A Southerner's Response to an Insular Critique: Where to Find the Social and how to Understand the Use of Clusters in our Studies on Social Representations

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The Sherif (just before being killed): - This is unfair, I don't deserve to end this way.
The killer: - There is no relationship between what one has done and what happens to him.

(Extract from the film "The Unforgiven", directed by Clint Eastwood)

Allansdottir, Jovchelovitch & Stathopoulou in their paper (this volume) criticize: a) the statisticalisation of social representations, which leads us to the ingenuity of stating that a social representation = a cluster. b) the external aggregate of the social in this kind of research. c) the definition of what is social on the basis of a criterion of aggregated individual responses, or in some other cases instead of consensus, disent. d) the closure of the concept of social representation due to the use of techniques which are external to the concept.

The authors of this commentary consider themselves as forced representatives of a group of non anglo-saxon researchers who are trying to combine the heuristic power of the metatheory and theory of social representations with triangulative and intersubjective methodological developments, and who believe that formalizing and using methods of statistical contrast are very important tools (Marques,1983; Di Giacomo,1981,1986; Flament, 1986; Beaufils, Paicheler & Le Disert,1987; Bellelli,1987; Ayestarán, DeRosa & Páez, 1987; Abric,1989; Verges, 1989; Echebarría & Páez, 1989; Deschamps & Clemence,1990; Páez, Echebarría, Valencia, Romo, SanJuan & Vergara,1991; Páez & Paicheler,1990; Elejabarrieta,1991; Doise, Clemence & Lorenzi- Cioldi,1992; Apostolodis, Antypa & Paicheler, 1992; Echebarría, Elejabarrieta, Valencia & Villareal, 1992). We share with these authors the belief in the fact that just the use of qualitative and interpretative techniques (and in some cases only the use of these techniques) will not guarantee some advance. In depth interviews and group discussion are only useful when: a) they are performed with a coding system and system of categories of analysis which may be replicated, are intersubjective and whose reliability has been tested. They must also include all the advances made in the area of linguistics, and not only those linguistic patterns which are somewhat obsolete (as for example, speech acts); b) there is a triangulation of methods (surveys, laboratory experiments and in-depth interviews or focus groups); c) the results are later subject of formalization and data analysis.

We will try our best to be worthy representatives of this criticized group. Allansdottir et al's criticism could also be oriented towards other authors who are in a position of stronger influence, such as for example their own professors Gaskell and Fraser (1990), who have a

similar conception as ours in their study of widespread beliefs, or Doise, Clemence & Lorenzi-Cioldi (1992), who push the statisticalisation of the concept of social representations to a much higher level of sophistication (or perversion) than we do.

In our commentary, first of all we will revise the definitions of social representation, the discussions that surround the concept, the similarities and differences with other representational constructs, because this is the frame in which our stigmaticized, as an example of statisticalisation of social representations, research was developed. We will review the concept of what "social" is. We will explore the differences between the concepts of social representations, ideology and attitudes, while we will stress the similarities with other concepts. Secondly, we will explain the results and limitations of the Echebarría & Páez research (1988), because we think that the interpretation which Allansdottir et al present of this research somewhat reverses both our reasoning and our aims.

Thirdly, we will point out some aspects which we think may help to develop future studies. Due to space limits, our style will be telegraphical and affirmative (dogmatic if you wish to think of it in that way).

We will begin with a brief comment on what we think are two basic and simple metatheoretical errors to which Allansdottir et al fall victims to. Believing that this is not the place to stress this point, we will devote more time trying to show how we tried to combine the conceptual aspect of what a social representation is, with the methodological issues. We will also state those developments in the research on attitudes and common sense concepts with which we think the research in social representations may converge.

