

BREAKING CONVENTIONS

FIVE COUPLES IN SEARCH OF MARRIAGE-CAREER BALANCE AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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5. Having It All: Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Wesley Clair Mitchell

While most women of her generation and class opted for work or marriage, Lucy Sprague Mitchell came close to “having it all.” Both she and her husband, Wesley Clair Mitchell, were acclaimed writers, teachers, and institution builders, she in progressive education, he in economics. Lucy wrote a pioneering book about children’s use of language and co-founded the celebrated Bank Street College of Education, which still trains teachers in the curricula she pioneered. Wesley, one of the foremost economists of his generation, produced groundbreaking analyses of business cycles and developed quantitative indicators of the US economy.

In addition to their distinguished careers, the Mitchells had a fulfilling marriage and raised four children, two of whom were adopted. Lucy wrote about their relationship, careers, and family life in *Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself*, published in 1953, five years after Wesley’s death. Her message — as relevant today as it was in the 1950s — was that both wives and husbands need to adopt new behaviors to make such marriages work. She showed that it was possible for a wife and mother to pursue a career when her husband supported her efforts and helped to raise their children.

When they married in 1912, the Mitchells were determined to construct a dual career marriage, and for the most part, they succeeded admirably. They were more effective than many couples in balancing career and family demands, navigating between marital intimacy and independence, and reshaping the typical gendered division of labor within the home. But their results were not flawless and the process

was not painless. No dramatic demarcations or crises threatened their marriage, but there were stresses, dissatisfactions, and disappointments.

Their relationship shattered conventional gender stereotypes and challenged traditional notions of masculinity, love, and romance. Breaking the mold proved easier for Wesley than for Lucy. Comfortable with himself, Wesley was not very troubled by the way their lives deviated from the norm. But Lucy had deeply internalized many conventional notions of gender roles. It took her years to appreciate that the man she initially found to be too weak and passive was a tower of quiet strength and a model husband for an ambitious woman.

Early Lives

Lucy's upbringing in the 1880s provides a sharp contrast to the domestic life she and Wesley created in the 1910s and 1920s. Born in 1878, Lucy was the fourth of six children of Lucia and Otho Sprague, a wealthy Chicago merchant. Her childhood was troubled and unhappy, marked by her father's repressive parenting, the deaths of two younger brothers, an older sister's emotional instability, her father's struggle with tuberculosis, and her mother's withdrawal and depression. Lucy described the Sprague household as the epitome of a Victorian family in which an authoritative husband and paterfamilias ruled over a submissive family. Otho, who was ten years older than his wife, made all decisions for the family, and strictly disciplined the children in accordance with his puritanical religious beliefs. Lucy and her siblings recited Bible verses at breakfast. Frivolity and time-wasting were frowned upon, as were bright colors and displays of emotion. Punishments were frequent. Lucy blamed her father for stifling her mother's impulsive, fun-loving nature and artistic spirit. The result was a depressed wife and mother, and highly anxious children who carried a strong sense of personal failure and guilt.¹

Lucy found herself retreating into "an inner world" of her own creation and often felt like an "on-looker" in her own life. Writing stories and poems was a secret pleasure that she viewed as a secret

1 This description of Lucy's childhood and upbringing is based on her book, *Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953), pp. 30–51.

vice. Considered too nervous to go to school, she was schooled at home. Like many precocious daughters, she educated herself by reading the books in her father's library. She also learned by listening to the conversations of his business associates and the cultural and civic leaders who came to the Sprague home in the early 1890s. Having made a fortune by establishing a chain of wholesale grocery stores, Otho moved as easily in Chicago's civic arena as in the realm of big industry, big business, and big finance. The Spragues entertained many of the luminaries who flocked to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, as well as members of the faculty and administration at the newly founded University of Chicago.²

Lucy admired the energy and ambition of her father and his business associates, but began to question their politics and values, especially her father's equation of success with making a lot of money. She was fortunate in having female mentors. Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, offered alternative values and an alternative model of success for the impressionable teenager. Alice Freeman Palmer, who sometimes stayed with the Sprague family when she was in Chicago, befriended Lucy and provided her with another, very different, model of female achievement. (Alice's dual career marriage is discussed in Chapter 1.)

Lucy's life became harder after she moved with her parents to Southern California in 1893, when she was fifteen. After years of battling tuberculosis, Otho became a virtual invalid who insisted on very exacting care; Lucia became more withdrawn, sometimes going for a week without speaking. Lucy spent several long, miserable months serving as the family nurse, housekeeper, and fill-in cook before she was enrolled at the Marlborough School in Los Angeles.³ She boarded at the school during the week and returned home on weekends to resume her caregiving duties. The school was a lifeline for Lucy, providing her with a solid education and an opportunity to be with girls her own age. She blossomed and formed friendships that lasted for decades.

2 LSM, *Two Lives* (TL), pp. 58, 59, 64–66.

3 Lucy wrote that she did this for a year (TL, p. 110). Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 37, explains that it was about six months.

Miserable at the prospect of returning home after she graduated in 1896, Lucy sent her older sister, Mary, a despairing letter announcing her desire to go to college. Mary, who had married Adolph Miller, an economics professor at the University of Chicago, did not offer any help. But she shared Lucy's letter with Alice Freeman Palmer when the two couples met in Paris. Alice immediately proposed that Lucy live with her and George and attend Radcliffe, and persuaded Lucy's parents to agree.

Lucy's life changed dramatically when she lived with the Palmers. They provided a warm, loving, and happy home that was as nurturing as it was stimulating. She became a surrogate daughter to the childless Alice, who introduced her as "my only daughter." Going on "sprees" with Alice, listening to George read poetry, conversing with the Harvard faculty who came to dinner, and meeting the educational leaders who arrived from around the country to consult with the Palmers gave Lucy an education that was as important as the formal classes she took at Radcliffe. Alice's support and example were especially consequential. "No one who lived with Alice Freeman Palmer could believe that an intellectual career must make a woman unwomanly — or unfeminine, either," Lucy noted in *Two Lives*.⁴ Alice's ability to combine an "eager zest for life" with a light touch in wielding formidable executive ability made a deep impression on Lucy.⁵ She always regarded Alice as "one of the great people of the world," and maintained that no one other than Wesley wielded a stronger influence on her life.⁶

Lucy experienced her first romance during her college years. She fell in love with Joe, a "blonde charmer" who was a young, financially insecure cousin of George, and a frequent visitor to the Palmer home in Cambridge. Joe was in love with her, but the relationship ended disastrously in her senior year when he was found to be peddling lewd photographs to Harvard students. He claimed he was selling them to make enough money to marry Lucy. Advised by George to jump bail after his arrest, Joe fled to Mexico. He wrote to Lucy, asking her to send

4 LSM, *TL*, p. 193.

5 LSM, *TL*, p. 73.

6 LSM, manuscript chapter on her Chicago years. Columbia University Library, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS#0884, Lucy Sprague Mitchell Papers (LSM Papers). Lucy wrote a draft of an unpublished autobiography (UA) in the 1940s, and later incorporated revised sections of it into *Two Lives*, published in 1953.

him money since she had so much of it. His “bitter, recriminating” letter shocked her more than his involvement in selling the pictures.⁷

After she graduated from Radcliffe in 1900, Lucy’s life was again taken over by her family’s needs and expectations. She spent the summer of 1900 in Maine, caring for her psychologically fragile sister, Nancy; she lived with a cousin in Chicago during the winter and officially “came out” in Chicago Society. Throughout the spring and summer of 1901, she devotedly nursed her mother, who came to Chicago to be treated for cancer of the abdominal membranes. After Lucia died in the fall of 1901, Lucy returned with her father to Pasadena. Depressed and desperate for something to do, she started to train as a landscape gardener. When she fell seriously ill several months later, relatives brought her back to Chicago.

Once again, Alice came to Lucy’s rescue: She invited Lucy to travel in Europe with her and George during his sabbatical year, and help out with the book he was writing about his namesake, the English poet George Herbert. The trip began happily in the fall of 1902, but ended in tragedy. After several weeks in England, the trio moved on to Paris, where Alice fell ill with an intestinal blockage. Days later, she died after an emergency operation. (For details, see Chapter 1, p. 85.) Her last words to George were “Take care of Lucy.”⁸

Grief-stricken, Lucy returned to Cambridge with George and lived in his house for many months. Greatly depressed by the deaths of Alice and her own mother, struggling against George’s dependence on her, Lucy felt rudderless and trapped. She supplemented her work on his book with graduate courses and a part-time job as a secretary to the Dean of Radcliffe College, but she felt unable to take control of her life. George had fashioned “a vise even stronger than Father forged for me,” she realized, one that left her “drained of all capacity to live except as his shadow.”⁹ It was not until George proposed marriage, claiming he wanted to fulfill Alice’s instruction to look after her, that Lucy was able to break free. The shock of his inappropriate proposal — she was twenty-three, he was over

7 LSM, *TL*, pp. 125–26.

8 LSM, *TL*, p. 132.

9 LSM, *TL*, p. 133.

sixty — and distortion of Alice's dying request finally galvanized Lucy to take action.¹⁰

Once again, the academic world provided her with a lifeline. Lucy left Cambridge when President Benjamin Wheeler of the University of California at Berkeley offered her a position at the college, intending that she would become its first Dean of Women. Wheeler had gotten to know Lucy during the summer of 1903 when she was visiting her sister, Mary, and brother-in-law, Adolph Miller, who was teaching at Berkeley. Writing about Wheeler's offer more than forty years later, Lucy stressed how both were taking a major risk: each had only a vague notion of what she would do as dean, and she had no training for the job. Wheeler proposed that she come to Berkeley and get to know the school and its students; after a year or so, he and she could jointly develop her position as Dean of Women. She agreed, but insisted — at George Palmer's urging — that she also be given some teaching responsibility.¹¹

Lucy arrived in Berkeley in the fall of 1903 and spent several years as an assistant adviser, taking courses, and teaching a few of her own before being appointed Dean of Women and Assistant Professor of English in 1906. As dean, Lucy organized social and cultural activities and club houses for the female students, none of whom were housed on campus. She tried to broaden their horizons by taking them on field trips to San Francisco, training them in the elements of self-government, and informing them about employment possibilities in fields other than teaching.¹²

It was at Berkeley that Lucy got to know Wesley Clair Mitchell, although they had met in 1900 or 1901 at a dinner given by the Adolph Millers in Chicago. (Robert Herrick, the relative of George Herbert Palmer and friend of Alice who would become Elsie Clews Parsons's lover in the 1920s, was a guest at the same dinner.¹³) Unlike Lucy, Wesley grew up in a warm and loving home where parents and children shared common interests and activities and delighted in talking to each other about them.¹⁴ His father, John Wesley Mitchell, a physician,

10 LSM, "Unpublished Autobiography" (UA), LSM Papers. Lucy did not mention George's marriage proposal in *TL*.

11 LSM, *TL*, pp. 133–34; LSM, UA. LSM Papers.

12 LSM, *TL*, pp. 194, 198, 207, 210. See also, Antler, pp. 100–5.

13 LSM, *TL*, p. 99. For Herrick's relationship with Elsie Clews Parsons, see Chapter 3.

14 LSM, *TL*, p. 28.

never recovered from the leg wound he suffered in the Civil War and eventually became an invalid. In contrast to Lucy's submissive mother, Wesley's mother, Lucy Medora McClellan Mitchell (Medora), to whom Wesley was very close, was a strong advocate of women's rights. Born in 1847, she supported women's suffrage and practiced birth control after she had seven children in eleven years. Believing that women should have "a controlling voice in their own life interests", she assumed considerable responsibility for the household as her husband's health deteriorated.¹⁵ John Mitchell made a series of bad business investments, and money was a constant worry. Nevertheless, Medora, who had studied at Oberlin College and taught school before her marriage, made sure that her daughters as well as her sons had opportunities for post-secondary education.¹⁶

Like Lucy, Wesley had shouldered a lot of family responsibilities at an early age — "far too early," he would tell her. Even as a youth he was "earnest and serious."¹⁷ Compared to Lucy's circles in Chicago, his world growing up in Decatur, Illinois was narrow and small. But it widened considerably when he became an undergraduate at the newly opened University of Chicago in 1892. After graduating in 1896, he did a year of graduate study in economics at the University of Halle in Germany, and then returned to the University of Chicago to complete his PhD degree. He worked for a year at the Census Office in Washington, DC before joining the economics department at the University of Chicago in 1900. His first book, based on his doctoral dissertation, was published in 1902.

Courtship: Mastering a "Primitive" Woman

Adolph Miller, Lucy's brother-in-law, brought Wesley to Berkeley in late 1902, about nine months before Lucy arrived. His course on "Economic Origins" was one of the first she took at the university, and they met frequently at the homes of mutual friends. He had made a

15 LSM, *TL*, p. 27; Medora Mitchell to WCM [late 1911 or early 1912], and June 18, 1912. LSM Papers.

16 Wesley's older sister, Beulah, attended and then taught at the Art Students League in New York.

17 WCM to LS, October 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

good impression on her in Chicago, but seeing more of him in Berkeley, she decided he was intellectually advanced but socially and emotionally immature.¹⁸

Neither Lucy nor Wesley was prepared for the dramatic events that changed their relationship in May 1907. Arriving at a fancy dress party in a gypsy costume, Lucy mesmerized the guests by dancing a spontaneous and lengthy gypsy dance. Adolph Miller reprimanded her for forgetting “her position” and dancing with abandon. But Wesley was enchanted and — by his own admission — fell completely in love with her. He quickly sent her two poems which expressed great admiration for her. Two weeks later, he wrote her a letter telling her he loved her and wanted to marry her. Lucy — shocked and perplexed — claimed to be emotionally attached to another man and wrote a firm refusal. Instead of pressing his case, Wesley retreated.¹⁹

Lucy did not tell anyone about this incident; Wesley confided only in his older, married friend Sarah (Sadie) Hardy Gregory, who also knew Lucy. Over the next few years, Lucy and Wesley saw very little of each other. He immediately buried himself in writing the draft of a book on the money economy. After spending five months working for the US Immigration Commission in San Francisco in 1908, he headed east to teach at Harvard University. When he returned to Berkeley in the fall of 1909, Lucy was about to leave to spend the academic year 1909–1910 in Berlin with Berkeley President Benjamin Wheeler and his family.

Both Lucy and Wesley were back in Berkeley in the fall of 1910. They could not avoid meeting, but Wesley felt very awkward in her company.²⁰ Nevertheless, in the spring of 1911, he was arranging hiking expeditions that Lucy joined. Their relationship took another dramatic turn when they spent five weeks camping in the Sierra Mountains with

18 LSM, *TL*, p. 143.

19 This paragraph is based on LSM, *TL*, pp. 213–14; the Mitchells’ courtship letters; and the letters Wesley wrote to Sarah Hardy Gregory on May 11, 1907; May 16, 1907; and June 7, 1907. He sent drafts of the two poems — “The Dancer” and “Heart’s Quest” — to Gregory, asking her advice on the wording and the rhymes. Typescripts of the letters and poems are in Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MsColl\Mitchell, Wesley Clair Mitchell Papers (WCM Papers). Neither Wesley’s proposal letter nor Lucy’s response has survived (*TL*, p. 214).

20 WCM to Sarah Hardy Gregory, May 17, 1911. LSM Papers.

mutual friends in the summer of 1911. Their entourage included three walkers, four riders, a cook, a packer, and seventeen horses and mules carrying supplies.²¹ Lucy found Wesley to be a different personality in the mountains than in the valley — more fun-loving and less serious, bolder and more adventurous, even something of a strong, protective hero. Twice he rescued her from danger, by ordering her to climb a tree while he chased off a herd of cows, and by coming back for her in the midst of an electric storm after she had gotten separated from the group. “Never will I forget him as he came leaping down those boulders in that wild storm,” she wrote forty years later in *Two Lives*.²² To mark their new relationship, Lucy gave them new names. She dubbed him “Robin” as a reminder of the great outdoors and his perpetually rosy cheeks. She became “Alta”, a reference to high mountain peaks. Lucy would call him Robin for the rest of his life, but Alta did not stick. Wesley went by many names: his parents, siblings, and early friends, used his middle name, Clair, although his mother often called him “Bonnie” in reference to his looks. To his professional colleagues and the friends he made in New York, he was Wesley.

They returned from their trip “deeply in love”, according to Lucy. Nevertheless, like many career-oriented women, she hesitated to marry. Her struggle to overcome the marriage-career dilemma was complicated by uncertainty about her career path. She had told President Wheeler in the summer of 1909, a few months after her father died, that she intended to leave the deanship within a few years.²³ Feeling that academia was too much of an ivory tower, she turned down offers from Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, to become Dean of Barnard College.²⁴ By the fall of 1911, she still was not sure what she wanted to do.²⁵ Undaunted by her blossoming relationship with Wesley, she left Berkeley in October for a previously planned four-month trip to New York where she shadowed several prominent women as they went about their work so

21 LSM, *TL*, pp. 216–17.

22 LSM, *TL*, pp. 220–21.

23 LSM, *TL*, p. 204.

24 LSM, *TL*, p. 210; Nicholas Murray Butler to LS, May 28, 1909; July 12, 1909; August 31, 1909; and July 14, 1910. LSM Papers.

25 LSM, *TL*, p. 210.

she could understand what they did.²⁶ She gathered information about emerging employment opportunities for her Berkeley undergraduates, but also explored possibilities for herself and made valuable contacts with leading female professionals.

Lucy and Wesley exchanged more than sixty letters while she was away. Like other nineteenth-century couples, they were engaging in the courtship ritual of “testing” their suitability as life partners by exploring their personalities and their ideas about marriage.²⁷ They confessed their worst faults, voiced their greatest fears, and probed to see their loved one’s reaction to these revelations. The testing process was common, but their concerns were very different from most couples of their day. Lucy was testing two things in particular: how supportive Wesley would be as the husband of a wife who worked outside the home, and whether he was forceful enough to be the kind of “masterful man” she desired for a husband. The first issue was more easily resolved than the second. Lucy did not yet understand that the kind of support she was looking for was unlikely to come from a man who epitomized conventional notions of masculinity.

Lucy’s experiences in New York gave her a renewed sense of purpose, a greater appreciation of her talents, and a clearer focus for her ambition. She felt she could hold her own among the female leaders she was meeting, and found that her ideas about education interested philanthropists and journalists. Despite her lack of training, she felt the equal of the women she was spending time with in New York and confident that she had the potential to be one of the “big, educational constructors.”²⁸ All this strengthened her desire to work after she married. She put Wesley on notice: “[W]hat is a necessity is that I have an outlet, a use for my own constructive force — & I think, though I am not certain, that that would have to be wider though not deeper than my

26 The women Lucy shadowed included Lillian Wald at the Henry Street Settlement (where Lucy roomed with Florence Kelley); Mary Richmond at the Charity Organization; Pauline Goldmark, who was conducting a social survey; and Julia Richman, who was working on education in the public schools. Lucy also volunteered with the Salvation Army. (LSM, *TL*, pp. 208–9.)

