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# Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups[1]

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Social groups—like teams, committees, gender groups, and racial groups—play a central role in our lives and in philosophical inquiry. Here I develop and motivate a structuralist ontology of social groups centered on social structures (i.e., networks of relations that are constitutively dependent on social factors). The view delivers a picture that encompasses a diverse range of social groups, while maintaining important metaphysical and normative distinctions between groups of different kinds. It also meets the constraint that not every arbitrary collection of people is a social group. In addition, the framework provides resources for developing a broader structuralist view in social ontology.

We shape and are shaped by social groups. We are classified in racial, ethnic, and gender groups. We celebrate holidays with our families. We engage in social and political actions in groups. We play on teams. We form clubs. Parliament, Congress, and the Supreme Court pass laws and issue decisions that can affect millions. Each of these seem to involve social groups of some sort or other. Here I begin to develop a framework for social ontology centered on social structures. I focus on showing how the view could be used to accommodate a wide range of social groups. Along the way I gesture towards ways the theory might be extended to include other social objects and kinds. The view I offer is broad and encompassing enough to capture the range of groups considered above. Further, through appeal to epistemic and metaphysical differences in social structures the framework captures relevant differences between various sorts of groups. Even though not all social groups are the same, social structures are central to the nature of all social groups. The framework avoids oversimplifying while achieving explanatory and ideological parsimony.

While encompassing a wide range of social groups is a virtue, we need to proceed with caution as we do not want a theory to account for the diversity of groups by taking every arbitrary collection to be a social group. Gilbert takes it as "common ground" that some people are not "automatically a social group by virtue of having members with a common property" (1989, 9). Going back earlier, Durkheim argues for a distinction

[1] I thank audiences at Fordham University, the Oxford University Structure in Metaphysics Conference, INPC Metaphysics on the Mountain 2, the Canadian Philosophical Association, the 2017 Critical Social Ontology Workshop, and participants at a CEU summer seminar for useful feedback that greatly improved this paper. In particular I owe thanks to Derek Anderson, Reid Blackman, Maegan Fairchild, Tyler Hildebrand, Rebecca Mason, David Sanson, and two anonymous referees for helpful discussion and comments. Support for this project was provided by a PSC-CUNY Award, jointly funded by The Professional Staff Congress and The City University of New York.

between a social group and a "mere sum of individuals" (1895, 129). Young argues that social groups are not "merely arbitrary classifications of individuals" and that an ontology of social groups "does not commit one to reifying [all arbitrary] collectivities" (1990, 44). I argue that a structuralist framework provides resources for an ontology of social groups that includes intuitive groups and fails to overgenerate.

The purposes for and roles of social groups are not met by just any arbitrary collection of people.[2] Yet, as Thomasson notes, it has "proven difficult" to give a view of social groups "that includes all of those groups one might intuitively think of as social groups, without drastically overgenerating social groups" (forthcoming, 1). She gestures towards a constraint that a social ontology should be parsimonious while being encompassing enough to capture the social groups common sense tells us exist. The existence of some social groups is common sensical. These should be included in an ontology of social groups. Yet, more than just common sense ought to guide our inquiry in social ontology. Some groups might not be very intuitive, but they may figure in explanations in our best theories. Other social groups might seem "unintuitive" yet have causal powers. These too ought to be included in an ontology of groups. The following is an (admittedly imprecise) desideratum a theory of social groups ought to meet:

> *Goldilocks Constraint:* An ontology of social groups should include social groups that are common sensical and that figure in explanations and should not overgenerate social groups.

Two comments on the Constraint: first, part of the motivation for the Goldilocks Constraint is common sense. While here I offer an ontology that fits (at least partially) with common sense in terms of *what* social groups exist, it does not follow that the *natures* of social groups are common sensical. The natures of many social groups may be surprising in various ways—even if their very existence is not.[3]

Second, while I take meeting the Goldilocks Constraint to be a virtue of an ontology of social groups, I am not making the stronger claim that there are not arbitrary sets (or sums or aggregates or . . .) of people. That is, I am not arguing against (or for) a universalist ontology. Rather, even if all of these arbitrary sets (or . . .) exist, they are not all

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[2] There are many interesting social and political questions about the roles social groups (ought to) play. Explanations of different sorts can be offered as to why groups form and whether social groups should (not) be formed, transformed, or dismantled. For instance, the existence of some social groups might be explained, at least in part, due to innate psychological tendencies to categorize and generalize (Gelman (2003), Leslie (2013)). Groups are also central in many social and political projects. For instance, social groups are at the core of identity politics (Alcoff (2000), Fraser (1996), Taylor (1994), Young (1990)). Marxists and critical race theorists (Mills (1998)) argue that some groups form to reinforce or establish privilege in, e.g., capitalist and white supremacist societies. Some social groups might be what Hacking calls 'looping kinds'. According to Hacking labeling can induce "changes in self-conception and in behavior of the people classified" which in turn "demand revisions" of classifications and theories (1995, 370). Classification might reinforce and alter social groupings. Groups are also formed to entrench powers and responsibilities in positions (e.g., Chief Justice) and government bodies (e.g., the Senate). While there are many worthwhile questions and views on the social and political roles of groups we might consider, here I focus on the metaphysical nature of social groups in order to show how such an account can capture the difference between arbitrary collections of individuals and social groups. The way the account relies on social structure and social factors allow for the framework developed herein to cohere with various views on the social and political roles of groups.

[3] Thanks to Nina Emery for pressing me on my reliance on common sense.

social groups. The Goldilocks Constraint requires that not every arbitrary collection of people is a *social group*.[4]

One final note before proceeding. I will not offer a definition of 'social'. Giving a non-circular definition of what it takes for something to be social is difficult, if not impossible.[5] While being social is obviously connected to society and to human social behavior, without a definition of 'society' and 'social behavior' that do not appeal to 'social' we are no closer to a definition. The social often has to do with enacting systems to structure human behavior, but recessions are social, and were not enacted to structure behavior. Social behavior often involves cooperation and collective action, but it need not. I characterize **social factors** through examples. Marriage is social, as are legal systems and universities. *Being a husband*, *being British*, and *being President of the United States* are social. Systems of class, race, and gender are social. The economy, economic growth, and money are social. The fact that U.S. presidential elections are on Tuesdays is social. The convention of driving on the right is social. The popularity of hip hop and of athleisure are social. Social factors include at least social behavior, patterns of action, habits, beliefs, intentions, processes, practices, activities, rules, laws, norms, and arrangements.