Two Steps Backward and one Side Step (This is not a Lenin Quote): Description is Explanation and the Method Ensures us that Science is Correct

First of all, it was assured that the explanatory character or nature of social representations is due to its descriptive capacity (page 6). This is neither the time nor place to develop the idea, but explanation implies abstraction, decontextualization and generalization. You do not necessarily have to be a positivist to accept that the object of science is explanation and not description. The explanatory relationships may be causal, functional or intentional, but they are abstract generalizations. Although they are not mechanicists they are volitional or functional. (Sayer, 1984; Páez, Valencia, Morales & Ursúa, 1992).

Secondly, it is said that to work with a method is intrinsically perverse, and implicitly it is assumed that if you work with the correct method you may achieve "good or correct science". Although the method in this case is qualitative analysis, this is a naif positivist approach, which holds the method responsible for the development of science (Páez, Valencia, Morales & Ursúa, 1992).

This discussion draws us back to times so long past that we do not think it is necessary to go into this point in any more detail. Now we will state our main aspect of interest.

Definition of Social Representation

Moscovici (1961/76) defined social representations as a cognitive and symbolic product about a social object created by a group and used by it to allow communication among the members of that group, it is also used to guide responses towards the object of the representation (Moscovici, 1988). Doise (1990) defined social representations as the

organizing principles of the positions adopted in the symbolic relationships between actors, positions which are linked to the specific inclusion of these actors in a defined group of social relations. In other words, the study of social representations seeks to operationally understand how the subjects cognitively organize their social experience, as a result of their social relationships.

To find an Opinion and to See that it Changes According to the Social Position is not enough to Confirm that a Social Representation Exists

Our research was inserted in a context in which there was a strong criticism towards studies which only collected opinions on a subject, stated that these opinions changed in accordance with the social position of the subjects, and from all this,inferred the existence of social representations. We should remember that Moscovici's classical study was based on closed questionnaires, open ended questions and chi square tests, crosstabulating the answers with ideological , religious and social identification. These results combined with the content analysis of newspapers, were the basis of the empirical part of his study (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Allansdottir et al may well criticize that in this case, a social representation was based on differences.

Moscovici's work was stimulating and novel, but it was seen as necessary to go beyond a transversal study with a crosstabulation of opinions with social position because this kind of research may be open to criticism.

To confirm that the people have or state an opinion or belief about something is not enough, we have stereotypes which do not fulfil any social role. And due to the fact that human beings are social animals, to state that thought is social, that it is always produced as a result of a shared experience with others, is only useful as a metatheoretical reference. To find that in his narration or description of romantic love a person reproduces and recreates ideologies that have been around for centuries does not enable us to advance very much. Better still, these elements are not sufficient or enough to be able to state that a representation is social, although they are necessary.

Definitions of what is Social

It seems that Allansdottir et al have no problems whatsoever in using individual responses in a research. What they seem to criticize is that the mere aggregate of these or the systematic variability of these are used as sufficient criteria to state that we are in view of a social phenomenon.

Reviewing the concept of "social", we find the following definitions (Gaskell & Fraser,1990):

a) Attitudes, cognitions,etc. of social objects (people, institutions, groups) in contrast to non-social objects (natural categories,i.e. flowers). This is a distinction which does not differentiate social cognition from social representation, and furthermore this distinction is quite objectionable. (A natural object, i.e: a rose, may have an impact and a social meaning).

b) A shared representation: a representation which appears in an important percentage of people (i.e.: in the classical prototype research in at least 10% of the population - Fehr,1988; Fehr & Russell,1991). The problem here is: how many people are enough people? This depends on the universe from where we have obtained our sample, and the limits to possible

opinions, although this question does not have a simple answer. A 10% sample in a homogeneous group is just a criterion and we are still awaiting any other better one. But the fact that the representation is shared in the social ecology is a prototypical attribute of the social representations (probabilistically necessary). On the other hand, an idiosyncratic belief or an account of a specific small group will hardly be a social phenomenon.

c) A representation arising from the social processing of information, arising via communication with others, emerging and available in public accounts and which is interpersonaly communicable. This attribute is also prototypical, although there are phenomena which are transmitted by silence, or which are social due to the contradiction between what is verbally transmitted and what people actually do.

d) A representation that has social functions, that helps maintain a social system. This is the attribute which we consider necessary, although it is not enough, and it must be combined with some of the attributes mentioned before, although not necessarily with all of them.

e) A representation that is distributed in external forms of culture, that is trascendental, such as language structure, work of art, literature, etc. which has an existence outside of the individuals. This attribute is also very important, although sometimes social representations exist in structures of informal meaning (rumours, proverbs...).

