

Studying Knowledge in Everyday Life



- How social representations are studied – and how they are connected to empirical studies?
- How does social psychology contribute to an understanding of:
 - diversity in knowledge?
 - the value of different forms of knowledge/expertise?
 - the dialogues that emerge between different knowledge systems?
- How can social representations be applied to contribute to transformations in community life?

Jovchelovitch:

Knowledge system = triad: self, other object

Self-other and self-object relations

“To all knowledge there corresponds a relationship between people and between people their environment that is both natural and social”

(Jovchelovitch, 2007, p157)

Study of social knowledge involves:

- Study of the relationships that are the foundation of knowledge formation
- Sensitivity to the logic that underlies these relations

How does a knowledge system meet the needs of those constructing and using it?

- A knowledge system - the social memory of a community
- Need to
 - map the social representations in a community
 - develop an understanding of the representations by talking with people – how does each draw upon locally constructed social representations
- Jovchelovitch:

“There is an emancipatory potential embedded in the task of recognising the validity of a community’s knowledge and engaging in critical dialogue with it”

- Existence of different forms of knowledge, often conflicting knowledge, exist in communities
- Fulfil different functions
- Respond to different needs in the life of communities

For example, response to dramatic change – use of different social representations/knowledge systems to make sense of it

e.g. value of education, value of manual labour

- Cognitive polyphasia - different, perhaps contradictory social representations

Study of:

- Content of knowledge
- What it expresses
- Interrelationships between different forms of knowledge
- Also - how people face alternative forms of knowledge
 - How do they question and re-negotiate knowledge?

- Can not describe a knowledge system by comparing it with researcher's own logical and scientific form of knowledge
- Undermines interpretation of local usage of social representations to make sense
- Influences interventions based on this research – so there will be very real consequences
- e.g. What is best for:
 - black youths in London
 - people living in de-industrialised towns
 - people living in favelas in Brazil
 - indigenous populations in nations with more powerful white residents

- Jodelet - how the recognition of everyday knowledges is crucial when interventions and policies are being considered
- e.g. reintegration of mental health patients into the farming community of d'Aix-en-Provence
- Social representations linked to identity defence were dominant
- Historical social representations: the mad = animals (animalism)
- Social representations used for specific personal purpose - symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2003 – English work)

Mapping representational systems

- Need to identify the subjective, intersubjective and objective worlds that social representations inhabit
- Walking the locale/talking to people in that community
- Can begin to identify how people are using dominant social representations in their talk
 - e.g. different generations might draw upon different social representations / use them differently
- Gervais (1997) Shetland Islands –environmental disaster
 - Residents reorganised social representations in order to make sense of the unfamiliar

Use of narrative

- We live our lives through stories
- Narratives effective for generating data
- Emphasise different ways in which people use social representations to make sense of events
 - How they select different social representations for different purposes during their narrative
 - Usually without conscious awareness of doing this
(power of social representations)

- But - how do other knowledge systems impact upon a community's own knowledge system?
- Every knowledge system contains social representations of the knowledge systems of others
 - e.g. recognition of how others see them, view an issue etc. we have to take the other's perspective and recognise other social representations in order to defend against them, reconsider our standpoint etc.
- As in-group and out-groups change, new information about how each sees the other has to be recognised, anchored and objectified for formation, maintenance or change to take place
- It is through narrative that these can be explored

Reading

- Howarth, C. (2002). Using the theory of social representations to explore difference in the research relationship. *Qualitative Research*, 2, pp. 21-32
- Jovchelovitch, S. (2007). *Knowledge in Context: representations, Community and Culture*. London: Routledge.
Chapter 6