

# **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY\***

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Doise (in press) has emphasised that researchers have focused empirical work on only one aspect of the theory of social representations. They have mainly been concerned either with describing the content of existing representations or they have been interested in examining how anchoring and objectification operate. They have left largely unexplored Moscovici's hypotheses concerning the ways in which, at the level of the metasystem, social groups generate representations which serve group purposes. Representations serve different types of group interest and Moscovici describes three: diffusion, propagation and propaganda. Representations serving these three communicative purposes have different structures and organisation. They differ particularly in the extent to which they are consensually shared within a group or a subgroup. The defining property of a social representation is not simply that it should be shared. The predicted internal structure of the representation and the extent to which it is dispersed within a recognisable group or social category will depend upon the functions it is serving. This has major implications for the empirical approaches which should be adopted when exploring social representations.

It suggests that intra-group dynamics and inter-group relations will direct or channel the formation of any specific social representation. This requires that the theorist should formulate clear predictions concerning the structure of a representation as revealed in the thought, utterances and action of the individual in relation to that individual's position in a group. It calls for the analysis of likely implications of changes in group structure for the representation. It necessitates consideration of the inter-group processes which promulgate the social representation and afford it a venue in which to be used. It emphasises that representations are embedded in complex representational networks and that they are liable to change, whether subtle or global, as a result of their relationships to each other.

## **Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory**

Having emphasised the importance of intra- and inter-group processes in shaping social representations, it is hard to avoid asking whether it is now timely to seek to integrate the theory of social identity (Tajfel, 1978) and the theory of social representations. In their original forms, these two theories represent two distinct paradigms. The word "paradigm" is used loosely by psychologists. We talk about paradigms which are models of methods of discovery. We also talk about paradigms which are models of description or explanation. In both senses, Social identity theory and Social representation theory reflect different paradigms.

Social identity theory, while it attempts to explain intergroup relationships, is a model which focuses upon individual needs and motivation (the need for a positive social identity)

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as the means of fundamentally explaining inter-personal and intergroup dynamics. In contrast, social representations theory, in describing how people come to interpret and make their world meaningful, is a model which focuses upon processes of interpersonal communication as the determiners of the structure and content of the belief systems which are called social representations. Moscovici at least (though not some of his followers) has shunned formal propositional elaboration of the model. He has rejected the need for formal definitions of the constructs he uses in the model and avoids prediction on the basis of the model. Social representation theory is largely concerned with describing the content of representations not with predicting what that content will be in any particular group context. It is primarily a functionalist model: much attention is paid to explaining the purpose of representations.

Social identity theory and Social representation theory have characteristics which set them apart as quite distinct paradigms. Neither could be regarded to have introduced a paradigm shift (in the Kuhnian sense) into social psychology. Both have venerable ancestors within the discipline. They reflect the social cognition - social construction debate which has haunted social psychology since its inception. Social identity theory and the theory of social representations could be linked to create a more powerful explanatory model of action and could mark a step towards a real paradigm shift in social psychology.

Integrating the two theories could make both more ready to face their critics. Integrating them could also produce a generic theoretical framework which might replace, or at least contextualise, a large number of social psychological models each of which has been created to explain a narrow range of social behaviour in highly specific settings.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) could benefit from the alliance with social representations theory because it has been too narrowly focused on explaining intergroup conflict and differentiation (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). By addressing the issues of social representation, it can provide a model of the broader role of identity processes in directing the social construction of what passes for reality. The liaison may ultimately even encourage the integration of social identity theory and self-schema theory since recent work on schema has been shifting towards a recognition of the essential role of social processes in cognition (e.g. Deaux (in press), Markus (see Gurin and Markus, 1989) and, Abrams (1992).

The advantages for the linkage of social identity theory and social representations theory would not be one-sided. Social representation theory benefits too. One of the major problems currently with the theory of social representations is that it cannot explain why a particular social representation takes the form which it does. Social representations, at one level, are cognitive structures which function to facilitate communication between members of a collectivity because of their shared or consensual form. For the individual, their role is to give novel experiences (whether people, objects, events) meaning by setting them in a contextual frame that makes them familiar (Moscovici, 1981; 1984; 1988). At another level, social representations are public rhetorics used by groups to engender cohesiveness and manoeuvre relative to other groups. What is unclear in the theory is any process which determines the actual form which the representation takes or the likelihood that any one individual will be able to reproduce or accept it in its entirety. Social identity theory could help to describe the processes which might be at work in both shaping the form of the representation and then determining the work it is made to do above and beyond simply making the new familiar.

In presenting here some preliminary explorations of how identity processes might be linked to processes of social representation, it is useful to start with questions about groups and representations.

## **Groups and Social Representations**

The relationship between social identity and social representation is undoubtedly dialectical: their influences upon each other are reciprocal. It should also be acknowledged that while in any one instance they may be causally linked, in others the relationship may be non-causal (both being determined by some external variable or complex network of variables). But to analyse the potential relationship between social identities and social representations it is necessary to take one step back and examine how social representations are tied to groups. Of course, Moscovici has acknowledged in some of his writings that social representations are intimately related to group processes (Moscovici, 1981; 1984). The problem has been pinning down quite how they are connected.