This set of prototypical attributes would define social representations. But we would have to differentiate these social representations from other forms of social knowledge such as ideology.

There are three other aspects which Gaskell & Fraser (quoting McGuire) do not explicitly mention, and which we think are important:

f) The fact of it being a social event, this aspect was stressed by authors such as Durkheim when talking about the collective representations, when we refer to a social event, we are talking about its character which is not only shared, but also normative and prescriptive. Emerging from the group interaction these representations are "imposed" on the subject (Leyens & Codol, 1990). This is the constructive feature of social representations. Collective representations signify that which is socially desireable, what is normative and prescriptive, and what is associated with attitudes, whilst at the same time also being,

g) affectively and value laden (Sherif, 1982).

h) representations are not distributed in the same way in the ecology or in a specific context, different positions are associated or better suited to some representations and not others (Sperber, 1990). This in some ways converges with attribute "d", and with Gaskell & Frasers's strong definition of widespread beliefs:" those beliefs which define a social category and as such serve to maintain (i.e. is functional for) that social group or category " (1990,p.11).

It is also necessary that the beliefs and opinions have a structure and are associated with some orientation or disposition towards action (Di Giacomo, 1981; 1986).

We could summarize the question of when we may say that we have a social representation in the following terms: the existence of a social representation is not only defined by the existence of a number of people who share that representation. A social representation refers to interaction scripts and implicit theories that are publicly displayed. Moreover, those beliefs have social functions such as to protect social identities, to explain

relevant social events, and to guide and justify actions towards the objects of representation. Furthermore, those beliefs are structured and anchored in ideological and value systems, in cultural artifacts which objetify or have an existence outside of the head of individuals, and also have emotional valences (Jodelet, 1989; Doise & Palmonari, 1986; Doise, 1990; Di Giacomo, 1986).

Critiques of the Concept of Social Representation

We are now going to briefly point out three critiques which social representations have faced and which we tried to answer in our research. First of all, some authors have said that social representations do not exist because subjects change their rhethorical and discursive contents in different contexts. The most important aspect for a psychologist would be to analyze the linguistic repertoires (Potter & Wetherell,1987). Underlying this assumption we can find a declarative and reflexive conception of knowledge. This is in opposition to cognitive psychology and philosophical researches and also to common sense, which have found that not all knowledge is declarative and can be linguistically expressed (George, 1988).

It has also been said that it is difficult to find an agreement of opinions or consensus (the number criteria is criticable). However, the criteria about consensus are less important than the social functions of representations or than the existence of evaluative dimensions and common conceptual hierarchies underlying them (Di Giacomo, 1986; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Those functions and dimensions can be subject of empirical contrast- and not only subject of linguistic analyses (Doise 1986;1990).

The last critique is about the circularity in defining social representations: the existence of a group is defined by shared representations and social representations are defined because they are shared by a group. However, the group can be defined by an external criterium apart from that of representations. For example, we can define the existence of a social group using different categorical indexes such as social class, ideology, political party membership, religious beliefs, and so on (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Elejabarrieta, 1991; Eiser, 1987). Moreover, we can look for structures of beliefs independently from the groups previously defined by the external indexes. Finally, we can try to compare both groups and clusters of beliefs and to analyze the relationship between them. Another method is to use, in multidimensional analyses or in analysis of correspondence, beliefs as the active variables and group membership as auxiliary variables. A significant distribution of the groups among the space of the beliefs will allow us to observe if there are covariations between them, without having to use group membership to create the map of beliefs (Doise, Clemence & Lorenzi-Cioldi,1992; Deschamps, Comby & Devos,1992). In this way, we could empirically solve the problem of circularity.

