

‘Poor people don’t come to the LSE’: My first month at university

by **Ronda Daniel**, a second-year sociology undergraduate.



My first month at university was very much the same, both in my first and second year. Overall, I can say so far that I've had an amazing time at university. I felt very welcomed by the sociology department with its welcome events and talks, as well as freshers' opportunities to join societies, and I wouldn't change the people I have met for the world. And in my second year, I'm finding my courses really intriguing (particularly family life and race and ethnicity).

Aside from these positives, which have really made my degree, I have always felt, since I was a first year fresher, a feeling of exclusion and intimidation. Initially, I wasn't sure if this was because I was nervous about my course, or intimidated by the LSE as an institution. Coming into my second year, in one of my first lectures (not for sociology), the lecturer said 'poor people don't come to the LSE'. Whilst this was met with some sharp gasps, it was also met with raucous laughter. I pulled a face, thinking to myself, 'was he mocking the LSE, or mocking the poor?' I still don't really know the answer to this question. What the lecturer said, and the nonchalant response from students, has stuck with me and still shocks me thinking about it.

My time here coincides with the LSE's 120th anniversary. Last year, I wrote an article in the Beaver (the LSE Students' Union's newspaper) arguing that the founders, Sidney and Beatrice Webb would be proud of the LSE's prominence in social research, and its ability to change the world, especially in terms of social inequalities, social policies and environmental policy. However, I also argued that the Webbs would be ashamed of the arrogance and elitism of the student body. Looking back and entering a new academic year, I still feel the same. As a sociologist, Beatrice Webb posed as a seamstress to conduct an ethnography in London, and infamously criticised other social researchers at the time, by arguing that crime was a result of poverty, and not the other way around.

I think that in 2015 Britain, in a society saturated with media images of poverty porn, it would be a very important lesson to learn, that demonising people is wrong especially at the LSE. Something that will always stay with me is hearing a fellow class mate say that people that have to rely on social welfare and housing, were 'scroungers', and 'the underclass' without knowing that this was my familial circumstance prior to attending the LSE. Had this student tarnished other minority or marginalised groups, such as women, ethnic minorities or LGBTQ+ with the same brush, the

comment would have resulted in an uproar. However I felt like the classist comment was brushed aside by other students, even when people said they disagreed. This made me realise how important it is to have a voice, especially within sociology, to raise awareness of issues like this, and inequalities that are sometimes so brushed aside or overlooked.

I feel lucky to be in such an inclusive department with such peers who are aware of issues such as inequality and class. I feel that it is important for sociologists, both at the LSE and in general, to take pride in themselves as sociologists, and individuals, regardless of their background. I would advise freshers of this year not to feel disheartened as I did at comments like the above, and to challenge them. If someone writes a post on Facebook you don't agree with, don't defriend them – debate with them! I know it might only be small things, but just reaching one person and changing their perceptions is what sociology is all about can and has changed the world.

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