### **1. Production, Differentiation and Function**

In examining the connection, it is important not to confuse a social representation with the process of social representation which produces it. Group processes affect both the process of social representation and the form of a social representation.

In considering the relationship of group dynamics and social representations, there is, firstly, the question of ownership. Obviously, a group may be the producer of a social representation. Alternatively, and equally obviously, it can be produced outside of the group. Often, more interestingly, a social representation will be co-produced by different groups with executive producers changing over time as the social representation develops. The tendencies to see social representations as the property of either unstructured concatenations of individuals communicating without a goal or the possession of a single highly goal-oriented conglomerate are both misleading. There is no reason to believe that social representations are not just as likely to be generated over great periods of time, with contributions from many different sources who are motivated by quite different objectives. This is clearly most true of the development of those social representations which equate with political ideologies. It is also evident where social representations are as it were “borrowed” by one group from another. An illustration of this comes from the work of Palmonari, Pombeni and Zani (1987) who showed how psychologists seeking to professionalise themselves integrated into their representation of the professional psychologist images common to other professional groups.

To the extent that structured groups are the producers of social representations, their form and development will not be controlled by any simple intra-individual, or even interpersonal, processes of anchoring and objectification. The form will serve group objectives. The task of theorists now is to show how group dynamics influence the operation of the processes of anchoring and objectification at both the intra-personal and inter-personal levels. So far we have failed to specify how these processes operate, not in terms of their cognitive underpinnings but rather the systematic biases which social influences introduce into their operation.

Power differentials are only one such influence which might be examined empirically. Intergroup power differentials will have an important impact upon the development of social representations. The acceptance of alternative social representations of a single event is likely to be greatly affected by the relative power of the two groups generating them.

The implications of the need to consider inter-group power relations for those studying social representations are significant. It requires, firstly, that the analysis explicitly establishes what power hierarchies exist which are pertinent to the representation. This often

means going beyond the target group for the study and sampling members of sometimes very distant outgroups simply to verify assumptions about which groupings are relevant. Secondly, it will frequently require a historical analysis of the relationship between groups and their changing use of representations over time. Such an analysis may use a diverse array of sources and data types (e.g. autobiographical, archival, legal). Thirdly, it will demand that the distribution of a representation within the group is discovered. A powerful group may be able to impose a representation on some members of a less powerful group but not on all of them. Only by developing sophisticated indices of the diffusion and degree of acceptance of the representation across the subordinate group is it possible to fully test assertions about the effects of power. All of these considerations militate against using minimal grouping experimental paradigms since establishing arbitrary and recognisably transient power differentials cannot be expected to reveal much about the operation of representational processes within real hegemonies.

In social identity theory, Tajfel (1981) argued that stereotypes serve three types of function:

- social causality - scapegoating
- social justification
- social differentiation

By extrapolation, one can assume that social representations serve these functions. But the emphasis in echoing Tajfel is too one-sided: it suggests that the form of a social representation will be determined by group needs. Yet, this ignores the possibility that over time a social representation will constrain the group's range of options in seeking legitimation or differentiation. Lyons and Sotirakopoulou (1991) illustrated how established representations can constrain and channel attempts to achieve positive differentiation for the ingroup. They showed that not even the most ardent British nationalist would claim Britain to be superior to France in food or fashion (though they were also unwilling to acknowledge inferiority). Traditional social representations constrict any gambit for improving the group's position by determining what will be credible as a claim. This is rather more than saying that the new social representation is anchored in the old. The issue here is credibility and not necessarily ease of information storage or retrieval and not even the search for familiarity.

The functions which the social representation serve for the group will also affect the processes of anchoring and objectification. At least, the functions served should affect the prior systems of representation chosen to act as the anchor for anything new or any development of the old. They should shape the objects which will be chosen as the frame of reference or referent points for familiarisation which permits objectification. It is interesting when exploring the social representations of AIDS/HIV that new beliefs about the disease were not in the early years tied to representations of other sexually transmitted diseases but to rather less secular comparitors: it was widely represented as the plague meted out as divine punishment to homosexuals. This representation clearly served many intergroup prejudices.

The functions identified by Tajfel focus upon the group's manipulation of facts and their interpretation in the service of self-interest in intergroup comparisons. But social representations obviously serve other types of function for the group. Groups can also use representations to foster common consciousness among members which need not be associated with the intergroup context. Basically, this is merely to emphasise that social representations serve group functions at the intragroup level. Sharing the representation can become the badge of membership and the precursor of understanding the reason for sharing common goals. Some

recent work on environmental social representations illustrates that novices in green movements are virtually “educated” into particular representations of the issues (Ashford and Breakwell, 1992). Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) argued that social representation contributes to group identity formation in the sense that merely by sharing a social representation, group members come to feel a common identity since they have a common “world-view”.

It is important to recognise that one implication of this power of social representation processes to engender a common sense of identity will be that social representations, once created, are very persistent but, more importantly, that the processes themselves will not disappear or fade away. There is a very clear illustration of this point in the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the resurrection of ethnic and religious identities. The old social representations are as vivid as ever; they may have been lying low for nearly five decades or longer, but they were still there.

One of the most obvious empirical implications of integrating the social identity and social representation paradigms is that this relationship between group identity and representational processes becomes a key issue. The methods used will need to take account of the longevity of representations tied to groups. Historical analyses would seem potentially valuable. Within the representation research tradition, they are already used to some extent. But this would be a significant addition to the empirical armoury of social identity theorists.

