

Social Knowledge and Identity Dr Judith Marshall

Social Representations Theory



Module

1	Overview Social Representations Theory
2	Social Representations and Identities
3	Self and Identity
4	The Discursive self
5	Figured worlds
6	Communities, participation and identity
7	Social Knowledge
8	Social Knowledge and the public sphere
9	Narrative identity
10	Studying 'Knowledge':

Assessment: two coursework components

Component 1 (50%): Essay (2,500 words)

Title:

'With reference to appropriate theory and empirical evidence, critically evaluate the usefulness of a social representations approach to explaining identity'

Submission date: **Thursday 2nd March 2017 by 12.00 pm** (midday)

Component 2 (50%): Reflective written assignment (2,500 words)

Assignment:

Participation, membership and identity

Identify and briefly describe **two** communities of practice/figured worlds to which you belong/have belonged to some degree.

Reflect upon your experience of participation and membership of these communities.

****Use appropriate theory and research to support your submission****

Submission date: **Thursday 27th April 2017 by 12.00 pm** (midday)

Interconnecting themes

Identity	
Self and Identity	
Explanations of identity	
• Social representations theory explanation • Discursive explanation • Narrative identity	
Communities	
• Communities of practice • Legitimate peripheral participation • Participatory appropriation, guided participation, apprenticeship	
Social Knowledge	
• Encountering the knowledge of others • Studying 'knowledge'	

Culture

- The category of culture is only one level of analysis
- Year 1 - levels of analysis?
 - Biological level – brain processes, genetic influences
 - Psychological level – thoughts, feelings, motives, intentions
 - Environmental level – past and current physical and social environments

Different way of considering levels of analysis

- Doise: 'theories are designed to capture different aspects of reality' (1986, p.11).
- 4 levels:

Intra-personal level: cognitive organisation

Inter-personal level: individuals within a given situation

Ideological level: the power of collectively constructed systems of beliefs, representations, values and norms to validate and maintain an established social order (Doise, 1986, p.15).

Positional level: pre-existing social positionings of individuals

- Wundt - 'Völkerpsychologie'
 - Both individual and cultural perspectives
 - Social Psychology is the study of
 - 'those mental products which are created by a community of human life and are, therefore, inexplicable in terms merely of individual consciousness since they presuppose the reciprocal action of many' (Wundt, 1916)

Durkheim:

- '**Collective conscience**' = "totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society" that "forms a determinate system which has its own life" (Durkheim 1893/1984:38-39)
- Move to '**collective representations**' - used to explain the life of a society
 - myths, traditions, legends, science, religion etc.
 - static systems
 - independent of unique individuals

- Separation of sociological and psychological forms of social psychology
- Psychological social psychology was
 - a) Required to account for collective and group phenomena as a separate level of analysis to that of 'the individual' and 'personality',
 - but
 - b) Continued to prioritise the individual as the level of explanation.
- Continued under-emphasis of the role of the socially constructed self in group interaction (Hogg, 2007).

Social Representations Theory

- European social psychology
 - Moscovici: Director of the Laboratoire Européen de Psychologie Sociale (European Laboratory of Social Psychology)
 - Moscovici (1961): 'La psychanalyse: Son image et son public'
- Making sense of 'Psychoanalysis' - a medical treatment without medication?
- Catholics
 - Communists
 - Urban liberals

- Variety of research foci, including:
 - Identity (Duveen, Breakwell)
 - Health (Herzlitch, Joffe)
 - Madness (Jodelet)
 - Politics, (Jovchelovitch)
 - Education (Duveen, Ivins)

Social representations

- Moscovici's response to Durkheim's fixed/static 'collective' representations
 - Argued the psychological /social divide is artificial
 - Reintroduction of the psychological to the sociological
 - Emphasis on the dynamic quality of representations

Social representations

- Lay theories of phenomena that are important to us
- Folk beliefs or systems of belief about common objects
- Concepts, images, and theories that we create of our changing world
- Systems of values, ideas and practices that serve two kinds of functions:
 - Change the unfamiliar to the familiar so they bring order and manageability to our world
 - They facilitate communication

- Jodelet (1991):

"Social representations are images that condense manifold meanings that allow people to interpret what is happening; categories which serve to classify circumstances, phenomena and individuals with whom we deal, theories which permit us to establish facts about them. When we consider social representations embedded in the concrete reality of our social life, they are all the above together."

