

Researching The Ordinary: The Extraordinary Sociological Research of Pearl Jephcott (1900-1980)

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Introduction and Aims

The lives and works of many sociologists have now been well documented and explored yet even when these biographical accounts are combined with boarder authoritative accounts of the discipline this 'standard history' is by no means a fully complete nor an uncontentious one

Yet needs to be done to examine the history of our discipline and reassess the significant contributions made by 'other' researchers so that we may also reappraise what can be learnt from these ordinary sociologists.

Pearl Jephcott

Pearl Jephcott (1900-1980) is one such researcher whose contribution to sociology, and the sociologies of youth and community in particular, is suitable for reassessment.

Girls Growing Up (1942),
Rising Twenty (1948)
Some Young People (1954)
Married Women Working (1962)
A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill (1964),
Time of One's Own (1967)
Homes in High Flats (1971)



Yet despite the quality and depth of her work she is now largely forgotten save for the occasional citation

Why Jephcott ? Why Now ?

- Jephcott's sociological practice was based on a **need for 'reality congruent' insights** developed in order that she may cast a lens on the realities of working class life. **She wrote richly detailed studies that offered an unsentimental reflection of 'lived realities'**, of the ordinary, of the mundane, of the quotidian
- Jephcott's **methodological innovation and pluralism** in the use of **text, image and non-standard data sources** that mark her out as **being sociologically 'ahead of her time'**. Jephcott was an ordinary researcher researching the ordinary but her legacy is anything but ordinary.
- Not least, because there **is a breadth and depth to her research contribution that rivals that of many 'established' scholars**

Methodological Innovator

- *A Focus on the 'Quotidian': Specimen Days of Women and Children*
- *Early Adoption of Auto/Biographical Methods of Research*
- *The Use of Images*
- *Full Ethnographic Immersion*

The 'Ordinary' in Jephcott's Work

Ordinary is captured fully in two of Jephcott's books – *Girls Growing Up* (1942) and *Rising Twenty: Notes on Some Ordinary Girls* (1948). In *Rising Twenty* Jephcott offers a very useful, if cautionary definition of the ordinary as typical, in her study of one hundred girls from three different parts of the UK:

The girls [in this study] are quite ordinary people, distinguished by no one characteristic except that in March 1945 they were well over 17 and under 21. Typical is a dangerous label; but to a casual observer these particular girls seem to bear a family likeness to their million and a half contemporaries in England and Wales, and seem more or less birds of a feather with the other girls of their immediate localities (Jephcott 1948: 19).

A Time of One's Own (1967)



Homes in High Flats (1971)



Why has Jephcott been Ignored ?

Give her signification contribution in terms of both quantity and quality and her methodological innovation it is surprising Jephcott's work has been 'forgotten'.

- Jephcott's career was characterised by her late entry to the formal academic environment, her mobile trajectory (Nottingham, LSE and Glasgow)
- She did not ever secure a permanent academic post yet she published widely – her posts were short-term, temporary and insecure
- Gender - 'male-dominated staff and the prestige of 'male' theory were normal in the period from 1960 to 1980' Delamont (2003:13)

Conclusions

Jephcott's legacy is important because the themes she dealt with are so contemporary, current and relevant and the manner in which she explores them so innovative. Jephcott deserves to be reconsidered and reappraised.

Revival around Jephcott's work ?

- [\(Re\)Imagining Youth](#) - Susan Batchelor, Alistair Fraser, Leona LI Ngai Ling and Lisa Whittaker