27 See Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

28 LS to WCM, October 29, 1911. See also, LS to WCM, November 3, 1911 and November 8, 1911. LSM Papers.

home. This, theoretically, you would approve of. But practically, would you? Could you? Would I?"²⁹

Nevertheless, she assured him that his work would have precedence over hers. "If I marry you, your work and your standards shall prevail [...] if your work is not more important than mine (leaving aside the most important of all which is *our* work, our home, and our possible children), why then, I do not wish to marry you."³⁰

As her ambitions grew, Lucy became more insistent that her future partner would have to support her work. "This is the genuine, the unquenchable, the vital me & you must reckon with it if you would reckon with me," she warned Wesley.³¹ Describing her desire to fight injustice, "straighten out the human mess", and leave a legacy that would outlive her, she asked Wesley whether he was sure he wanted "a wife who is urged by such passionate intensity."³² He took her seriously and encouraged her to think big and aim high. "Your letter about your budding interests and your plans for future work pleases me to the core of my heart," he assured her.³³ A few days later, he elaborated:

Your need of work is to me one of your most splendid qualities. I not only admire but also sympathize with it, because it answers my expanding need. To stifle it would be to cut off the sweet source of happiness to you and helpfulness to others. If marriage threatened such a result you certainly ought not to marry. Furthermore I agree most heartily that the home in and of itself would not give adequate scope to your distinctive energies. You have proved your fitness to serve a larger circle, & you ought not willfully to make it narrow.³⁴

Knowing how important work was to him, he accepted that Lucy would feel the same, and applauded her determination. "On the critical issue I am perfectly clear — I should be prouder of you for holding to your constructive work, for marrying *like a man* without narrowing your sphere & usefulness," he wrote.³⁵

29 LS to WCM, October 29, 1911. LSM Papers.

30 Ibid.

31 LS to WCM, November 3, 1911. LSM Papers.

32 LS to WCM, November 8, 1911. LSM Papers.

33 WCM to LS, November 3, 1911. LSM Papers.

34 WCM to LS, November 6, 1911. LSM Papers.

35 WCM to LS, November 3, 1911. Emphasis added. LSM Papers.

Wesley was able to bring a sympathetic understanding to the problem because his friendships with several women enlightened him about the difficulties highly educated women encountered when they married and lacked a professional outlet, and the challenges they faced if they tried to maintain a career after they married. His closest friend and confidante in Berkeley, Sarah Hardy Gregory, had been a Fellow in Economics at the University of Chicago when he was an undergraduate. Sadie had experienced her own version of the marriage-career dilemma and agonized for years about marrying Warren Gregory, a lawyer from a prominent and wealthy San Francisco family. She taught briefly at Wellesley College before she married him in 1896. Constrained by societal expectations, Sadie did not work after she married, but she struggled to find an outlet for her formidable intellectual gifts.³⁶ When Wesley was writing the material that would be incorporated into his magnum opus, *Business Cycles*, she served as his intellectual sounding board and critic. She read the chapters he churned out in the late spring of 1907, just after Lucy rejected his precipitous marriage proposal. Both Sadie and Wesley derived immense satisfaction from this arrangement, and it made him optimistic about the pleasures of sharing his work with a future wife.³⁷

From his friend Dorothea Rhodes Lummis Moore, Wesley knew something about the challenges couples faced in dual career relationships. Dorothea had gone to medical school and practiced medicine during her marriage to the journalist Charles Lummis. Five years after they divorced, she married Ernest Carroll Moore in 1896. When Ernest taught at Berkeley between 1900 and 1906, Dorothea was head of the South Park Settlement in San Francisco and working for reforms in the juvenile court system.³⁸

36 Sadie and Wesley had a conversation about the difficulties these social norms created for intellectually-inclined women who married well-to-do men with successful careers. WCM, Diary Appointment Book, September 3, 1907. WCM Papers. Wesley made daily entries in his Diary Appointment Books from 1905–1948. They are an invaluable source of information about his and his family's activities.

37 For more on Wesley's friendship with Sadie and the help she provided him in 1907, see below, pp. 397–399.

38 The difficulties Dorothea's career caused in her first marriage to Charles Lummis are discussed in Lystra, pp. 207–13, and Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 126–27. Dorothea and Wesley corresponded for years after each

The only downside Wesley contemplated if Lucy were to have a career of her own was the likelihood that she would be too busy to help him with his work. He would have liked her advice on the manuscript of *Business Cycles* in the fall of 1911, but knowing the many demands on her time, he did not think it “fair” to ask for her help. But he wanted to work with her in the future: “To feel that we are working together will be a joy to me. And won’t it be to you? Could we do anything which will bring us closer together in the most delightful & lasting fashion?” he asked. He was convinced that her “keen insight, well-proportioned judgment [...] & excellent literary taste” would greatly improve the final product. “Together we can make it much better than I can make it alone, or aided only by the criticisms of professional friends & Sadie Gregory,” he assured her.³⁹ (At this time, Lucy knew little about the assistance Sadie had provided. But she would be greatly troubled to discover, forty years later, just how much help Sadie had given Wesley.)

Despite the fact that they knew “few married couples who attempt and still fewer who succeed” in pursuing separate work, Wesley was confident that he and Lucy would succeed and have a stronger marriage as a result. “Neither wishes to throw the whole burden of managing our common life upon the other, neither wishes to absorb the other’s whole life,” he noted. “Each of us can feel a just pride in what the other accomplishes. And this feeling will enable us to make what to others might be a bar separating them in sympathy a bond uniting us — a bond re-inforcing our love and steadying the life we build together.”⁴⁰ By helping each other in their work, he insisted, they “would pull together & in the end I fancy that we’d find we had a common load.”⁴¹

Wesley’s efforts to convince Lucy he took her work seriously were bolstered by the practical support he offered. When she announced that New York would be the best location for her work, he replied that moving to New York would also be helpful to his career.⁴² When she

left Berkeley, and saw each other when Dorothea visited New York. Ernest Moore would later become Vice President and Provost of the University of California, Los Angeles.

39 WCM to LS, November 15, 1911. LSM Papers.

40 WCM to LS, November 6, 1911. LSM Papers.

41 WCM to LS, October 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

42 LS to WCM, October 29, 1911; WCM to LS, November 6, 1911. LSM Papers.

said she might need to return to New York for six weeks on her own in the spring, he agreed that work and duty sometimes had to take precedence over personal pleasure. However, he did not want her to spend a year alone in New York, because he felt that at their relatively advanced ages, they should not delay too long before starting a family.⁴³

Wesley's solution for the problem of raising children when a woman worked was hiring help to attend to the children's routine care.⁴⁴ He did not propose that he would take on any household responsibilities, but Lucy had reason to believe that he would help out in emergencies. While she was in New York, Wesley devoted a great deal of time to helping his sister, Eunice, and her family when Eunice was ill and her husband was away. Both Wesley and Sadie Gregory kept Lucy informed about the help Wesley provided, despite the toll it took on his writing.⁴⁵

Wesley found it easier to ease Lucy's doubts about his willingness to support her work than to overcome her fear that he would not be "a masterful man." She was immensely ambivalent about what she wanted in a man and a marriage. She assumed that if they married, she and Wesley would have a marriage of "companionable equality."⁴⁶ But she criticized him for not being more commanding and assertive. Despite her independence and ambition, she was susceptible to the romantic ideology and gender stereotypes that portrayed men as masterful and in charge and women as submissive and dependent. Lucy repeatedly expressed a desire to be conquered by Wesley; she wanted to feel compelled to offer him "the homage which your soul demands of hers."⁴⁷ Similarly conditioned by societal stereotypes, Alice Freeman Palmer, Grace Chisholm Young, and Beatrice Webb were other ambitious women who wanted to be overwhelmed by a powerful, heroic man.

43 WCM to LS, December 14, 1911. See also, WCM to LS, November 6, 1911. LSM Papers.

44 WCM to LS, November 6, 1911. LSM Papers.

45 WCM to LS, October 23, 1911; November 6, 1911; November 7, 1911; November 10, 1911; November 12, 1911. Sarah Hardy Gregory to LS, November 8, 1911. See also, WCM to Medora Mitchell, December 3, 1911. All in LSM Papers.

46 LS to WCM, December 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

47 LS to WCM, November 20, 1911. LSM Papers.

Lucy began questioning Wesley's forcefulness as soon as she left for New York. Explaining that she found him "academic" and "unaggressive," she reminded him how he had meekly accepted her rejection of his declaration of love in 1907 and made no effort to change her mind. "A man of more force — not intellectual or even emotional, but more force in meeting the world & whipping it into line would have persisted & insisted," she pointed out.⁴⁸

She continued to hammer the point throughout the fall. "Your character, your loveliness & your intelligence appeal to me convincingly. In those three great essentials I acknowledge you my superior & find yielding easy," she wrote. "But there is a subtle something which I have & which you lack — a something which kept me from considering the possibility of marrying you for many years [....]. It is called — when we force ourselves to name it 'personality.'"⁴⁹ Lucy struggled to clarify what she meant. She was talking not about "character" but about "something quite different: something which conquers tho' it does not deserve to, a something which compels tho' it does not command, a something which apparently wins without effort [... something that] stands for a real if intangible power."⁵⁰ The key point, for Lucy, was that she had this intangible source of power and Wesley did not.

Deeply ambivalent about her own powerful "personality", Lucy wanted a partner who would help keep it in check, and she was not sure Wesley would be equal to the challenge. "[My personality] must be guided or it will run riot. Can you do that without breaking its spirit? I doubt if anything but personality can control personality. I doubt if intelligence or character can ever really curb the impetuous rush without bruising & mutilating the intangible wild thing," she cautioned.⁵¹

She conceded that they would be "very happy", "far happier than most", if they married. But still she hesitated, knowing that "in my soul I should not be humbled. I should not feel the best had come to me. I should not feel that to serve you was the greatest privilege that had come

48 LS to WCM, October 26, 1911. LSM Papers.

49 LS to WCM, December 2, 1911. She used almost exactly the same language in her letter of December 18, 1911, but substituted "sweetness" for loveliness. LSM Papers.

50 LS to WCM, December 2, 1911. LSM Papers.

51 Ibid.

to me."⁵² Lucy's reservations show that at some deep emotional core she was, as she put it, a very "primitive" woman. Feeling that Wesley had no understanding of female psychology, she explained to him:

A woman always feels a rush of gratitude, founded on humility, that she is given to serve a man. She bows with proud humbleness before the masculine creature she acknowledges as her lord, her leader [...]. The fact remains that *your masculinity* does not compel me. It is not a thing to be reasoned about: it is a thing to be felt [...] I am too much the primitive woman to be satisfied without this sense of leadership, this feeling that my husband is a 'masterful man' [...]. Character you have and I honor you; intellect you have & I admire you; Sweetness of nature you have and I love you: but leadership, mastery, personality you have not & you do not compel me.⁵³

Lucy was brutally candid in telling Wesley that she feared her desire for children would lead her to marry "a man whose personality is less than mine & whose conquest of me was due not to dominance of his soul over mine but to the cowardice of my own soul."⁵⁴ She was equally honest in admitting that she did not love him as fully as she knew she could love a man.⁵⁵ She was referring to her relationship with her college boyfriend Joe, whom she described in her unpublished autobiography as "the one human being I might have loved enough to make me forget myself."⁵⁶ Knowing that Wesley did not expect or elicit such a loss of self was deeply troubling to Lucy.

Her doubts about Wesley's "masculinity" did not mean that she found him physically unappealing. "I want you with all the quivering

52 LS to WCM, December 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

53 Ibid. Emphasis added. The reference to female psychology comes from LS to WCM, October 26, 1911. LSM Papers.

54 LS to WCM, December 2, 1911. Lucy's fear that she might marry in order to have children was hinted at in a "Round Robin" letter she wrote to her Radcliffe classmates on the train to New York in October, 1911. She described her longing to have a child in a poem, "The World's Gifts", which she enclosed in LS to WCM, December 3, 1911. When Wesley took this as a sign that her resistance was weakening, she assured him that the poem was written "in an impersonal frenzy" with "no thought of you or any man." (LS to WCM, December 18, 1911.) After Wesley's death, she recalled how fearful she had been that her desire to have children might have prompted her to marry a man she did not love. LSM, "Robin" (November 20, 1948), pp. 12–13. All in LSM Papers.

55 LS to WCM, November 27, 1911 and December 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

56 LSM, UA, quoted in Antler, p. 86.

longing of a passionate woman — I want the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, and your lips, the whole of you. If I were with you, I would put my arms around you and come close,” she wrote.⁵⁷ Wesley was equally attracted to Lucy, but reminded her, “There is so much more in both of us and between both of us than passionate longing to be in each other’s arms.”⁵⁸

Lucy’s doubts were compounded by knowing that her friends did not think Wesley was a suitable mate for her. She was painfully aware that she would be “marrying down” by choosing Wesley. “You do not compel *my* world. The people you draw to you are not *my* people. You need to be interpreted to be understood by those who instinctively choose me as their own,” she lamented.⁵⁹ Planning to go camping with Wesley in the Yosemite when she returned to California, Lucy insisted that her friends, not his, should accompany them. “I want to decide [the marriage question] when my kind of people are with me to keep me conscious of *my* background,” she explained.⁶⁰

What bothered Lucy were not the differences in their material circumstances, but the differences in their social worlds. Her self-defined milieu was a world of achievers, players on a big stage. Her father, a self-made millionaire, was a pillar of Chicago’s civic and cultural life. She went from his home to the Palmers’ home where she met many of the nation’s academic leaders. In New York, she felt comfortable in the company of women who were carving out new professions and heading new institutions. The men and women Lucy identified as part of her world when Wesley was wooing her — Marion

57 LS to WCM, November 8, 1911. LSM Papers.

58 WCM to LS, November 15, 1911. His passion for her: WCM to LS, November 14, 1911 and November 26, 1911. LSM Papers.

59 LS to WCM, December 2, 1911, emphasis in the original. Similarly, LS to WCM, December 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

60 LS to WCM, November 22, 1911, emphasis in the original. LSM Papers.

Jones Farquhar,⁶¹ Benjamin Wheeler,⁶² and Adolph Miller⁶³ — were people who assumed their own importance and made others respond accordingly. She wanted to be surrounded by people who made things happen. Less successful individuals were not only weak but dull.

Lucy wanted to live in a world of luminaries, and she was not sure Wesley would provide entrée to it. As he himself admitted, his social circles constituted a “very small world.” The people he described as his intimates — his family, Sadie Gregory, Dorothea Moore, and the economist Thorstein Veblen — were not people in prominent positions, but people he was drawn to because he thought he could help them.⁶⁴ (Although Veblen is more famous today than anyone in Lucy’s social world, in his own day he was a controversial figure and thinker who was let go from one academic position after another.⁶⁵) Wesley’s own career trajectory may also have given Lucy pause. He had shown promise, and was sought after for academic jobs, but at the age of thirty-seven he had yet to make a major intellectual contribution to economics. Lucy was also

61 Lucy and Marion Jones Farquhar (1879–1965) had been intimate friends since they were roommates at the Marlborough School in their teens. Marion was the daughter of Senator John Percival Jones of Nevada who made a fortune in silver mines and railroads and co-founded the city of Santa Monica. Lucy visited the family in their home where she met many prominent people. Marion won several US tennis titles and, in 1900, two Olympic medals in tennis. She married architect Robert D. Farquhar in 1903, had three sons, and lived in Greenwich Village. After their divorce, she became a well-known violinist and voice coach. (LSM, *TL*, pp. 112–14; <https://www.olympedia.org/athletes/2736>.)

62 Benjamin Wheeler, President of the University of California at Berkeley from 1899 to 1919, led the school through an unprecedented period of physical growth and expansion and consolidated the power of the university president at the expense of the faculty. During the year Lucy spent with Wheeler and his family in 1909–1910, when he was a visiting professor at the University of Berlin, Wheeler was treated as an important dignitary by Prussian society and politicians. Lucy accompanied the Wheelers to state dinners, social occasions, and university functions. The Berkeley faculty opposed Wheeler’s “autocratic” ways and forced him out of office in 1919. (LSM, *TL*, pp. 205–7; “Days of Cal: A Brief History of Cal: Part 2”, www.bancroft.berkeley.edu/CAIHistory/brief-history.2.html)

63 Adolph C. Miller married Lucy’s older sister, Mary, in 1895. In 1902, he became a Professor of Economics at Berkeley with responsibility for developing its College of Commerce. He left Berkeley when he was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Interior in 1913. In 1914 he became one of the original members of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve (www.millerinstitute.berkeley.edu/page.php).

64 WCM to LS, December 7, 1911. LSM Papers.

65 For Veblen’s checkered career and Wesley’s efforts to help him, see Elizabeth Walkins Jorgensen and Henry Irvin Jorgensen, *Thorstein Veblen, Victorian Firebrand* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1999).

quite ambivalent about the academic arena as a venue for achievement. She felt that academia was too much of an ivory tower and too many academics were pedants. Nor did she want to live in a world which she feared would never take her seriously because she lacked an advanced degree.⁶⁶

Wesley tried various stratagems to counter Lucy's arguments and concerns. By the middle of November, he had become more assertive about expressing his opinions as truth and more likely to treat her as a weak female who needed his strong masculine guidance and protection. He described her as "a brave honest little girl" and insisted, "Oh, little one, you do need my help in solving this problem, whether that help would prove serviceable in the future or a burden."⁶⁷ Noting that it was she "who most needs help — the one whose inner strength is less — the one whose fluttering spirit is more likely to fail midst the storms of life," he suggested that together they could develop a plan of action for her future work. He even proposed a specific topic for her to research.⁶⁸

Lucy was outraged when Wesley suggested she lacked perseverance and focus. "I must say that my spirit has never 'fluttered in the storm of life.' If I have steered an unsteady course, it has not been from lack of courage or lack of vision," she protested.⁶⁹ Nor was she inclined to accept Wesley's advice about the future direction of her work. Ignoring his suggestion that she take up philanthropy, she developed her own plan, her "vision" she called it, for incorporating sex education and community values into a public school curriculum.⁷⁰

None of this seemed to bother Wesley. He applauded her plan and made no further effort to guide her. Nevertheless, he refused to accept

66 LS to WCM, December 25, 1911. Her lack of training: LS to WCM, October 29, 1911. LSM Papers. Her negative view of academia: LSM, *TL*, p. 211.

67 WCM to LS, November 18, 1911; LS to WCM, November 20, 1911. See also WCM to LS, December 16, 1911 in which he refers to her as "such a satisfactory girl!". LSM Papers.

68 WCM to LS, December 5, 1911. LSM Papers.

69 LS to WCM, December [12?], 1911. LSM Papers.

70 Lucy sent him an outline of her plan for educating women and girls about sex, but later noted that her ideas "had crystalized and broadened." (LS to WCM, December 20, 1911, LSM Papers.) On the train from New York, she wrote two papers: one that detailed her views on sex education, and one on educational innovations to address the needs of "The Whole Child." LSM, *TL*, pp. 210–11.

Lucy's judgment that because he lacked "personality", he lacked mastery and leadership. "There is a considerable force within me which does not fear your force or acknowledge its own inferiority," he assured her. He conceded that many of her friends "would always consider me a queer stick, & wonder why so fine a woman threw herself away on such a person." But he argued that she was too courageous and independent to let herself be swayed by people who "would laugh at you for making an eccentric choice." Moreover, he promised, "[T]hose who really matter 'will understand & value me.'"⁷¹

Wesley did not agree that he would be the weaker partner if they married. Countering her charge that he lacked "leadership, mastery, and personality," he outlined an alternative vision of leadership as proof of his "virility." His mastery was expressed in his role as a pioneer and explorer rather than in commanding others.

