

Katharine Jenkins, University of Nottingham:
Social Practices, Social Status, and Opaque Social Kinds

ABSTRACT

Mapping Social Kinds: A User's Guide

This paper aims to develop a framework for understanding social kinds that is based on two main ideas: interest-relative explanations, and social practices. Social kinds are conceived of as explanatory kinds, but different interests arising from different explanatory projects can lead us to focus on different social kinds. Moreover, social kinds can be explanatory in different ways: some are explanatory due to patterns of causal regularity, similarly to explanatory kinds in the natural sciences, whilst others are explanatory due to being taken as the focus of social practices. Taking sex/gender as a case study, I show how this framework accommodates key insights from a range of different accounts of social ontology whilst effectively quarantining certain key points of disagreement between them, thus providing an immediately useable framework for investigating social kinds.