

**SOCIOLOGY IS AN INTELLECTUAL
ADVENTURE WHICH HELPS YOU SEE
THINGS YOUR NON-SOCIOLOGICAL
FRIENDS CAN'T SEE**

In sociology classes you learn about things like education, family life, religion, beliefs, sex and gender differences, social class and so on, and these are things that you come into contact with all the time. In fact, you live these things in your own everyday life so you already have knowledge and ideas about them. Furthermore, you probably think that you understand them already.

Education

You know how the education system works because you study in it and you know how and why males and females are different because you experience the differences every day. However, once you start studying sociology, you have to unlearn quite a lot, forget all your assumptions and look at social life anew, with fresh eyes. Sociologists challenge what you think and how you experience social life and this gives you new and different perspectives.

For example, you probably think of the education system as a way of giving everyone a chance to learn as much as they can so they can contribute as much as they can to society. But what if the education system is really about making sure the children of the rich do best while pretending everyone is getting equal opportunities? Or what if it is really just about making people conform rather than helping them to think for themselves? Or maybe the main purpose of education is to produce males and females who are different so they leave school with different ambitions and different aptitudes? Maybe, just maybe, much of what you thought you knew about education is a smokescreen disguising the way that education really works and what it is really for.

It can be a bit disturbing having everything you thought you knew challenged. But sociology is that sort of subject. It makes the familiar become unfamiliar. It makes you think again about the world around you and the wider world too.

'Sociology makes you into a critical thinker'

Perhaps the most important way in which sociology changes the way you think is that

it makes you critical. It makes you question everything but, you will be relieved to know, it also gives you the tools to answer all your new questions. Although your own experience is useful for understanding social worlds, it is never enough on its own.

Other people have very different experiences to you and if you just look at the social world from your own perspective then you will get a very narrow, partial and untypical view of what it is really like. In sociology, therefore, you have to learn to understand the viewpoint of other people whether you agree with them or not. You have to understand why they reach those viewpoints and to think about whether those views are justified or not. Sociologists rarely all agree about anything so you will always come across different points of view.

Evaluation

Luckily, though, studying this subject requires you to develop skills of evaluation. This means you have to understand and analyse different views, and in the process work out what their strengths and weaknesses are. Part of what helps you to do this is studying methodology — that is, the methods that people use to collect and analyse information. You learn to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different methods and to find flaws in research. You will be able to work out for yourself whether the evidence used by sociologists (and others) is really credible.

Being able to do this is an incredibly valuable skill. You develop the ability to make logical arguments, question the assumptions behind ideas and decide for yourself just how believable research is. As a result, you don't ever have to take any argument or claim at face value. Whether it's a claim by made by a politician, a newspaper report or an argument put forward by a friend on social media, sociology students are at a distinct advantage over others in working out what to believe and what not to believe.

'Sociology is for life, not just for A-levels'

You might be thinking that this is all very well, but isn't sociology really just another subject you will forget once you leave school or college unless you carry on studying it further? Won't it be just like trigonometry, or history, or Shakespearean literature

that you are never going to use later on? Of course all the above *might* be things that you use in later life, but one thing about sociology is that there is no *might* about it: you *will* use what you have learnt in sociology in your future work and life. You won't be able to help it.

Whatever type of work you go into there will probably be some sociology in the training and it will certainly be useful in actually doing the work. Doctors, police officers, social workers, managers, shop workers, factory workers, air traffic controllers, accountants and so on, all need to understand the social context in which they work and of the organisations they work for and with. They will also need to understand something about power, opportunity and inequality to get on in their chosen career. Sociology helps you with all of this and more.

The adventure begins (or continues)

For all these reasons, sociology is challenging and unsettling, but it will make you see the social world around you in different ways. Once this has happened there is no going back: you are a sociologist for life. Sociology is an intellectual adventure which helps you see things your non-sociological friends can't see. What is more, you might just have a better understanding of the things that matter most to people. Sociology is so much more than a way to get a qualification. Enjoy it.

References



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Martin Holborn is a managing editor of Sociology Review.