Your world is made up of men & women who are captains of bands doing work in the well-settled busy land of the present. You feel in yourself the capacity to be such a captain — to sway the interests of your contemporaries & to work out your visions in the lives of men & women. Now I am not fond of this kind of life. The land of the present strikes me as a most unsupportable place for the mass of men [...]. So I leave the land of the present & go forth into the land of the future as an explorer [...]. Such an explorer is, if you like, no leader [...] he can do better work if he travels alone.⁷²

Old-fashioned leaders saw someone like himself "as a visionary, an unpracticed person, one not to be trusted with the direction of affairs", Wesley admitted. In his view, it was the captains of industry and trade who "lack vision, courage, insight." He asked Lucy to join him in carving out new ideals and promised that if she did, she would no longer think he lacked virility. Wesley's vision of a pioneering leader struck a responsive chord in Lucy but did not erase all her doubts. "It may be I am too much of an explorer by temperament to follow anyone's trail even yours, or it may be that I do not feel you are a sure-guide, that I have not found *my* leader. I do not know. But something there is that

71 WCM to LS, December 7, 1911. LSM Papers.

72 WCM to LS, December 2, 1911. LSM Papers.

risers in inexplicable pride & refuses to let me make the last surrender," she responded.⁷³

When they set off for Yosemite, Wesley was confident that his sense that Lucy belonged to him would triumph over her feeling that he could not "dominate" her. He was right, but several more weeks went by before Lucy finally agreed to marry him. Adolph Miller offered Wesley his congratulations but informed him that the family was "somewhat divided" over the engagement. Lucy believed the Millers disapproved of her choice.⁷⁴

Planning for their new life together, Lucy and Wesley decided to resign from Berkeley and move to New York, although neither had a job there. During a hectic spring, Wesley completed the manuscript of *Business Cycles*, and Lucy produced an elaborate Greek pageant, written, acted, and danced by Berkeley's women students. They married on May 8, 1912 in a simple ceremony attended by a few family members and close friends, despite her relatives' desire for a fancier and larger wedding in Chicago.⁷⁵ After stops in Chicago and New York, the Mitchells left for a seven month working honeymoon in Europe. On the trip, they corrected the proofs of Wesley's manuscript, attended lectures, and met with leading economists (including Beatrice and Sidney Webb). Lucy visited schools in England and attended meetings of the London County Council, which oversaw local education.⁷⁶

Lucy's doubts were allayed enough for her to marry. Balancing their very different personalities, finding a satisfying outlet for her ambition, and integrating professional life with family life would be the work of years not months. In the process, Lucy had to rethink her ideal of manhood and reconcile her assumptions about marital equality with her desire to submit to a more powerful male.

73 LS to WCM, December 29, 1911. Emphasis in the original. LSM Papers.

74 Adolph Miller to WCM, February 1, 1912; LSM, UA. LSM Papers.

75 WCM to Medora Mitchell, March 10, 1912; Medora Mitchell to WCM, April 1, 1912. LSM Papers. His parents were unable to attend the ceremony.

76 LSM, *TL*, pp. 232–34.

Career Building and Family Building

When they returned to New York in December 1912, Lucy and Wesley set to work to build their careers. Wesley turned down offers from Cornell University and Yale University, and began teaching economics at Columbia University in the fall of 1913. After *Business Cycles* came out in September 1913, he was recognized as the leading authority on using statistical empirical data to analyze economic trends. His reputation assured, he was promoted to full professor in 1914.⁷⁷

Lucy meanwhile worked hard to establish her credentials as a progressive educator. She took classes, volunteered as a visiting teacher, and helped to develop and administer a psychological testing instrument for the Board of Education. She refined her ideas about using schools to teach sex hygiene and promote community values, while learning about educational experiments in other parts of the country and developing relationships with progressive education leaders in New York City. She would later describe her “fumbling” efforts to define a focus, but her activities were in fact driven by powerful internal logic, fierce determination, and strong ambition.⁷⁸

Lucy’s preparations paid off in the spring of 1916, when a large grant from a wealthy, philanthropically-minded cousin enabled her to launch the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE). (The name was a form of “polysyllabic intimidation,” Wesley teasingly observed.⁷⁹) Lucy spent two weeks finalizing the plan with Wesley and Harriet Johnson, an educator she had worked with on several projects, but the outlines had been brewing in Lucy’s mind throughout her time in New York. The BEE’s purpose was to marry what researchers were learning about child development with the approaches teachers were using in experimental schools — two related but independent fields when the BEE was founded.⁸⁰

Lucy would later describe the early years of the Bureau as one of the most exciting and stimulating periods of her life. With the grant, the BEE was able to fund its own research projects, gather and disseminate

⁷⁷ LSM, *TL*, p. 241.

⁷⁸ Fumbling efforts: LSM, *TL*, pp. 249–50.

⁷⁹ LSM, *TL*, p. 252.

⁸⁰ LSM, *UA*, Chapter 14, LSM Papers. LSM, *TL*, p. 222.

information about experimental efforts around the country, and support efforts to apply the learnings to educational practice in experimental schools. In October 1916, Lucy started teaching at Caroline Pratt's Play School, giving her an opportunity to engage directly with young minds and put her ideas into practice.

Building a family presented a parallel challenge during these career building years. Lucy was thirty-three when she married, and Wesley was thirty-seven — old to be starting a family. When Lucy did not become pregnant, they decided to adopt — an unusual step for members of her social class. After a few months of working with an adoption agency, they brought home an eight-month-old boy at the beginning of February 1914. As champions of progressive education, whatever concerns they might have had about his future were allayed by their belief that character was molded by environment rather than heredity.⁸¹ Nevertheless, they hesitated to name the boy after family members, and debated whether he should call them “aunt” and “uncle” rather than “mother” and “father.”⁸² In the end, they named the baby John McClellan Mitchell (Jack), incorporating Wesley's father's given name and his mother's maiden name, and Jack called his adopted parents “mother” and “father.”⁸³ Five months after his adoption, Lucy was pregnant; she gave birth to Sprague in March 1915. Wanting more children, the Mitchells adopted again. Two-month-old Marian (Marni) joined them in April 1917. Lucy gave birth to Arnold, their fourth and last child, less than a year later, in February 1918. (Sprague and Arnold were both given family names from Lucy's side.)

81 They were reassured by what John Dewey wrote about nature and nurture. WCM to LSM, March 13, 1914; LSM to WCM, March 15, 1914. LSM Papers.

82 LSM to Medora Mitchell, February 1, 1914 and February 9, 1914. Believing that “environment is much more than heritage”, Wesley's parents enthusiastically welcomed their grandson and wanted him to call them grandma and grandpa (Medora Mitchell to LCM, February 4, 1914). Lucy's upper-class relatives were more concerned about the potentially harmful influence of heredity. Cautioning that “blood will tell”, Lucy's Aunt Nan advised her to thoroughly investigate the baby's “pedigree.” (Nancy Atwood Sprague to LSM, February 3 [n.y.]. See also, A. Sprague to LSM, February 14, 1914. All in LSM Papers.

83 Lucy wrote a charming adoption story for Jack and noted that he accepted it without question when she told it to him in 1918. LSM Papers.



Fig. 6 Lucy and Wesley with their four children in 1918. Unknown photographer. Lucy Sprague Mitchell Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Lucy's happiness was complete. After years of struggle and doubt, she had a successful career, a loving and loved husband, and four thriving

children. Both she and Wesley felt “a kind of miracle had come to us.”⁸⁴ But their busy, happy life was not simply the product of privileged entitlement and random good fortune. It was also the result of very hard work.

Managing a Four-ring Circus

Wesley made good on the assurances he had given Lucy about the importance of her work and his willingness to help her. Over the long course of their marriage, he provided consistent and enthusiastic support, contributed substantive input, and shouldered childrearing responsibilities without complaint. Without his involvement and encouragement, Lucy insisted, she could not have accomplished what she did.⁸⁵

Wesley was actively engaged in Lucy’s work at the BEE. He worked with her and Harriet Johnson on the initial plan, served as treasurer and a trustee, and was a member of its governing body until 1931. His expertise in quantitative measurement and analysis was especially valuable. He attended monthly Board meetings, sat on the hiring and membership committees, wrote funding proposals, advised on legal and financial matters, and connected the fledgling organization to experts in various fields. At the annual year-end party, held in the Mitchells’ home, he generally gave an address on some aspect of social science that related to the bureau’s work.⁸⁶ The BEE was very much a family enterprise — significantly, one that was grounded in Lucy’s work, not Wesley’s. He also joined her at Caroline Pratt’s Play School, where he taught carpentry.

Wesley was as eager to help out with their children as with the BEE. He was especially unusual among the fathers of his time because he engaged in their care and development when they were infants and toddlers. According to Lucy, he defined the childcare challenge they faced as “a family problem shared by fathers” not a wife’s responsibility

84 LSM, *TL*, p. 259.

85 LSM, *TL*, p. 259.

86 LSM, *TL*, pp. 274, 368. Bank Street College Archives (BSCA), Records of the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE), Working Council Minutes and Reports. See also, WCM, Diaries, WCM Papers.

alone. The key, they agreed, was for husbands to become more involved in domestic life. This had to occur, Lucy warned, without any feeling that “masculine dignity has been outraged.”⁸⁷

The Mitchells tried to arrange their schedules so that at least one of them was with the children at meals, bath time, and pre-bedtime play.⁸⁸ Wesley routinely read to the children and told them stories. When baby Marni took two bottles a night, he and Lucy took turns getting up to feed her.⁸⁹ When Lucy was away, he made special efforts to be home at mealtimes and bedtime.

Both parents scheduled their lives to maximize work time and family time. When the children were infants and toddlers, they were put to bed around 6:30 PM and slept for twelve hours, allowing both Lucy and Wesley significant time for other activities in the evenings.⁹⁰ Lucy held many evening meetings in their home, and often provided her colleagues with dinner beforehand. Wesley read and wrote late into the night, frequently after Lucy was asleep.⁹¹

Although Wesley was an unusually engaged father, the Mitchells' domestic life was not an equal division of labor, nor was it intended to be. Lucy, who had desperately wanted to be a mother and made the education of children her life's work, spent far more time with the Mitchell children than Wesley did. She got up at 6 AM to breastfeed or give juice, but worked in bed — sometimes in the company of a child — before the family ate breakfast together at 8 AM.⁹² She nursed the children when they were ill, took them to medical specialists in other cities, and sometimes took a child on a special vacation. When there was a new baby, she cut back to part-time teaching so she could nurse the baby and spend more time with the older children. Wesley might have shared some of Marni's nighttime feedings, but it was Lucy who routinely bathed and changed her.

87 LSM, UA, Chapter 30, “A Backward Look”, p. 10.

88 LSM, TL, p. 258.

89 WCM to Medora Mitchell, June 23, 1917. LSM Papers.

90 Reports on the Mitchell children, written for their schools, some by Lucy, some by Wesley: Arnold (November 26, 1919 and May 23, 1922); Marni (December 15, 1920 and May, 1922). LSM Papers.

91 BEE Working Council Minutes, BSCA. WCM, Diaries, WCM Papers.

92 LSM, TL, p. 259.

When the children were very young, and Lucy was working at the BEE and the Play School, she deliberately structured her life so that there were few boundaries between her professional and domestic worlds. Physically, socially, even financially, her work life and home life were fully integrated. Her world looked like a chaotic four-ring circus, she would explain, but it was an organic whole, and each aspect contributed to and strengthened the others. The unifying focus was children.⁹³

Lucy's balancing act was greatly facilitated by the physical connections between her work life and her domestic life. She operated the BEE out of her home in its first years, and her closest colleagues and friends lived within a short walk of each other in Greenwich Village. The mews of the Mitchells' Greenwich Village townhouse provided the play yard for Pratt's Play School, and the school eventually acquired additional space from the Mitchells. In 1921 the Mitchells bought and refurbished six houses, three on West 12th Street and three on West 13th Street, which had adjoining back yards. The BEE and its Nursery School occupied most of one house on West 13th Street. Pratt's Play School, eventually renamed The City and Country School, was housed in the other buildings. The Mitchells lived in a large apartment that took up the top two floors of the houses on West 12th Street. Their apartment had its own, separate entrance, but could also be accessed from the school. Teachers and students moved freely between the two during the day. These arrangements allowed Lucy to breastfeed her children and see them at intervals throughout the day.⁹⁴

Lucy worked in the midst of her family. She chose not to have a study of her own until the children were older, when she took over what had been the playroom in their summer residence in Greensboro, Vermont; later she created a study on the third floor of their Greenwich Village home. Before that, she said she scribbled her experimental children's stories at the dining room table, in the subway, or on a bus.⁹⁵ (She never took taxis.) It was typical that Lucy tried to catch up on her work

⁹³ LSM, *TL*, pp. 271–72.

⁹⁴ LSM, *TL*, pp. 255, 484. Irene M. Prescott, "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: Pioneering in Education", An Interview Conducted by Irene M. Prescott (Berkeley: University of California, 1962), <https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/217139?ln=en>. A copy, entitled "Reminiscences of Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Oral history, 1960", is in the Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Oral History Archives.

⁹⁵ LSM, *TL*, p. 259.

correspondence on a Sunday morning while playing with Marni and the two older boys. Wesley, meanwhile, sat alone in his splendid study, writing about economics.⁹⁶

There were a few significant periods early in the marriage when Wesley was not around to lend a helping hand. When they were in California during the summer of 1915, he went off on a three-week camping trip with friends. Lucy was unable to join him because she was hobbling about on crutches, due to a knee injury. She stayed behind with two maids to take care of four-month old Sprague and two-year old Jack, entertain Wesley's family and other house guests, and prepare a paper on her views on educating children about sex, which she was to deliver to a conference in San Francisco in early August. Although Lucy encouraged Wesley to enjoy himself, what she wrote about the family's activities in letters to him and in daily entries in his diary suggest that she was greatly stressed and more than a little resentful of his absence.⁹⁷ She apologized for sending him a "rather woeful" letter at the start of his trip, but continued to write him detailed accounts of the domestic difficulties she encountered. She also made it clear that the demands of household, children, and guests left her little time or energy to focus on her talk. As a result, she was greatly disappointed in the final product.⁹⁸

Wesley did not again go off by himself on a pleasure trip. But there were times when his work took him away from the family for extended periods. From early 1918 into 1920, he typically spent three days a week in Washington, DC. He was employed by the War Industries Board where he became Chief of the Price Section, with responsibility for estimating the need for key materials, tracking imports, and setting prices.⁹⁹ Wesley's weekly commute began in February 1918, just ten days before Lucy gave birth to their fourth child. He was in New York for Arnold's birth, but returned to Washington two days later. Lucy, deeply involved in the BEE and the Play School, remained in New York with four-year old Jack, three-year old Sprague, one-year old Marni, and newborn Arnold. Throughout the spring, Wesley took the midnight

96 WCM to Medora Mitchell, June 23, 1917. LSM Papers.

97 She made the daily entries in his diary while he was on his camping trip, July 14-August 8, 1915. WCM, Diary, 1915, WCM Papers.

98 LSM to WCM, July 25, 1915; August 4, 1915; August 5, 1915. LSM Papers.

99 LSM, *TL*, pp. 296-97, 301; WCM, Diaries, 1918-1920, WCM Papers.

sleeper train to Washington on Wednesday nights. He returned to New York on the Saturday night sleeper, arriving home in time for Sunday morning breakfast.¹⁰⁰

During these years, Wesley struggled to establish a satisfactory balance between his professional life and his family life. He took a leave of absence from Columbia so he would be free to volunteer for war-related work in Washington, DC, as many experts in various fields were doing. He turned down a job offer in Washington in the fall of 1917 because he thought it would require too much time away from his family.¹⁰¹ The position he accepted early in 1918 was more manageable, but still put a great deal of pressure on him and Lucy. (In the summer of 1918, he refused another assignment that would have kept him in London through the end of the war.¹⁰²) Like many women who juggle part-time work with family responsibilities, Wesley was sometimes frustrated by not having more time to give to a job he found stimulating and challenging. The work “is all excitement — one corner turned & another in sight at the same instant,” he wrote to Lucy.¹⁰³ “Life [in DC] continues to be exciting. Indeed I am in a mood to demand excitement & to make it when it doesn’t offer itself,” he announced.¹⁰⁴ To his mother, he confided, “The great difficulty is that I can be there but half the week.”¹⁰⁵ Anxious to protect his work time in Washington, he resisted moving a meeting of the BEE’s Trustees from Sunday to Saturday.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, when a domestic crisis arose, Wesley made himself available to Lucy without complaint or hesitation. In the summer of 1918, he accompanied the family to their summer property in Greensboro, Vermont and then returned to Washington. A week later, Lucy had to cope with what Wesley described as “a chapter of accidents”: two of the children and the most dependable of the maids were ill, and two other members of the household staff had sprained their wrists cranking the engine that pumped water for the cottages. Wesley rushed back

100 Wesley’s weekly commutes are documented in WCM, *Diaries*, 1918–1920, WCM Papers; his letters to his mother and Lucy, and WCM to W. E. Hocking, April 9, 1918. LSM Papers.

101 WCM, *Diary*, November 2, 3, and 4, 1917. WCM Papers.

102 WCM to LSM, August 1, 1918. LSM Papers.

103 WCM to LSM, June 14, 1918. LSM Papers.

104 WCM to LSM, August 20, 1918. LSM Papers.

105 WCM to Medora Mitchell, March 12, 1918. LSM Papers.

106 WCM to W. E. Hocking, April 9, 1918. LSM Papers.

to Greensboro to help, despite Lucy's insistence that he did not need to come. He returned to Washington after a week, where he devoted a great deal of time to hiring a professional nurse who was willing to endure the very rustic living conditions at Greensboro.¹⁰⁷

Patriotic duty continued to push against family responsibility. "I should not be going back to Washington if I did not feel it every man's duty to aid all he possibly can in getting the country organized," Wesley explained to his mother when he returned from his emergency week in Greensboro. "In some ways my past researches have given me special training for it, & I must not leave unless family reasons make absences from home too much of a sacrifice for Lucy & the children. It is a hard choice even now."¹⁰⁸ For the rest of the summer, Wesley split his time between Washington, where he was working ten-hour days, and Greensboro. Scheduling his visits was another challenge as he tried to minimize the disruption to his office, while maximizing his usefulness to Lucy.¹⁰⁹ Any extra time he took off would have to be made up later, he warned. When he was not able to get away from his office, Wesley commiserated about how difficult things were for Lucy, expressed concern for her well-being, and lamented that he could not be with her and the children.¹¹⁰

At the end of the summer, Wesley's job was expanded and extended under a new department, the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics.¹¹¹ Excited about the new work, which involved writing a history of prices during the war, he assured Lucy that the job would give him time to be with her and the children. He continued to commute between Washington and New York for another year and a half, prolonging this unusually difficult period for the family.