- Jovchelovitch (2007, p.67):

"Social representations bridge the individual-social divide through a focus upon 'the space in between communities and individuals'"

- 'Social representation' is an idea that explains what it is that binds people together in their groups or societies – that makes us act and interact together
- It is itself a social representation; one that makes the unfamiliar familiar and allow us to talk about social phenomena within the discipline of psychology
 - We make sense of new information to existing understandings and make these understandings real through communication

- Social representations are not only cognitive or linguistic phenomena or cognitive structures in which to organise information
- SR approach acknowledges the importance non-verbal material in the study of human psyche (e.g. Joffe 2002)
- They highlight also the symbolic, emotive and social aspects of how people make sense of their world – how lives are lived; the practices etc.
- Social representations go far beyond the cognitive – they can produce 'extremely real and concrete consequences in people's lives' (Jovchelovitch, 2001, p.177)

Examples of what social representations 'do'

Jodelet (1991)	Social representations of 'madness'	Protect community identities against the threat of madness and therefore otherness. This serves to exclude 'the mad'
Duveen (2000)	Social representations of 'gender'	Reproduce gendered identities and gendered relations. This serves to maintain and defend gender differences in the social order
Gervais and Jovchelovitch (1998)	Social representations of 'health'	Enables a community to sustain and defend its cultural identity. This serves to strengthen possibilities for multicultural communities.
Farr and Markova (1995)	Social representations of 'disability'	Elaborate and develop images of 'the disabled' in ways that elicit pity. This serves to maintain social inequalities.
Joffe (2002)	Social representations of 'AIDS'	Reduce the threat of HIV/AIDS by relating this to 'othered' groups. Serves as a means for resistance for those implicated or 'othered'.
Howarth (2002b)	Social representations of a community (Brixton)	Portray people from the area as criminal, deviant and threatening. Serves to maintain social exclusion across communities.

Anchoring and Objectifying

Anchoring - categorizes a new object into our pre-existing mental systems

Renders a strange and unfamiliar object familiar using familiar (existing) categories – recognition and naming

Objectification - crystallization of the new object into a figurative core.

Understanding the new object through imagery –takes the abstract into something almost concrete

Representation is liberated from the immediate context; projected into the world

Now cannot be changed by individuals ; once meanings take hold they provide the basis for communication

Social Representations

- **Prescriptive**
 - socially constructed metasystem
 - regulates, controls and directs individual minds
- Can influence at **unconscious level**
 - guides decisions and actions
 - makes us consider other people's opinions and thoughts
 - shared conceptualisations used to make judgements
- Social representations are **autonomous**
 - have an existence independent of any individual
 - they lead a life of their own

Core and Peripheral social representations

- Central Nucleus Theory (Abric, 1984) - a strand of social representations theory

Central elements - stable and define the core of a representation

Peripheral elements - beliefs and ideas that can be adapted in different contexts and by different social milieus

- Different focus of importance for different people/groups
e.g. Education – Valuable? Not relevant?
- What is important to you might not be recognised as important by another

Conflict and Cooperation

- Moscovici (1998)
- Cooperation provides a **common code** to discuss, debate and constitute social realities
- Conflict provides **debate** about as different interests and relations of power compete
- Dynamic aspect – change – challenge to Durkheim

Reified and Consensual universes

- **Consensual universe** - society is seen as being a group of individuals who are equal and free
 - Need shared conventions – language, topics, questions etc.

Reified and Consensual universes

- **Reified universe** - society is seen as a system of different unequal roles and classes
 - 'Scientific' world
 - System of interaction is shaped - we communicate from and to different roles and positions
 - Power relations, and behaviours and 'languages' appropriate to social context
 - Discourses from specialised fields constitute 'scientific' discourses e.g. the language of psychoanalysis
 - Acceptance rather than reciprocal understanding

Influence of consensual universe on reified universe

- Social Representations of science – easy to identify when they diverge from our own SRs
- Implicit SRs influence psychological research and theory
- Tend to go unnoticed as they reflect the SRs prevalent in contemporary society

e.g.

- Psychology as an objective, empirical discipline – dominant representation of science in the consensual universe
- Wider cultural influences on contrasting Russian and American psychology

- Social representations are themselves a social construction – socially elaborated and collectively shared

- Possess a dual existence:

Product of social thinking – structure beliefs and knowledge about phenomena psychologists consider important

and

Processes by which we construct our reality – understood as mechanisms that shape how we think and talk about objects, events and people

So they are ...