I begin (§*I*) with a preliminary discussion of structure and social structure. Then (§*II*) I develop a notion of social structures as structures that are dependent on social factors. I argue that social structures are constitutively rather than (merely) causally dependent on social factors. I draw two distinctions between ways social structures are dependent on social factors and one distinction in how they structure systems of entities (§*III*). The distinctions provide resources to develop a promising structuralist framework for social ontology. I motivate the view by sketching a structuralist ontology of social groups that meets the Goldilocks Constraint and captures similarities and differences between various groups. I examine the nature of organized social groups (e.g., teams and committees) (§*IV*). I argue that the view that they are structured wholes captures many of their features and show how social structures can be used to meet the Goldilocks Constraint for organized groups. Next I consider feature social groups (e.g., racial and gender groups) (§*V*). I suggest that they are social kinds that are nodes in social structures and show that the view can also meet Goldilocks. Finally (§*VI*) I draw concluding remarks and gesture towards how a structuralist view might be extended to other social objects and kinds. A structuralist ontology of social groups can deliver a view that is unified in explanatory and ideological terms. Moreover, it respects important differences between kinds of groups and captures the difference between social groups and arbitrary collections of people. A structuralist social ontology has a lot of promise.

## 1. (Social) Structure

'Structure' has been used to mean many things. In contemporary (meta)metaphysics 'structure' is often used to refer to relations of grounding or fundamentality (e.g.,

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[4] Thanks to Ted Sider and Agustín Rayo for pressing me on this point.

[5] Epstein (2015, 102) states that he is "not confident" that distinguishing clearly between social and individualistic facts can be done. Relating this to debates between individualists and holists in the social sciences he notes that a clear distinction is, however, a requirement for the viability of individualism. For, "[o]therwise, it is pointless for [an individualist] to assert that the social facts are exhaustively "built out of" the individualistic ones" (ibid.). Haslanger (2016, fn 8) states that she believes finding a non-circular definition of 'social' is unlikely.

Schaffer (2009), Sider (2011)). Structuralists in philosophy of mathematics and philosophy of science use 'structure' to refer to complexes of relations that deliver places wholly defined in terms of structural relations.[6] According to Fleetwood, sociologists have used 'social structure' to refer to "anything that is the result of human action, as opposed to some naturally occurring phenomenon" a meaning he notes is "impractically broad" (2008, 242). Haslanger (2007) states that she uses 'social structure' as "a general category of social phenomena, including, e.g., social institutions, social practices and conventions, social roles, social hierarchies, social locations or geographies and the like" (2007, 77). Porpora (1989, 195) argues that the following four definitions of 'social structure' have been used in sociology: (i) "patterns of aggregate behavior that are stable over time", (ii) "lawlike regularities that govern the behavior of social facts", (iii) "systems of human relationships among social positions", (iv) "collective rules and resources that structure behavior".[7] To Porpora's list, Elder-Vass (2007) adds that the sociological literature also uses 'social structure' to refer to (v) systems or objects that are structured. Given the multitude of ways 'social structure' has been used, it is no surprise that, as Porpora states, "there continues to be a certain blurriness in the way we speak of social structure" (2007, 195).

I take **structures** to be complexes, networks, or "latticeworks"[8] of relations. Structures in this sense can be represented as (although they are not identical to) graphs composed of nodes and edges. Nodes represent positions or places that can be occupied by objects. Edges represent relations that hold between nodes (or node-occupiers).

The relations that hold between nodes can be symmetric or asymmetric. They can be hierarchical or non-hierarchical. Authority, privilege, subordination, and other power relations are hierarchical. The *same weight as* relation is not hierarchical. Some relations specify the functional character or role of a position. For instance, in a structure of a baseball team the node labeled 'catcher' is related to the node labeled 'pitcher' by the *return the ball to* relation or the normatively laden *should return the ball to* relation. Some relations might require (i.e., metaphysically necessitate) that another relation holds. For instance, if A is larger than B, then B is smaller than A. The nature of *being larger than* requires that *being smaller than* holds of the same relata in the opposite order. The nature of *being a parent of* requires that *being a child of* holds of the same objects in the reverse order. Pairs of relations like these will, of metaphysical necessity, both be relations in a structure if either is.

Nodes are defined in terms of both (a) relations to other nodes and (b) (possibly null) additional requirements on occupiers. For instance a node might impose a requirement on the number of things that can occupy it, on what types of things can occupy it, or on

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[6] Shapiro (1997) and Resnik (1997) argue for structuralist views in mathematics. Ladyman and Ross (2007) argue for a structural realist view in philosophy of science. For dispositionalist views of properties that appeal to structures see Bird (2007) and Tugby (2013).

[7] The conception of social structures as rules and resources (as in Porpora's (iv)) is especially proponent in the work of the sociologist Giddens (1979, 1981). Haslanger (2007, 2011, 2015) adopts a similar view. There she uses 'social structure' to refer to schemas and resources, where schemas are "clusters of culturally shared (public) concepts, propositions, and norms that enable us, collectively, to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect" (2015, 4) and resources include things ranging from human qualities (e.g., strength), to the design and labeling of bathrooms, to animate and inanimate things (2007, 78). Her view in Haslanger (2016) is much more akin to Porpora (iii).

[8] Fleetwood (2008) uses this term in his definition of 'social structure'.

particular features any occupier must have. This conception of nodes is endorsed by Koslicki (2008). She states that structures are "entities which make available positions or places for other objects to occupy, provided that these occupants satisfy the type restrictions imposed by the structure on the positions in question" and which impose on the objects "a particular configuration or arrangement" (2008, 235-6). For instance, consider the molecular structure of table salt. It requires ionic bonds between sodium ions, Na+, and chloride ions, Cl−. That is, it requires both that certain relations hold and that the positions in the structure be occupied by atoms of a specific kind.

A **system** is the entities instantiating or realizing a structure. For example, a system of a sodium and a chloride ion can realize the structure of an NaCl molecule. Since structures can be instantiated by a system it is plausible that they are universals.[9]

To summarize structures are complexes/networks of relations that make available nodes/positions that might place additional requirements on their occupiers. In the next section I defend a view of social structures and their dependence on social factors.

## 2. Social Structures and Social Dependency

Social beings are related in many ways. For instance, as I write in a crowded coffeeshop I am positioned 5 feet to the north of one person and 5 feet to the south of another. This example involves a three-node structure with relations of spatial and cardinal direction between them. The system instantiating the structure is composed of three people. Does this involve a social structure? While the question might appear to be merely terminological, it is not. Recall the present aim of our inquiry. We are developing and motivating an ontological framework on which social structures play a central role in explaining the natures of social groups and in meeting the Goldilocks Constraint. Given this aim, it is important to develop a tool with the right level of precision. The view of social structures I develop here accords with Haslanger's (2016) view that "social structures... are networks of social relations" (2016, 13) and with a conception of social structure from the Marxist tradition.

