap who does nowt to earn it."(case-study 186)

Reflecting the criticisms of anti-gambling groups some respondents adopted a moral or religious stance, particularly working-class non-conformists (Erens et al, 2004; Reith, 1999):

Mr L. is a Methodist . . .has never taken part in any gambling transaction, all of which – even charity sweepstakes – he regards as sinful. (case-study 1)

Others observed the risk others took, learned from their misfortune and would not gamble themselves:

Mrs. A. . . . does not gamble and wishes her husband wouldn't, as he often loses half his wages at the dogs. (case-study 86)

The opprobrium from anti-gambling groups was particularly focused on the working-class, they argued that a 'profligate', 'indigent' and 'feckless' working-class could not afford to gamble, and doing so would lead to a poverty that could be avoided (Laybourn, 2014:609). The case studies do indicate that some respondents gambled recklessly even when they could not afford to do so resulting in financial difficulties for their families:

Mrs. R. is bitter about her husband's gambling on horses, and she says he sometimes loses all her earnings as well as his own. (case-study 97)

However, examples of profligate gambling were in the minority. The majority of respondents who said they gambled bet modest amounts, for example, "occasionally a shilling on a horse", and were cautious about when they would place a bet "only if I get a good tip".

The football pools was a popular gambling activity across all classes, and even the respondents who claimed they didn't gamble did the pools:

Mr. F. . . . is opposed to gambling on religious grounds but does a football coupon every week because he does not regard that as gambling. (case-study 37)

The pools were widely regarded as an innocent and harmless activity that could provide family entertainment and the results were something to look forward to, accompanied by the hope of winning some money to use in 'normal and familiar ways'(MO, 1948: 102):

Mrs. O. . . . does not gamble but when her husband does a football coupon she shares it with him and they "get a bit of fun" checking the coupon. Once they won £54. They "went on the bust" with £4, put £25 in the savings bank and sent Mr. O's elderly mother away for a holiday with the other £25. (case-study 59)

The pools were also popular because respondents hoped for "a big win" that they would not have the chance of obtaining in any other way:

Mr. E. . . . and it might bring in a big win.(case-study 83)

The pools, as well as other forms of gambling, offered hope of escaping from poverty and wretched conditions:

Mr. P. . . . a cutter in a firm of tailors. . . . does a football coupon because "it gives me just a chance of getting away from this slavery."(case-study 100)

Other respondents stated that they enjoyed gambling for its own sake. The excitement and fun of a race and the occasional thrill of a win were pleasurable experiences and provided respondents with an enjoyable form of entertainment (Clapson, 1992; Laybourn, 2014):

Mr. G. is a steady gambler and bets on horses every day throughout the flat-racing and steeple-chasing seasons. . . . on balance he admits he loses, he says the net loss is trifling and is well worth the entertainment he has. (case-study 180)

As has already been mentioned, Rowntree (1941) and, more recently, Downs (2015) note that gambling, particularly for the poor, offered some happiness, hope and colour to their routinized lives. For this respondent gambling very clearly provided a release from the monotony of her dull, empty life:

Miss K. is employed in a factory. . . . a keen gambler, betting most days on horses. . . .She likes going to the grey-hounds and does a football coupon. She says she is fully aware of her

chances against winning, but it gives her an interest in life, which is otherwise lacking . . . She thinks the excitement she gets is "cheap at the price".(case-study 21)

Although the chapter in *EL&L* on (commercialised) gambling is primarily (given the misery it can cause) anti-gambling, Rowntree, in particular had noted for some years that the activity did provide interest and a hope of escape for those who felt that life offered little and where more worthwhile activities were unavailable. Whether in a minor or major key, the case-studies indicate that the gambling process provided some attainable emotional satisfaction. The respondents in *EL&L* who gambled did not bemoan, to the chagrin of Rowntree and Lavers, the absence of alternative 'worthwhile' leisure activities. Rather, they found in gambling a degree of enjoyment and, sometimes, even real excitement and remained untroubled by knotty questions of ethical justification.

Sexual Promiscuity

There was an assumption amongst the general public that sexual promiscuity was increasing, whilst Rowntree and Lavers used the measure of illegitimacy statistics as an estimate for the rise in "illicit sexual intercourse" (*EL&L*, 1951:205). A Mass Observation survey seems to concur. In the survey, 44% of the sample considered standards of sexual morality were declining, 29% thought that they were much the same as ever, 17% thought they were improving and 10% were undecided (MO, 1949).

