

<3? Relationship categorisation in social research

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Social scientific research (qualitative as well as quantitative) often relies on the categorisation of its subjects in order to make sense of the world. This 'ordering' happens in a range of different ways, with demographic categories such as gender, race, age, class, etc. as the most common markers for categorisation. However, there are also more specialised ways of ordering the worlds we live in that differ between research fields. For example, research on intimate interpersonal relationships often categorises these relationships as well as the people who are in (or not in) them.

While ordering the world in social research may very well be unavoidable, work in Science and Technology Studies as well as Gender and Queer Studies has indicated that such ordering is never 'innocent': social research on intimate relationships may influence which relationships people can engage in. For example, while there is increasing academic interest in non-monogamous as well as non-romantic and non-sexual relationships, a large proportion of research on human relationships still focuses on dyadic, monogamous, heterosexual, sexual and romantic (as opposed to asexual/aromantic) relationships and thereby takes part in the social production of such relationships as the norm that everyone is expected to aspire to.

Utilising concepts from Science and Technology Studies and Gender and Queer Studies, I analyse academic publications on intimate interpersonal relationships with a mixed-methods approach in order to trace the ways in which social research on such relationships contributes to the normalisation of some and marginalisation of other ways of doing relationships.

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