Social structures are not simply structures that relate social things. There is nothing inherent in the structure involving distance and cardinal directions that requires anything social. It could be instantiated just as easily by three rusty lumps of aluminum. A social structure must be, in some sense, inherently social. Consider a first-pass characterization of social structures:

> *Social Structure (characterization 1):* A **social structure** is a structure that is dependent on social factors.

Social structures are dependent (in a sense yet to be specified) on factors like social practices, habits, beliefs, intentions, arrangements, and patterns of actions. To say that something is dependent on social factors is to say, in part, that it is nomologically contingent.

[9] See Koslicki (2008: 252-254) for a characterization of structures as objects. If structures are universals the ancient question about whether they can exist uninstantiated arises. In the philosophy of mathematics ante rem structuralists hold that structures can exist without being instantiated, while in rebus structuralists argue that structures exist only in virtue of being instantiated in or by some system. Since our focus is on social structures, it will be easier to talk of structures requiring instantiation for their existence so I will adopt this practice. There are several points where amendments would be needed if one adopted the view that structures can exist uninstantiated. The way to make needed amendments is obvious.

Social structures are not necessitated by the laws of nature; they depend on social factors that could (and in some cases should) be different.[10]

Further, social structures must depend on social factors in more than a *merely* causal way. Causal dependency can be understood in terms of the following thesis:

> *Causal Dependence*: X (being F) is causally dependent on Y if and only if Y (partially) causes X to exist (as F).[11]

A social structure is causally dependent on social factors if (1) social factors (partially) cause the structure to exist or (2) social factors (partially) cause the structure to have some feature. Structures that causally depend on social factors might figure in explanations. For instance it has been posited that the rise of dairy farming is part of the cause of widespread lactose tolerance in adults.[12] If correct, lactose tolerance is (partially) causally dependent on social factors.[13] Yet, there is a clear sense in which genetic mutations (e.g., the mutation causing lactose tolerance in adults) are not social. Counting anything causally related to social factors as social will not give us the sort of classificatory tool we need. Part of our aim is to develop a structuralist framework of social groups that can meet Goldilocks. To meet this goal, a more nuanced and fine-grained notion is needed—a notion on which social structures constitutively depend on social factors.

There are various ways to spell out non-causal dependency relations (e.g, in terms of grounding, metaphysical necessity, realization, constitution, or conceptual priority). Here I suggest adopting a disjunctive view of constitutive dependence:

> *Constitutive Dependence*: Structure, S, *constitutively* depends on social factors just in case
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> (i) in defining what it is to be S reference must be made to some social factors or
> (ii) social factors are metaphysically necessary for S to exist or
> (iii) social factors ground the existence of S (or the fact that S exists).[14]

If any of the three disjuncts is met, a structure constitutively depends on social factors.

With a notion of constitutive dependence, we can give our final characterization of social structure:

> *Social Structure (characterization 2):* A **social structure** is a structure that is constitutively dependent on social factors.

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[10] Dependency on the social is sometimes characterized in terms of social construction. If one prefers, the notion of dependency could be recast in terms of social construction.

[11] The thesis is similar to causal social construction theses given by Haslanger (2003: 317) and Mallon (2014). Some take grounding to be a form of causation. Here I mean to rule out grounding/metaphysical causation.

[12] See Zimmer (2015) for an overview of some recent research on agriculture and alterations in DNA.

[13] Thanks to J.M. Fritzman for suggesting this case to me.

[14] The thesis is related to theses of constitutive social construction (Haslanger 2003: 318; Mallon 2014). If one holds a view on which universals can exist without being instantiated, condition (ii) can be changed to read: social factors are metaphysically necessary for S to be instantiated and (iii) can be changed to state: social factors ground the instantiation of S (or the fact that S is instantiated).

Structures are networks of relations that make available nodes that may also impose requirements on their occupiers. Social structures are structures that are not merely causally, but constitutively dependent on social factors. A structure can constitutively depend on social factors in its relations and/or its restrictions on node-occupiers. For instance, the relations in social structures might include hierarchical social power relations or legal relations about how citizens should be treated. Nodes in a structure might require occupiers to be citizens of the United States or to have a debt-to-income ratio above a certain level.

Given the definition of social structure, not every structure related to social practice or instantiated by social beings is a social structure. Structures that are not constitutively dependent on social factors, even if they can serve to arrange systems of people, are not social structures. For instance a structure with nodes only related by the *taller than* relation and a structure involving only the *surrounds* relation are not social structures. Structures that are merely causally dependent on social factors are not social structures. For example, the molecular structures of synthetically created molecules are not social structures.

## 3. Distinctions in Social Structures

Three distinctions in social structures will complete the toolkit needed to develop a framework for a structuralist ontology of social groups. First, epistemic access to something's being dependent on social factors can be obvious or non-obvious. For instance, the three-branch system of government in the United States is clearly dependent on the social. Other cases, like gender, are dependent on the social, but can appear natural. It is only through reflection and argumentation that we learn that they are dependent on social factors. Social structures can be overt or covert.[15] Something's dependency on social factors is **overt** if its dependence is or can be "openly acknowledged" (Griffiths 1997, 147). A social structure can be overt without everyone (or even many) actually believing that it is a product of a social practice. Rather, overt social structures are those that upon reflection would be acknowledged to be dependent on the social. In contrast, something's dependency on social factors is **covert** if it is taken to be wholly natural and independent of social factors.

Second, a structure can relate to intentions in two ways. First, a structure itself might be (un)intentionally created. Something is **intentionally created** if some person or some people (collectively) intended to create it. The structures of government organizations and sports teams are often intentionally created social structures. In contrast something is **unintentionally created** if no people (individually or collectively) intend to create it. Second, a structure might be (un)intentionally instantiated. A structure is **intentionally instantiated** when some people intend to instantiate it, perhaps by intending to play certain roles. Otherwise a structure is **unintentionally instantiated**. Economic class structures and the structures that reinforce racism might be unintentionally instantiated structures.[16] Alternatively,

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15 The terminology is from Griffiths (1997). Griffiths spells out the distinction both in terms of whether the categories are taken to be natural or not, as I do, and in terms of whether knowledge would "disrupt the process by which the category is constructed" (1997, 147). I do not use the terminology in the second sense.

16 Thomasson (2009) argues that some social entities are not intentionally created. For instance she takes class systems and economic recessions to be byproducts that are, as she puts it, "generated, rather than created or constructed" (2009, 549). Tuomela takes states of inflation and pollution to "belong to social artifacts broadly understood" but takes these to be derived in a way that can be unintended and unanticipated (2003, 161).

class and race might involve structures that are intentionally created or instantiated by those in power to exploit and reinforce capitalism and white supremacy.

