

Everything Is (Sociologically) Not What It Seems

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There are ways to see things. And seeing in certain sociological ways may advance us to form a view from which our understanding of the institutions and values in our society opening doors to alternatives and more possibilities. Then when we use that knowledge with the attempt to make progress, we know we can make meaningful changes, we can move forward together—all for our better future.

Berger (1963) wrote in his book *Invitation to Sociology* that “the sociological understanding of the nature of human solidarity can be employed in the service of both totalitarian and democratic regimes.” As so, our betterment—and others’ worsening—is up to us to choose how to apply what we know.

So what is it that we know?

Data by themselves is just plain data—it’s raw materials that need our work to be ready for use. “Statistical data by themselves do not make sociology,” statistical data only become sociology once being put within a theoretical frame of reference—that is being sociologically interpreted (Berger, 1963, 02). The interpretation is broad; when applying statistical techniques, the implications form an understanding about society.

Sociologist must base his statements about society in ways that allow others to check on, to repeat, to develop further; the statements must be based upon observation of certain rules of evidence (Berger, 1963, 02). As working in a science, sociologist develops their scientific rules of evidence and reflects upon methodical problems—with scientific discipline. And that “any scientific discipline must develop a terminology” to avoid the semantic traps in everyday

communication; meaning that “sociologist must have a precise, unambiguous definition of the concept if his work is to proceed with any degree of scientific rigor” (Berger, 1963, 03).

No matter what, sociologist lives in society—his own life is part of his subject matter. So at times when he “leaves the sociological frame of reference and moves into the realms of values, beliefs, and ideas that he shares with other men who are not sociologists” (Berger, 1963, 04), he should keep in mind that “there is no logical priority for one interest against another” (Berger, 1963, 08). This, is the image of the good sociologist that Berger wants to embrace—the sociologist who “will want to open that door, to understand these voices. Behind each closed door he will anticipate some new facet of human life not yet perceived and understood” (Berger, 1963, 05).

Regardless the subjects of his findings are nobility or degradation, power or obscurity, intelligence or folly, they all should be equally interesting to him. However, it is important to note that sociologist is a person with his own bias, he may be or may be not aware of and concerns with the practical applicability and consequences of his findings, and there maybe unequal in his personal values/ tastes (Berger, 1963, 05).

Ultimately, “thinking sociologically” drives one’s passion to understand society, to question society. What are people doing with each other here? What are their relationships to each other? How are these relationships organized in institutions? What are the collective ideas that move men and institutions? —these questions always remain essentially the same (Berger, 1963, 06); the passion furthers on.

## Reference

Berger, P. (1963) Sociology as an Individual Pastime in *Invitation to Sociology*. New York: Penguin.