Social Representations and Other Representational Constructs

We are now going to pay attention to the existing discussion concerning the differences and similarities between social representations and two other representational constructs such as attitude and ideology. We think this is an important point because another criticism which has sometimes been directed towards social representations is that these representations were nothing more than an "old dog with a new leash", and that the idea of social representation was used instead of other concepts such as attitudes, ideology or collective representations.

We will start off with the differences between social representations and ideology. Social representations are heterogeneous, they are less systematic and less institutionalized than ideology. Moreover, social representations are not hegemonically imposed on a culture. Ideology, by contrast, as a systematized belief system, is institutionalized and hegemonically imposed. Ideology is shared by members of the same culture. In contrast, in a culture there can be different social representations. However, there are interactions between social representations, ideologies and scientific knowledge (Doise, 1986, 1990; Moscovici, 1988).

With regard to the differences between social representations and attitude, we are going to use Jaspars and Fraser's (1984) point of view to analyze them. Thomas and Znaniecki's "social value" concept is closer to the social representation concept than are current attitudes. For these authors, attitudes do not allow us to find interindividual differences but shared characteristics among the members of a group.

The differences between attitude and social representations emerge from the evolution of the concept of attitude following Floyd Allport's influence on this topic. From then onwards, we can basically find two kinds of definitions concerning attitudes. One behavioural and another cognitive. From a behavioural point of view, attitudes are "probabilistic behaviors", both covert or overt (Lott & Lott, 1985;). From a cognitive point of view, attitudes are "perceptual or cognitive filters" used by people to understand the world (Sherif,1982). Both these definitions are individualistic in character and they are quite far away from the socially shared character of social representations. However, in Sherif's work the concept of social norm, which is thought to be a part of an attitude, is quite close to the concept of collective representation (something which is normative and prescriptive, which emerges from interaction or a collective product, which is "outside" of the individul and is imposed on him/her.)

Today, attitudes are seen as a component of social representations (Moscovici, 1961/76; Doise 1989). We can find three components or dimensions in social representations: a) Information: knowledge about a social object. b) a structure or organization of that information around the figurative nucleus. c) Attitude: defined as an evaluative dimension, be it positive or negative, towards an object. Moscovici (1976, p. 72) said that attitude "is the most frequent of the three dimensions and, perhaps, the first genetically. It is reasonable to conclude that people represent something only after having taken an affective attitude towards it". Some studies on the development of social knowledge about countries and ethnic groups have found that children first have an ethnocentric attitude and prejudice against different groups even before they have clear information about those countries or groups (Milner, 1984). According to Moscovici, attitudes are evaluative structures which have two functions: (a) A regulative function or selection of behaviours, and (b) a motivational function through the affective valence.

Although the research in social cognition shows a tendency towards solipsism and individualism, there are some studies or areas of research in relation to attitudes and common sense concepts (scripts and prototypes) which we think converge and/or complete the theory of social representations, whilst also providing intersubjective methodological tools which may be replicated and quantified.

Attitudinal Structures, Prototypes, Cultural Scripts, and Social Representations

Different authors -such as Tourengau & Rasinski (1987)- state that attitudes are structures of the long term memory, in particular scripts or scenarios, i.e., a set of beliefs and feelings about the antecedents, causes, behaviours and appropriate solutions to given situations. There would be manifold scripts and scenarios available about social problems- such as, for instance, people who are poor because they really are just very lazy and who take advantage of the state aid, would be associated with rage;or people who are poor due to social injustice, who should be helped by the state,associated with a feeling of unfairness. This would be reinforced by the fact that subjects with different attitudes would invoke different values and different attributes in order to evaluate the attitudinal object.