This was the only period of their marriage when Wesley repeatedly urged Lucy to curtail her activities so she did not wear herself out and become ill. Always before, he had assured anxious relatives, his mother

107 WCM to Medora Mitchell, June 23, 1918; WCM to LSM, June 24, 1918. LSM Papers. Wesley was also eager to protect Lucy from the claims of her relatives. After the death of her aunt, he informed the Sprague family that someone other than Lucy would have to deal with the family affairs because she was already overburdened (WCM to LSM, June 28, 1918. LSM Papers).

108 WCM to Medora Mitchell, June 23, 1918. LSM Papers.

109 WCM to LSM, July 24, 1918. LSM Papers.

110 WCM to LSM, July 20 [1918]; August 1, 1918; June 14, 1918. LSM Papers.

111 WCM to LSM, August 15, 1918. LSM Papers.

in particular, that Lucy was not “overdoing” or endangering her health by working too hard. Now, Wesley advised Lucy to do less, and rejoiced when she agreed.¹¹² His concern was double-edged: he was genuinely worried about Lucy’s health and the strain she was under, but he also must have feared the toll on his own work if she fell ill and he had to deal with family emergencies.

We do not know how Lucy felt about the fact that Wesley was away so much between 1918 and 1920. Her letters to him have not survived, and she was unusually circumspect when she wrote about this period in *Two Lives*. Her few extant letters from the time suggest that she tried to take the difficulties in stride and gloss over the hardships. Nevertheless, her acknowledgement to a friend that “to manage four babies and nurse one is rather taxing!” seems like a veiled complaint.¹¹³ Lucy had a great deal of household help, but she and the children were often ill. It was a critical time for her own work, as she and her colleagues struggled to develop an effective organizational structure for the BEE, develop its research agenda, set quality standards for the work it funded, and launch the BEE’s own nursery school.¹¹⁴

There were many reasons why Lucy might have accepted Wesley’s absence without complaint or resentment. His part-time absence was clearly preferable to his being away all the time. She did not want to move to Washington. She may have agreed about the claims of war and patriotic duty. Very likely she was pleased to see Wesley become more assertive about the way he approached his work. Perhaps she welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate that his work was more important than hers, as she had insisted it should be.

Several things suggest, nevertheless, that the separation took a toll on the Mitchells’ relationship. Lucy was not waiting like a loyal Penelope or a heartsick housewife for Wesley’s weekly return from Washington. Nor did she go out of her way to see to his comfort. On the contrary, when he

112 WCM to LSM, December 25 [1918], and February 22 [1919]. After Sprague’s birth in 1915, Medora expressed anxiety “lest Lucy’s ever urgent ambition leads her to too early exertion.” (Medora Mitchell to WCM, April 7, 1915). In 1918, she advised Wesley to “be prompt with safeguards against [Lucy’s] too great ambition, and unlimited enthusiasm.” (Medora Mitchell to WCM, May 18, 1918). All in LSM Papers.

113 Letter fragment from LSM, June 14, 1918. See also, Lucy’s “Round Robin” letter to her Radcliffe classmates, October 6, 1924. LSM Papers.

114 BEE, Working Council Minutes, 1918 and 1919, BSCA.

arrived home on a Sunday morning, she was often not there. Typically, she was staying at Caroline Pratt's country property. Sometimes she took one or two of the children with her. Often she extended her stay into the early days of the week, when Wesley was at home. If Lucy remained in New York, Caroline was likely to be with her when Wesley arrived. She dined often with the Mitchells, went to the theatre with them, and frequently popped in for "a chat" with Lucy.¹¹⁵ Lucy used her weekend getaways with Caroline to work on the stories that she would publish in *The Here and Now Storybook* and as a source of rest and relaxation. She may also have been trying, perhaps subconsciously, to indicate displeasure with their commuting marriage.

Wesley might be faulted for being away from home for long stretches of every week while the children were so young. Nevertheless, he took only a part-time wartime job in Washington; he did not complain about the significant wear and tear entailed in his weekly commute; he willingly rearranged his schedule to come to Lucy's assistance when domestic crises arose. None of this should be downplayed. His behavior was a radical departure from the way many men of his day — including many of the husbands featured in this book — behaved. Moreover, when he was in New York, he voluntarily chose to adjust his work schedule so that he could spend more time with the children, and Lucy could have more time to work.

A Real Worker at Last

Both Lucy and Wesley expanded their professional horizons and achievements in the 1920s, during the second decade of their marriage. On leave from Columbia University, Wesley helped to launch two major research organizations that advanced his vision of using quantitative information to develop economic indicators and shape national policy. As a founder and the first Director of Research at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), a post he held from 1920 to 1945, he oversaw work that deepened his analysis of business cycles and applied quantitative measurement to studies of national income and other

¹¹⁵ Wesley's arrivals and departures and Lucy's comings and goings are noted in WCM, Diaries, 1918–1920. WCM Papers.

topics. As a founder and board member of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) between 1923 and 1945, he was instrumental in bringing quantitative statistical analysis, as well as a more inter-disciplinary focus, to the study of social problems. He joined with other progressive educators in opening the New School for Social Research in 1919, and taught there for several years before returning to Columbia. A non-traditional school for adult learners that promoted the free exchange of ideas and interrogation of major social problems, the New School assembled a faculty of scholars and artists who were reformers and activists as well as teachers.¹¹⁶

Lucy took off in a different direction. Although the BEE amassed an extensive base of observational records and quantitative data on students in progressive schools and used the information to understand children's developmental stages, Lucy increasingly found outlets for her creative energies by writing stories and books for children, developing innovative school curricula, and training others in her methods. Her pathbreaking *Here and Now Storybook*, published in 1921, provided a theoretical discussion of how children between the ages of two and seven acquire and use language, along with a collection of children's stories, written by Lucy, that applied her theoretical framework. The stories were intended to expand children's understanding by helping them to explore the world around them and make sense of their own experiences and environments. Based on children's actual experience of the real world — the "here and now" — Lucy's stories were a departure from both the fantasy-based tales and didactic moral tales that made up the bulk of children's literature at the time.¹¹⁷

When the book was received as "a serious professional contribution" by the education community, Lucy felt that she had become "a real worker", at last. "I was beginning to grow up professionally as well as personally. I knew it and Robin knew it too," she noted.¹¹⁸ Newly confident, she next developed an innovative social studies curriculum for children aged eight to twelve. It combined information about the

116 Judith Friedlander, *A Light in Dark Times: The New School for Social Research and Its University in Exile* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 6–13, 49–50, discusses the early history of the school and Wesley's role in it.

117 LSM, *Here and Now Storybook* (New York: Dutton, 1921). LSM, *TL*, pp. 284–85.

118 LSM, *TL*, p. 288.

history, geography, and science of different places and different periods with poetry, narrative prose, and layered and detailed maps.

As Lucy became more involved in teaching and moved the Bureau's focus away from quantitative measurement towards the exposition and application of educational theory in books, curriculum development, and teacher training, there was less reason and fewer opportunities for Wesley to be directly involved in her work. Nevertheless, he remained a trusted advisor, lecturer, and trustee at the BEE, knowledgeable about what Lucy was doing, cognizant of organizational stresses and strains, and familiar with the personalities who worked with her.¹¹⁹

When they did not work directly together, Lucy stressed that she and Wesley talked "endlessly" about his work and hers.¹²⁰ Although the specific content of their work was quite different, their approaches had much in common: a mutual interest in collaborative, cross-disciplinary work; a conviction that they were breaking new ground; and a commitment to theoretical work that had practical application in the real world. These were strong points of connection that increased the sense that they were pulling a common load. Lucy reported that Wesley read everything she wrote, and she read all of his less technical writing, which amounted to a substantial body of speeches and addresses. Their letters to each other are full of information about their respective endeavors and plans for future work. Wesley's diaries record when he was reading her books and articles, and when she was reading her stories aloud to him. He valued her reaction as a literary stylist and lay reader, and felt her suggestions improved his writing.¹²¹ When they were courting, he had identified this as the role he hoped she would play and tried to convince her that she was uniquely qualified to do it.

Connecting over Their Work

Even when he was not directly involved in Lucy's professional life, Wesley took vicarious pride and pleasure in her accomplishments. He reported on her activities in his diaries, and described them in letters to his parents and siblings. He was an enthusiastic audience for all her

119 For the shift of focus at the BEE, see Antler, pp. 290–93.

120 LSM, *TL*, p. 249.

121 WCM to LSM, December 29 [1918]. LSM Papers.

books. After reading an early version of the material she would publish in 1921 in the *Here and Now Storybook*, he applauded, “You certainly are a versatile creature my dear — combining a theory of how to write stories that a psychologist might envy [...] with the fire that delights a child, the faculty in rhyming of a bard & the sketching of an artist’s happy moments.”¹²² He was equally enthusiastic about the reception of *Horses Now and Long Ago* (1926) which embodied Lucy’s innovative approach to teaching children what she called “human geography.” He wrote:

You are a radiant creature, and in time I expect to see a school system organizing itself in ordered fashion round the classics which you are producing one after another. Time may come when even those stuffy foundation people will see that they were mistaking academic moons for the real sun, because the real sun was rising in a part of the heavens unexpected by them.¹²³

Wesley also accommodated Lucy’s work by welcoming her colleagues and friends into the Mitchells’ domestic life. Her closest colleagues — Caroline Pratt, Jessie Stanton, and Harriet Johnson, along with Johnson’s partner and child, and Marion Farquhar and her three sons — formed an extended family group that became the core of the Mitchells’ social life. They shared meals, holiday celebrations, travel, and children’s activities and outings in the city, the Mitchells’ weekend homes, and their summer retreat in Greensboro. Having feared that “her world” would not take to Wesley, Lucy was pleased to find that her New York friends became his friends too.¹²⁴

Involvement in the children’s upbringing remained an important part of Wesley’s support throughout the 1920s. Although the Mitchells employed as many as five maids, and occasionally a baby nurse who helped with the children’s physical care, Wesley continued to help out. He wrote detailed reports on the children’s activities and personalities for their teachers, and attended parent-teacher meetings and other activities at their schools. As the children grew older, he escorted them to doctor’s appointments, birthday parties, and music lessons, and spent time talking about their health and development with

122 WCM to LSM, December 25 [1918?]. LSM Papers.

123 WCM to LSM, Thursday morning [Aug 1926?]. LSM Papers.

124 LSM, “Robin” (November 20, 1948). LSM Papers.

various specialists. He took a band of children by train for a day at the Mitchells' Long Beach Island cottage to celebrate Sprague's birthday in April 1923. When the boys were teenagers, Wesley frequently helped them with their science, math, and German homework.¹²⁵

But it was Lucy who organized the children's schedules, took charge of moving the family between their Greenwich Village home and their weekend and summer residences, and searched for the best high schools for the children. Wesley helped out, especially in emergencies, but he irritated Lucy by not anticipating what needed to be done and not responding to problems without being prompted. Like other male professionals, when he worked at home he was isolated in a study where he was not to be disturbed. Lucy reported that the Mitchell children learned to respect Wesley's privacy when he was working, and even the youngest child knew he was not to be interrupted. He interacted with the children at regularly scheduled breaks. Late in the morning, he left his study and peeled an apple which he shared with any child who was around.¹²⁶ In Greensboro, he stopped writing in mid-afternoon and then worked on carpentry projects in his workshop; the children, each of whom had a set of small-sized tools, were encouraged to join him.

Nevertheless, Wesley tolerated interruptions well. He would stop his work and chat with any child who wandered into his domain. His youngest son, Arnold, later recalled the special times he had with Wesley in his study when he got home from school before his older siblings.¹²⁷ Lucy maintained that she was always interruptible for her children, but the neighbors' children at Greensboro saw a different side of her: they remembered her scolding them for making too much noise and chasing them off the property when she was trying to work.¹²⁸

Crafting a work-family balance that satisfied Lucy as well as Wesley was no easy task. His work-related absences could be very difficult for her. She was most likely to complain when she felt overwhelmed by family problems and unable to get her work done — an indication of how much she relied on his help and good sense. When Wesley was

125 WCM, Diaries, WCM Papers. School Reports on the children, LSM Papers.

126 LSM, *TL*, p. 317.

127 LSM, *TL*, p. 264.

128 Interruptions: LSM, *TL*, p. 315. Neighbors' children: Antler, p. 276.

away for three weeks at the annual meetings of the SSRC in August 1926, Lucy described an “explosion” she had with eleven-year-old Sprague and numerous problems with the car. Noting that she was “unwell” — a reference to menstruation — and feeling “like the very devil,” she concluded, “I miss you woefully & resent your giving the time unless it’s awfully worth *your* while.”¹²⁹ In 1928, Wesley left for his annual SSRC meeting just six days after Lucy returned from a lengthy trip to Europe with the two older boys. Lamenting that he would be away for three weeks, Lucy repeatedly asked when he could get back to Greensboro for a weekend visit. He replied that he would “shoot home the very first minute I can & stay until I am dragged back” but was unable to give her a specific date.¹³⁰

A few years later, when Wesley was working on economic analyses for a National Planning Board created by President Franklin Roosevelt, Lucy sent him several letters from Greensboro detailing a host of problems with their now teen-aged children that made it impossible for her to get any work done. She concluded, “perhaps it’s mean to wish you had been here.”¹³¹ Wesley expressed sympathy but had no intention of rushing home and thereby “deserting a pair of devoted colleagues at a critical moment.” Unless there was a family emergency, Wesley felt that obligations to colleagues weighed as heavily as obligations to family, and he expected Lucy to understand that.¹³² Whenever Lucy was away, Wesley assured her that everything was fine, and urged her to stay away for as long as she liked, finish whatever she was doing, and get a good rest.¹³³

Lucy appreciated that Wesley took on more domestic chores than many men of his era did, but she held him to a high standard and often let him know when she was irritated or frustrated by his behavior. What bothered Lucy was not that their household roles were unequal, but that Wesley failed to see how unequal they were and took much

129 LSM to WCM, August 25, 1926; emphasis in the original. LSM Papers.

130 LSM to WCM, August 24, August 27, and September 3, 1928. WCM to LSM, August 28, 1928. LSM Papers.

131 LSM to WCM, June 19, 1934. Similarly, LSM to WCM, June 25, 1934. LSM Papers.

132 WCM to LSM, June 26, 1934. Similarly, WCM to Beulah Chute, November 30, 1939. LSM Papers.

133 For example: WCM to LSM, February 2, 1920; March 4, 1925; and June 29, 1928. LSM Papers.

of what she did for granted.¹³⁴ They sometimes had quite different perceptions about how much each contributed to household tasks. Wesley noted in his diary that he and Lucy “got supper together as usual” on Sunday evenings when the maids were off as though he were an equal partner in the effort. Lucy’s perspective was that Wesley was rather useless in the kitchen and did virtually nothing except make the cocktails.¹³⁵

Like Grace Chisholm Young, Lucy felt her husband failed to appreciate the effort she put into keeping their complicated household running smoothly. Unlike Grace, she was inclined to let him know when his behavior irritated or angered her. In the long account of their life together, which she wrote just three weeks after Wesley’s death, as a personal communication to him, Lucy observed, “I did get mad at your unawareness of work that was not desk work.” The inequity involved in planning the meals, transporting the food on the train, and then cooking dinner when they arrived for a weekend in Stamford, even though she had been working just as hard as Wesley throughout the week, made her irritable, Lucy admitted.¹³⁶

Nevertheless, Lucy imposed many of these maddening unequal burdens on herself. Despite her irritation, she did not push Wesley to take on household tasks unrelated to childcare. Instead of trying to teach him to be more helpful in the kitchen, she made sure he did not need to get his own meals. When she was away from Greensboro for three weeks in 1926, she put twelve-year-old Jack in charge of preparing the meals, with eight-year-old Marni and seven-year-old Arnold as his helpers. Recalling this incident, a colleague observed that Lucy “always treated Robin as though he was somewhat helpless.”¹³⁷ Years later, when she no longer had household help, Lucy arranged for someone to get meals for Wesley when she was away. Making his own breakfast was noteworthy enough to be recorded in his daily diary.¹³⁸

134 LSM, “Robin”, p. 22. LSM Papers.

135 WCM, Diary, October 17, 1915, WCM Papers. LSM, “Robin”, p. 23. LSM Papers.

136 LSM, “Robin”, pp. 22–23. LSM Papers.

137 Charlotte Winsor, in Irene M. Prescott, “Interview with Charlotte Winsor, Irma Black, and Barbara Biber” (1962). LSM Papers.

138 WCM, Diaries, May 12, 1942; April 23, 1943; August 31, 1943. WCM Papers.

Constructing a Companionate Marriage: "Talking All the Time"

The Mitchells' marriage was highly companionate. Wesley was her "best friend" as well as her husband, Lucy wrote after he died.¹³⁹ "For many, love of children or love of work/is a substitute for the caring and sharing in marriage./But not for me!" she proudly proclaimed in a poem she wrote fifty years after their wedding.¹⁴⁰ During their first years together, Lucy and Wesley shared a rich social and cultural life. They hosted many dinners and parties, attended the theatre and art exhibits, read books and poetry aloud to each other, and travelled to New Orleans, California, and Chicago. Lucy was delighted to discover that Wesley knew how to "play" and was more willing to do so than she had imagined.¹⁴¹

Sharing activities made them richer. When Wesley went to an art exhibit by himself, or read a book he thought Lucy would enjoy, he wanted to repeat the experience with her.¹⁴² When she was away, his days were busier than usual, but he found them "empty." Without her, he said, "They have no radiance — no life."¹⁴³ He sometimes went shopping with her, and had an eye for spotting dresses and scarves in her preferred style.¹⁴⁴ They read poetry and books aloud to each other throughout their marriage.

Both Lucy and Wesley were engaged in planning and designing their homes in Greenwich Village, their summer compound in Greensboro, and their weekend retreats in Long Beach Island and Stamford, Connecticut. Lucy, who had wanted to study architecture, drew up the initial plans for the complex of small cabins in Greensboro, and she and Wesley spent months laboring over the details. They worked together to design a study for Wesley in each of their homes, and the bookcases that held his extensive book collection.¹⁴⁵ The carpentry projects Wesley,

139 LSM, "Robin", p. 27. LSM Papers.

140 LSM, "Caring and Sharing," January 31, 1963. LSM Papers.

141 LSM, *TL*, p. 235.

142 WCM to LSM, March 16, 1914 and March 17, 1914. His mother informed Lucy that Wesley need to share an experience with a loved one in order to fully appreciate it. Medora Mitchell to LSM, March 19, 1912. LSM Papers.

143 WCM to LSM, March 15, 1914. Similarly, WCM to LSM, June 4, 1920. LSM Papers.

144 LSM, *TL*, p. 255.

145 Greensboro: LSM, *TL*, p. 307. Studies: LSM, "Robin", pp. 19–20. LSM Papers. The Stamford study was especially challenging, requiring over 100 sketches.

a skilled amateur carpenter, undertook in Greensboro also involved joint planning, especially when Lucy did the finishing, painting, and stenciling. His attention to detail matched hers: he described his design for a lamp in eleven separate letters to her.¹⁴⁶

Caring for young children changed the Mitchells' routines but reinforced their sense of togetherness. In contrast to many wealthy households, the children ate their meals with their parents from a very early age. Both Wesley and Lucy spent time with the children before they were put to bed, and Wesley, as well as Lucy, read to them and told them stories; sometimes he also pitched in at bath time. He joined her in Christmas shopping, wrapping, and decorating when the children were young. For years, they hosted at least fourteen people, and sometimes as many as twenty-six, for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners.¹⁴⁷ (Household help, of course, made this possible.)