Structures are instantiated in space and time. Social structures are instantiated at points in history and in places with rich social, political, and cultural variation. A social structure being instantiated in one place or in one socio-political milieu need not be explanatory, predicative, or intuitive at a different place or time or in a different community (Spelman 1988). For instance, a racial or caste hierarchical structure instantiated in one society might not be instantiated in a different society. A country that was a monarchy (i.e., that involved an instantiation of a particular institutional structure) at one point in history might later become a democracy and involve an instantiation of, say, a three-branch government structure.

Often if a structure is intentionally created it will also be intentionally instantiated, but the two can come apart. For instance, suppose there is an unintentionally created hierarchical class structure, S. In a psychological experiment a researcher might intentionally organize her participants into a system that instantiates S. In this case the structure itself was not intentionally created, but it is implemented in a way that relies on researcher and participant intentions.

Third, social structures can be internal or external to a social group, object, or kind. To draw out the distinction I'll consider two examples that we return to in more detail in *IV* and *V*. First consider a baseball team. In Ritchie (2013, 2015) I argued that groups like teams, committees, and courts—what I'll call **organized social groups**—are entities with structures. They are structured wholes. On the view both members and structure are relevant to a group's synchronic and diachronic identity conditions. For instance, when a baseball team exists it has players and a structure. The structure consists of nodes that are defined, at least in part, by relations occupiers must bear to other node occupiers. The relations between nodes in a baseball team are internal to the team. It is the team itself that is configured or structured by the baseball team structure. A structure, S, is an **internal structure** relative to a realization by an object or system X just in case all the node's of S are occupied by elements of X and every element of X occupies some node of S.

Second, consider what it takes to be a woman. In feminist theory, gender is taken to depend on social factors like social norms, expectations, habits, judgments, constraints, and privileges. Moreover, many theorists take gender to be structural in the sense in which I use the term. For instance, Haslanger states "S is a woman iff S is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) and S is 'marked' as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (2000, 39). MacKinnon (1989) argues that gender is a sexualized hierarchy of dominance and submission, in which women occupy submissive positions. On Haslanger's and MacKinnon's views the social group women is defined in terms of power relations that hold between women and men. While I am not arguing that either of these views is correct, they will be useful in illustrating the notion of an external structure.

On these conceptions of gender, a node labeled 'women' might be related to a node labeled 'men' by relations of sexual dominance (i.e., men sexually dominate women), economic subordination (i.e., women are economically subordinated in relation to men),

and so on.[17] These relations relate the node 'women' to other nodes. They are outside or external to the node women. A structure, S, is an **external structure** relative to a realization by an object or system X just in case elements of X occupy only some node(s) of S and other nodes of S are occupied by entities or systems that are not elements of X.[18]

As the definitions make clear, the internal/external distinction is not a distinction that holds of a structure simpliciter, but rather a distinction that holds of realizations of structures. A structure might be internal relative to some system and external relative to another. For instance, while the structure of Major League Baseball's American League is internal to the league, it is external to each particular team.

Recall that one of our aims is to develop a framework that can meet the Goldilocks Constraint. The three distinctions discussed here as well as the definition of social structures above give us some resources to meet the constraint. Yet, there will still be *many* social structures that are instantiated by systems in ways that are counter-intuitive and that fail to figure in any causal or other explanations. These are structures that fail to, as Ruben puts it, single out people or groups "in a socially significant manner" (1985, 21). They fail to be explanatory or predictive in the way socially significant structures are. When discussing social positions, Haslanger draws a distinction between "thin" and "thick" positions. She states "thick" social positions "entail a broad range of norms, expectations, obligations, entitlements, and so on," whereas " '[t]hin' social positions carry very little social weight" (2003, 313). Similarly, Mallon states that social kinds are "categories that are or could be relevant or important or significant enough to figure in our successful theories" (2006, 6). As Haslanger and Mallon both note, much more could be said about what it is to carry social weight, be robustly explanatory, or be significant enough to figure in a successful theory. For our purposes I restrict our focus to social structures that meet at least one of the following conditions: (a) they intuitively exist or (b) they figure in causal or other explanations. Social structures like that of a baseball team clearly meet (a). Structures related to race, gender, class, and intersectional categories meet (b). Next, I turn to applying these distinctions to argue for a structuralist ontology of social groups.

## 4. Organized Social Groups and the Goldilocks Constraint

Here I briefly outline the view that organized social groups are structured wholes defended in Ritchie (2013).[19] Then I show how the view meets the Goldilocks Constraint. Organized social groups often, but do not always, have internal social structures that are overt and intentionally created. So, although there are infinitely many structures, many social structures, and even more possible social structures, the structuralist view being developed here offers a limited ontology of actual organized social groups. Baseball teams and the Supreme Court are in, arbitrary combinations of people that are not internally structured or that do not have structures that are intuitive or explanatory are out.

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[17] This understanding of gender is not intersectional. I consider how to include intersectional categories in a structuralist view in *V* below.

[18] Miller (2010) defines internal and external relations differently when theorizing about social institutions. On his usage internal relations are relations essential to the relata, whereas external relations are not essential to the relata. For instance, using his terminology *being married to* is internal to being a husband. On my terminology, *being married to* is external to being a husband, although it is internal to a married couple.

[19] The view is similar to neo-Aristotelian views like Fine (1999) and Koslicki (2008). See Ritchie (2013) for arguments that organized groups should not be identified with sets, aggregates, pluralities or fusions.

Organized social groups have structures. A group's structure captures its functional organization. For instance, a baseball team's structure captures the functional roles of the catcher, pitcher, outfielders, etc. Relations might include *calling the pitch*, *pitching to*, *returns the ball to*, and so on.

Nodes in an organized social group's structure carry requirements on who can occupy them. Given the nature of organized group structures, all have the requirement that only people/social creatures or structured groups of people/social creatures can occupy nodes. They may also place requirements on, for instance, an occupant's age, citizenship, or state residency.[20]

While organized social groups must have people or social creatures as node occupiers, there are other social entities that are closely related that might have non-person node occupiers. For instance, a sports organization, like MLB also includes non-person corporate entities, stadiums, and bank accounts as node occupiers. Baseball games—a type of a social event—include organized social groups, as well as a field, bases, a ball, and so on. A general structuralist view of social ontology might include different structures or different restrictions on nodes to capture the nature of social entities that are not groups.

Organized social groups have structures, but they are not *identical* to structures. They are structures that have been realized by individuals. When an organized social group exists it has both a structure and some members who occupy the nodes in the structure.