Thus, according to these authors, the attitudes towards abortion, for instance, would not be unidimensional, not even multidimensional, they would be better explained as different thematic conglomerates (for instance, those subjects with a strong pro-life attitude believe that men and women are different and that the main reason for sex is reproduction, whilst those who are pro-abortion believe that women and men are similar in duties and rights and that the objective of sex is to improve their intimate contact) (Tourengau & Rasinski 1987). Summarizing, we can say that subjects with different attitudes have different "implicit theories" and different "scripts". In other words, different people appeal to different social representations. If, apart from this, we consider that the culturally available settings have a socially determined distribution, we can clearly see how important social representations are in the study of attitudes.

The attitudes will become associated with different values and explanatory and behavioural outlines, which will shape different knowledge structures -and not just opposed attitudes. These structures or "scripts" which explain and guide people's behaviour will be congruent with their social situation - for instance, in the Echebarría and Páez study (1989), with the level of contact with homosexuals and AIDS infected people.

Two anthropologists, Holland & Quinn, stated the following (1987, vii): "....cultural knowledge seems to be organized in prototypical sequences of events -outlines which we call cultural patterns and which are themselves hierarchically associated to other cultural knowledge". The explanation given by another author of the so-called cultural pattern reflects its similarities with the aforementioned social representations. Lutz conceives cultural patterns as folkloric theories or patterns which culture has put at people's disposal and which are widely used to explain why things happen,to classify them and to make inferences about their changes and development. Her methods of study are similar to the ones postulated by social representations- the study of everyday narrations and accounts, by means of linguistic analysis, codification and multivariate analysis (see Lutz 1988). In other words, there are different prototypical categories and prototypical scripts, associated with different social positions. For example, Salmaso and Pombeni (1986) tested that the assumption that the prototypical attributes of the concept of work were present with a certain consensus in the Italian culture, but they also observed that they differed significantly depending on if the subject were workers or managers.

The methodology in the study of prototypes (free expression of attributes, scores of centrality, contrast of the relation between centrality and typicity, rememberance and judgement) must be combined with the systematic study of the influence of the social setting

in the context or structure of these prototypes. We think that future developments in the study of social representations may emerge from the use of these prototypes. Conceptually, the prototypical categories are defined by attributes which are neither enough nor necessary, there is a classification of social stimula using a method of family resemblance which leads to some not well defined borders. Those cases which have more central attributes are classified quicker and better as members of a certain category. The higher centrality scores an attribute receives, the better it is remembered. In the areas of social knowledge of emotions, there is an important tradition in the study of common sense concepts such as prototypical categories. Nowadays it is accepted that the common sense emotional concepts are structured as event prototypes or scripts (Fehr & Russell,1984; Fehr,1988; Fehr & Russell,1991; Russell,1991). Also, the prototype theories state that these common sense categories are organized by the "folk theories" which are shared in a culture (Semin, 1989).

We may consider prototypes as associated with the objectivation of the representations, that is to say, with the concretion in exemplars and/or ideal models based on attributes which are neither necessary nor enough. On the other hand, we may consider the scripts as associated with the function of anchoring, of inclusion in the relation between groups and the course of the interaction, present in the social representations.

The Research on Social Representations of AIDS and Its Relation to the Previous Discussion

We will briefly summarize those studies conducted on this topic, with the idea of contextualizing the aims of the research criticized by Allansdottir et al.

In the Echebarría and Páez study (1989), we were interested in studying the different social representations of AIDS which were shared by different groups. These groups were defined by their distance from both the social object (AIDS) and homosexuals and drug users. Moreover, we were interested in analyzing how those different groups had different information, different attitudes, different feelings towards high risk groups, and different behavioural intentions towards seropositive people. The structures of beliefs should be independently defined (not based on group membership) to avoid the problem of circularity. And we also have to see if these beliefs had, apart from structure, a prototypical script content.

