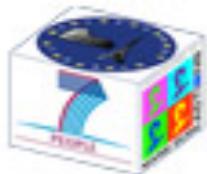




European/International Joint PhD in Social Representations and Communication International Summer School 2015



European Commission REA-Research Executive Agency
FP7 - PEOPLE Initial Training Networks
So.Re.Com. Joint-IDP
(PITN-GA-2013-607279)



Funded by the European Union

Mapping the impact and dissemination of the social representation theory across different geo-cultural contexts around the world: from Europe towards other continents

at the European/International Joint PhD in Social Representations & Communication
Research Center and Multimedia LAB

18th - 25th July 2015



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Sociological Thoughts on Social Representation and Social Norms

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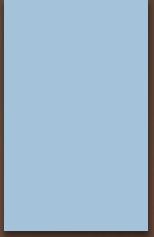
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Presentation goals

- 1) Introduce Foucault's theory in relationship to the concept of Social Norms;
- 2) Compare and contrast Social Norms and Social Representation;
- 3) Try to escape from the “impasse” between the two epistemologies.

Plan of Presentation

- 1) Foucault's hypothesis: the development of a society regulated by social norms;
- 2) Main characteristics of social norms;
- 3) Social norms and social representations: same or different epistemologies?



I) Foucault's Hypothesis: The Development of Societies Regulated by Social Norms.

Sovereign Power: an Outline

- ▶ The king's right of life and death over his subjects;
- ▶ Indirect right of life and death, in the case of war for example;
- ▶ Direct right of death in the case of punishment for disobedience.

The Decline of Sovereign Power

- ▶ Sovereignty as the organizing principle of power became ineffective to govern an increasingly industrialized society;
- ▶ Indeed, the "old" mechanics of sovereignty overlooked crucial elements both at the top (politics of mass) and at the bottom (work on detail – bodies/individuals) of society

Docile Bodies

- ▶ Development of disciplines in the 17th, early 18th century in order to focus on detail;
- ▶ Power over bodies at the individual level;
- ▶ Exercised at the local level, i.e. institutions such as schools, hospitals, etc.

Regulation of Populations

- In the late 18th century, in addition to disciplines, a second device appears to "manage" global phenomena, and "work" on biological or sociological processes of the human masses: Regulation of Population
- It's situated at the state level (global policies);
- It's a complex, centralized and coordinated organization.

A Normalizing Society

- ▶ No opposition between micro and macro-levels of technologies of power; between the institution and the State;
- ▶ Different levels;
- ▶ Indeed, regulators (macro/population level) and disciplinary (micro/individual level) mechanisms are articulated to one another
- ▶ “The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed” (Foucault, 1990, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, p. 139).

Sexuality at the Crossroads of the Normalizing society

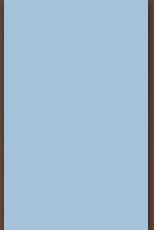
- ▶ Micro/individual level: discipline of the body (ex: control of masturbation of children of the late 18th until the 20th in family);
- ▶ Macro/populational level: procreative effects, large biological processes that affect the general population (Birth, Mortality rates, public health initiatives, etc.).

Bio-power : a Need to Enforce and Sustain Life

- ▶ Since the 19th century, bio-power has been supporting life at the micro and macro levels.

Bio-power as a Normalizing Mechanism

- ▶ Bio-power distributes life around indicators of value and utility
- ▶ A distribution around social norms.



II) Key Characteristics of Social Norms

- 1) No exteriority;
- 2) A common language;
- 3) Explicit but also and often implicit social norms;
- 4) A constraint;
- 5) Production of subjects and “problematic” behaviours;
- 6) An “average” behaviour (in terms of statistic);
- 7) Relative social norms.

No exteriority

- Norms have no exterior: it is impossible to be situated outside the norm :

“it makes no sense to try to go outside the norm like it is impossible to find a pure oxygen bubble in a different world. Norms allow differences. Someone who deviates from norms is consequently still situated inside norms”.

(Le Blanc, 2004, p. 13-14, our translation).

From No Exteriory to a Common Language

- ▶ Consequently, deviances are only a quantitative difference. We can distance ourselves from social norms, but we never absolutely can escape from them:
 - ▶ "If we live in society, and we can not live in an other way, we cannot escape from social norms or to live without reference to the norms, not necessarily to bend, to challenge or to abolish them but most often to take position (and simultaneously distance). So, we establish a common language with the "other." This common language, this normative grammar is the consistence of the social". (Otero, 2005, p. 67)

Social Norms as a Common Language

- ▶ Because we have to refer to social norms, they are common references, they constitute the vocabulary of a society;
- ▶ Without norms: no language, no communication.

Norms as a Common Language: the example of the Rules of the Road

- In order to coordinate and communicate with each other, motorists refer to the rules of the road;
- This is a common language to motorists; they refer to them even if sometimes (often in Montreal, or Rome), they don't follow it by the book;
- In this sense, rules of the road is the consequence of a several norms which regulate the traffic, *conduct the conduct of drivers*, from a Foucauldian perspective.

