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Sociology is the study of social phenomena and social issues. What about the state of society? And why do social changes occur? René Veenstra is Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences. Which sociological aspects play a role in the corona crisis and what is it like to have to work from home as a professor? Five questions for René Veenstra.

As a sociologist, what strikes you about this corona crisis?

The corona crisis is shaking up the world. Whereas in recent decades there has been an unmistakable shift from solidarity to individuality, now the corona crisis is once again making a strong appeal to solidarity. After years in which the government increasingly withdrew from the economy, the government is suddenly forced to help businesses and the self-employed. Before the pandemic, it was mainly young people who were wondering whether they would be able to buy a house or start paying into a pension, but now there are suddenly a lot more people with an uncertain future.

What do you think we can learn from sociology in relation to the corona crisis?

Over time, we as a society have come to care for an ever wider group of people. The sociologist Peter Singer talks about an expanding circle. Initially we only cared about our relatives and the local community, now our sympathy extends to the nation-state and increasingly to the rest of the world. This pandemic makes a great appeal to solidarity. The challenge is to continue appealing to our sense of togetherness. In [a nice opinion piece](#) (in Dutch), researchers at SCOOP talked about although we have to keep our physical distance because of the pandemic, we need social contact with each other. That's why they advocate replacing the term "social distancing" with "physical distancing".

You do a lot of research into bullying and relationships in the classroom. What effect is this period having on children? What do parents have to look out for? Do you have any



not originate at school but at home. When six-year-olds start at school, children from disadvantaged social backgrounds are already a few years behind. During the school year pupils progress equally, but every time it is summer holidays the gap grows. Now that children have to attend school at home because of corona, the inequality between these groups will also increase because some parents cannot support their children sufficiently. Other problems are that some children are unhappy or lonely at home. These children now need extra help. That's why I think it's very good that some teachers now go on home visits and strengthen the bond with their pupils on a weekly basis.

What is it like for you working at home as a professor, in terms of both teaching and research?

My research has come to a standstill. I had two important studies in progress. One study, SterkWerk (Meaningful Roles), is an intervention to reduce bullying at school. The first survey was back in the autumn. The final survey was supposed to be this spring, but has become pointless. Bullying at school is now physically impossible. The other study was about the transition from primary to secondary education, in which we also wanted to take into account the importance of preparation for and the results of the Citotest (a test at the end of Dutch primary school). But this test hasn't gone ahead at all this year. In terms of teaching, I will have the students write an essay instead of doing a written exam. At the end of March I gave feedback on their plan. I expect the final draft at the end of April. Furthermore, the supervision of postdocs, PhD students and thesis students will continue online. We also meet online as a sociology department on a regular basis. I think that's going very well.

How do you combine working from home with family life, exercise, etc.?

I quickly found a new routine. I often get up early and will usually have been working for some time before we go to breakfast at half past eight. In the afternoon we have lunch at 12.30 and in the evening we eat around seven. As a family we now manage much better to keep a fixed routine. Previously there would have been some kind of sports activity every night. Mine and my wife's swimming has stopped. Our children's basketball too. But now we do Pilates online, and cycling is also possible. My mother-in-law lives in Friesland. I have cycled over to her three weekends in a row now. The first time alone, the second time with my wife. The third time with my youngest son. When we're with her, we stay outside and we're wide apart. That way we keep our physical distance, but we can still be together.

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