

Why I am proud to have an Ology!

Heather Griffiths, a doctoral researcher in the Department of Sociology at Warwick University, on how she is proud to be a Sociologist.



“An Ology?!” chorused my family, when I told them I was giving up work to study Sociology. No, I didn’t know what they were talking about either, but it turns out that the credibility of my chosen discipline had been irreparably tarnished by **an advert from the 1980s for BT**. In a vain attempt to rectify this I have spent the last four years trying to explain to my family and friends what Sociology actually is. No, it is different to psychology and I am not going to be a psychiatrist or social worker. What I am doing is looking at your world and trying to make it just a little bit better. Not your entire world, that would be madness, but that piece of your world where you feel something is not quite fair.

Sociology is the kind of stuff we talk about all the time, over Sunday lunch, during boozy nights in the pub and by sharing countless media articles on Facebook. This is what drew me to Sociology in the first place – the fact that everybody is already talking about it, just most of the time they don’t realise it.

I see Sociology everywhere; to me it is simply exploring the world around us with a critical eye and an open heart. There are lots of disciplines that study the world and the people in it, but they often don’t allow us to stop and examine our lives in the way Sociology does. It allows us to question things we take for granted, and is where ‘normal’ becomes a ‘phenomenon’.

My specialist subject is Gender, something which has made my feminist mother very proud. The Sociological study of Gender has allowed me to turn our kitchen table conversations into coherent and structured arguments, supported by decades of theoretical debate and based upon empirical evidence. I still get a buzz when I think that I spend my days reading about the things my mum has been telling me for years (N.B. mum is always right), and with this knowledge I have just a little bit more power to fight gender inequality, and earn a living at the same time.

I am no radical or extrovert; I cannot shout into a loudspeaker and fire-up a crowd. I am studious and considered, but Sociology allows me to shout about things that bother me with words and carefully structured paragraphs. Studying Sociology has given me confidence to question the status quo, put my head above the parapet and say ‘this doesn’t seem right to me’. There are of course many people who do this without Sociology, and I applaud and envy them, but for those of us who have a heart but who are a little less sure about wearing it on our sleeve, Sociology offers the tools to enter the debate armed with empirical evidence and carefully selected social theories.

So my 'why Sociology?' is the ability to acquire knowledge that extends our everyday conversations into academic and political debate. It is the freedom to critically examine the world around us and explore just about anything as long as the end goal is to make things a tiny bit better. It is having the confidence to challenge existing ways of thinking and being armed with the tools to do so. And if that is what an Ology is, then I am proud to say I have one.

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