To occupy a node in a structure an individual must bear the relations specified by the structure. These might connect the node to occupiers of other nodes or, in the case of reflexive relations, to the node-occupier herself. In some cases an individual being normatively bound by certain relations might be enough for someone to be a member of a group.[21] Membership conditions for organized social groups are given as follows:

> *Organized Social Group Membership*: Some things, X, are the members of a group with structure S at time t and world w if, and only if, together X occupy the nodes of S at t and w (i.e., X are functionally related, or at least normatively bound, at t and w in the ways required by S).[22]

Since someone can stand in a relation to another individual at one time (or world) without standing in it at every time (or world) group membership can change.

The synchronic identity conditions of organized social groups also impose requirements on membership and structure. In some cases there might be additional requirements on external relations to other groups (e.g., other teams), to non-group entities (e.g.,

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[20] As a limiting case a node might require that it be occupied by a particular person. For instance, if bands are structured wholes, some band structures might require that specific individuals occupy particular nodes. For instance, the existence of Radiohead might require that Thom Yorke occupy the node of lead singer.

[21] For example, someone might be a bad shortstop. She might fail to field balls, fail to show up to practice, and so on. Yet, she is still bound by particular norms. Thanks to Amie Thomasson for suggesting an amendment in this vein.

[22] 'Occupy the nodes of S' is a collective predicate. It applies to some things X without distributing to each of the individuals (contrast with 'is tall' in 'The players are tall'). Given this, there could be two groups with the same structure that are nevertheless distinct. For some things X might jointly occupy the nodes of S and some distinct things Y might occupy the nodes of S without it being the case that the Xs and the Ys occupy the nodes of S. Thanks to Bryan Pickel for discussion of a definition in Ritchie (2013) that led me to this amended definition.

charters), or to events (e.g., the World Series or a presidential decree). These may be specific to particular organized groups (e.g., the Supreme Court) or to organized group types (e.g., U.S. district courts). To allow for additional requirements and relations without giving precise metaphysical analyses of specific groups or group types, here I offer only a necessary condition for organized group identity. If a group's identity makes no requirements on relations it must bear to external entities, the condition is both necessary and sufficient:

> *Organized Social Group Identity*: A group $G_1$ and a group $G_2$ are identical only if (1) for all t and all w, the structure of $G_1$ at t at w is identical to the structure of $G_2$ at t at w, and (2) for all t and all w and all x, x occupies node n in the structure of $G_1$ at t at w if, and only if, x occupies n in the structure of $G_2$ at t at w.

The condition requires that $G_1$ and $G_2$ are identical only if "they" co-vary in structure across times and worlds. The condition does not require that if $G_1$ and $G_2$ are identical then there is an unchanging structure that $G_1$ and $G_2$ have for all times and worlds.[23] A full account of the diachronic persistence conditions of organized social groups has not been offered here. The view allows for groups to persist through changes in members and through changes in structure. Causal origin plausibly figures in the persistence conditions of organized groups. A theory of the persistence of organized groups might also involve member intentions and the intentions of authoritative non-members. Other conditions might vary widely across organized group types. The view sketched here could be developed in various ways for different sorts of organized groups and according to one's general views of persistence.

The persistence and identity conditions offered here reveal that organized social groups are not simply pluralities of members as they can vary in members across times and worlds. Further, they can be extensionally coincident and not identical. For instance, imagine a case in which Dwayne, Kai, and Jingyih are all and only the members (at a time and world) of the Fencing Club and the Philosophy Club. If organized social groups were identical to pluralities of their members, the "two" clubs would be one. Yet, the clubs have different aims and goals. They have different structures and roles for individual members. They also have different (possible) histories and futures. While the clubs are presently and actually co-extensional, they are distinct. The view of organized social groups as structured wholes sketched here captures this. Next I turn to additional requirements on the social structures of organized social groups that will allow us to meet the Goldilocks Constraint.

The structures of organized social groups are social. They are structures that can only be defined with reference to social factors. Beliefs, intentions, habits, practices, and other social factors are also metaphysically necessary for and ground their existence or instantiation.

Consider two groups that are plausibly organized social groups—the Supreme Court and a family. Both have internal structures that are dependent on social factors. Yet, the way the structures relate to intentions and whether they are overt or covert differs. The structure of the Supreme Court is (at least primarily) intentionally constructed and implemented. It is through the efforts of writers of the constitution and subsequent politicians

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[23] Thanks to Wesley Cray for comments that led to this clarification.

that the structure and make-up of the Supreme Court is as it is. It was through the actions and intentions of George Washington, the first Chief Justice John Jay, associate judges Rutledge, Cushing, Wilson, Blair, and Iredell, members of Congress and, perhaps, collective acceptance by the American people that the Supreme Court structure and the Supreme Court came into existence. The structure of the Supreme Court and its relation to other branches of U.S. government evolved through actions and intentions (e.g., through John Marshall changing a practice so that the court handed down one opinion rather than each justice writing an individual opinion).

Intentions are also relevant to when the Supreme Court structure is instantiated in a system. In many cases, it is through the intentions of the members to collectively form an organized group (and through the intentions of each to play her or his role in the group) that a group structure is implemented. In other cases, someone in power might form an organized social group with specific members before those members have any intentions to play their required roles. Given societal power relations, this can be enough for the group to be formed. Yet, it still involves the intentions of someone with authority.

The structure of the Supreme Court is obviously dependent on social factors. No rational adult thinks that the organization of the Supreme Court, or the organizations of other governmental bodies, teams, clubs, or committees is independent of human social actions or that their structures are nomologically necessary. The structures of organized social groups like these are overt.

The structure of a family is somewhat different. In many instances while the roles that are defined for parents, children, aunts, cousins, grandfathers, and so on are dependent on social factors, they might be taken to be natural. For instance, that a mother is the primary caregiver might be taken to be wholly natural. However, the ways the role of a mother is defined and the ways it relates to other parental and familial roles varies drastically across times, cultures, and communities. Family structures are social, but can be covert. Since familial structures are sometimes thought to be natural, it is also plausible that some family structures are not intentionally constructed or implemented. They might be shaped by broader social factors, for instance, by a commitment to capitalism, the acknowledgment of gender pay inequity, or farming practices that require families to have many members. One's being a member of a particular family or a family adding new members need not be intentional.

I have sketched the view that organized social groups are structured wholes. On the view organized groups are internally structured. All organized group structures must meet the following conditions:

(i) organized group structures are social structures
(ii) organized group structures require that node-occupiers be people/social creatures or structured groups of people/social creatures.

Condition (i) requires that the definition of social structure be met. Condition (ii) requires that organized social groups have people or non-person social creatures as members.[24] Since there are non-human social creatures condition (ii) allows for there to be non-

[24] The second disjunct in (ii) allows for organized social groups to have other organized social groups as members. For instance, Congress might be argued to be a structured whole with the House of Representatives and the Senate as members. The House and the Senate are structured wholes.

human organized groups so long as they have internal social structures. Organized group social structures also often, but as the example of families illustrates need not always, meet the following two conditions:

(iii) organized group structures are overtly dependent on social factors
(iv) organized group structures are (at least primarily) intentionally created and instantiated.