Rowntree and Lavers categorise types of sexual promiscuity as either by specific association or prostitution. Specific association is defined as "the action of two specific individuals who have sexual intercourse and who, whatever their motive, at that time each desired to have intercourse exclusively with the other"(*EL&L*: 204). Within this group, they include long-term sexual relationships, casual pick-ups and sex within a circle of friends. These relationships refer exclusively to heterosexual relationships. Homosexuality is discussed under a separate heading of "Perversion". If the more liberal views and values of the twenty-first century were imposed on the case-studies, it is very probable that a smaller number of respondents would consider themselves, or be considered to be, sexually promiscuous. What constituted promiscuity and what was regarded as acceptable sexual behaviour must be understood and interpreted from the perspective of the times in which *EL&L* was written.

About a third of the case studies do not comment on the respondents' sexual habits, but it is assumed here that these people were not promiscuous. Those respondents who explicitly stated they were not sexually promiscuous gave a variety of reasons. Some were adamantly opposed to sexual promiscuity, either on moral or religious grounds:

Miss R. is a barmaid in a small hotel. . . . She is bitterly opposed to sexual promiscuity and despises anyone who indulges in it. (case-study 96)

Miss S. . . . is a strict Roman Catholic. . . . she is in love with a married man . . . Because of her religious beliefs she has always refused to become the mistress of the married man. (case-study 23)

Many of the married respondents were faithful to their spouse, maintaining that their marriages were happy:

Mr. W. . . . says his eleven years of married life have been one long honeymoon, and he grows more in love with his wife every year. (case-study 35)

Not all marriages were so idyllic, and the experiences of an unhappy marriage made some respondents decide to be celibate:

Mrs. J. . . . divorced . . . says that she suffered so much from seeing "that contemptible rat of a husband of mine running after every little bit of skirt", that she has always kept away from men. (case-study 49)

Sexual promiscuity is stated in just over a third of the case-studies. Using the classification of promiscuity in *EL&L*, the majority of cases indicated that the relationships were by “specific association” rather than “prostitution”. A few respondents had exclusive relationships with a lover, but these were temporary arrangements:

Miss. L. . . . has one lover at a time, and is faithful to him while her affection lasts – normally about six months. (case-study 169)

Mr. V. . . . lives with a woman – almost any woman as long as she is young and passionate. . . .He changes women every few months. (case-study 163)

In contrast to these semi-permanent relationships, casual pick-ups were more prevalent and were often accompanied by a hedonistic attitude to life:

Mrs. D. . . . divorced . . . [she has] no lack of lovers from whom she extorts gifts of clothes, jewellery . . . and money. . . . and sees nothing extraordinary, let alone wrong, in her behaviour. (case-study 33).

Mr. D. . . . is very handsome . . . and is vain about his appearance . . . his leisure is divided between watching football or cricket according to the season, drinking in a public house, and making love to any attractive girl he meets. (case-study 108)

With regard to prostitution, the case-studies indicated that a few respondents were prostitutes, and others availed themselves of their services:

Mr. X. . . . Occasionally picks up a prostitute and wishes he could afford a regular mistress. (case-study 17)

Miss R. is a 22-year-old prostitute . . . “A short life and a happy one,” she said, “I don’t want to grow old. I’m having a wonderful time now. It might last another ten years. I don’t care if I die then.”(case-study 101)

Almost all of those who were sexually promiscuous did not regard themselves as morally corrupt and did not consider that they were causing harm to themselves or others. They certainly did not recognise the views of Rowntree and Lavers that their actions were selfish, purely animalistic or that their time could be spent more wisely:

Miss T. is popular with men as she is very attractive . . . she leads an active sexual life . . . and says “I don’t see any harm in it. I always have a steady lover and it doesn’t hurt him if I have an occasional fellow besides.”(case-study 26)

Despite the apparent casual attitudes towards promiscuity, it is worth noting that there are few examples of extra-marital sex with only a small number of married respondents who were sexually promiscuous. It seems that for most respondents, marriage negated or curtailed promiscuity:

Mr. N. . . . was promiscuous before marriage but not since.(case-study20)

The majority of the chapter in *EL&L* is devoted to heterosexual relationships but some respondents were noted to be homosexual. Given the laws regarding homosexuality in 1948, it is surprising that these respondents admitted to being homosexual, but perhaps this demonstrates the level of trust they had in the investigator.