The function served by social representation processes must be recognised as distinct from the function of the specific social representation which is then generated. There are actually two levels of function that we are dealing with here. The function of the process of representation and the function of a specific representation. The process of representation may function to anchor and objectify novel experiences and understandings. Knowing that anchoring and objectification occur does not help us to predict the actual shape of the representation which results or the action which it will motivate. Group dynamics and individual needs determine the function of the specific representation and consequently its actual structure. Only modelling these effects will help us to explain the forms which action actually takes.

## **2. Targets of Representation**

The second issue concerning the relationship between representation and group dynamics is the question of the object or target of the social representation. The connection of groups and social representations can come through the relationship of the group to the object of the representation rather than to the way it is produced.

A group may actually be the object of the social representation either directly, because it is characterised in the representation, or indirectly, because its recognised outgroups are characterised in the representation. Either way, the social representation can come to reflect the existing group identity or posit an alternative identity for the group (affecting the defining properties of the group). The work which Jodelet (1989, 1991) has done to unearth the representations of mental illness illustrates forcefully the power representation has in a community to create an identity for a social category.

Yet, a social representation may be significant to a group not because the group produces it or because it directly defines the boundaries of the group identity; it may simply be targeted upon an object which is important to the group at a specific time. An example can be drawn from the research conducted by a social geographer, Matthews (1981, 1983). A community

group from an inner city neighbourhood which included a red-light district which was facing re-development found the broader community's social representation of the prostitutes in the area important. The broader community (City Council) wanted to redevelop the area in such a way as to eliminate the sex industry enclave based upon a strong negative representation of the effects of the male and female prostitutes working in the area. The proposed redevelopment adversely affected the interests of the community group (e.g. breaking up a long-established working class neighbourhood in an unsympathetic way). The social representation of prostitution in the area became a vital fulcrum for renegotiating the redevelopment plan.

Another example would come from the representation of genetic engineering by society. This is clearly significant for those who suffer from genetically transmitted diseases. Legislative decisions affecting potential offspring are based upon reactions to the social representation of genetic engineering which dominates. This example shows that the representation does not have to be about people - it can be about a scientific process. Moreover, it shows again that social representations held by a powerful few (legislators) can have tremendously significant effects for those who many have no effective route to influence the representations.

Any research which takes the distal impact of representations seriously will have to tackle two problems which will affect its methodology. First, it must actively explore which groups of people are likely to be affected by the representation - other than the group producing it. Having identified them, they will have to be sampled. Sampling appropriately will depend upon having some criterion for inclusion such as potential range of diffusion of the representation effects within the group. Whatever criterion for sampling is chosen, it needs to be explicit. One of the great problems in research in this area is that samples tend to be opportunistic. This means that when any questions which concern the extent of diffusion of the representation or its impact in the group are asked, it is difficult to know how far strong generalisations can be made. If the sampling is inadequate or inappropriate, it is obvious that any conclusions, but particularly those about diffusion or consensus, are invalidated. At least, if researchers specify the criterion used in sampling it is possible to deduce the level of assurance with which generalisations are made. It can also help in interpreting apparent disparities in representations produced by members of a group over time.

The second empirical problem to be faced concerns the timeframe for the research. Distal effects of representations may be longterm consequences, not immediately apparent at the time that the representation is produced. This means that studying the groups potentially affected at the same time as studying the group generating the representation may be fruitless. The empirical problem lies in guessing the sensible timeframe to adopt. One way around the difficulty is to employ a time series design: collecting similarly structured information on a number of different occasions from the same population but not necessarily the same sample.

### **3. Salience of Representations**

The third issue to address in analysing the relationship of representations and group dynamics concerns the importance of a social representation to the functioning of the group. In understanding the role that group membership has shaping the process of social representation for an individual it is important not only to look at the part the group plays in the production of the representation or the relevance of the target of representation to group definition and objectives, it is also important to consider how significant or salient the representation is for the group. The same social representation will vary in its actual importance to

the group over time and across situations. The relative importance of different social representations will similarly vary with circumstance. It should actually be possible to develop at least a crude model of the factors which will affect the importance which a social representation has for a group. This has not been attempted yet.

#### **4. Relationships between Representations**

Finally, in considering groups and representation, there is the question of networking of social representations. It is notable that most empirical research on social representations has chosen single targets for representation and treated with the resulting representations in isolation (e.g. representations of health, mental illness, the city, a student protest, the family). Yet we all know that a social representation of one target relates to that of another (this is actually implicit in the notion of anchoring). The problem empirically lies in knowing when one finishes and another begins and the decision may ultimately be arbitrary. Sotirakopoulou (1991) in her longitudinal study of the nature of anchoring has shown empirically in relation to the changing representations of the Unification of Europe how difficult it is to talk about one discrete social representation being anchored to a separate discrete but prior representation. It seems reasonable to suggest that groups can often dictate to members which are the appropriate linkages between representations for them to make; constraining the individual degrees of freedom in association.