Shared enjoyment of their children, shared concerns about their health and well-being, and shared planning for their activities and futures added to the Mitchells' sense of companionship as the children grew up. Nevertheless, the Mitchells' notions of togetherness did not require them to do everything together. When they were courting, Wesley had predicted their marriage would be stronger because neither felt the need "to absorb the other's whole life."¹⁴⁸ After they married, they met the challenges of managing time apart as well as time together, and balanced intimacy with independence more successfully than many dual career couples.¹⁴⁹

As individuals who married later in life, the Mitchells were accustomed to having independent time and separate friendships; as dedicated professionals, they were used to being absorbed in work projects. As their children grew older, Lucy and Wesley's efforts to maximize work time and family time meant that they often divided their parenting duties and followed different schedules on weekends: they took the

146 LSM, *TL*, p. 132.

147 WCM, Diaries. WCM Papers. Holiday dinners: LSM, *TL*, p. 265.

148 WCM to LS, November 6, 1911. LSM Papers.

149 Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: Personal Relationships in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp. 114–19, notes that in the 1950s, couples who felt they had successfully achieved greater intimacy through greater companionship in shared activities often complained about feeling suffocated and claustrophobic from too much togetherness.

children on separate outings in the city, and came and went at different times, sometimes even on different days, to their weekend home. Time together was even more limited during the week. Lucy had many evening meetings as well as full work days.¹⁵⁰ When she did not have meetings, she was often tired and went to bed early. Wesley stayed up later, reading and working after she and the children were asleep. Their time at Greensboro, where they went every summer from 1916 to 1947, was restorative: they shed their administrative and teaching responsibilities, focused on their writing, and spent more time with the children and with each other. Lucy found the Greensboro summers idyllic, which may explain her frustration when Wesley left to attend several weeks of SSRC meetings. Her idea of heaven was being at Greensboro with “Robin at work and I at work / Robin and I sharing and loving to share.”¹⁵¹

Lucy and Wesley enjoyed their separate activities, but found it essential to talk to each other about them. “I have so *much* to tell,” Lucy observed when she was traveling in Europe without Wesley.¹⁵² When he spent a year teaching at Oxford University in England in 1931–1932 and she stayed in New York to keep Bank Street’s Cooperative schools afloat in the wake of the Great Depression, she noted, “I miss talking things over with you terribly.”¹⁵³ The day Lucy arrived in Oxford for a visit, Wesley wrote in his diary, “Talking all the time. Happy.” — a rare expression of his feelings.¹⁵⁴ Wesley always took vicarious pleasure in hearing about Lucy’s activities — her “adventures” he called them — and made note of them in his diaries and his correspondence with his mother and sisters.¹⁵⁵

Conversely, when the Mitchells did not talk, their relationship suffered. Writing to Wesley on the eve of their twentieth wedding anniversary in 1932, Lucy acknowledged there had been periods when they had “stopped talking — stopped much give & take.” But, she insisted, these were mere “episodes in loving intervals of companionship.”¹⁵⁶

150 When Wesley proposed that they go to the theatre, she agreed with enthusiasm, but listed five evening engagements within an eight day period that limited her availability. LSM to WCM, February 1, 1924. LSM Papers.

151 LSM, “Today I Fell to Thinking” (March 12, 1950). LSM Papers.

152 LSM to WCM, July 2, 1928. LSM Papers. Emphasis in the original.

153 LSM to WSM, December 6, 1931. LSM Papers.

154 WCM, Diary, January 3, 1932. WCM Papers.

155 Her adventures: WCM to LSM, November 1, 1935, and October 15, 1939. LSM Papers.

156 LSM to WCM, May 7, 1932. LSM Papers.

Forging a More Egalitarian Marriage

The Mitchells' marriage was not only highly companionate, but also more egalitarian than many. Although there was no equal division of domestic responsibilities, Lucy's needs, interests, and commitments were taken as seriously as Wesley's. Household routines, family activities, and social life were structured around her work as much as his. She was not expected to play a traditional helpmate role to advance Wesley's career. When an interviewer remarked on how unusual Wesley was in permitting her to devote so much of her time to her work, Lucy responded that there was never a question of his "permitting" her to do anything; that was not the way their relationship worked.¹⁵⁷ He did not try to impose his opinions and tastes on her or mold her to his image of womanhood. He was supportive and facilitative of her work, without being directive or controlling. "In our long married life, Robin never once took the attitude that the way to help me was to put his judgment on me. He helped me but he did not try to reform me. He just accepted me," Lucy wrote appreciatively in *Two Lives*. He could do this, she came to realize, because he "had not a trace of the masculine infallibility which had afflicted the older men who had influenced my life."¹⁵⁸

Wesley gave Lucy more support for her work than she gave to him. She was not a traditional helpmate or, as she phrased it, a "guardian" wife.¹⁵⁹ She helped proofread the tables and text of *Business Cycles* on their honeymoon, and she occasionally made charts, proofread, and typed for Wesley during their early years together. But these were mere "practical chores" that neither she nor Wesley thought worth her while after she found a clear direction for her own work. Once she established her own busy career, "Robin would not have accepted this kind of help from me, nor would I have offered it," Lucy stressed.¹⁶⁰

Nor did she uproot herself or her own work in order to advance Wesley's career. She and the children did not accompany him to Washington during the years he worked there in the late 1910s and early 1920s. She did not move with him to England when he was a visiting

¹⁵⁷ Prescott, "Lucy Sprague Mitchell", p. 149.

¹⁵⁸ LSM, *TL*, p. 236.

¹⁵⁹ LSM, Draft *TL*, Chapter VI, p. 17. LSM Papers.

¹⁶⁰ LSM, *TL*, p. 249.

professor at Oxford University in 1931–32, although she rearranged her schedule so she could spend two months with him.

The Mitchells entertained Wesley's friends, but it was Lucy's friends and colleagues and the organizations she was affiliated with that dominated their social life. She rarely attended his classes or went to his office.¹⁶¹ There were practical reasons for this. Lucy's work and social life were anchored around their home in Greenwich Village, while Wesley's professional world was more remote from the family center. Her schedule was exceptionally busy; as a working wife and mother, she did not have time to be an active partner in Wesley's work. He could devote more time to her endeavors, in part, because he did not have as much responsibility for the children and the household. In many dual career marriages, it was not unusual for the husband to serve as his wife's partner, champion, facilitator, editor, manager, or promoter. A working wife, in contrast, often had little direct involvement in her husband's work.

The difference in the assistance the Mitchells provided to each other, especially in the early years of their marriage, did not trouble them. Wesley was genuinely interested in and happy to be involved in Lucy's work at the BEE and always made time for it. He was grateful for whatever help she gave him and did not seem to mind that she was less engaged in his work. As discussed later, it was only after he died, when Lucy discovered how much assistance his friend Sadie Gregory had given him at an earlier stage in his career, before he married, that Lucy began to question whether she ought to have done more to help him.

Lucy and Wesley's relationship was a major shift from the power dynamic of a traditional nineteenth-century marriage. Several things helped them make this transition successfully. They benefitted from the changing context of American life: by the time they embarked on their second decade of marriage in the 1920s, ideals of companionate marriage were more widespread, and a growing proportion of middle-class wives and mothers were in the labor force, although the total

161 Lucy wrote that when Wesley held his seminars for his advanced students at their house, she sometimes sat in on them or joined the students afterward for beer and sandwiches (*TL*, p. 386). The only time Wesley recorded Lucy's attendance at one of his lectures was in 1914. Lucy did not see his NBER office until shortly before his retirement in 1945. (WCM, Diary, January 12, 1914 and May 24, 1945. WCM Papers.)

number remained small. Lucy herself was part of a 1926 study of 100 college graduates who were married and working outside the home; like Lucy, many of these women were mothers.¹⁶² But there are more significant reasons why Lucy and Wesley were unusually successful in structuring a marriage that supported two independent careers.

Wesley's financial indebtedness to Lucy was an unacknowledged but undoubtedly powerful motivator. Like many ambitious wealthy women, Lucy "married down" in both social and economic terms. Her inherited wealth supported the work she did in New York and financed their multiple homes. It also provided Wesley with a freedom and lifestyle he had not previously enjoyed. Because he helped to support his family and pay for his younger brothers' educations and business investments, Wesley felt compelled to take the highest paying job offer he received in the years before he married.¹⁶³ After he and Lucy married, he left the University of Berkeley without having another position, spent seven months in Europe, and did not teach again until the fall of 1913. Leaving a teaching job without having secured another was quite unconventional, he told his parents.¹⁶⁴ But he assured Medora that the money he sent them every month was his "own", not Lucy's.¹⁶⁵

The Mitchells also drew strength and inspiration from having many like-minded friends and colleagues. When they were courting, both Lucy and Wesley noted that they had no good models for the type of marriage they envisioned. The Palmers did not count, Lucy maintained, because they had no children.¹⁶⁶ (Given how strongly she criticized George's desire to be obeyed, self-importance, and manipulative tendencies, it is possible that she came to question how supportive a husband he was to Alice.) The social and professional circles the Mitchells formed in New York and Greensboro included numerous dual career couples who were pursuing separate careers and raising children.

162 Virginia MacMakin Collier, *Marriage and Career: A Study of One Hundred Women Who are Wives, Mothers, Homemakers, and Professional Workers* (New York: Bureau of Vocational Information, 1926).

163 LSM, TL, p. 185; WCM to LS, October 18, 1911. LSM Papers. WCM to Sarah Hardy Gregory, June 16, 1908 and June 21, 1908. WCM Papers.

164 WCM to Medora Mitchell, March 10, 1912. LSM Papers.

165 WCM to Medora Mitchell, July 9, 1913. LSM Papers.

166 WCM to LS, November 6, 1911; LSM, Draft Chapter 30, "A Look Backwards", p. 10. LSM Papers.

Wesley's closest friend in New York was fellow Columbia economist Vladimir G. Simkhovitch, who was married to Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, the founder and director of the Greenwich House Settlement. Wesley and Vladimir, who had met as graduate students in Germany, talked often at Columbia, played chess together, and consulted each other on professional issues.¹⁶⁷ Mary, a close friend of Elsie Clews Parsons, worked through her two pregnancies and moved her family into Greenwich House Settlement when she opened it in 1902.¹⁶⁸ Wesley sat on the Board of Greenwich House with Herbert Parsons, taught at the New School in the same years as Elsie Clews Parsons, and enjoyed chatting with Elsie when he saw her at wedding in 1937. Mary was involved in several BEE projects, and the Mitchells and the Simkhovitches socialized as couples.¹⁶⁹

Several other women who worked with Lucy were wives and mothers. Helen Thompson Woolley, a University of Chicago PhD, collaborated with Lucy on developing and fielding a psychological survey of public school children. She spent a month in the Mitchells' home in 1915, leaving her husband and her two young daughters behind in Ohio.¹⁷⁰ Psychologist Leta Stetter Hollingworth was involved in several BEE projects, as was her husband Harry Hollingworth, who taught psychology at Barnard College.¹⁷¹

The Mitchells' circle of intimates in Greenwich Village included women who challenged traditional notions of womanhood by forming unconventional households and personal relationships as well as by

167 WCM, Diaries, WCM Papers.

168 See Chapter 3, p. 192, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Simkhovitch, Mary Kingsbury," in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, ed. by Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980), pp. 648–51.

169 WCM, Diaries. WCM Papers.

170 See Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 81–83. See also, Elizabeth Scarborough and Laurel Furumoto, *Untold Lives, The First Generation of American Women Psychologists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 199–202.

171 Banned from teaching in the New York City public schools because she was married, Leta Hollingworth earned a PhD from Columbia in 1916 and taught psychology at Teachers College. Her husband, Harry Hollingworth, not only supported her career but also wrote a biography of her. See Victoria S. Roemele, "Hollingworth, Leta Anna Stetter" in *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. by Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1975–1982), II, pp. 206–8; Rosenberg, pp. 84–86; and Harry Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth: A Biography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1943).

working outside the home. Lucy was especially close to Harriet Merrill Johnson, a co-founder of the BEE and the first director of its Nursery School. Johnson and her partner, Harriet Forbes, adopted a baby girl from Russia. Caroline Pratt, the founder of the City and Country Day School and one of Lucy's dearest friends in the late teens and early twenties, lived with a female companion, Helen Marot.¹⁷² Elisabeth Irwin, who founded an alternative, experimental public school, and worked closely with Lucy on several projects, lived in an openly lesbian relationship with Katharine Anthony. They raised two adopted daughters.¹⁷³

These couples wrestled with many of the same career-life choices as Lucy and Wesley. Their lives, writings, and professional endeavors offered critiques, both implicit and explicit, of traditional marriages and family life. Believing that children would be better off if they were not in the constant care of a mother, the women devoted their lives to developing the kinds of institutions — high quality nursery and primary schools with progressive curricula — that enabled women to enter the workforce with less guilt and anxiety about their children. Wesley's involvement in the New School introduced the Mitchells to additional individuals who were experimenting with alternative life styles.¹⁷⁴

The families who spent their summers at Greensboro and formed a tight-knit social community included still more dual career couples — Agnes and Ernest Hocking, Clive and Elizabeth Lewis Day, Frank and Amey Watson. Agnes Hocking and Elizabeth Day, both married to academics, were founding teachers and administrators of pioneering progressive schools. They began their work around the same time

172 Pratt and Marot lived together from 1901 until Helen's death in 1940. Marot also carried out several projects for the BEE. See Mary E. Hauser, *Learning from Children, The Life and Legacy of Caroline Pratt* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

173 Lillian Fadiman, *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), p. 29; "Elizabeth Irwin, Long an Educator", *The New York Times*, October 17, 1942. Patricia Aljberg Graham, "Irwin, Elizabeth Annette" in *Notable American Women*, ed. by James, James, and Boyer, II, pp. 255–57.

174 Notably, Elsie Clews Parsons, Emily James Putnam, and Alvin Johnson. Wesley remained on the Board of Directors of the New School after he stopped teaching there in 1922; Lucy eventually replaced him on the Board. See Friedlander, p. 50 and Note 26, p. 386.

that Lucy launched the BEE and started teaching at the Play School.¹⁷⁵ They too struggled with many of the same challenges as the Mitchells. Elizabeth Day loved teaching but admitted that the demands of managing both the school and her household made her “always tired and frequently cross” — a characterization that Lucy could identify with. Agnes Hocking often voiced regrets about not being a full time mother, but always insisted she did not want to give up her career.¹⁷⁶ Winifred Rieber, another friend from Berkeley days, had a flourishing career as a portrait artist. She often left her husband and children behind in California when she took off to paint a commissioned portrait.¹⁷⁷ Rieber painted several portraits for the Mitchell family and stayed as a guest in their Greenwich Village home.

Friendships of this sort were rare among the other couples featured in this book. Knowing so many other couples who were juggling careers, households, partners, and children contributed to Lucy’s growing sense of confidence. That Wesley as well as Lucy had close friends who were similarly situated was particularly unusual. Both Mitchells could draw comfort from the fact that they were not completely alone or aberrant in their efforts.

175 The Hockings and other Harvard couples founded a progressive, experimental school for their children in 1915; it later became the Shady Hill School. Agnes Hocking taught English and poetry at Shady Hill, and served as its administrative head during its early years. Ernest Hocking taught philosophy at Harvard and was an early Trustee of the BEE. See Edward Yeomans, *The Shady Hill School: the First Fifty Years* (Cambridge, MA: Windflower Press, 1979). Elizabeth Lewis Day, married to Yale professor Clive Day, was a mother when she purchased a private school in 1916. Having overcome Clive’s objections to her working full time, she was the school’s principal between 1916 and 1938 and also taught English and drama (“The Hopkins School: Celebrating 350 Years” at www.hopkins.edu). Amey Eaton Watson was former social worker, a PhD sociologist, and social activist. Her position as an Instructor at the University of Utah was terminated when she married Frank D. Watson in 1913. She subsequently taught at the Pennsylvania School for Social and Health Work and earned her PhD at Bryn Mawr in 1923, when she was the mother of three boys. A fourth son was born in 1924. Amey did field work and wrote several reports for the Women’s Bureau at the US Department of Labor. Frank Watson taught at Haverford College. See Amey Eaton Watson, “Illegitimacy: Philadelphia’s Problem and the Development of Standards of Care” (1923) and *Household Employment in Philadelphia* (1932).

176 Antler, pp. 278–79.

177 Dorothy Rieber Joralemon, “Too Many Philosophers”, *American Heritage Magazine*, 31 (October/November 1980), <https://www.americanheritage.com/too-many-philosophers#1>.

Shared Visions at Work and Home

Both Lucy and Wesley were consciously trying to adopt marital roles and behaviors that they thought were important for future generations. This was a mutually shared vision rather than something one partner tried to impose on the other. Wesley argued the point in their courtship letters. Lucy made it a major theme in *Two Lives*. They were not bohemians or radicals, but they were visionaries who were as pioneering and collaborative in the workplace as in the home. Their behavior in one sphere reinforced their behavior in the other, and brought them closer together.¹⁷⁸

Colleagues noted that Lucy was deeply “unconventional” in her thinking. She described herself as “half Gypsy.”¹⁷⁹ Her decision to marry Wesley flew in the face of her upbringing and defied the expectations of her friends and relations. He challenged convention by moving to New York without the assurance of a job. The Mitchells’ decision to adopt a baby was sufficiently unusual for a family of their wealth and social standing that the *New York Times* wrote a news article about the adoption.¹⁸⁰ After they had a biological child, the Mitchells flaunted convention again by adopting a second baby.

They were pathbreakers in the workplace as well as in the home. The progressive education that Lucy advanced was an intentional break with nineteenth-century educational theory and practice. The BEE’s efforts to develop scientific evidence and measures of children’s developmental stages and link them to experimental efforts in the classroom were highly innovative. Lucy’s *Here and Now Storybook* was hailed as “epoch making” and “revolutionary” and she encouraged

178 Historian Eric Rauchway places the Mitchells’ marriage in the broader context of American Progressivism, arguing that they, and other married couples like them (notably, Dorothy Whitney and Willard Strait, and Mary Ritter and Charles Beard) used their ideas about family and social obligation as the basis for educational, economic, and social reforms that would liberate individuals and society from traditional roles, social conventions, and gender norms. See Rauchway, *The Refuge of Affections: Family and American Reform Politics, 1900–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 2–12, 20–22, 94–121, 126–57, 173.

