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How social representations of attitudes have informed attitude theories:

the consensual and the reified.

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How social representations of attitudes have informed attitude theories: the consensual and the reified.

In this paper I discuss the importance of examining the impact of our common-sense making on the development of academic psychological constructs. This shall review the history of social psychology in understanding differences and similarities in the ways attitudes and social representations have been theorised. After a concise review of each of the concepts I examine the points of connection and tension between the two concepts, with particular reference to the dialectic of the social and the psychological. This highlights the influence of dominant constructions of the individual within the discipline of social psychology itself and on recent research in attitude theory in particular. The paper discusses how social psychologists have used, have been constrained by, and have developed particular social representations of the individual and of 'attitudes' themselves in the reified realm of academic psychology. By way of a conclusion, the example of racism is drawn on to reveal the conceptual and political consequences of theorising either racist attitudes or racialising representations.

Key words:

attitudes; social representations; history of social psychology; individualism; racism.

In 1935 Allport claimed that 'the concept of attitudes is probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary American social psychology' (p. 798). 70 years on, after much research, debate and controversy surrounding attitude theories, could we make the same claim today? Furthermore, does the attitude concept have this importance for contemporary social psychology seen from a more European perspective? In these 70 years there has been much discussion and critique on the capability of the attitude theories to address the social essence of psychological phenomena. Central to many of these discussions have been comparisons of attitude theories with more explicitly 'social' perspectives within the discipline – primarily social representations theory (see Fraser and Gaskell, 1990; Gaskell, 2001; Jaspers and Fraser, 1984).[i] This is because many see social representations theory as a way of re-socialising psychological concepts as it brings into focus the role of history, ideology and communication within the psychological realm (Moscovici, 1972; Oktar, 2001). The aim of this paper is to consider these arguments and so demonstrate the importance of examining the impact of our common-sense making on the development of psychological constructs. This shall explore whether social representations and attitudes should be seen as competing or complementary concepts.

What will become clear is that the answer to this question will depend on the definitions used. At a point in the history of the discipline what were seen as attitudes were very similar to what we call social representations today: the research of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918 – 1920) is a prime example of attitude research that could well fit within a contemporary social representations framework (Farr, 1996; Murray, 2002). Since then, however, the way we use the term 'attitude' in social psychology has changed and at present, I shall argue, the concepts have to be seen as incompatible. It is essential to sensitise the student and scholar of social psychology to the historical and ideological influences on these concepts. Essential because these historical and ideological influences shape the way we use the concepts and therefore have important conceptual and political consequences. The 'uniquely European approach' of social representations (Forgas, 1981, p.180) with its focus

on community, collective practices and the institutionalization of social knowledge (Jodelet, 1991) has often been compared to the 'Americanisation of the attitude concept' tied to discourses of individualism and subjective evaluation. There is nothing inherently complementary or competing in the concepts themselves. It is only their changing contexts or paradigms that can be described as complementary or competing (Guba, 1990).

To understand the way the attitude concept is conceptualised today, it is necessary to look at the history of the work in this field. It is my intention to show how the progressive individualisation of social psychology has led to an extremely narrow understanding of attitudes focused almost entirely on the decontextualised individual and hence an (almost) asocial and so apolitical version of social beings. This, in turn, has led to the development of a variety of theories attempting to 'put the social back in social psychology'. From attitude theorists attempts have been made to broaden, or 'stretch' the concept to allow for a better understanding of the social. An example would be Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action which takes account of social norms – and one could see social norms as a version of social representations. Others have reacted by suggesting that the concept 'attitude' is incapable of incorporating the social to any significant degree, and that a truly *social* psychology needs new conceptual tools. Instead critics generally advocate discourse analysis (Potter, 1996), interpretive repertories (Wetherell and Potter, 1992), a rhetorical-responsive approach (Shotter, 1993) or the theory of social representations (Farr and Moscovici, 1984).

I shall argue that in order to understand this history one needs to look at the social representations held in society and held by social psychologists *themselves* about the concepts relevant to their field. What I seek to do in particular is demonstrate that social psychologists have used, have been constrained by, and have elaborated on their social knowledge, or social representations, of the individual and of attitudes. In order to understand why it is that the 'attitude' concept has been so pervasive in psychology, it is necessary to look at how social representations of attitudes have been institutionalised and transformed within the discipline. This follows an insightful tradition with social psychology that has long recognised the

impact of common sense-making on psychological theories – that is the interplay between common-sense psychology and scientific psychology (Gergen, 1973; Heider, 1958). Thus we can explore the relationship between attitudes as an academic psychological construct (attitudes as reified) and attitudes as a meaningful term in everyday discourse (attitudes as consensual). Thus I am using the *theory* of social representations to compare and contrast the *content* of the theories of attitudes and social representations. This may seem a rather convoluted argument. But if one accepts that social representations *do* exist and are *what* make understanding and debate possible, one must use social representations to communicate one's argument, even if it is an argument concerning the theory of social representations itself.