### **Identity and Representational Processes**

Tajfel's (1978) original definition of social identity as that part of the self-concept derived from group memberships with the value attached to those memberships treated identity dynamics as the main motive force determining intergroup relations but he chose to leave theorising about identity to others. Identity in social identity theory is a black box construct: its properties treated as a given. It became evident to me in trying to apply the theory that this was unsatisfactory. The predictive reliability of the theory is low and I believe this because it deals with only one special case of the influence of identity processes upon group membership. The need for a positive social identity does not operate alone in motivating action and beliefs relevant to group dynamics.

#### **Identity Process Theory**

Dissatisfaction with social identity theory has led us to try to develop a model of identity process. This model of identity process is based on the argument that identity is a dynamic product of the interaction between on the one side the capacities for memory, consciousness and organised construal which are characteristic of the biological organism and on the other the physical and societal structures and influence processes which constitute the social context (Breakwell, 1986). Identity structure is determined by two types of process: first, assimilation-accommodation. This is basically a memory system. It absorbs new elements (personal, such as values, attitudes, or style, and social, such as group memberships or interpersonal networks) and adjusts the existing structure to locate them. The second process - evaluation - entails the allocation of value to identity elements. Both identity processes are ultimately information-processing systems which can be characterised in terms of a series of rules for drawing inferences from new data. It must be said that these algorithms are biased towards self-interest rather accuracy.

The two processes are guided by principles which dictate what endstates are deemed desirable for the structure of identity and determine what changes in it will be made. There is considerable evidence that at least four such principles operate:

a. the self-esteem principle - the individual will seek to achieve and maintain self-esteem. The desire for self-esteem is a basic tenet of every theory of identity. It has been shown to induce selective perception of information, channel value formation and modify attribution processes.

b. the continuity principle - the individual will seek what Erikson (1980) neatly called "persistent sameness with oneself". Continuity should not be equated with consistency: continuity can be associated with growth and change which require inconsistencies between past and present conceptions of the self just as long as these changes are congruent with the development of the same identity. One may argue that what is sought is subjective rather than objective consistency (cf Shotter, 1985; Gergen and Davis, 1985).

c. the distinctiveness principle - the individual will strive to optimise distinctiveness from other people; pinpointing unique elements of identity.

The principle does not seem to push towards total distinctiveness. People like to be a little different but not completely. The significance of distinctiveness as a desirable endstate for identity perhaps fluctuates more than the other two principles. It is often subsumed by the desire for self-esteem.

d. the efficacy principle - the individual will try to maintain an identity structure which is characterised by competence and control (what Albert Bandura, 1989, calls self-efficacy). The absence of efficacy is associated with feelings of futility, alienation, and "helplessness".

To some extent, the self-esteem principle can be treated as superordinate. The other three contribute towards achieving self-esteem in their various ways.

The relative importance of these principles in dictating how assimilation-accommodation and evaluation processes operate is undetermined. In global terms it may be indeterminate. In all probability, it is situation-specific and dependent upon the existing identity structure configuration. The identity principles I am describing here may be culturally-specific. Anthropological analyses would suggest that the definitions of selfhood are far from constant across time, people or place. The proposed principles would hardly be expected to operate in those cultures, such as those in parts of Bali or New Guinea, where the individual is not acknowledged as an abstract ethical or normative category. The principles may also be related to developmental changes in the cognitive capacity of the individual for information processing across the lifespan. It has been known for many years (Flavell, 1977) that there are age-related trends in the richness, differentiation and complexity of self-conception during childhood.

Given a society and an age group where the principles do operate. The object of some of our current research is to establish rules of transition which will predict under what circumstances the individual will move from applying one principle to applying another.

By incorporating a model of identity process into the Tajfelian model of group relations, we believe that we are developing a more generic theory of social psychological processes. This is not the place to describe the strategies which our model of identity predicts will be used in pursuit of satisfying the demands of the four principles outlined. Suffice it to say that they subsume the predictions of social identity theory and sharpen the specification of when

they will operate (see Breakwell, 1988, for further details). Since we allow ourselves to deal seriously with social cognition, we are able to analyse strategies lodged at the intra-psychic, interpersonal, intra-group and intergroup levels. Strategies at each of these levels can be attempted when the individual is faced with a group membership which is unsatisfactory.

So, we have arrived at what I will call identity process theory - a model which unites elements of US cognition theories with European models of group relations.

I have argued above that social representations are a often product of group dynamics, developed to serve group interests. The point I want to make now is that identity processes will help to determine which social representations an individual adopts. Since group or category memberships determine in part of structure of identity, there are a number of ways identity might influence how an individual relates to a social representation.

### **A. Exposure**

Memberships will firstly affect exposure to particular aspects of a social representation as well as to the target of the representation itself. Groups ensure that members are informed about or engaged with social representations which are central to group objectives and definition. Outgroups ensure that members are presented with other aspects of social representations which may be rather less in keeping with the ingroup's interests. Additionally, there are, of course, many other purveyors of social representations (the media, the educational establishment, the government). Memberships may influence exposure to these not directly but indirectly, influencing the level of attention paid to particular social representations or affecting opportunities to interact with them.

The effects of exposure can be examined in developmental perspective. Augustinos (1991) has argued that age, in so far as it equates with length of exposure to a group's repertoire of social representations, will relate to the degree to which the individual shares with others of the same age a social representation. She tested this notion by examining teenagers' representations of different groups in Australian society. She showed that while individual differences were present in all age groups, they reduced systematically with age. This line of enquiry is clearly worth taking further, it has echoes of Vygotsky's claims concerning the role of social influences upon apparent cognitive development.