179 Prescott, “Interview with Winsor, Black, and Biber.” LSM Papers.

180 “Waifs Find Good Homes,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 1914. See also, Antler, p. 231.

and supported other innovative writers of children's literature.¹⁸¹ She continued to adapt and invent throughout her career — developing a pioneering social studies curriculum in the 1920s, forging a teacher training college out of a cooperative network of experimental schools in the 1930s, incorporating her progressive educational philosophy into several New York City public schools in the 1940s. She went on a five-month trip to Asia when she turned sixty in 1938 because she felt she was getting stale and wanted to spark her creativity.¹⁸²

Wesley similarly broke new ground in economics, as he had intended to do.¹⁸³ His study of *Business Cycles* (1913), which built a new theoretical system out of quantitative evidence and empirical observation, was regarded as a “landmark” publication that had “revolutionary consequences” for the study of economics. The projects he headed at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) from the 1920s into the 1940s, which developed national economic indicators out of quantitative data sources, were equally pioneering.¹⁸⁴

Collaborative decision-making was another hallmark of their work and a marked contrast to Lucy's father's style of authoritarian leadership. As the Director of Research at NBER, Wesley excelled in getting businessmen, labor leaders, statesmen, and scholars to agree to a common research agenda and reach a uniform interpretation of the evidence. His colleagues found him to be “magnanimous in sharing credit” and praised him for having “taught us to work together and help one another.” His work at the SSRC was similarly focused on getting experts in different disciplines to work collectively in pursuit of common goals.¹⁸⁵ In his final months, he had a recurring nightmare in which he was responsible for the construction of a medieval cathedral, but could

181 Epoch-making: Elizabeth Jenkins in *Journal of Home Economics*. Revolutionary: Harold Ordway Rugg in *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Both quoted in Antler, p. 253. Encouraged other writers: Anna Holmes, “The Radical Woman Behind ‘Goodnight Moon’”, *The New Yorker*, February 7, 2022, 16–22, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/02/07/the-radical-woman-behind-goodnight-moon>.

182 Prescott, “Lucy Sprague Mitchell”.

183 WCM to LS, October 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

184 National Bureau of Economic Research, Press Release (May 12, 1952) announcing the publication of *Wesley Clair Mitchell: The Economic Scientist*, ed. by Arthur F. Burns. See also, Arthur F. Burns, “Wesley Clair Mitchell, 1874–1948” [n.d.], and Frederic C. Mills, “Wesley Clair Mitchell, 1874–1948” [n.d.]. All in LSM Papers.

185 Arthur F. Burns to LSM, November 3, 1948. “Resolution Adopted by the Executive Committee of Board of Directors of National Bureau of Economic Research,

make little progress because there was no spirit of cooperation among the workers.¹⁸⁶

Collaborative leadership that stimulated “joint thinking” and promoted cross-disciplinary work was a foundation of Lucy’s educational “credo” as well.¹⁸⁷ The BEE went through numerous reorganizations and protracted debates in its early years as Lucy and her colleagues struggled to find an organizational structure that reflected and advanced this collaborative vision.¹⁸⁸ The BEE’s Cooperative School for Student Teachers (CSST), better known as the Bank Street College of Education, also embraced collaborative and cooperative management structures and decision-making.¹⁸⁹ Lucy’s collaborative approach was reflected in her working relationships as well as in the BEE’s management structures. Colleagues described her as stimulated by intellectual give and take, quick to incorporate co-workers’ suggestions into her thinking and writing, and happy to work anonymously behind the scenes to advance the BEE’s objectives.¹⁹⁰

Both Lucy and Wesley brought the same collaborative, cooperative approach to their marriage and strove to avoid what they referred to as “executive” behavior in the home. Wesley was as anxious to foster cooperative traits in his children as in his professional colleagues. Concerned about six-year-old Sprague’s competitiveness and aggression with other children, Wesley turned to his son’s teachers for help, explaining, “I don’t like struggles for personal ascendancy & I don’t acquit myself well in them when they are unavoidable [...] I shall be glad of anything that gives a more cooperative turn to Sprague’s dealings with others.”¹⁹¹ When Lucy was traveling in Europe with the two older boys in 1928, Wesley was uncomfortable about issuing directives to the younger children and household staff in order to prepare the Greensboro complex for the summer.¹⁹² When he was teaching at Oxford, Lucy sent

November 16, 1948”; Mills, “Wesley Clair Mitchell” [n.d.]; WCM to Robert Redfield, October 24, 1939. LSM Papers.

186 LSM, “Robin”, p. 24. LSM Papers.

187 BEE, Chairman’s Report, 1921–22 and 1922–23, BSCA. LSM, UA, LSM Papers.

188 BEE, Working Council Minutes, 1918–1921, BSCA.

189 LSM, *TL*, pp. 469–72.

190 Prescott, “Interview with Winsor, Black, and Biber”, LSM Papers. Lucy’s continuing commitment to collaboration: LSM, *TL*, p. 547.

191 WCM, School Report on Sprague Mitchell, February 6, 1921. LSM Papers.

192 WCM to LSM, June 17, 1928. LSM Papers.

him a series of letters detailing her conflicting thoughts about whether she and the children should join him in Europe and what kind of new car to buy. He weighed in, but insisted that the decisions were up to her.¹⁹³ Lucy was equally troubled about having to take command when decisions about schedules needed to be made, and family members and guests could not decide on a course of action. "Life has been viciously executive for me," she complained to Wesley after one such episode in Greensboro.¹⁹⁴

Coming to Terms with a New Type of Man

Despite their shared values, creating a pioneering marriage that met their emotional needs and enabled them to pursue independent careers proved easier for Wesley than for Lucy. His letters and diaries reveal none of the resentments or frustrations that men like George Herbert Palmer, William Henry Young, and Robert Herrick experienced as the partners of career-oriented women. Wesley did not feel his masculinity was compromised by taking on a greater role in the children's upbringing, supporting Lucy's career, or making decisions with her. But Lucy struggled to reconcile his behavior with her socially-determined sense that men should be powerful, assertive, and dominating.

Like Sidney Webb, Wesley was a natural partner, a collaborator by temperament as well as conviction. He explained to Lucy before they married, "I detest the feeling of anger which serious opposition rouses in me, and I am always ready to let others do as they like in small matters rather than waste time in trying to persuade them that my ways are better."¹⁹⁵ Professional colleagues and personal friends alike characterized Wesley as an "encourager" and "sympathizer", and praised him for his "kindness", "gentleness", "sweetness", "modesty", "simplicity", and "humility."¹⁹⁶ These attributes, more often associated with self-effacing nineteenth-century women than domineering nineteenth-century men, help to explain how Wesley could be so

193 WCM to LSM, April 24, 1932. LSM Papers.

194 LSM to WCM, June 22, 1934. LSM Papers.

195 WCM to LS, October 18, 1911. LSM Papers.

196 These words occur again and again in his obituaries and the sympathy letters Lucy received after his death. LSM Papers.

generously supportive of Lucy. He treated her the same way he treated everyone.

Wesley could also draw on the example of his parents' marriage and values, particularly the influence of his mother, to whom he was very close. Medora Mitchell had taught Wesley important lessons about women's rights, intellectual abilities, and aspirations. Impressed by Lucy's "energy" and "vigor," Medora encouraged her son to play an enabling role in his marriage. "[G]ive her strength and poise and rest by your very presence — by oiling the cogs, and helping to bring the things to pass as she may wish," she advised.¹⁹⁷

As Lucy recognized and envied, Wesley had a unity of character that she lacked. Untroubled by self-doubt or guilt, he accepted himself as readily as he accepted others. His values, beliefs, and personality all drove in a similar direction, reinforcing and strengthening him. Comfortable with himself, he was comfortable with others.

For Lucy, temperament, belief, and upbringing were more at war with each other. She described herself as a "scientist by conviction" not by "temperament."¹⁹⁸ The same distinction applied to her approach to leadership. Despite her faith in the value of collaborative decision-making, she often took charge. At home, she made the decisions and arrangements that kept her complicated household running smoothly. To ensure that things got done, she had to issue orders and establish routines. She played a similar executive role at the BEE and the City and Country School where she handled the practical details that kept the organizations in operation: raising funds, balancing the budget, purchasing supplies, paying the bills. Lucy did not like being an administrator, but she knew she had the requisite skills to run an organization well. In this aspect of her work, one colleague observed, she was "the Boss."¹⁹⁹

Lucy could be imperious and sometimes seemed to feel entitled. She issued a lot of orders when she travelled, and expected family

197 Medora Mitchell to WCM, March 4, 1912, in response to his letter of February 27, 1912. For his devotion to his mother, see also WCM to Medora Mitchell, May 12, 1912. LSM Papers.

198 LSM, *TL*, xviii.

199 Lucy's administrative skills: LSM, *TL*, p. 288. The Boss: Barbara Biber in Prescott, "Interview with Winsor, Black, and Biber." LSM Papers.

and colleagues to smooth her way and make arrangements for her.²⁰⁰ Brilliant, charismatic, and driven, she failed to appreciate that others had to struggle to accomplish much less. Children, colleagues, and students could find it difficult to live up to her exacting standards. Perhaps Wesley did as well.

At home, Lucy was quick to express annoyance or anger, although she might be apologetic or embarrassed about it afterward. After one set-to with Wesley when she set off on a work-related trip, she apologized for her "horrid" behavior and asked for assurances that he still loved her.²⁰¹ When Wesley was absent from home, her letters reported her frustrations with domestic woes, family members, and houseguests. Blaming one irritable mood on her menstrual cycle, she apologized to Wesley, "Glad you are to miss this for once!"²⁰² Looking back on their marriage after Wesley's death, Lucy was filled with guilt about her anger and impatience. A poem she wrote in 1951 lamented, "temper flares in the same old way." Another expressed regret that she had not been "more adequate and gentle."²⁰³

Lucy was an immensely charismatic, supportive, and inspiring leader and teacher, well-loved by her colleagues, student teachers, and the children she taught. But she could also be a taskmaster. "Many a meeting opened with Lucy giving us an arithmetical account of all the hours, added up into days, she had been forced to waste while she waited for us, her tardy colleagues," a BEE staff member recalled.²⁰⁴ She could also be harsh with underlings: she berated a janitor who mixed up the slides she had prepared for viewing.²⁰⁵ Even her peers found Lucy intimidating. Henry Rieber, married to the artist Winifred Rieber and

200 When Lucy stayed longer than expected on a trip to Florida, Wesley and her colleagues went to a great deal of effort to find a substitute speaker for a talk she was scheduled to give (WCM to LSM, February 20, 1934, LSM Papers). When she went to California to help Arnold find a house in 1947, Lucy instructed Wesley's sister, Beulah, to supply the name of a hotel and a rental car agency because "We all have to get started the minute we arrive." She also wanted Beulah to mail a letter for her (LSM to Beulah Chute, August 22, 1947, LSM Papers).

201 LSM to WCM, May 29, 1914. LSM Papers.

202 LSM to WCM, October 3, 1916. LSM Papers.

203 LSM, "I Sometimes Think" (Christmas, 1951); "Today I Fell to Thinking" (March 12, 1951). LSM Papers.

204 Barbara Biber in *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: An Hour of Remembrance* (New York: Bank Street College of Education, 1967), p. 20. LSM Papers.

205 Antler, p. 321.

later a good friend, recalled an early encounter with Lucy at Berkeley that “scared the life” out of him.²⁰⁶ Lucy herself regretted that she often lost her temper and expressed herself more forcefully than she should have when she worked with Elisabeth Irwin, head of the Little Red Schoolhouse, on a public school adaptation of the BEE’s curriculum.²⁰⁷

These incidents, many of which occurred when people caused her to waste precious time, reflected the intense pressure Lucy felt as a working wife and mother. Her upbringing made her immensely sensitive to what she called the “sin” of wasting time; the many demands on her as a teacher, chairman of the BEE, author, wife, and mother of four, exacerbated her distress. Despite her anxieties and feelings of inadequacy, Lucy’s experience of entitlement and privilege gave her an expectation that others should do things for her. While Wesley’s upbringing reinforced and strengthened his companionate and sharing traits, her background provided lessons on behavior that was to be avoided rather than emulated.

Lucy’s conflicting ideas about what she wanted in a man and a marriage were harder to resolve. When they were courting, she assumed she and Wesley would have a marriage of “companionable equality.” But she faulted Wesley for not being more commanding and assertive, and she found it difficult to envision a satisfying relationship in which the man would not be more powerful, more important, more masterful, and more “compelling” than the woman. Wesley was one of the rare men of Lucy’s acquaintance who encouraged her to be independent and did not expect her to live vicariously through him. Yet he was so different from her expectations of a “manly” man that she repeatedly called his masculinity into question and hesitated to marry him.

To come to terms with Wesley, Lucy had to redefine her notions of masculinity and rethink the attributes that characterized a “good” husband and a strong leader. In part through Wesley’s example, and in part through the evolution of her own philosophy of leadership, she was able to free herself from her longstanding attraction to big personalities and strong leaders of a traditional type. She came to see that Wesley was a stronger man than she had initially thought. As a result, he could support, encourage, and help her, without trying to direct her or control

206 Henry Rieber to LSM, June 30, 1944. LSM Papers.

207 LSM, *TL*, p. 422.

her. For Lucy, this was transformational. "With you I learned to respect my work. You respected it. You respected me. Guilt and shame, lack of self-confidence evaporated and I accepted myself," she wrote in her musings about their relationship after he died.²⁰⁸ "I began to use what powers, what talents, what abilities I had instead of trying to ignore or suppress them," she explained in *Two Lives*.²⁰⁹ Wesley could give her freedom and encouragement precisely because he lacked a traditional male ego and made no claims for "masculine infallibility" and privilege.²¹⁰

In Lucy's new understanding, what had once seemed like faults and weaknesses began to look like virtues and strengths. She came to see Wesley as a model husband, better suited to the needs of a twentieth-century woman than the powerful and domineering men she had admired growing up. She also came to appreciate that his supportive personality reflected, not a lack of ego, but a healthy self-confidence that did not require him to be the center of attention or establish ascendancy over others.

Over time, Lucy became more disparaging of those who did not exhibit Wesley's collegial, supportive behavior. When she wrote her autobiography in 1944, she was sharply critical of men like her brother-in-law Adolph Miller who were convinced of their own infallibility. She remembered Miller as a "ponderous", pontificating, thirty-five-year-old, "giving the world his infallible opinions in well-rounded sentences." And yet, when she and Wesley were courting, Lucy had faulted him for not being more like Miller. It took her years — and Wesley's help — to break "the spell of Adolph's infallibility," she admitted.²¹¹ Her brother, Albert, a Chicago businessman and city controller, was cut from the same cloth. Convinced that he knew what was best for everyone, he grew "sullen and hurt" when his advice was ignored, Lucy observed.²¹² She even faulted George Herbert Palmer for his characteristic self-importance, concurring in the judgment of his sister-in-law who dubbed him, "The Little Almighty."²¹³

208 LSM, "Robin", p. 26. LSM Papers.

209 LSM, *TL*, p. 541.

210 LSM, *TL*, p. 236.

211 LSM, *UA*, p. 12. LSM Papers.

212 LSM, *UA*, p. 107. LSM Papers.

213 LSM, *TL*, p. 100.

Lucy was equally critical of women whom she thought were too authoritarian or too demanding. In the 1920s, she fell out with two of her closest friends — Caroline Pratt, the founder of the Play School (later the City and Country School), and Marion Farquhar, her roommate at the Marlborough School — over this issue. Pratt, whom Lucy regarded as “a kind of genius”, was immensely influential in Lucy’s understanding of child development.²¹⁴ They worked closely together at the Play School, and their professional collaboration blossomed into a personal friendship. But time and again, Caroline proved unsupportive of Lucy’s innovative research, writing, and teaching. When she refused to let Lucy use the records of students she had taught at the City and Country School, Lucy was unable to complete a book that was half written. Having her project end this way was as painful as suffering a stillbirth, Lucy reported.²¹⁵ Caroline’s refusal to account to the BEE for the projects it funded at her school was another source of tension. Lucy stopped teaching in the City and Country School in 1928 and renegotiated her financial support for the school a few years later. They could no longer work together because Pratt was the kind of leader who insisted on having her own way. “She clipped my wings,” Lucy explained.²¹⁶

The treatment Lucy received from her friend Marion Farquhar in the early 1920s was equally hurtful. When Lucy spent several months in a glassed-in room on the roof of the Mitchells’ brownstone after being erroneously diagnosed with tuberculosis, Marion never came to visit and did not even write Lucy a letter. Lucy’s sense of abandonment was acute. Reflecting on the “strangeness” of her friend’s behavior, she realized how one-sided their friendship had become: Marion thought of her only as an appreciative audience for Marion’s exploits. The two women continued to take trips together and attend social gatherings in each other’s homes, but Lucy no longer felt the same self-sacrificing devotion. Their friendship ended abruptly in 1941 for reasons that are not clear.²¹⁷ Such painful experiences with trusted friends undoubtedly

214 LSM, UA, p. 408. LSM Papers.

215 LSM, UA. LSM Papers.

216 LSM, *TL*, pp. 410–14. For more on Pratt’s work, personality, and relationship with Lucy, see Antler, pp. 244–46, and Hauser, *Learning*.

217 Lucy’s account of Marion’s behavior (referred to as Vivian) in her unpublished autobiography is very raw and anguished; she did not mention it in *TL*. On the abrupt end of their friendship, see Antler, Note 45, p. 403.

increased Lucy's appreciation of Wesley's steadfast support and affection.

In addition, Lucy came to realize that Wesley had a stronger personality than she originally thought. As his career advanced, he exhibited a more assertive "make things happen" style that contrasted with what Lucy had earlier called his "unaggressive academic" approach to life. As he gained prominence and recognition in his field, she could take vicarious pleasure in his career success. And through her own work, she came to understand that the collaborative leadership he exercised at NBER and SSRC, the social science research organizations he helped to found in the 1920s, was ultimately more effective than her father's style of issuing commands and making all the decisions. Redefining her notion of leadership enhanced Wesley's image.

Wesley's ability to keep Lucy on an even keel was especially important. She was a woman of strong emotions who was given to dramatic outbursts. She described her life in terms of "searing" experiences and responded to people and events with an intensity that could be overwhelming.²¹⁸ Overcome by the breathtaking views from the summit of the Sierra Mountains in 1911, she was frustrated when her fellow campers, Wesley included, did not respond in kind. "In a grandiloquent gesture I swept my arm towards that shimmering vision below us. 'You look at that unmoved!' I shouted and retired to a rock of my own, sobbing violently. I hadn't an inhibition left at 14,503 feet," she wrote in her unpublished autobiography.²¹⁹

Lucy could be as "histrionic," as she characterized it, in her daily life.²²⁰ In contrast, Wesley strove to avoid emotional exchanges and defuse emotional scenes. "He disapproved of emotional intensity in discussions — even when it did not take on a personal tone — lest it be strong enough to prevent any real meeting of the minds. I have seen Robin exercise a kind of unobtrusive, calming influence in many

218 Lucy coped with "searing memories" of her beloved Alice Freeman Palmer after Alice's death in 1902 (LSM, UA. LSM Papers). In 1938, she enjoyed five months of "searing experiences" that changed her life when she traveled in Asia. (LSM, Notes on rereading the diary of her trip. LSM Papers.)

219 LSM, UA. LSM Papers.

220 LSM, "Robin", p. 27. LSM Papers.

meetings," Lucy wrote.²²¹ He had an equally calming effect on her. He could withstand the force of her emotions without responding in kind.