- Products of interconnectedness between people and processes of reference through which we conceive the world around us

Useful reading for principles of SRT

Deaux, K., Philogene, G. (2001). *Representations of the Social*. Oxford: Blackwell.
(Chapter 2)

Moscovici, S. (2000). *Social Representations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
(Chapter 1)

Break



10 Minutes!

Social Knowledge and Identity

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SOCIAL CATEGORISATION AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION

- Lakoff (1987) - categorization
 - a universal cognitive tendency
 - allows communication about the world
 - fundamental to perception, thought, language and action
- Categorisation
 - organisation and structuring in a meaningful way
 - effective communication about the social and the material world
- Social categorisation - **complex process**
 - Social objects are variable, dynamic and interactive

SOCIAL COGNITION VIEWPOINT

- Simplify reality to make more sense of it
- Stereotyping - a crucial element
- Social categorization and stereotyping
 - outgroup members as homogenous and ingroup members as heterogeneous
(Linville and Jones, 1980)
- Salient, identifiable features - the 'top three': age, gender and race
 - "central, visually conveyed, automatically accessed categories"
(Fiske, 1998, p375)

- Social cognitive research assumes that social categories reflect reality
- Cultural and contextual factors determine which categories become most salient at a specific time
- Categorization seen as a mental activity
- But - social origins and contextual features - relatively ignored
- Origin and function of categorizations argues to be based within normal cognitive life

SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORY (TURNER ET AL)

- Key tenet:
 - group-based perception has the same cognitive and psychological validity individual-based perception
- Self-categorization theory: group-based perception can be more psychologically valid, meaningful and useful
- Group-based perception - reflects material and social reality
 - groups exist in power and status relations
 - social identities are created and supported by group memberships

- **Social-cognitive accounts**

- fixed and invariable mental schemas

- **Self-categorization theory**

- process and content of categorization are dynamic (social context)
- categorization enhances social perception
(Oakes, Haslam and Turner, 1994)
- material and social intergroup relations are caught through both categorization and stereotyping

- **Self-categorization theory**

- psychological and motivational nature of categorization
- a predominantly cognitive approach
- assumptions about reality
- assumption that categorization is cognitive work

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY

- **Social categories...**

- Symbolic
- Functions
- Political
- Ideological

- **Categories = social representations**

- symbolic, affective and ideological
- widely shared
- proliferate within the temporal social and political settings
- constructed socially and discursively
- flexible and dynamic

- Early idea of the shared, consensual and collective nature of stereotypes (Haslam, 1997) has been eroded by definition of stereotypes as individual cognitive constructs stored in individuals' minds

- Representations of the social world increasingly consensual through increased social communication and interaction causes

- Augoustinos (1991) found that representations become more similar (consensual and shared) as we age

- But - consensus can't be assumed - Netherlands/ethnic hierarchy (Hraba, Hagendoorn and Hagendoorn, 1989)

- "There is a consensual universe, but there is not precise consensus on every element at each level"
(Moscovici, 1985, p.92)

- Collective level:
 - social representations function as shared objectified structures

- Individual level:
 - variability as to how the elements are framed and articulated

(Augoustinos, 2001)

- Social representations theory:

- anchoring/categorization = collective and ideological activity
- relevant in time and place
- categories for anchoring rooted in social/cultural experience of the individual
- Names/labels allow social objects to be located in knowledge
- Social categories - objectified symbolic meaning systems
- Objectified → independent social representations

Example: BIOTECHNOLOGY

- Gaskell and colleagues - biotechnology - how people engage with new knowledge
- Images and ideas from films and media reporting
 - Dolly the sheep
 - GM foods - 'Frankenfoods'
- Biotechnology represented via **anchoring and objectification**
- But - different knowledge bases and different agendas.

SIMILARITIES IN THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND ATTITUDES

- Abric (1993) - core and periphery elements of social representations
- Stability of attitudes - durable and changing elements
- Belief systems (e.g. Rokeach, 1970) - central-peripheral dimensions
- Central beliefs - consensual and resistant to change
- Peripheral elements - flexible, more sensitive to change

USEFUL READING

- Augoustinos, M. (2001). Social categorization: towards theoretical integration. In K Deaux and G Philogene, *Representations of the Social*. Oxford; Blackwell. Chapter 14
- Gaskell, G. (2001). Attitudes, Social representations and Beyond. In K Deaux and G Philogene, *Representations of the Social*. Oxford; Blackwell. Chapter 16