### **B. Acceptance**

Memberships will affect acceptance (or rejection) of the social representation. They do this sometimes by establishing the extent of the credibility of the source of the social representation. They do it at other times by explicit commentaries on the representation. Failure to accept the group's verdict on a social representation can put the individual at risk of censure or even rejection. The consequences of rejecting the group's preferred representation of an object clearly vary with the importance that it has for the group. The consequences will also depend upon the individual's power within the group.

It would be foolhardy however to overemphasise the tendency towards conformity within a group concerning social representations. Moscovici, himself, has shown that groups are capable of encompassing considerable divergence of representations among their membership. The problem of modelling the extent of the group's tolerance for disagreement in my opinion is very pressing.

Just as the relative power of groups is significant, the relative power of individuals in the group is also important. It may be these individual power differentials which explain why even in homogeneous groups not all members will reproduce the same representation of a target. Social representations may be most simply defined by their "shared" status but it would be ignoring the facts to assume that large numbers of people share identical representations. Even when the representation is meant to be consensual, as in the case of stereotypes, there are still differences between individuals in the details and organisation of the representation. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) have said Moscovici has not specified what level of consensus or sharing must be attained before a social representation can be said to be shared within a group. Many of the early empirical studies (Di Giacomo, 1980; Hewstone, Jaspars and Lalljee, 1982) used methods which ignored diversity or individual differences in representation. The implications of integrating the identity and representation paradigms is that methods used must allow the description of both consensus and diversity. This means that data must be collected from individuals, not simply from aggregates. It also means that sampling within the group should include individuals from different statuses or roles. Analysis should focus upon similarities across people but not to the exclusion of establishing their dissimilarities.

Differences in the extent to which a representation is available to and used by any one individual must be something to do with the individual's position in the group but it is also to do with their relationship to the target of the representation and to the context in which the representation is elicited. This has recently been clearly recognised where research on stereotypes is concerned (Billig, 1985; Hewstone, 1989; Hraba, Hagendoorn and Hagendoorn, 1989; Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn, 1991) and, of course, stereotypes have been argued to be one type of social representation (Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Hogg and Abrams, 1988). If correct, this is important for the design of research. It means that greater care needs to be taken in establishing the significance of the representational target to the individual. It suggests that an inevitable question in any research on representations should be: what is the significance of X to you personally (where X is the target of the representation). Recognising the relevance of context of elicitation also changes the shape of data collected. A structured analysis of the context in which people are asked to express their representations would be required.

### **C. Use**

Memberships will thirdly affect the extent to which the social representation is used. Definition of use in this context is difficult but would include: the frequency the social representations is communicated to others, and, the frequency it is addressed (i.e. used as a point of reference in making decisions, assimilating new information, evaluating a situation).

The repertoire of social representations which can be addressed or used in any given situation is broad. The ones chosen will be influenced by the group memberships pertinent to the situation.

These effects would imply that there will be considerable individual differences in any specific social representation one cares to elicit. This is borne out empirically. Social representations, though shared, do not seem to be shared in their entirety - even within relatively homogeneous samples. Individuals customise their social representations to suit personal goals: including self-esteem, efficacy, continuity and distinctiveness.

## **Identity and Social Representations of Politics**

I want to illustrate these relationships between identity, group membership and social representations using data collected as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project on identity development and economic and political socialisation; known as the 16-19 study. This was a longitudinal study of two age cohorts (15-16 years and 17-18 years respectively when first contacted) who were postally surveyed on three occasions at annual intervals (May, 1987, 1988, and 1989). Our initial sample amounted to 4830 people.

From the point of view of identity process, group membership and social representation theory, the first thing to say is that the representation of the political system which these young people held was clearly related to their political involvement. Those who had some consistent party preference - that is to say, those who identified themselves as consistently conservative or consistently labour over our three surveys - were more likely to represent the political system as responsive to the electorate, as essentially democratic. More importantly, those who had a consistent political party preference were more likely to reproduce in a coherent way in their own opinions the patterns of policy-related social representations which separate left from right in British politics. This was expressed in their opinions about taxation, welfare rights, nationalisation, and other policy issues. Stable Labour and stable Conservative alike were more able to generate the coherent pattern than those who were inconsistent in vote preferences.

Essentially, what we have shown is that only a small minority of young people express a system of beliefs and attitudes which could be regarded as constituting some recognisable political ideology. The majority hold mutually contradictory opinions on political issues. This is fundamentally based, in my opinion, on their almost total failure to understand anything about their own political or economic system. They simply do not put the pieces of the jigsaw together. What then happens is that they reproduce, when pushed, fragments of the political ideologies/social representations to which they have been exposed. The fragments rarely hang together sensibly by any objective criterion - they may do subjectively but we have been unable to prove even that. Where they do hang together, they are associated with clear affiliation to one party or the other. Possession of a coherent representation is linked to membership of the appropriate group.

## **Salience and Centrality of a Social Identity**

Not just the stability of a social identity but its centrality to the overall self concept or self-schema will also affect exposure, acceptance and use. There are many indirect illustrations of this point in the literature. For example, Gurin and Markus (1989) in a fascinating exploration of the cognitive consequences of gender roles for women showed that women would espouse more intense representations of the gender inequalities in society where a non-traditional gender role was for them a central social identity than where it was not central.