Although Wesley sometimes disappointed her by not being sufficiently sensitive to her emotional needs, Lucy appreciated his ability to rein her in and help her maintain equilibrium. Early in their marriage, she apologized profusely for being "horrid" to him while he was "as usual sweet and dear" to her. Already, she appreciated the effect of his soothing influence. "You may cure me sometime—at least I used to be worse, didn't I?" she inquired.²²² Several years later, after venting her frustration with a houseguest in a letter to Wesley, Lucy concluded, "I need you sweetheart, to keep me poised. Dear, dear boy — I could never exist without you."²²³ In response to Lucy's increasingly agitated letters about the US economic crisis and its toll on the Bank Street network of cooperative schools and the Mitchells' finances in the early 1930s, Wesley sent soothing counsel and analyses from England that made the situation seem less dire.²²⁴

This is what Lucy had said she wanted in a husband: someone who could hold her more flamboyant, effervescent, and emotional personality "in check" without breaking her spirit. She had feared that Wesley would not be able to do that because he had no inclination to dominate. She discovered that he could calm her without trying to control her. He did not share her dramatic reactions to people, places, and events, but he tolerated them and even derived a vicarious sense of pleasure and excitement from them. This pattern was established early and is fundamental to understanding their relationship. Wesley fell in love with Lucy the night she performed a spontaneous gypsy dance at a party in Berkeley in 1907. The dance shocked Lucy's brother-in-law, but something in Wesley responded to and yearned to share Lucy's passionate approach to life. Although he would sometimes recoil from what he "gently" referred to as Lucy's "dramatic way", he admired her intensity and enthusiasm.²²⁵ She made his life more vibrant and more fun. "We are most eager for your return — not because we lack anything

221 LSM, *TL*, p. 387.

222 LSM to WCM, May 29, 1914. LSM Papers.

223 LSM to WCM, October, 1916. LSM Papers.

224 WCM to LSM, April 16, 1932. LSM Papers.

225 Her dramatic way: LSM, "Two Me's" (October 1960); his admiration: LSM, "Stand By Me Dear, Stand By Me" (November 12, 1962). LSM Papers.

we esteem necessary to our comfort, like swept floors, but because we have a better time when you are with us," he wrote when she was away.²²⁶ The house seems "uninteresting without you," he reported during another of her trips.²²⁷ And he always looked forward to seeing what she would do next.

By seeing Wesley's gentleness as an expression of strength rather than weakness, Lucy came to understand that he was a force to be reckoned with. "I might so easily have wrecked a lesser man — and a lesser man might have wrecked me, too," she observed.²²⁸ Nevertheless, she took pains to show in *Two Lives* that Wesley was not weak or spineless. The compromises they made in their marriage were not all "mushy concessions" on Wesley's part, she pointed out. When a fellow economist asserted that the "C." in Wesley's name stood for compromise, Lucy countered that he was willing to fight for what he believed in, but he picked his battles carefully and did not enjoy the fight.²²⁹ And she stressed that anything he did to help out at with the children, he did voluntarily, because he wanted to, rather than because she required it.

Lucy also used various strategies to show that, as important as her career was, Wesley's career was more so. She contrasted her "fumbling" and "groping" attempts to establish herself as an educator and develop the BEE to Wesley's seemingly effortless ability to secure academic and research positions after he left the University of California, Berkeley. She stressed how critically important he was to her career, not only by encouraging and supporting her, but also by applying his expertise — in scientific measurement, economics, and finance — to her work. "I have many half formed ideas both for farming & for Bureaus & for my own work. I *wish* you were here. Not only I need you but the whole community needs some such leadership as you could give. We're very messy in our thinking," Lucy wrote when Wesley was away at Oxford and she was struggling to keep Bank Street and its network of cooperative schools from financial collapse.²³⁰

226 WCM to LSM and Arnold Mitchell, July 4, 1930. LSM Papers.

227 WCM to LSM, June 4, 1920. LSM Papers.

228 LSM, *TL*, p. 236.

229 LSM, *TL*, p. 234.

230 LSM to WCM [April, n.d.], 1932. Emphasis in the original. LSM Papers.

All this suggests a lingering need on Lucy's part to convince herself as well as the rest of the world that a man whose outstanding traits were gentleness, supportiveness, and a desire to get people to work together could still be successful, strong, and masculine. The new model husband who made it possible for his wife to work embodied a new style of masculinity. Wesley understood this from the start; Lucy came to realize it only gradually.

Motherhood and Career: Stresses and Satisfaction

Lucy portrayed the pleasures and challenges of being a working wife and mother very differently than many of her contemporaries did. Although her life was "hectic", she wrote in *Two Lives*, "I loved it. I thrived on it." She gloried in "a wonderful life" that was enriched by "desire, zeal, righteous indignation, enjoyment, [and] hard work."²³¹ She wanted the world to understand that married women might choose to work outside the home because they "enjoy having a profession, enjoy tackling an intellectual or a social or a business or an art problem, enjoy contacts with people and with thinking that they would never have if they thought their place was steadily and exclusively in the home."²³² She made this point not only on her own behalf, but on behalf of all working mothers. She did not see herself as unwomanly or unfeminine. Nor did she see herself as a bad wife or a bad mother.

Lucy was equally forthright in writing about the hardships entailed in juggling the BEE, classroom teaching, and writing books while raising four children and being married to a man who had an equally demanding career. "Women who carry responsibility for both home and jobs are still in conflict. A mother who takes a job in the world as it is now organized really has two jobs, and she has to be both strong and smart to carry them both adequately," she cautioned.²³³ She acknowledged that working mothers are often anxious and exhausted, and conveyed the pain involved in ceding a child's care to someone else. Under doctor's orders to stop breastfeeding her youngest child when he was eight months old, Lucy wrote that she felt like "an outsider" when

²³¹ LSM, *TL*, p. 540, and LSM, UA. LSM Papers.

²³² LSM, UA, "Chapter 20, Looking Backwards and Forward", p. 8. LSM Papers.

²³³ Ibid. Similarly, *TL*, p. 542.

she saw the mutual devotion the baby and his nursemaid lavished on each other.²³⁴

Lucy wanted to be as much a part of her children's lives as a mother who did not work outside the home. Like Grace Chisholm Young, she set a standard of "supermomism" for herself. She seemed to feel she had to do not just as much as, but more than, a non-working mother would do. She embroidered and sewed her children's clothes; made doll clothes; darned socks and mended torn clothing while she sat in meetings. When the children were sick, she slept in their rooms so she could tend to them during the night. She also took on the care of her friends' children. Weekends and summers were generally spent with at least one additional child, and usually several; Polly Forbes-Johnson, the adopted daughter of Harriet Johnson and her partner, Harriet Forbes, spent so much time with the Mitchells that she was treated as an honorary fifth child and called Lucy and Wesley "mother" and "father." Marion Farquhar's three sons spent a great deal of time with the Mitchells. One lived with the Mitchells when he was recovering from a tubercular hip in the 1920s, and Lucy supervised his care.²³⁵

Anxious to present herself as a mother who welcomed opportunities to spend time with her children and made enormous sacrifices to do that, Lucy sometimes minimized how much domestic help she had and the role that others, including Wesley, played in the children's upbringing, and how much her work took her away from home.²³⁶ Occasionally, she fudged facts, explaining that her absence from the family — the days she spent at the Shady Hill School in 1927 and her decision not to accompany Wesley to Oxford in 1931 — was motivated by the needs of a child rather than the demands of her work.²³⁷ Returning to New York

234 LSM, School Report on Arnold Mitchell, November 26, 1919. LSM Papers.

235 Polly: WCM to Beulah Chute, May 31, 1938. Marion's son: LSM, UA. LSM Papers.

236 We learn more details about Wesley's involvement in the children's care from his diaries and letters than from *Two Lives*.

237 In 1927, Lucy spent three days a week in Boston, teaching her new geography curriculum at the Shady Hill School, taking Marni with her. The plan evolved, Lucy wrote in *TL* (p. 422), to benefit Sprague, who had become too dependent on her while he recuperated from an accident. But Wesley's diaries for 1927 (WMC Papers) and Lucy's Round Robin letter to her college classmates (December 18, 1927, LSM Papers) suggest that the opportunity to teach the geography curriculum at Shady Hill was the driving force behind her absence from home. In 1931, Lucy instructed Wesley to explain to his British colleagues that she was unable to join him for his year as a visiting professor at Oxford due to a son's illness, rather than because she

after a visit to Oxford, she assured Wesley, "I hate leaving you in Oxford. Not that you need *me*. But I rather think you need a *wife*!"²³⁸

"What happens to the children, especially to young children, when both parents work is the *real* problem. Concern for their children is what makes it so difficult for a working mother and keeps her anxious and usually tired," she acknowledged in *Two Lives*.²³⁹ Nevertheless, Lucy's primary focus in that book was the toll the juggling act took on the mother, not the children. She was less attuned to the difficulties the children of working mothers experienced. Because her professional life focused on children's development, she was convinced that working made her a better mother. "Trying to learn what children are like helps any mother with her children. I know I made many mistakes with my children. But I believe I would have made even more without my work," she asserted.²⁴⁰

That was not the view of her children, however. Lucy's biographer, Joyce Antler, who interviewed Lucy's three sons in the late 1970s, reports they felt like "guinea pigs in the laboratory of progressive education" and resented Lucy's career. They remembered her as emotionally remote and thought she had not been deeply involved in their lives. They felt much the same about Wesley as a father, but did not blame him so much. Several of the children felt they had received more loving care from — and as a result, had developed a stronger emotional bond with — Mollie Cotter Casey, who worked for the Mitchells for many years. She was hired as a maid and eventually became a trusted and loving housekeeper who took charge of the house and children when Lucy was working. Mollie openly expressed her affection for the children, and they loved her in return. Arnold described her as his "real mother." All the Mitchell children found it difficult to live up to what they saw as their parents' very demanding expectations and lofty example. Tensions

was needed at Bank Street (LSM, "Robin", p. 19, and LSM to WCM, May 7, 1932, LSM Papers). Lucy similarly explained in *TL*, p. 388, that Arnold's health was the reason she did not go to Oxford for the year.

238 LSM to WCM, February 24, 1932. LSM Papers. Emphasis in the original.

239 LSM, *TL*, p. 542, emphasis in the original.

240 LSM, *TL*, p. 540.

and resentments persisted after the children became adults. Lucy's relationship with her only daughter Marni was particularly difficult.²⁴¹

This does not negate the loving efforts Lucy made to ensure her children's health, well-being, and happiness. It suggests rather, that just as wives and husbands are likely to have different versions of the same marital narrative, so there are two perspectives on a parenting relationship—the child's and the parent's.²⁴²

Complaints about emotionally distant parents were not uncommon among the children of early career women; nor were they uncommon among other children of this era, especially those brought up in wealthy and prominent families, even when the wife did not work.²⁴³ Despite Lucy's interest in child development, both she and Wesley adopted childrearing policies, common to their own day, that seem unduly harsh to a later generation. Lucy threw cold water on Jack's face to get him to stop screaming when he was five. The children were sent from the table when they were too silly, "whiny" or "uncontrolled." A nursemaid shut eighteen-month old Arnold in a closet to break him of throwing tantrums. When Sprague would not stop crying when it was time to go to bed, Lucy spanked him; when he continued to cry, the maid shut him in a closet. Lucy became impatient with Marni when she dressed too slowly.²⁴⁴ Wesley, unhappily but conscientiously, spanked a four-year-old visiting child for bedwetting.²⁴⁵ The Mitchell children were reacting to these behaviors as well as to Lucy's work and the pressures of her demanding schedule. Marni and Jack's relationships with their parents were further complicated by the fact that they were adopted.

Lucy acknowledged that there were tensions with her children, but overall she presented a very rosy picture of the Mitchells' domestic life. This was not just a defense mechanism; it was characteristic of her optimistic approach to life. Nevertheless, she seems to have been particularly self-absorbed and self-protective about her parenting. While this may have damaged her relationships with her children, it also

241 Antler, pp. 360–62. On Lucy's relationship with Marni, see Mollie [Cotter Casey] to LSM [December, 1958], and LSM, "Another Christmas — 1958." LSM Papers.

242 Phyllis Rose remarked on the "his" and "her" versions of marital narratives in *Parallel Lives, Five Victorian Marriages* (New York: Vintage, 1984), pp. 6–7.

243 See Chapters 2 and 3.

244 LSM reports and notes on the children. LSM Papers.

245 WCM, Diary, August 31, 1914. WCM Papers.

helped to free her from guilt and allowed her to offer encouragement to those who believed mothers should have careers and fathers should be more involved in childrearing.²⁴⁶ She could take pride in knowing that she herself had contributed to the institutions and learning that would provide more adequate care for children outside the home. She could also be confident that the care her own children received outside the home was of the highest quality.

Lucy's accounts of the early years at the BEE and the City and Country School and summers at Greensboro — times when her personal and professional lives were intimately fused — are so vividly and lovingly sketched in *Two Lives*, that they dominate the reader's understanding of how she balanced family and career. She was less forthcoming about how much she was away or busy, especially in later years when the children were still at home. She did not mention, for example, the weekends she went away with Caroline Pratt to write her stories for children, the vacations they went on together, or the times she was away visiting other schools, giving lectures, or attending professional meetings — activities that are recorded in Wesley's diaries and in the Mitchells' correspondence. In 1927, Lucy was away from home for three days a week, while she was teaching at the Shady Hill School in Massachusetts. Later in the 1920s and early 1930s, when she was teaching at the Little Red Schoolhouse in Manhattan, working with teachers and staff at CSST's network of progressive schools, and giving seminars at the BEE, she was out of the house on most weekdays and Saturday mornings, as well as several evenings a week. In 1931, her schedule was so packed that she had very little time to spend with Arnold, the only child at home. She felt badly about that, but she did not cut back on her work. Nor did she report how busy she had been in *Two Lives*.²⁴⁷

Despite some exaggerations, omissions, and blind spots, Lucy's picture of the way she and Wesley fit their work into their family life is mostly honest and certainly caring. Neither she nor Wesley engaged in the mythmaking that George Herbert Palmer did when he wrote his *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*. Both Mitchells were committed to the idea that men and women had to behave differently if women's efforts to work

²⁴⁶ LSM, TL, p. 543.

²⁴⁷ LSM to WCM, October 18, 1931 and November 22, 1931. LSM Papers. Sprague and Marni were both in boarding school; Jack was with Wesley in England.

were to succeed. For the most part they applied those beliefs proudly and straightforwardly in their daily lives.

Later Years

Lucy drew an idyllic portrait of the Mitchells' marriage in *Two Lives*, describing their long happy years together, united by work and children, shared activities, and unfailing support for each other. Nevertheless, there were times, especially later in their marriage, when Wesley's propensity to immerse himself in his work made her feel that he was not sufficiently attentive to her and the children. After his death, she wrote a poem describing how she could tell at "a glance" whether he was focused on statistics or on her.²⁴⁸ Wesley seemed especially withdrawn during the children's adolescence, she noted.²⁴⁹ He often chose not to attend the weekly dances the teenagers held in the Greensboro barn, chaperoned by parents. When he did show up, he frequently sat in a corner and played chess.²⁵⁰ Instead of joining the family for movie outings and musical evenings, he sometimes holed up in his study to read after dinner.²⁵¹

Wesley's emotional reserve increased Lucy's sense of distance. He "was so sane, so controlled himself — and always had been — that he sometimes failed to notice the emotional difficulties some child was facing. He took it for granted that all the rest of us, *including myself*, were equal to managing our difficulties alone," Lucy wrote in *Two Lives*, signaling how dependent she had become on his emotional support and sage advice.²⁵² When her editor proposed that she soften this judgment, and mentioned specific ways to do so, Lucy refused. The editor's suggested changes were "simply not true," Lucy insisted.²⁵³

Wesley was all too aware of his inclination to withdraw. In 1934, he wrote to a close friend from Berkeley days, "Life has been so full of pressing obligations of late that I feel in the danger of losing all

248 LSM, "Statistics or Me" (December 26, 1951). LSM Papers.

249 LSM, *TL*, pp. 481–82.

250 LSM, *TL*, p. 483.

251 WCM, Diaries, March 19, 1936; November 26 and 27, 1937. WCM Papers.

252 LSM, *TL*, p. 482, emphasis added.

253 Unidentified editor's comments on a draft of *Two Lives*, with Lucy's handwritten responses. Emphasis in the original. LSM Papers.

human contacts in the midst of efforts to improve social conditions. That would be a horrible fate and it is one to which an unfortunate with my temperament might really succumb."²⁵⁴ To fellow economist Joseph A. Schumpeter, he confided, "my next volume is getting a hold upon me that is slightly terrifying at times. Like you I feel occasionally that I am not a human being but a machine for turning out technical copy."²⁵⁵

Wesley's customary restraint and withdrawal were especially troubling for Lucy as she and Wesley aged. Disappointed by his calm reaction to her distress when she suffered a detached retina in December 1945, she turned to her Bank Street colleagues for sympathy and sustenance.²⁵⁶ A year later, he failed to comprehend how frightened she was when a spasm in a cerebral blood vessel caused a temporary memory loss.

Retirement posed new hurdles. Wesley retired from Columbia in 1944 when he turned seventy; a year later, he resigned as Director of Research at NBER and from other posts, although he continued to work on NBER projects. Struggling to discern meaningful patterns in masses of statistical data and explain them in his customary elegant and precise prose style, Wesley was pleased to spend more time in Stamford where he could write undisturbed. Lucy started to write her autobiography, an activity she enjoyed immensely. Twenty years earlier, Wesley, a voracious reader of all forms of literature, had read Beatrice Webb's autobiography, *My Apprenticeship*, aloud to Lucy, to their mutual enjoyment.²⁵⁷ Perhaps Beatrice's exploration of the development of her craft and credo, and the social and familial context of her upbringing, provided a model and inspiration for Lucy. Wesley was confident she would produce "a most interesting document" and pronounced the opening chapter "charming."²⁵⁸

In 1946, the Mitchells gave up their New York apartment and made Stamford their permanent home. Wesley was happy that they saw

254 WCM to Dorothea Moore, January 27, 1934. LSM Papers.

255 WCM to Joseph A. Schumpeter, November 18, 1936. LSM Papers.

256 LSM, *TL*, pp. 498–99. The long account of her recovery from the detached retina is in LSM Papers and *TL*, pp. 499–504.

257 WCM, *Diaries*, March and April, 1926. WCM Papers. *My Apprenticeship* is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, pp. 321–322.

258 Most interesting: WCM to Beulah Chute, April 1, 1944, LSM Papers. Charming: WCM, *Diary*, March 27, 1944. He read additional chapters of Lucy's autobiography in April 1944, August 1944, and February 1945. WCM, *Diaries*, WCM Papers.

little of other people because he had more time to work.²⁵⁹ But Lucy, who depended on interactions with colleagues, found it hard to be in Stamford, cut off from her friends and activities, more or less isolated with a husband who was content to “work, work, work, with almost no interruptions.” Although she had thought moving to Stanford was a good idea, she came to feel that it pushed her towards retirement before she was fully ready.²⁶⁰ She and Wesley still spent one night a week in Manhattan, allowing her to attend meetings on various projects at the BEE, but this was not enough for Lucy.²⁶¹

Wesley suffered a heart attack in September 1947 when he was seventy-three, but made a good recovery. Two months later, he became the first recipient of the Francis A. Walker Medal, an award given every five years by the American Economic Association to the living American economist whose career had made the greatest contribution to economics.²⁶² Lucy and their son, Jack, were in the audience when Wesley received the medal.