Together these constraints yield an ontology of organized social groups that meets the Goldilocks Constraint. The Goldilocks Constraint states that an ontology of social groups should include intuitive and explanatory social groups without overgenerating social groups. The structuralist ontology of organized social groups I offered here correctly includes social groups like sports teams, government bodies, and committees that follow Roberts' Rules of Order as they have internal structures and meet (i)-(iv). Not every arbitrary collection is an organized social group. For instance, each of the following fails to be an organized social group by violating one or more of the constraints:

people (un)intentionally arranged forming an 'X' shape
the moons of Jupiter
amoebas floating in a petri dish
women
African Americans

Some do not involve social structures (people in an 'X' shape). Others do not involve people or social creatures (moons, amoebas). Others do not have internal organized group social structures (women, African Americans).[25] While I claim that women and African Americans are not *organized* social groups, they are social groups. In the next section I turn to examining another sort of group—a sort that includes groups like these.

## 5. Feature Social Groups and the Goldilocks Constraint

Economic classes, racial and gender groups, sexual orientation groups, and other groups that are central in our lives and our socio-political landscape categorize people in various ways. My aim here is not to argue for a specific view of gender, race, or any other group. Rather, I argue that a structuralist framework is amenable to various particular views of the nature of groups like these and provides resources to meet the Goldilocks Constraint. More would need to be done to show that a structuralist ontology of social

[25] There are two worries one might have with the claim that the social groups women and African Americans do not involve an internal organized group structure. First, one might argue that there is structure within social groups like these since groups are intersectional. Yet, even on this view, the internal structure is not an organized group structure. It does not involve overt intentional roles like those set out in the organized group structure of a team or a committee. It does not create particular structured wholes like the Obama family or the Minnesota Timberwolves. Second, the claim that groups like these do not have an internal organized group structure does not entail the claim that, e.g., African Americans could not organize. Clearly there has been significant and important organizing within the African American community. Rather, the claim is that being a member of, e.g., the group African Americans does not *require* that one play a specific role in a particular structured whole. For instance, a person who is African American might be engaged with and play a role in a chapter of Black Lives Matter, but being African American does not require that one do so.

groups is the most viable metaphysical model. The discussion here is meant to motivate that it is a promising framework that deserves further exploration.

On a structuralist framework, social groups like economic classes and gender groups involve shared social positioning in a way I spell out further below. They might also involve individuals being grouped or socially positioned due to other shared features. The shared properties could be more or less mind-dependent. For instance, on some views membership in a feature social group requires actually having certain biological features, ancestry, or falling above/below a certain debt-to-income ratio. These features are (at least largely) mind-independent. Alternatively, membership might depend on being judged or believed to have some particular feature (e.g., being judged to have ancestors from a particular part of the world). Or membership might require sharing a way of self-identification or self-labeling, a way of acting, or a way of understanding the world. For instance, Gooding-Williams argues that being a black person involves identifying as black and starting "to make choices, to formulate plans, to express concerns, etc., in light of one's identification of oneself as black" (1998, 23). Greenwood argues that social groups involve "shared social forms of cognition, emotion, and behavior" (2003, 102). On my use of 'feature' individuals grouped according to others' judgments, being bound by common norms, self-identifying or self-labeling in a particular way, having shared ways of acting or cognizing, and so on all involve feature sharing. The features need not be mind-independent. The category of shared features is construed very broadly.

Rather than a single shared feature, groups might be specified in terms of a loose cluster of features. Doing so allows for one to be anti-essentialist about social groupings. Anti-essentialism involves a rejection of the view that there are some features that are necessary and sufficient to being, e.g., a woman. It involves a rejection of essentialism which, as Grillo puts it, "is the notion that there is a single woman's, or Black person's, or any other group's, experience that can be described independently from other aspects of the person—that there is an "essence" to that experience" (1995, 19). If membership in a group is specified in terms of a cluster or disjunction of features, one can avoid essentialism (Heyes 2000, Stoljar 2011).

On each of these views some feature or partially overlapping cluster of features is shared. Not all involve shared genetics or bodily features, but all involve some (cluster of) features. Given that there is some sharing of features (broadly construed), I'll call groups like these **feature social groups**.

Feature social groups figure in explanations, affect how we make sense of the world, and influence how we are treated and what expectations others have of us. In addition to features required for membership in a feature group, a person x being a member of a feature social group, G, can also figure in inductive inferences about additional features x has. For example, from the information that someone is a woman one might infer (perhaps unconsciously) that she has hair that reaches her shoulder. Feature groups meet the following definition of kinds—kinds are "categories or taxonomic classifications into which particular objects may be grouped on the basis of shared characteristics of some sort" (Koslicki 2008, 201). More specifically feature social groups are a variety of *social kind*.[26] Not all social kinds are feature social groups, for instance, money is plausibly a

[26] Haslanger describes gender and race as social kinds (2006). Diaz-Leon defines a social constructivist view of race as the view that "races should be identified with socially constructed properties, or *social kinds*" (2015, 547, *emphasis original*).

social kind but not a feature social group. Feature social groups are just one important variety of social kind.

Social kinds, like natural kinds, involve shared features and figure in inductive inferences. While the relationship between social and natural kinds is not easy to pin down,[27] there are some apparent differences. Social kinds are dependent on social factors (e.g., practices and judgments). Social kinds don't seem to 'carve nature at the joints' in the way natural kinds are sometimes argued to. Conclusions we arrive at when making inductive inferences based on feature social groups may not be reliable and might reinforce oppressive norms. Moreover, it is the overwhelming consensus that racial groups—one instance of the variety of social kind being discussed here—do not involve shared natural essences that explain personality, intellectual, and moral attributes.[28] Next, I develop a structuralist account of groups on which feature social groups—a particular sort of social kind—are nodes in social structures.[29]

Recall that nodes in structures are defined in terms of relations to other nodes and (possibly null) additional requirements on node-occupation. If feature social groups are social kinds that are nodes in social structures, they must be defined in terms of relations and (possibly) additional requirements on node-occupation. Gender groups, racial groups, and economic classes have been argued to depend on largely relational features as well as on other features that "mark" one for membership. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to systematically examine examples of all intuitive feature social groups, here I consider one example in some detail. This will serve to draw out the way that feature social groups rely on both relational/structural features and have additional requirements on group membership. It will also show how the structuralist framework could be adopted by a range of theorists who have argued for specific views of particular feature social groups (e.g., racial or gender groups). I am not arguing for a specific view of what it is to be black or to be a woman or to be gay. Rather, my aim is to begin to develop and motivate a more general structuralist view of the ontology of social groups. Using an example will be illustrative, even if one disagrees with the specifics of the views considered.