Social Norms as the Social Fabric

- ▶ We have to understand social norms as a social fabric, common to all subjects;
- ▶ Social norms are at the heart of social ties and constitute our social code of the road;
- ▶ To adopt it is not necessary, but to not refer to it is strictly impossible.

The Rules of the Road: Explicit and Implicit Norms

- ▶ Some rules of the road are explicit, others are implicit, unspoken
- ▶ The driver's handbook is the explicit and formal language of motorists;
- ▶ Nevertheless, an implicit language exists (In Canada, it is still tolerated to drive at 115 km/h and not at 100 km/hour – even though that is the written authorized speed);
- ▶ Consequently, it's sometimes difficult to make social norms visible because we often internalize them. Several norms have become so integrated in our psyches that they are seen as "natural".

The Normative Constraint

- ▶ Social norms constraint and coerce;
- ▶ We have to blend, to conform to them
- ▶ There is a risk of penalties if we do not;
- ▶ See Foucault's concept of “micro-penalties” in order to sanction deviances to social norms.

Production of Subjects and “Problematic” Behaviours

- The functions of social norms are :
 - To fabricate and produce subjects (subjectification):
 - These subjects are "subjugated by others (parents, supervisors, leaders, social classes, etc.) by dependence or control, or by their respective identities (gender, occupation, nation, ethnic group, etc.)" (Otero, 2003, p. 48) (our translation).
 - To define "non-compliant" or "problematic" behaviours, i.e. marginality.

A Statically Average Behaviour

- ▶ A social norm is an “average” behavior;
- ▶ It’s not an ideal behavior, a fantasy or a dream;
- ▶ It can be defined by the mean of all behaviors by a social group or a society;
- ▶ A norm often appears in a society;
- ▶ If a norm becomes less frequent, it no longer constitutes the norm and becomes deviant, marginal.

Relative Social Norms

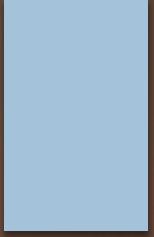
- ▶ Social norms are not absolute, they belong to a specific society, in a specific time;
- ▶ They vary in function of:
 - 1) Social setting (social situations, social groups belonging, etc.);
 - 2) Socio-demographic details.

Social Norms are Different From Socio-demographic Characteristics

- ▶ Social norms are functions of socio-demographic data (age, gender socio-professional status, etc.);
- ▶ “Eating on the go” for lunch will be considered more “normal” for an employee in a multinational than for a retired person.

A basic definition of Social Representation

► Social representations can be defined as social and cognitive materials created and shared by a group or subgroup to allow them to situate themselves « and to represent to themselves the world around them, to guide and organize their behaviors often by suggesting or prohibiting objects or practices » (Mannoni, 2012, p.4, our translation).



III) Social Norms and Social Representations: Same or Different Epistemologies?

Similarities

- 1) They are “metatheories”, so they can help us to understand the social in details;
- 2) Absence of externality;
- 3) A common grammar.

Like social norms, social representations (SR):

4) change over time and according to social groups (see difference between SR as defined by Moscovici and the concept of collective representations by Durkheim);

5) are more or less numerous in the population and do not have the same importance for people (primary and secondary social norms vs. main and peripheral nuclei) (Abric, 2003).

Differences

- 1) SR, unlike social norms, are not constraining, coercive.
- 2) There are no penalties if people distance themselves from the most common social representations;
- 3) Consequently, SR do not produce « problematic » social representations, even if the minority fact can be explained by a representational dynamic. (Moscovici, 1996; Orfali, 2002).

- 4) Another epistemological difference between theory on social norms and SR is that social norms are conduct / behaviours while RS are an intermediate step in the production of this behaviours;
- 5) In this context, we can act in a "non-rational" perspective in relation to our social representations (this is not possible with social norms which are the act);
- 6) In other words, SR cannot explain all social behaviour.

Bidirectional links between social norms and RS

- However, SR are not always the “anteroom” to social norms;
 - For example, the rules of the road were produced according to a social representation of traffic (Pianelli, Abric and Saad, 2010);
 - And sometimes, social norms are the source of RS (Chokier and Moliner, 2006)
 - For example, to justify discrimination, people will "produce" theories (inferiority, etc.) that will later become RS.

A difficult Reconciliation?

- Social norms are the result of a theory of power while SR produce a common sense theory ... where is the power in SR' theory ?;
- The theory of biopower - from which the social norms - emerges in relation to a new form of regulation of conducts appeared in the 19th century;
- SR emerged with the declining role of mythical thought in modern society and the affirmation of scientific knowledge (Moscovici stated that the SR have replaced myths in modern societies, as guideline to adopt different types of behaviour).

Thank You!

► Questions?