Moreover, centrality of a social identity to the self-concept often motivates the active search for exposure to group-relevant representations. Some of the work done by Coyle (1991) on the development of gay identity shows a clear pattern of significant and unqualified self-definition as gay being followed by a period of seeking affirmation from other gay men and the adoption of specific patterns of social representation.

While centrality of the social identity to the self-concept will affect the exposure to and acceptance of a social representation, one would expect that the centrality of the social identity

will change across situations and thus affect the differential use of the social representation. Even if a social representation is very salient to a group and thus to a social identity, it is unlikely to be used in a particular situation unless that social identity is seen to be relevant to the situation. The repertoire of social representations which can be addressed or used in any given situation is broad. The ones chosen will be influenced by the social identities pertinent to the situation. Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1991) illustrate this in the use of ethnic stereotypes, showing them to be context-specific and dependent on the group significance of the situation.

These effects of social identity upon social representations would imply that there will be considerable individual differences in any specific social representation one cares to elicit. This is borne out empirically. Social representations, though shared, do not seem to be shared in their entirety - even within relatively homogeneous samples. Individuals customise their social representations to suit personal goals: in identity terms, these would include self-esteem, continuity and distinctiveness (Breakwell, 1986). This does not always work in the way one might expect. Sometimes social representations with a negative impact upon the individual's social identity are accepted and used. For instance, in the early 1980s unemployed young people were found to accept and reproduce aspects of the very negative social representation of unemployed youth common at the time (Breakwell et al, 1984). They did however add elements to it which set their version apart from the general one: combining self-recrimination for lack of ability and effort with a strong fatalism which was not present in the common version of the representation.

While social representations play a part in shaping social identities (both their content and their evaluation) through defining group identities and boundaries, social identities in turn through influencing exposure, acceptance and use of social representations can shape their development. It does not take much imagination to see how a new idea might be stifled and never become a shared representation if group dynamics restricted its exposure, acceptance and use.

The integration of the social identity and social representation paradigms puts these issues surrounding exposure, acceptance and use forward as prime targets for empirical exploration. No methodological constraints are involved in pursuing them except the need to have data from individuals which is both pertinent and open to systematic analysis which will reveal individual differences.

### **Traits and Social Representations**

In considering the relationship between social identities and social representations, it becomes evident that one really also needs to consider other dimensions of the self concept as potential determinants of individual differences in involvement in the processes of social representation. There is no need to go into the tired old argument about the distinction between personal and social identity (Breakwell, 1986; 1987). The term trait is used here to refer a psychological characteristic which is long-lived and, though differentially manifested across situations, can be said to relate to behaviour in a systematic manner. This definition would include as traits such facets of the self-concept as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and psychological estrangement (Breakwell, in press).

Clearly, traits and social identities, from the viewpoint of the entire biography of an individual, are not always so discrete and separate. Traits can become a part of self-categorisation. For example, having the trait of shyness can lead to self-definition as part of some

conceptual grouping of shy people, it may even lead to seeking out the company of other shy people and, thereby, to group membership. Traits certainly lead to classifications imposed by other people. The shy person is identified as such and whole domains of social behaviour are no longer expected of her. In contrast, group membership may call forth or intensify certain traits. Membership of a women's group might actively promote assertiveness. Membership of the conservative party might actually nurture conservativeness.

From the perspective of the entire biography traits may, therefore, not be so clearly separable from social identities. Yet, taken at a single moment or over a brief period in the person's development, when a social representation is to be acquired, evaluated and applied to look at traits may be useful. It may be particularly useful to consider those self-evaluative traits, like efficacy, self-esteem, estrangement, which actually may systematically influence the way group memberships are chosen and enacted.

At this point, it is not necessary to consider the potential relationships between traits and social identities. For clarity they can be dealt separately in relation to processes of social representation, yet it will become clear that there is a great deal of similarity between their respective links to social representation processes.

There are two ways in which traits relate to social representation processes:

1. Traits as psychological states shape the individual's exposure to, acceptance of, and use of a social representation. Moscovici argues that social representations are a product of inter-individual communication/interaction and many personality traits would recognisably influence the course of such interaction. To go back to our shy person; shyness could prevent participation in many areas of communication necessary either to acquire or to influence a social representation. There are other examples. The trait of curiosity has a self-evident relationship to gaining exposure to a variety of social representations. In our research on the public images of science and scientists we have shown that curiosity is also related to a general proclivity to accept and use as well as access novel ideas (Breakwell and Beardsell, 1992).

2. Traits as self-conscious self-definitions also shape readiness to expose oneself to, accept or use a social representation. In so far as at this level traits are self-categorisations, it could be argued that they are also social identities. However, they still need to be treated as different from those social identities which are derived from group memberships. This is particularly relevant since identities derived from memberships will be subject to group-determined pressures towards particular types of social representation which are absent where self-ascribed traits are concerned.