Let's return to the case of women. As we saw, Haslanger and MacKinnon argue that gender groups are positions in hierarchies of subordination/submission and privilege/dominance. Both views can be interpreted in a structuralist framework as identifying the feature social group women with a particular node in a social structure. The structures in which the nodes are positioned are constitutively dependent on social factors; they depend on social practices, patterns of interaction, agreements, beliefs, and so on. Gender structures could not be defined and would not exist without social factors. On the view

[27] See Mason (2016) for arguments that some social kinds are more natural than others. Khalidi (2013, 2015a) argues that some social kinds are natural. Dupré (2004) argues that social kinds share some commonalities with biological kinds.

[28] Mallon calls the denial of the view that racial groups explain "thick" characteristics like moral and intellectual attributes "the ontological consensus" (2004, 647). He notes that this is a consensus between both social constructionists (e.g., Alcoff (2006) and Mills (1998)) and racial eliminativists (e.g., Appiah (1985) and Zack (1994)).

[29] The view I develop bears some similarities to Khalidi's view of natural kinds as nodes in causal networks. For instance, he states "[w]hat enables natural kind categories to play the role that they do in our inductive, explanatory, and taxonomic practices is that they consist of highly connected nodes in causal networks" (2015b, 9). Since our focus is on social groups, I won't argue for a view of other social kinds, e.g., money, nations, recessions, or corporations, here.

of structures adopted here nodes can also require occupiers to meet further possibly non-relational conditions. So, the view can accommodate Haslanger's requirement that "sexual difference functions as the physical marker to distinguish the two [gender] groups" (2000, 38). That is, one might be "marked" for membership in a gender group based on observed or imagined physical features.[30]

Haslanger and MacKinnon are not alone in proposing accounts of gender that can be interpreted as identifying gender groups with nodes in social structures. Let's consider one more account. Ásta argues for a highly context-dependent view of gender (2011, 2015). On her conferralist view someone is conferred a gender in a context based on certain target properties. She states "people taken to have the relevant target property (e.g., sex assignment) get conferred onto them constraints and enablements in the context and that is what gender in that context consists in" (2015, 889). On the conferralist view being a woman or being a man consists in constraints and enablements and requires having the feature of being conferred a social status. A proponent of a conferralist view could hold that women is a social kind that is defined in terms of constraints and enablements which are relations between people and other entities. Further, membership in the kind in a context (i.e., occupying a node in a context) requires that one be conferred the status through persistent judgments.

There are, of course, views of gender or other features that are not amenable to treatment in the ontological framework under development. For instance, a view on which gender is dependent solely on chromosomes and not on any social relations could be accommodated by a structuralist framework. Feature social groups do, however, seem to involve both relations to other groups and entities and additional possibly mind-dependent characteristics required for membership. Moreover, we saw that various prominent views of gender can be interpreted using the resources of social structures and nodes. While there is much more to be done to argue that all feature social groups are nodes in social structures, we have reason to think the view is promising.

At the end of *III* I stated that the social structures on which our inquiry would focus are those that are either intuitive or that figure in causal (or other) explanations. Gender structures figure in explanations and gender groups intuitively exist, so they meet the requirement. One might worry that focusing on gender groups fails to take intersectionality seriously. Intersectional critiques emphasize that focusing on a single dimension or axis of oppression yields theories that erase the most marginalized and that fail to account for how gender, race, class, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and so on intersect in ways that are not additive (Crenshaw (1989, 1991)). For instance, Collins argues that "[i]ntersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions" (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, nationality, age), that "oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type," and "that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (2000, 18). Similarly, Mohanty argues that views that take women to be "a stable category of analysis" are "simplistic formulations" which limit "the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities" (1984, 344).

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[30] Given the flexibility in the view being developed, the theory that identifying as a woman is central to being a woman could also be captured in a structuralist ontological framework. Identifying as a woman might be sufficient to "mark" one for membership in a group that also comes with specific norms, privileges, or limitations. In this way, the framework developed and motivated here does not fall prey to criticisms like those given by Jenkins (2015) that Haslanger's view of gender is trans exclusionary.

While our aim to meet the Goldilocks Constraint requires that not every arbitrary collection of people forms a social group, the view allows for the existence of intersectional groups.[31] Here I outline one way that a structuralist framework could be used to give an ontology of intersectional groups. Again, as emphasized in setting out the structuralist framework above, I do not intend to argue for a specific view of intersectional groups. Rather I am sketching how a structuralist view of social groups can be intersectional.[32]

In theorizing about intersectional groups in a structuralist framework one must use care not to fall back on the sort of single-axis framework that is the subject of intersectionality critiques. For instance, suppose one were to posit a gender structure with nodes for gender groups and a race structure with nodes for racial groups and combine these structures into a larger structure with relations between the various groups. In theorizing about gender groups one would likely be obscuring issues about race. Similarly, in theorizing about racial groups one would plausibly be obscuring issues about gender. Yet, this is precisely what is criticized by intersectional theorists. One is obfuscating the experiences and existence of the most marginalized.

Even if a metaphysical model that conjoined a racial and gender structure could avoid marginalizing, it is not clear that it could accurately capture the intersectional groups that one might hold are part of an ontology of social groups. Let me explain. Women are racialized in various ways. There are Asian women, black women, Latinx women, white women, and so on. This means that on the model just proposed, the node labeled 'women' would need to be related to every racial group node. But, Asian women are not people in a gender group who are related to people in a racial group. Rather they are individuals who are in a gender group, in a racial group, and in an intersectional racialized gender group. To avoid the problems arising from positing separate structures that are combined through relations, it would be better to posit distinct structures that vary in their complexity.

There are many social structures that are instantiated. Social structures can include nodes for more or less "fine-grained" intersectional groups. For instance consider three sorts of social structures: (i) a social structure involving economic class features and relations, (ii) a social structure involving class and race features and relations, and (iii) a social structure involving features and relations related to class, race, and gender. The first might include three nodes for working, middle, and upper-class people. The second will include nodes for groups like upper-class black people, middle class black people, and working class black people. Finally, the third will include social groups (i.e., nodes) like upper-class Latinx women and middle-class Latinx men. While there will obviously be similarities between these structures, none are proper parts of any others. For instance, (iii) does not include a node for upper-class people, so (i) is not a proper part of it. The intersectional groups that are components of more complex structures do not arise from merely adding together less complex single-axis structures.