Wesley’s second heart attack, in August 1948, was far more serious. When Lucy suggested hiring a professional nurse, Wesley initially demurred. But after giving it some thought, he agreed, observing, “I don’t suppose you’re getting much writing done.” His reaction was characteristic, Lucy explained: “He did not think in terms of anxiety or illness but in terms of protecting my work.”²⁶³ After a few weeks, Wesley realized he would not be able to work again and resigned from all of his NBER projects. It was at this point, Lucy believed, that he lost his will to live. He refused food, water, and medicine, and died after several days in the hospital, in late October 1948.

Immediately after Wesley’s death, Lucy experienced what she described as a period of profound “dislocation.” In her grief and loss, her inner stability evaporated and she “regressed” to an earlier stage in her life, before she married Wesley, when she had been consumed by anxiety, insecurity, and guilt. She got through it by reliving her

259 WCM to Beulah Chute, December 2, 1940. Similarly, WCM to Beulah Chute, October 3, 1941; January 4, 1943; August 1, 1944. LSM Papers.

260 LSM, *TL*, p. 504.

261 WCM to Beulah Chute, November 30, 1947. LSM Papers.

262 American Economic Association, <https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/honors-awards/walker-medalists>.

263 LSM, *TL*, p. 529.

experiences, and reviewing and reassessing her years with Wesley. She spent the first weeks after his death writing a long account of their marriage, in the form of a letter addressed directly to him. In it, she poured out her love and admiration for him, but also noted behavior that frustrated or disappointed her.²⁶⁴

Several months later, Lucy started gathering material to use in writing his biography. She wanted to write a book that would describe Wesley the man as well as Wesley the renowned economist. Finding it difficult to discuss his life and work without writing about their life together, she finally decided to tell both their life stories, incorporating material from the autobiographical memoir she wrote in the mid-1940s as well as his papers and correspondence.²⁶⁵ Wesley might have approved: in 1946, he read a pre-publication copy of *Our Partnership*, Beatrice Webb's account of her life and work with Sidney, with great interest and discussed the potential audience for an American edition of the book with his son, Arnold, who worked in publishing.²⁶⁶

Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself, published in 1953, traces Lucy's and Wesley's lives before they met, discusses their independent careers, and describes their life together as spouses and parents. Along with the Bank Street College of Education, this portrayal of a dual career marriage is Lucy's legacy for future generations. She was fortunate not only in being able to live a new style marriage, but also in being able to articulate the vision she shared with Wesley and to point the way for others. Believing that dual career marriages would become more common in the future, she emphasized the satisfactions and advantages of such unions, and the need for both men and women to adopt new roles to overcome the challenges. Solving "the family problem" required new behaviors from husbands and fathers as well as wives and mothers, Lucy insisted.²⁶⁷ Advertising copy stressed that Lucy's accomplishments "were made possible by a husband who believed thoroughly that a wife and mother could also be a professional

264 LSM, "Robin". LSM Papers. This account of the Mitchells' marriage was written about three weeks after Wesley died.

265 LSM, *TL*, pp. 546–47. LSM to Arnold Mitchell, January 18, 1951. LSM Papers. Arnold was enthusiastic about the new approach.

266 WCM, Diaries, October 28, 1946 to November 6, 1946. WCM Papers.

267 LSM, *TL*, pp. 539–42.

woman.”²⁶⁸ Readers, especially women who hoped to combine work outside the home with marriage and motherhood, found the book inspirational. “I will be recommending it often!” the married dean of Radcliffe College, Lucy’s alma mater, assured her.²⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Lucy had to wrestle with some personal demons when she was writing *Two Lives*. Throughout their marriage, Wesley was more involved in Lucy’s work and provided her with more support and engagement than she offered him. She felt no guilt about this while he was alive. But after he died, she was deeply disconcerted to discover, when she read his correspondence with Sarah Gregory, that Sadie had provided Wesley with a very different type of intellectual support before he and Lucy married. Lucy began to question whether she might have done more to help Wesley, and whether, by doing less, she had lost an opportunity for greater intimacy with him.

Sadie, a wife and mother who did not work outside the home, was a trained economist who served as a sounding board and critic for Wesley between 1907 and 1911, while he was writing the book that would become *Business Cycles*. She gave him substantive feedback on the manuscript, helped him to articulate and focus his themes, and advised him about his career.²⁷⁰ Inspired by her interest, he valued her encouragement and emotional support as well as her technical understanding and advice. Sadie was also the only person who knew about his passion for Lucy and his unsuccessful proposal to her in 1907.

When he had first known the brilliant, beautiful, and charming Sadie when she was a Graduate Fellow at the University of Chicago in 1894,

268 Written for the Book of the Month Club, April 6, 1951. LSM Papers.

269 Berenice Brown Cronkite to LSM, November 27, 1953. LSM Papers.

270 Lucy included lengthy extracts from Wesley’s correspondence with Sadie in *Two Lives*, pp. 165–79. Typescripts of these letters, and others that he wrote to Sadie between 1905 and 1908, are in the WCM Papers. Sadie destroyed the originals of many letters after sending transcripts of them to Lucy. (Sarah Hardy Gregory to LSM, October 16, 1950. LSM Papers.) Wesley addressed Sadie as “dear mentor” and “Sadie the Wise” and referred to her as his “best friend” (WCM to Sarah Hardy Gregory, June 17, 1907; June 24, 1907; June 16, 1908. WCM Papers). In 1908, when he was torn between accepting a job at the University of Chicago or negotiating a higher salary from the University of California, Berkeley, she drafted a letter for him to send to President Wheeler (WCM to Sarah Hardy Gregory, June 16, 1908; June 21, 1908; November 9, 1908. WCM Papers).

Wesley had regarded her with “secret adoration.”²⁷¹ Their friendship, renewed after Wesley came to Berkeley, where Sadie and her husband had a second home, continued for the rest of his life, and Sadie’s interest in his career remained strong. Visiting New York in 1914, she went to hear him lecture, accompanied by Lucy — one of the rare times Lucy attended one of his lectures. Sadie went to see his office at NBER in 1936; Lucy did not see it until 1945, shortly before Wesley retired as NBER’s research director.²⁷² Over the years, their friendship was strengthened by periodic visits between the two families (both before and after Sadie was widowed in 1927), the long talks they had during these visits, and the support each family gave to the other’s children. In the 1930s, Wesley tore open a letter from Sadie with excitement when he recognized her handwriting on the envelope.²⁷³ The last time he saw her, in 1948, he noted that her eyes were still “as bright blue as in the 1890s.”²⁷⁴ Sadie and Wesley’s devotion and concern for Thorstein Veblen, the radical economist who had taught both of them at the University of Chicago, and their efforts to help him were other strong bonds.²⁷⁵ But the foundation was the mutual satisfaction each derived from their work on Wesley’s early manuscript. In the Mitchells’ marriage, in contrast, the intimacy born of close intellectual collaboration was experienced more through Wesley’s involvement in the work of the BEE than through Lucy’s role in his activities.

Learning after Wesley’s death how much Sadie had contributed to *Business Cycles*, and knowing how comparatively little she herself had done by merely helping to proofread the text, Lucy realized that the tribute Wesley paid her in that book — “But more than all others, my wife has shared in the making of this book” — was undeserved. “If I had known then what I know now, I should not have permitted him to say this,” she wrote in a draft of *Two Lives*.²⁷⁶ Lucy’s editor counseled her, “It is for you and for you only to decide whether *your own feelings*

271 WCM to Sarah Hardy Gregory, March 23, 1934, quoted in Jorgensen and Jorgensen, Note 4, p. 225.

272 WCM, Diaries, January 12, 1914; January 17, 1936; May 24, 1945. WCM Papers.

273 WCM to Sarah Hardy Gregory, March 23, 1934, quoted in Jorgensen and Jorgensen, Note 4, p. 225.

274 WCM, Diary, June 5, 1948. WCM Papers.

275 See Jorgensen and Jorgensen, pp. 125–26, 173–74, 180–81.

276 LSM, Draft *TL*, LSM Papers.

about Robin's friendship with S. G. (as you realized this more fully after Robin's death) belong in the book." Resisting the editor's suggestion to introduce Sadie earlier in the book, Lucy wrote, "I have rewritten this 3 or 4 times & I am *sure* [underlined twice] I should not discuss their friendship until I take up his and my relationship."²⁷⁷ If in her grief and disorientation after Wesley's death, Lucy felt retrospectively jealous of Sadie's relationship with Wesley, it cannot have helped that Lucy's son Jack inquired in 1950 whether Arnold had named his new baby Gregory after "father's close friend."²⁷⁸

Acknowledging the help she had given Wesley was a sensitive issue for Sadie as well as for Lucy. For Sadie, this must have brought back painful memories of her time at the University of Chicago when she had unwittingly become the center of a marital contretemps between the economist Thorstein Veblen and his first wife, Ellen Rolfe Veblen. That crisis was precipitated when Veblen acknowledged Sadie's help, but not Ellen's, in producing his translation of an economic study in 1895. (Ellen helped with the translation; Sadie helped with proofreading.)²⁷⁹

Sadie provided Lucy with copies of Wesley's letters, but preferred to remain anonymous and played down her contribution to *Business Cycles*. Wesley "would have gone steadily on in his development in any case," she pointed out.²⁸⁰ But Lucy decided to identify Sadie and reprint lengthy extracts from Wesley's letters to her to explain the evolution of

277 Unidentified editor's comments on a draft of *Two Lives*, with Lucy's handwritten responses. Emphasis in the original. LSM Papers.

278 John McClellan Mitchell to LSM, April 30, 1950. Arnold Mitchell had spent several holidays with the Gregory family after he moved to California. LSM Papers.

279 Veblen's infatuation with Sadie Hardy (later Gregory) and its effect on his unhappy marriage are discussed in Jorgensen and Jorgensen, pp. 39–64, and detailed in the letters they reprint. Sadie left the University of Chicago in the fall of 1895 to teach economics at Wellesley College, a position about which she was deeply ambivalent. She was equally torn about marrying Warren Gregory, who had pursued her for years, and to whom she was secretly engaged. A few weeks into the semester, she had a physical and mental collapse which left her unable to work. In February 1896 — months after she had left Chicago and set a date for her wedding to Gregory — Veblen confessed to Sadie that he had loved her from the day he first saw her. A month later he informed Ellen about his feelings for Sadie and began to press for a divorce. He assured Ellen that his relationship with Sadie was platonic, and Sadie felt there was nothing she should be embarrassed about in her relationship with Veblen. She married Gregory in April 1896, but Ellen's jealous misery and rage persisted. This was the first of many contretemps in Veblen's troubled first marriage.

280 Sarah Hardy Gregory to LSM, June 26, 1949. LSM Papers.

his economic thinking. Lucy did not publicly acknowledge her sense that she did not deserve Wesley's accolade in *Business Cycles*, but she struggled to justify her own, lesser contributions to his work. She could not offer the same type of assistance as Sadie, Lucy repeatedly stressed in *Two Lives*, because she was not a trained economist. Moreover, by the time she and Wesley married, he no longer needed the detailed technical advice and encouragement that Sadie had provided. Most importantly, he valued Lucy's work too much to expect her to lavish such time-consuming attention on his manuscripts. She concluded that she may have best facilitated Wesley's work by giving him the space and time he needed to do his writing, and keeping others from interrupting him.²⁸¹

Lucy was describing a very traditional wifely role, one that often diminished rather than added to spousal intimacy. This essentially negative appraisal seems too harsh, and undercuts her claim that she and Wesley developed their sense of "pulling a common load" by talking to each other "endlessly" about their work. Her assessment might accurately characterize their later years, when Lucy felt Wesley was withdrawing into his work, but it does not capture the long, jointly productive decades of their middle years. That Lucy would write this suggests that she might have begun to question whether she had done enough for Wesley, or that she might have come to regret that he had not needed her more.

* * * * *

Lucy lived for almost twenty years after Wesley died. She did not teach again, but she continued to write and publish accounts of her educational work. At the age of seventy-five, she began a three year stint as Acting President of Bank Street. When that ended in 1955, she moved to Palo Alto, California and bought a house just a few blocks from the home of her youngest son Arnold and his family. She saw them on a daily basis, and traveled across the country to visit her other children and grandchildren. Lucy continued to reflect on and write about her life experiences, especially her life with Wesley and the process of growing old; many of her written musings and poems were addressed to Wesley.

281 LSM, TL, p. 249.

Even in old age, Lucy had to wrestle with conflicts between her career and her family. Her sons were well launched in life, but Marni suffered from chronic alcoholism. When Marni required surgery and almost died from repeated hemorrhages in the spring of 1958, Lucy returned to New York to be with her during her four months of hospitalization. She went home to California in July only after Marni was out of danger. A month later, a heart attack put eighty-year-old Lucy in the hospital and severely curtailed her mobility. When the University of California at Berkeley announced that Lucy would be awarded an honorary doctorate of letters at the end of September, her doctors told her that she could attend the ceremony but not walk in the procession or participate in the celebratory luncheon. Tragically, Marni died in Stamford just a few days before the ceremony, after suffering another hemorrhage. Mollie, the Mitchells' beloved caregiver and housekeeper, was with her at the end. Marni's funeral took place on the very day Lucy's honorary degree was awarded. Lucy grieved for Marni, but weakened by her own health problems, remained in California, and received her honorary degree in person.²⁸² It seems a cruel irony that Lucy, who struggled so hard to balance work and family life, should have been confronted with such a stark choice between the two so late in her life.

After several years of declining health and flagging capacity, but continuing engagement in writing projects and reflections about the aging process and her own life, Lucy died of a heart attack in October 1967, at the age of eighty-nine.

Free to Be Herself

The Mitchells' companionate marriage was based on a different vision of love than the traditional romantic ideal. Lucy described Wesley not as a romantic lover but as "a perfect companion." She wrote, "I cannot imagine a more perfect companion than Robin, whether he was gay or serious. For, though he was so stimulating, he was at the same time a most *comfortable* person to be with, by which I mean he was just himself and content to let others be themselves."²⁸³ When they were courting,

282 See Antler, pp. 349–50. Lucy poured out her grief and love for Marni in a poem, "Another Christmas — 1958." LSM Papers.

283 LSM, *TL*, p. 506, emphasis in the original.

she assumed that a strong romantic hero could become an equal partner in a companionate marriage. Over time, she discovered these two ideals were incompatible.

We know that the traditional vision of romantic love was immensely attractive to Lucy when she was deciding whether to marry Wesley. We also know that — at times — Wesley could be too reserved and too absorbed in his work for Lucy's tastes. Did she sometimes want a different type of partner, someone whose intensity and passion could match her own? Was there an emotional core that did not get tapped in their relationship?

The answer to these questions is undoubtedly, yes, at least at times. There are hints that Lucy was sometimes troubled by a lack of romance in her life after they married. She wrote in *Two Lives* that she was "really touched" to receive a telegram from Wesley when they were apart on their twentieth wedding anniversary, suggesting that she expected an anniversary greeting. But when she "tore it open", she was disappointed to find that he merely advised her to "use your own judgment" about purchasing a new car.²⁸⁴ Lucy herself may have contributed to the lack of romance and sentimentality in their relationship. After Wesley died, she blamed herself for not being more expressive about her love for him during their final years together.²⁸⁵

Wesley's deficits might have caused Lucy occasional regret or irritation, but they did not produce the type of deep depression that Beatrice Webb suffered during the first decade of her marriage. Both Mitchells were wise enough to accept each other's imperfections; they realized they each had what they termed "the flaws of their virtues."²⁸⁶ Wesley may sometimes have shied away from the heat of Lucy's emotions, but he accepted them as the flip side of the intensity that he admired in her and vicariously enjoyed. And Lucy knew that Wesley's

284 LSM, *TL*, p. 325. The Mitchells generally avoided sentimental anniversary rituals. They celebrated their first anniversary by planting flowers together, but after a few years they spent the day working, as they preferred (WCM, Diaries, WCM Papers). On a few occasions, they forgot their anniversary altogether. They sometimes forgot the children's birthdays, at least those of Jack and Marni, the two adopted children (WCM, Diary, June 1, 1917, WCM Papers. WCM to LSM, February 1, 1917; LSM to WCM, February 6, 1934. LSM Papers).

285 LSM, "Robin", and the poems she wrote to Wesley in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, "The Cycle of Fear" (November 10, 1960). LSM Papers.

286 LSM, "Robin", p. 222. LSM Papers.

ability to support and encourage her was linked to his reserve and his willingness to let others have the limelight. Despite herself, she liked having the appreciative audience that Wesley provided. Although she was somewhat embarrassed by what she called her “exhibitionist tendency”, she welcomed attention and enjoyed being the star of her own drama.²⁸⁷ Sharing center stage with a more extroverted personality might have caused other, more serious difficulties in her marriage, as it did in her friendships with Caroline Pratt and Marion Farquhar.

The Mitchells were also wise enough not to expect that all their emotional needs could be met by one person. Lucy looked for stimulation, both intellectual and emotional, outside her marriage. Not in affairs, not from other men, but in intense friendships with female colleagues and friends: not only with Pratt and Farquhar, but also with Harriet Johnson, co-founder of the BEE and the first head of the BEE’s Nursery School, and Jessie Stanton, who became the head of the Nursery School after Johnson’s death in 1934. Wesley’s lifelong friendship with Sadie Gregory may have provided a similar outlet for him.

Lucy’s friends and colleagues were not only included in the Mitchells’ social life, but also integrated into their living arrangements. Jessie Stanton occupied a separate apartment in the Mitchells’ Greenwich Village brownstone after their children went off to college; Harriet Johnson and Harriet Forbes purchased land from the Mitchells and built themselves a house on the Mitchells’ farm in Stamford; visiting friends stayed for weeks at the guest cottage at Greensboro. When Lucy and Wesley started taking annual trips together during the Columbia exam period in the 1930s, each brought a friend along as a companion. Friends, not Wesley, accompanied Lucy on the numerous European trips she took over the years. In the 1940s, she sometimes felt unhappily isolated with Wesley when they retired to Stamford.

The steadfast support Wesley provided to Lucy should not be undervalued, however. Early death had claimed many whom Lucy loved most: her two younger brothers died before she was fifteen; her fifty-one-year old mother died in 1901 when Lucy was twenty-seven; Alice Freeman Palmer, Lucy’s beloved surrogate mother, died a year later at the age of forty-seven. Others who were important to Lucy

²⁸⁷ Exhibitionist tendency: LSM to Arnold and Jean Mitchell, January 18, 1954. LSM Papers.

used her for their own advantage: she had to break free from them in order to do what mattered to her. Joe, her first love, turned on her when she would not send him money when he fled the country after selling pornographic pictures. "Two selfish old men", as Lucy characterized them, had tried to control her and kept her from getting the professional training she desired. Her father had not wanted her to go to college or get a job, and Lucy never forgave him for exposing her to tuberculosis by insisting that she nurse him through his illness. After Alice died, George Herbert Palmer established an emotional stranglehold over Lucy and tried to manipulate her into devoting her life to him. Marion Farquhar and Caroline Pratt failed Lucy as well.

But Wesley remained constant and true, always there for Lucy even if, at times, a bit dull or abstracted. He genuinely had Lucy's best interests at heart, acted on them, and enabled her to act on them as well. His reliability, support, and independence were fundamental to her ability to have a life that encompassed work, children, and domestic happiness. A more traditionally masculine or romantic man would have made it harder for her to pursue an independent career. Married to Wesley, Lucy was free to be herself.