The importance of self-attributed traits can be illustrated with data from research conducted on the sexual activities of 16-21 year olds (Breakwell and Fife-Schaw, 1992; Breakwell, Fife-Schaw, and Clayden, 1991). The work is a cohort-sequential longitudinal study involving postal surveys of an initial achieved sample of about 3,000 young people drawn randomly from all those in the relevant age cohorts in three districts of England. One facet of the findings can be used to illustrate the current point. A series of questions were posed to elicit aspects of what might reasonably constitute a representation of AIDS/HIV: knowledge of the routes of transmission; beliefs about people with AIDS; convictions concerning the possibility for discovering a cure; and feelings about personal chances of contracting the virus (including levels of fear). An extensive set of questions about sexual activity (e.g. age of first intercourse, numbers of partners, condom use, patterns of sex acts ranging from

kissing to anal intercourse) were also asked. Additionally, self-descriptions of traits which included willingness to take risks were elicited.

The trends in this data are clear: self-professed riskiness is correlated with less “safe” patterns of sexual behaviour (basically, more partners and less condoms). One could argue that people responding to the questionnaire in this way are using both the trait descriptions and the report of behaviour to self-categorise as risky. There is no need to claim here that the behaviour reported is determined by the trait. For the purposes of this argument what matters is the relationship of both behaviour and trait to the representation of AIDS/HIV. Riskiness (defined in terms of self-ascribed behaviours and trait) was positively correlated with a representation of AIDS/HIV which effectively diminishes the risks attached. So, risk-takers are more likely to feel a cure is feasible, to think it is possible to identify a person with AIDS by looking at him/her, and to think that having sex with only one partner will prevent infection.

No indisputable reasons for this relationship between a self-ascribed trait and aspects of a representation can be offered here. It maybe that the representation is just a justification or rationalisation for risky acts, generated either before or after they occurred. The point is merely that this sort of relationship between self-description, representation and action exists and needs researchers to adopt the empirical approaches which will allow it to be explored.

The argument does not require that all traits affect the adoption of every social representation. It merely suggests that when examining the differential adoption of a social representation either in its entirety or in some part, it is necessary to consider the role of personality traits. This is a somewhat unfashionable stance in social psychology. Yet, it is supported by the recent work of Gecas and Seff (1989, 1990) which has shown how closely related self-categorisation (in terms of social class, for instance) and traits (*viz* self-efficacy and self-esteem) actually are. There is now reason to believe that the underlying trait of self-efficacy (as defined by Bandura) is fundamentally important in predicting not only action but also the acceptability and use of patterns of social representation.

### **Efficacy and Estrangement**

We concentrated on two underlying dimensions of identity in the 16-19 study. One is efficacy: one’s belief in one’s ability to handle problems, achieve goals and deal with people effectively (Sherer et al, 1982; Bandura, 1977a, 1977b, 1989). The other is estrangement: one’s sense of powerlessness, worthlessness and meaninglessness, akin to alienation (Seeman, 1959, 1972; Hammond, 1988). Efficacy and estrangement are, not surprisingly, negatively correlated; they are two facets of the individual’s sense of control.

We were interested in the importance of the opinions of others to the process of self-evaluation. This differs according to the absolute levels of efficacy or estrangement experienced by the individual. Self-doubt, manifest either in low efficacy or high estrangement, should result in greater reliance upon others as a source of reference. This was in fact found to be the case for our respondents. Low efficacy and high estrangement was associated with greater concern for the opinion of others. Such people are showing signs that they do not trust themselves to evaluate themselves and, even if they could, they fear their assessment would be worthless.

It was predicted that the same process of self-doubt might result in greater conformity to traditional self-images for those lower in efficacy: they would be less willing to stand against

strong social representations of the roles they are expected to fulfil. This was tested in relation to acceptance of traditional sex roles.

In fact, efficacy is related in the predicted way to acceptance of sex roles. Basically, greater efficacy, in both males and females, is associated with greater acceptance of the equality of the sexes. Stronger feelings of incompetence are linked to a desire on the part of females to accept traditional subordinate sex roles and on the part of males to seek to keep women in those subordinate roles.

Just as they are related to the acceptance of social representations of sex roles, efficacy and estrangement are related to representations held about the political system. Young people who are more estranged are more likely to think that they have no influence on political decisions, that politicians are uninterested in public opinion, and that the political system is corrupt. Estrangement is negatively correlated with interest in politics, belief in the importance of knowing about politics and level of political activity, whether this involves simply talking politics or more direct political protest.

Efficacy was also related to political attitudes and activity. Even after educational level is taken into account, people who report greater efficacy claim to know more about politics, regarding them as interesting and important. Efficacy is significantly correlated with involvement in political action such as marching on demonstrations or writing to an MP. It is also related to the willingness to become engaged in political talk with family or friends.

In fact, general efficacy seems to prime the person for participation in the political system. It is related to willingness to vote in the next election and expressing firm political party preferences. Efficacy seems to predispose acceptance of a social representation of the political system as responsive and amenable to change through the participation of the individual in the democratic process.

Self-evaluation is clearly related, as predicted, to social representation in the political domain. There is little evidence from our data that estranged youth is politically militant. The evidence points in the opposite direction: disillusionment with the system is resulting in a withdrawal from it and this abandonment of conventional politics is not matched by any search for radical alternatives. Estrangement is, however, a particularly good predictor of Labour allegiance, even when social class and education are partialled out first.