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[31] Intersectionality is primarily a theory about interlocking forms of oppression rather than a view about groups (Collins & Bilge (2016)). If social groups are defined in terms of oppression, then it seems that intersectionality ought to be taken seriously by a metaphysics of groups. If social groups are not defined in terms of oppression, it is less clear that intersectionality must be accounted for by an ontological view, although it is still certainly relevant for social and political projects.

[32] The general structuralist framework I am developing here could also be used to develop non-intersectional models of social groups. These will be models that may obscure and reinforce oppression. The framework itself does not rule them out, but other factors can.

In some social-political contexts social structures that are fairly minimal and involve nodes for, e.g., economic classes or gender groups could serve in explanations and predictive generalizations. For instance, women quite generally are expected to engage in emotional labor. An explanation in terms of women can be useful. This is not to say that intersectional groups do not exist or that other aspects of a person's identity are thereby irrelevant. Rather, the account allows for the existence of gender groups as well as intersectional groups.

Explanations that appeal to, say, gender groups, rather than intersectional groups, might also obscure or reinforce oppression. To avoid these problems and to offer more nuanced and predictively accurate explanatory models, intersectional feature groups like working-class Asian American women might be appealed to. As long as a feature social group is intuitive or figures in explanations and predictive generalizations, they can be included in an ontology of social groups that meets the Goldilocks Constraint. Significantly more would need to be said to offer a fully spelled out structuralist view of intersectional groups. My aim here was to show that intersectional groups are not ruled out given the Goldilocks Constraint and that the structuralist framework provides resources that could be used to offer an account of some metaphysical issues related to intersectionality.

I have sketched and motivated the view that feature social groups are nodes in social structures. The view entails that feature social groups are *externally* structured. Not every node in a social structure is a feature social group. Feature social groups are nodes in social structures that meet the following conditions:

(i) they must be defined, at least in part, in terms of social factors,
(ii) they must restrict occupation to people/social creatures, and
(iii) they must allow for multiple occupiers at a time and world.

The first condition takes feature social groups to themselves be constitutively dependent on social factors. The condition is required given the possibility of social structures that involve some nodes that are not defined in terms of or dependent on social factors. Given (i) such nodes are not feature social groups. Condition (ii) captures that feature social groups are groups of people or non-person social creatures. While there are plausibly many other social kinds that have objects, events, or non-social creatures as instances, these are not our current focus. Finally, (iii) is required as we are considering social groups. Feature social groups are kinds rather than roles for one individual or a particular object. Condition (iii) ensures that roles like the U.S. President are not feature groups.

On the view being developed, feature social groups are nodes with restrictions on occupiers in social structures. The examples of feature social groups considered thus far are plausibly nodes in covert unintentional social structures. To return to the example of gender, de Beauvoir claimed that "social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature" (1949/1972, 18). Building on the idea, Frye argues that the scale of oppressive structures can also make them difficult to notice. She argues that "one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole" (1983, 5). While many feature social groups might be nodes in covert unintentional social structures, I do not impose this is a requirement on feature social groups.

There might be overt intentional social structures that also have nodes that are feature social groups. For example, doctors might be a feature social group that is part of an

overt social structure involving hospital administration, insurance companies, legal policies, relations to other staff, patients, buildings, and so on. Arguably, such a structure would be overt and at least partially intentionally created. The distinction between overt/covert and intentional/unintentional structures might mark regularities in some aspects of feature groups. For instance, it might be that feature groups that are nodes in covert (primarily) unintentional structures are likely to be those that are involved in widespread oppression. The additional work required to see that social factors are relevant could help explain the persistency of certain forms of subordination or oppression.

The structuralist view of feature social groups—a certain sort of social kind—as nodes in structures also offers a new way to understand the metaphysics of kinds. In some sense, kinds seem to be (clusters of) properties. In another sense, kinds seem to be the sorts of things that have members. Many working on natural kinds argue that kinds are properties or clusters of properties,[33] but one could also argue that kinds are entities that are more class- or group-like.[34] The view offered here, on which feature social groups are social kinds which are (certain sorts of) nodes in social structures is amenable to both approaches. Nodes are defined in terms of relations and other features. They can be understood to be (clusters of) properties. On this view they are intensional or hyperintensional entities. Alternatively, one could take kinds to be entities that are more class-like. The view that kinds are nodes in structures also delivers classes of entities that vary across times and worlds (i.e., the class at a world-time has all and only node occupiers as members at that world-time).

Given the actual social structures that exist economic classes, and racial, ethnic, and gender groups are feature social groups. Not every random group of people is a feature social group. For instance, people with larger left ears than right ears or being one of Albert Einstein, you, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and LeBron James are not feature social groups. Given our actual social practices, intentions, beliefs, patterns of actions, and so on there is no social structure with a node for people with larger left ears than right ears. If our practices were different, there could be a social structure with such a node but at the actual world there is not. The Goldilocks Constraint requires that an ontology of social groups includes the intuitive and explanatory social groups without overgenerating. The view sketched here takes feature social groups to be social kinds that are nodes in social structures that meet conditions (i)-(iii). While there are infinitely many structures, many social structures, and even more possible social structures, the actual ontology of feature social groups is limited. Racial and gender groups are feature social groups, collections of people who have visited Boise, Idaho or who have an odd number of hairs on their heads are not.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

By centering our ontology of social groups on social structure and by drawing epistemic and metaphysical distinctions among social structures, the Goldilocks Constraint can be met. The structuralist social ontology sketched and motivated here includes social groups like Muslims, women, and lesbians as well as intersectional groups like working-class black Brazilian trans women. It also includes organized groups like the New York Knicks and the Supreme Court. Groups that are part of our common sense ontology and

[33] See, e.g., Armstrong (1978), Millikan (1999), Boyd (1991).

[34] For a view on which kinds are sui generis class-like entities see Summerford (2003).

those that figure in explanations are included, gerrymandered collections of people are not. Moreover, a structuralist social ontology unifies social groups within one framework, while maintaining important metaphysical distinctions between them. On the account, organized social groups are wholes with internal social structures that are often overt and intentional and feature social groups are social kinds that are nodes in social structures. Structure is at the core of both views.

The framework developed herein also provides the resources for a broad and encompassing view of social ontology. For instance one could argue that artifacts, like cars or guitars, are wholes that are internally structured by overt intentional social structures (Fine (1999), Koslicki (2008)). Social kinds like money and property could be identified with nodes in social structures with different restrictions than those relevant for an account of feature social groups. Social roles for individuals like the Prime Minister of Canada might be identified with nodes that are kind-level individuals (Carlson (1977)).

Focusing on social structures provides resources to clarify the nature of various social groups and opens promising lines for future inquiry in social ontology. A structuralist view of social ontology has a lot to offer.

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