The number of respondents who were sexually promiscuous in 1948 indicates that the greater sexual licence that occurred during the war did not abruptly cease in the post-war period (Costello, 1985) and that ‘the sexual revolution’ of the late 1960s is, to a degree overstated (Szreter and Fisher, 2010; Cook, 2014). While the relatively low number of extra-marital relationships in the case-studies suggests that marriage for the majority of respondents was sacrosanct, those respondents who were sexually promiscuous saw “no harm in it”. They (counter

to Rowntree's and Laver's opinion that promiscuity reduces an individual's moral fibre) found pleasure and enjoyment in the activity and were unperturbed by thoughts as to its moral consequences.

Setting the case-study Interviews in their times

Britain in 1945 found its national debt to be four times what it had been in 1939, its overseas markets had massively reduced, and Lend-Lease ended abruptly on 20th September 1945. To fund the reforms that Labour had promised at the 1945 election and for in fact the country to survive at all the Government needed to address its indebtedness or face ruin. John Maynard Keynes called the situation "a financial Dunkirk". While a combination of a loan from America, the devaluation of sterling and the arrival of the Marshall Plan (April 1948) were to secure the economic future, things at the everyday level were to remain bleak (Cairncross, 1985).

As Arthur Marwick puts it, the period 1945-50 represented a "highly distinctive few years" that were still dominated by the effects of war (Marwick, 1996: 11). While the war had been won and the bombs and rockets had stopped there were after the celebrations of victory the daily facts of the still-present destructive power of the conflict – bomb sites were everywhere, as well as vast destruction of housing stock, the Victorian slums in which many lived had become yet more dilapidated, there were power cuts because of the coal shortage, rationing not only continued but increased, a pre-fab was considered a luxury, petrol could only be used under special circumstances and holidaying abroad was banned. The loss of day-to-day minor treats continued into the early 1950s - whether this was a desire for a pair of new nylons, a bar of milk chocolate or something preferable to generally despised snoek or largely rejected whale meat.

As Prime Minister Attlee broadcast to the Nation on 10th August 1947:

You all know the serious economic position of our country and the drastic steps which the Government are taking to overcome our difficulties. The measures which we are taking will affect everybody. The problem that faces us can only be solved if everyone shares in the sacrifices necessary and joins in the work required for success. . . . I cannot tell you how soon we shall emerge into easier times (Attlee, 1947).

It was in this environment that the fieldwork for *EL&L* was carried out during 1947/48. Although post-war conditions would improve, there was often little sense of uplifted spirits in the years to 1950. *EL&L* captures this atmosphere well, where frequently among a number of respondents there is a prevalent tone of only petty gratifications amid the daily grind. While they may not represent the majority of the population, such respondents nonetheless provide a snapshot of a recognisable group caught in a no man's land where the energies of war have dissipated, and genuine affluence has not arrived. In terms of daily experience and national morale, the effects of the post-war economic boom had yet to be fully experienced – in short, 1950 was not 1960. This was the context, then, for the case-study responses in *EL&L*. For Rowntree and Lavers, these immediate post-war conditions exacerbated what they already felt, namely, that:

*. . . society in general had failed to provide worthwhile ways for people to spend their new leisure and their new earnings. Not only has society failed to provide worthwhile leisure time facilities, but it has also failed to ensure that individuals are fitted, by a broad process of what is now called 'further education' to create interests for themselves. As a consequence, persons untrained to do anything more difficult than read the names of the winners in the stop-press of the evening papers . . . have turned to gambling, faute-de-mieux. (*EL&L*: 147).*

Although it is here specifically gambling that is being addressed, it is not to be doubted that the authors see this "lack of nothing better to do" or mental lethargy as in part responsible for an increase in drinking, smoking and sexual promiscuity. However, it needs to be said that while Rowntree and Lavers may be correct in their assumption, they do not in any extended way raise the possibility that some people may regard gambling, drinking, smoking and recreational sex as real, enduring and worthwhile personal pleasures.

Concluding Remarks

Asa Briggs, in his definitive *Social thought and social action: a study of the work of Seebohm Rowntree, 1871-1954*, recognises *EL&L* as an oddity within Rowntree's corpus, "For the first time Rowntree was concerned in an extensive rather than an intensive piece of research . . ." (Briggs, 1961: 324). He notes that Rowntree himself recognised certain difficulties:

It is comparatively easy to collect facts and make proposals with regard to social and economic matters . . . But when one comes to an investigation into the cultural and spiritual life of the nation one is dealing with imponderables (Briggs, 1961: 324).