Beliefs about AIDS with regard to causes, groups and people who are victims of AIDS, preventive behaviours,etc. should have a structure and a content. Different historical studies have shown that the label attached to an illness, its symptoms, the reasons and ways you may be infected, the diagnosis and ways of coping with the illness are common aspects of the representations of illness (Skelton & Croyle, 1991). Bishop's studies (see Skelton & Croyle, 1991) show some data suggesting that lay people cognitively organize and recall information about illness and health according to a prototypical logic. Also, Lalljee's studies suggest that people represent AIDS as an event or script prototype (Lalljee,1991).

The first phase of this research consisted of a study of the quantitative and qualitative questionnaires, of an analysis of newspaper reports, and a pre-test which included in-depth interviews and group discussions (Páez, San Juan, Romo & Vergara,1991).

The content of the questionnaires showed the emergence of a script in the representations of the illness, (causes, what it is and symptoms, who it affects, what to do with regard to those infected, and what to do oneself). Also in other studies, the prototypical aspects of the

beliefs about AIDS were already tested. Specifically it was studied if the ideas which were freely and spontaneously generated had any relation to the closed ended questions,and if there was any correlation between the frequency of freely produced memories and the centrality and typicity scores (Blanco, Páez, Penín, Romo y Sanchez, 1992).

The prototypical aspect of the scripts was tested, and it was experimentally confirmed that when in a vignette or short story a person showed the prototypical symptoms of AIDS, which were inferred from other studies (those symptoms which were mentioned more and had higher centrality scores) and was also a member of those groups which stereotypically are thought to be affected (homosexuals and "promiscuous" young people), people answered more that the person had AIDS. He or she was held to be responsible for the situation, they suffered more rejection, and there were more negative affective reactions - in comparison with those people who had the same symptoms but were members of the prototypical script of another illness (i.e. a middle age executive who is overweight and has suffered a stroke).

We also expected to find differences in memory in those groups of beliefs (both in free recall and recognition). We wanted to confirm, in the sense stated by Tourengau & Rasinski (1987), that the different scripts had an influence as mnesic structures in the individual processing of the information. To test this, two weeks after the interview, a group of people from the sample underwent a test of free recall and recognition (see Páez, Echebarría, Valencia, Romo, SanJuan & Vergara,1991, for a detailed discussion).

In the criticized version of our paper, a quick cluster analysis (SPSS-X) with a two cluster solution was carried out on the questionaire and showed as a result two opposite belief structures. The first one was a representation of AIDS as a very contagious disease, affecting fringe and abnormal people, asssociated with rejection and very extreme preventive behaviours. The second one was a "liberal" representation of AIDS as a sexually transmitted disease, rejecting the isolation and stigmatization of seropositive people. There were no differences in correct preventive behaviour between both clusters.

We never stated that there were only two social representations or that they were defined by the existence of clusters. This last aspect was only a sign of the structured character of the beliefs, and it was also a way of testing if a group of beliefs could exist in a "mixed" fashion. In a simplified and pure way it showed those other characteristics which would allow us to state that these belief structures were social representations, that they were congruent with the level of contact with seropositives and with the affective, attitudinal aspect towards homosexuals and the disease.

The different clusters of beliefs were associated with different levels of social contact with high risk groups. Both clusters of beliefs- the liberal and the conservative- which were established independently of groups, were congruent with the level of social contact. People with less contact with seropositives and with a more negative attitude towards AIDS came closer to the conservative belief cluster (see Paez et al, 1991).

We also confirmed the congruent relation between attitude, structures of knowledge (clusters), groups defined in function of religious beliefs, the level of social contact with high risk groups, and the social and preventive behaviours. Due to the fact that these cluster were congruent with the level of knowledge of seropositives and with the attitude towards AIDS, we have some evidence to state that these are social representations.