The causal relationship between these dimensions of identity and social representation is in no sense unidirectional. Efficacy and estrangement predispose acceptance of certain political and societal representations which in turn will shape action and the meaning attributed to experiences, but these actions and appended meaning will reshape the content of identity even if not the underlying operation of identity processes.

Treating personality traits as important in the study of social representational processes has significant implications for the type of empirical approach which is feasible. Clearly, the data source for both traits and representations must be at the level of individuals. Sampling must allow for individual variations in the target trait and the form of data analysis chosen must permit exploration of individual differences. This effectively means that the analysis will have two apparently conflicting objectives. It will look across individuals for communalities in the structure of representations. It will also seek to pinpoint the patterns of differences between individuals and how these relate to trait variations.

It would also be interesting to see how far it is possible to track the role of an individual in the generation of a social representation. Social identity clearly has a role to play in dictating

the significance of any one individual (power differentials, networks, etc) but it would also be intriguing to see how personality traits relate to involvement in developing a representation. At the moment, there appears to be no research on this type of issue and it is alien to the recent tradition of social representation research. Yet it is an arena where it would be possible to go that one step further in uniting the cognitive traditions in social psychology with the social analysis movement in social psychology.

The empirical implication of the need to track individual inputs to the development of a social representation lies largely in the time-frame for the research. It requires a design which is in one way or another longitudinal - either continuously following the individual over some period which is predicted to be formative in the development of the representation or time-sampling the relationship between the individual's activity and the structure of the representation.

The relationship between personality traits and social representation can be examined in reverse of course. It could be argued that in so far as traits are socially constructed domains (prototypes), they are a product of social representation processes. This notion that the dimensions of personality are socially constructed segments, with a socially determined meaning and significance, is attractive. It does not mean that the trait possessed by an individual is any the less real but it gets us away from assumptions that traits are individualistic and non-social explanations for action.

### **Action, Identity and Social Representations**

Social representations relate to both individual and group actions. They often specify objectives for action and the course it should take. The major problem in explaining, worse still predicting, individual action in any particular situation lies in the fact that the person will be characterised by several social identities and their attendant social representational baggage at the time. These identities may push towards different, even conflicting forms of action.

The emphasis which is nowadays placed upon notions of centrality or salience and contextualisation of identities is meant to overcome this problem. The identity salient in the context will direct action - so the line of argument goes. The problem is then that it is usually impossible to establish except post hoc that a particular identity is salient in the situation.

The other approach to this problem has been to examine the interactive effects of group memberships. This recognises that identities do not have separate existences, like individual ice cubes segregated from each other in their plastic tray. They interact and their interaction changes their implications for both representational processes and action decisions. The research which has explored these issues of "multiple category membership" or cross-category membership (Doise, 1978; Deschamps and Doise, 1978; Vanbeselaere, 1987; Hagendoorn and Henke, 1991) is in its infancy. It is, however, clear that attributional aspects of social representation are much influenced by such interaction of category memberships. One would expect action decisions to be similarly affected by it.

The research on cross-category memberships has so far tended to rely upon rather stylised pairings of memberships (Muslim-non-Muslims/High-Low Class; Male-Female/Arts-Science Students) and to explore them as if their interaction was global (without variations across individuals or situations). Moreover, it ignores the fact that there are different sorts of groups. This is hardly likely to produce a robust model for predicting action. The empirical problem lies in catching the implications amidst the fluidity of transitions in the relative

importance of each membership. Billig (in press) in analysing situated rhetoric, the arguments which disclose both identifications and social representations, may be getting closer to tapping into this flow.

There may be another type of solution to the problem empirically. Instead of attempting to control for the interaction of group memberships by setting up relatively arbitrary experimental cross-classifications, the impact of these multiple memberships upon representations could be examined statistically. The multivariate statistical approaches adopted in several of the later chapters in this book illustrate how, assuming the sample size is large enough and the relevant information collected, it is possible to partial out the effects of disparate networks of group memberships. Given the right indices of group salience, this approach could also allow researchers to explore the salience-related processes linking multiple memberships to representational preferences.

It would, clearly, be foolish to jump to the conclusion that there will be inevitably some high correlation between the requirements of identity, trait or social representation and action. It is actually necessary to specify the conditions, physical and psychological, in which they do predict action (and are not merely post hoc rationalisations for action taken, generated by the individual who has acted).

### **Conclusion**

Integrating the social identity and social representation paradigms has a number of methodological implications. None of these involve the imposition of any single methodological orthodoxy. In fact, the theoretical integration calls for a parallel diversity of empirical approaches. The choice of method of data collection or analysis in any particular study should be determined by the theoretical proposition to be tested. In virtually all cases, a variety of methods will be needed to address the theoretical question fully. The real problem lies in relating findings drawn from different methods to each other. In studying the genesis of a representation it may be important to use a historical analysis of the relative power of the groups producing it and affected by it. In looking at its spread within a group, it may necessary to use surveys with carefully chosen samples. In assessing its persistence, time series sampling may be utilised. There is no question of homogenising data from these different sources in some bland soup or, even, laying one upon another in some rather more substantial lasagna. They should be related to each other via the theory used. The empirical findings are not an end in themselves. They are valuable in so far as they can test and develop the theory. Integration is not at the level of empirical findings but at the level of theoretical conclusions.

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