Briggs is clear that such imponderables were not overcome in *EL&L* but saw the work as a trailblazer:

*It directed public attention to an area of enquiry which had received far too little attention in Britain from either sociologists or social reformers. It was in that sense yet another pioneer study, and although it has been followed by several other different kinds of investigation and analysis notably Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), there is still a surprising neglect of what, since 1951, has come to be called 'mass culture' (Briggs, 1961:327).*

The neglect referred to by Briggs was somewhat met by the setting up of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1964, but it was to take some further years before expressive life-account data found a routine place in British sociological research or, specifically, in leisure studies (Anderson and Austin, 2012; Snape and Pussard, 2013).

EL&L is important for the historiography of biographical sociology, and its methodological imperfections and eccentricities do not detract from its historical significance. Its statistically questionable but explicitly expressive case-studies are an indication of the emerging methodological differences of the time. These were well represented in the late 1940s in the persons of two of the founders of the Mass Observation project, Tom Harrison and Charles Madge, both of whom had links with Rowntree and Lavers (Harrison, 1947; Madge 1947). These diverging approaches - roughly the anthropological versus the statistical or the qualitative versus the quantitative, often went their separate ways. However, the 'biographical turn' beginning in its modern form in the 1980s has seen a lessening of tension between them as the full particularities of the relationship between selfhood and social structure have become part of established forms of social analysis (Goodwin, 2012; Harrison, 2009).

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Notes

1. To avoid cumbersome repetition *English Life and Leisure* will be given as *EL&L*.
2. For two excellent discussions of Rowntree's classifications of poverty see Veit-Wilson (1986) and Freeman (2011).

3. The advertisement which Lavers successfully responded to was in *The Economist* for 23 March 1946 and ran, *B. SEEBOHM ROWNTREE (Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe) is seeking for a Man of sound education to help him in social work of many kinds, including the investigation of social problems. Essential qualifications required are: A keen interest in social reform on Liberal lines, a knowledge of social questions and social economics, a good statistical sense, and the power of getting on well with all kinds of people. Must work at Hughenden Manor.*
4. Francis J. Brown makes the following observation: *Some would criticise the fact that, while the report is factual, the conclusions are based upon value judgements. These are primarily drawn from Christian ethics but are justified by the authors not only on spiritual grounds, but even more on grounds of national interest* (Brown 1952: 239-240).
5. Among the investigating team were the social commentator Susan Garth and the sociologist Professor Ferdinand Zweig.
6. Some contemporaneous representative examples with serious methodological reservations include Morgan (1951), Ramsey (1951), (Riesman (1952), Wootton (1951). More sympathetic contemporaneous reviews would include Beveridge (1951), Brown (1952), Dearle (1952), Hanson (1952), Rumney (1952), A rare modern retrospective view of the work that is balanced and detailed and broadly sympathetic is Green (2008).
7. Any review by Beveridge (whose famous report of 1942 was to be the foundation of the modern welfare state) on a topic related to character and social life would command wide attention.
8. In some ways, without overstating the case, a point is being made not wholly dissimilar to the more sophisticated position advanced some years later by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957).
9. Russell Kirk is forthright on this point: "Since many of the persons interviewed were encountered loitering in cafes or bars, and since a sprinkling of records of prisoners in juvenile-delinquent camps was added, one may speculate that the opinions of the English solid citizen are under-represented in this sample; but despite that, anyone who has done a bit of sampling on his own hook realizes that the conduct confessed and the convictions expressed by these people are general among a dismayingly large segment of the population. They are the opinions of a population among whom thirty per cent of the babies are conceived out of wedlock, of whom only ten per cent go to church, who spend twice as much on drink and tobacco as upon rents and property-taxes, whose acquisitive habits make it impractical to put towels in public lavatories, whose Sunday reading is the rape and seduction items in the *News of the World*" (Kirk, 1953: 669).
10. Wootton in the same review also makes an observation that ironically would not now, among auto-ethnographers, be seen as needing exclusion from life-accounts, namely, "But what a gold-mine the case histories could be for writers of fiction- 220 characters in search of a novelist!" (Wootton, 1951:7).
11. The *Betting Act of 1853* made the operating of any special 'place', such as a betting house, for purposes of off-course cash betting illegal, although on-course cash betting at race meetings was legal. The *Street Betting Act of 1906* added to the earlier act by making bets on the streets and in other public places illegal. This legislation was not overturned until 1960 when the *Betting and Gaming Act* legalised most forms of gambling including venues where betting could take place, for which see Orford et al (2003).

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