On the other hand, the clusters of beliefs appear as the best predictor of the negativistic bias in memory. Generally speaking, we have confirmed the functional and predictive values

of social representations. Our aim was that of confirming that belief structures, associated with affective attitudes congruent with the social positions (in other words, social representations) lead to a distortion in recall, by means of selecting or changing the original information. We believe this gives a certain stability to the representations and, at the end of the argumentation, shows the social character of beliefs about AIDS. The kind of research we undertook not only allows us to confirm, but also to contrast our conclusions. It is bearing this in mind why we examined if the content of the memory distorsion and the content of the prototypical script of the structure of beliefs were congruent.

To achieve this last aspect, we performed another analysis, and also with the idea of checking the predictive power of the attitudes towards social groups, belief clusters and level of social contact. A classical critique towards the representational studies is that they give a central role to some elements which are only justifying rationalizations of previous practices (Páez, Insúa & Vergara, 1992). We will now present a short summary of this last research. In order to analyze the specific influence of attitudes, level of social contact with homosexuals and the belief clusters on the memory, a correlation and multiple regression analysis was carried out. Four indexes were obtained: 1) a false positive recognition item; 2) a false negative recognition item; 3) three true positive recognition items, and 4) two true negative recognition items. The index of the effect of these items on the memory was the result of adding the recognition items, consensually classified by 20 students as positive or negative depending on their content towards homosexuals (see Paez, Insúa & Vergara, 1992 for the classification of items). Correlations show a significant association between level of contact, attitude, clusters and false bias in memory. The conservative cluster and a negative attitude towards homosexuals were associated with a higher recognition of false positive and false negative information, suggesting a bias towards incorrect information. At a correlational level, negative attitudes towards homosexuals, low level of contact and a conservative-blaming representation of AIDS were also significantly associated with lower recognition of correct information and higher recognition of false items. The content of items is not an aspect which allows us to establish differences. Association patterns and general indexes of true and false recognition items were created. Results show that the more contact there is with homosexuals, the less negative is the affective attitude towards homosexuals, and there will also be a better memory about AIDS information. The results obtained are similar to those about sanitary information and attitudes towards sex: people with an extremely negative attitude are very timorous, they think that people who have AIDS are morally deviant, they possess less correct information and they also show less intention of carrying out correct preventive behaviours (Herek & Glunt,1988). Social Representations of AIDS, attitude towards and social contact with homosexuals have a significant specific influence on memory but, it is the attitude towards homosexuals (and not the representations or the social contact) that shows a higher degree of association with memory. This would suggest that, leaving out the level of experience and the structures of beliefs, the attitude towards a social category, fulfilling their functions of defence of social identity and orientation of interaction and communication, would be the central explanatory variable of memory about social objects, confirming Halbwachs' and Bartlett's ideas. This would lead us to conclude that the attitude and emotional dimension is one of the most important aspects of social beliefs (see Kinder & Sears, 1985).

Finally, we must note that the longitudinal and field nature of our research does not allow us to clarify which is the process that is beneath these biases in memory. It may be an effect of the influence of prototypical scripts, or it may be due to the fact that those people with

more liberal beliefs talk more with other people on this topic,or seek more information about it. Or even still, it could just be a response bias. Only laboratory studies carried out in isolation and using techniques which enable us to carefuly study any response will allow us to better understand our results.

Different Dimensions of Social Representations (Public Accounts and Collective Aspects) and Methodological Approaches: Some Perspectives

In the previous pages we have indicated what we have achieved, its limitations and why our work is not too similar to what Allandsottir et al have stated. We will now mention those areas of future development which may help to operationally reinforce the research in social representations.

To summarize our previous arguments and some of the literature (Jodelet,1989; Doise & Palmonari,1986; Di Giacomo, 1981, 1986) we will be able to talk about Social Representations (SR), and not just about collective representations (shared beliefs) or ideologies (dominant beliefs), if these beliefs have a structure, if they have emotional or affective resonances, if they are associated to different social behaviours and groups, and if they are publicly reproduced in group situations acting as justifications of when, how and why we think or behave in response to a social object or event. Attitudes, information and structure of social representations are the best known dimensions and those whose establishing procedures are clearer (i.e. Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi's (1992) excellent book on Social Representations and Multivariate Analysis).

We are going to focus on social representations as public accounts and as collective phenomena, two aspects which are thought to confirm the social character of representations, aspects from which we may draw more precise methodological consequences than we did in the studies on AIDS. 1) Social Representations (SR) are accounts given in communicative and group context. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of accounts using the group as the unit of data analyses are needed. Thus, for their study we need to work with group accounts, to perform content analysis, qualitative conceptual networks, dendrograms and quantitative clusters and dendrogram analysis (i.e. multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis using groups as the unit of analysis). Methodologically, the limitations of structured and closed instruments (scales, questionnaires) used in psychosocial research have been well established. Group discussions and in-depth interviews, with the necessary and indispensable methods for establishing the reliability and validity of the content analysis codes, allow the triangulation of empirical results, this means that questionnaire answers can be compared with the open and intensive research methods (for a different point of view on triangulation, see Flick, 1992). On the other hand, the motivational, dynamic and processual elements of the phenomena are picked up better using qualitative methods (Schwartz & Jacob, 1984; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The research on SR has the aim of trying to converge the quantitative and the qualitative perspectives in the study of group attitudes and beliefs (Sotirakopoulou & Breakwell,1992).

2) SRs are emergent processes, which have social functions and can be reconstructed using macro, micro and individual indicators. Thus, for their study we need to establish collective units of analysis, maximizing variances between groups and showing the relevance of the analyses of group units (i.e. Teune,1990; Kramer, 1983). We also need aggregated data and macro and microsocial indicators (i.e. group modes or means and socio- structural

group characteristics), in order to analyze at a collective level the associations between beliefs and micro and macro social indicators. For instance, in the classical research "The American Soldier", the work done with reference groups used aggregated data analysis and microsocial indicators. In this research the social structure was introduced in the survey design through the organizational structure of the military service. Unfortunately, this tradition of research was abandoned (survey research becoming dominant, replacing community studies with individual interview research, and this brought with it a shift from the collective to the individual (Coleman,1983).

Research on SR's will be able to show the social functioning of beliefs and this will demand collective indicators which could be compared with opinion polls on individual attitudes and social perception, as well as with in-depth interviews and group discussions on the predominant beliefs which different social groups have in different historical moments.

All this demands that triangulation should take into account: a) surveys and in-depth interview individual level data. b) group accounts, surveys and in-depth interview aggregated level data (mode, means.etc). c) micro and macrosocial "objective" indicators (institutional and organizational indexes,etc) (i.e. Hofstede's 1980 research on work values and economical development, size of the organizations, etc., used countries as the unit of analysis).

We will exemplify the possibilities of public accounts and collective level of analysis in social representations with a short account of a research conducted on Drinking Beliefs and Behaviour in the Basque Country (Social representations of drinking and youth behaviour: comparing surveys and focus group data and exploring aggregated data patterns (Basabe & Paez,1992; Paez, Basabe, Valdoseda, Igartua & Iraurgui, 1992).

Comparing results obtained from surveys with group accounts we found that beliefs about positive alcohol effects or expectations (i.e. drinking helps social interaction and helps one to have more confidence in him/herself) were shared and available both in group accounts and in individual responses. Negative effects were shared "privately" but were not displayed in groups discussions. Even more interestingly we found whilst conducting a structural causal modelling, that only positive beliefs were related to the degree of drinking, and that the same occurred when analysing group accounts and age (higher age groups shared more beliefs, i.e largest mode and means of ideas by group than the younger, in positive effects and drank more). Triangulation between individual responses (survey), content analysis of groups accounts and agreggated data analysis (group as unit of analysis) confirmed that beliefs about positive effects "circulated more" or were not only available "in the head", but were also accessible in the social discourse. These accessible and more actively distributed positive beliefs were more related to behaviour than the negative ones (Basabe & Paez, 1992).

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