I shall begin with a brief presentation of what attitudes and social representations are generally understood to be in current discussion, before giving an overview of the history of these ideas. After considering the importance of new developments in attitude studies, I shall then discuss what one can conclude thus far. That is, how valuable are the two concepts? Do their differing histories make them competing? If this is the case, can we discard one of the concepts in favour of the other?

Attitudes and Social Representations: a basic distinction

In everyday discourse we use the term 'attitude' to mean an opinion, or group of opinions, held by an individual about a specific object. They are seen as relatively fixed and stable over time and context (Hogg and Vaughan, 2002)[ii]. In social psychology what is meant by attitude is not so very different. Here, individuals are seen as responding to various 'attitudinal objects' (individuals, social groups, situations, social issues) and this response, it is supposed, is predetermined by their attitude towards that particular object (e.g., Hovland

and Rosenberg, 1960). Other influences on behaviour (such as situational factors, societal norms) are recognised, but there is an assumption that there is an underlying attitude towards the object which will be expressed in a 'neutral' context. Allport's classic definition is based on this assumption:-

> An attitude is 'a mental or neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related'.

> Allport, 1935.

There have been many definitions of attitude offered: 68 according to Campbell (1963). Wicker (1969) provides a good review: summarizing that there are two general conceptions of attitude. These are (a) that they are more-or-less consistent responses with a degree of organisation and predictability, and (b) that attitudes are underlying latent variables, inner processes that give direction and consistency to a person's responses. Campbell sought to combine these two conceptions by conceptualizing an attitude as a 'latent acquired behavioural disposition'.

An attitude does not directly correspond to behaviour (the response): Allport describes it as an *'influence'* on the individual's response. The work of Festinger (1957), some of the most well-known in this field, was based on an understanding of attitude as affective rather than behavioural. He set out to explore the relationship *between* attitudes and behaviour, and developed his theory of cognitive dissonance explaining how individuals cope with conflicting attitudes and actions. The focus of attention in Festinger's work is the individual. This is also the case in most of the work in the study of attitudes (Joffe, 2003). For example, Thurstone's (1928) measurement of attitudes was grounded in coherent measurement theory that is suited to studying individual differences and unsuited to studying differences between groups. The possibility that these attitudes may be shared and may be

social in origin and development is not generally considered. Attitudes, thus understood, are seen as the property of individuals.

This point is vital to an understanding of how theories of attitude differ to those of social representations. Theorists from the social representations perspective have criticised attitude theorists for their failure to conceptualise the inherently *social* nature of attitudes (Fraser, 1994; Purkhardt, 1993). The individual is seen in isolation, outside her or his social environment, receiving information and then responding to it. This environment, when it is considered, is taken as a given; there is no exploration of the fact that the individual may influence the nature of the environment and *vice versa*. Further, we cannot explore how attitudes are shared, how certain attitudes relate to one another, what the relation is between attitudes and identities, and how particular attitudes may defend, develop or challenge social relations in society as a whole. Attitude theories, then, leave us with little idea as to how and why the 'objects' about which attitudes are made have come into being and how our attitudes towards these 'objects' may support or further their social construction. Hence we do not explore the history of attitudes, or their relationship to ideology.

Rather than focusing on the individual's response to a particular object - whether cognitive, affective or behavioural, theories of social representations are concerned with the interactive and dynamic relationships between social knowledge, common identities and social practices (Howarth, Foster and Dorrer, 2004; Jodelet, 1991). Rather than take the environment as something 'out there' which the individual responds to via certain sets of attitudes, individuals are seen to actively co-construct intersubjectively-agreed realities which constitute this environment (Puddifoot, 1997). This happens through a process of 'social re-presentation'[iii]. Hence social representations have a far wider reach than attitudes as they 'embody and define the experience of reality, determining its boundaries, its significance and its relationships' (Purkhardt, 1993, p.32).

Social representations 'are social because they are shared by many individuals and as such constitute a social reality which can influence individual behaviour' (Jaspers and Fraser,

1984).[iv] One of the main functions of social representations is to establish a negotiated (and so re-negotiable) order to our worlds, to conventionalise objects, persons and events and to locate them in our collective and contested histories (Moscovici, 1984). Past experiences and ideas thus penetrate and transform our present experience and beliefs – on both an individual and a collective level (Offali, 2002). How representations differ from attitudes, however, is that they cannot be formed by the individual in isolation. They take shape in interaction, in dialogue and in practice with others (Marková and Wilkie, 1987; Moscovici, 1998) and are anchored in our traditions and ideologies. Nor are they simply 'found' in the minds of individuals, but are also evident 'in the world' (Moscovici, 1988, p. 214), in social practices (Bradbury, 1999), health campaigns (Joffe, 2002), health behaviours (Gervais and Jovchelovitch, 2000), images (Joffe and Haarhoff, 2000), the media (Krause, 2002), institutional cultures (Howarth, 2004), religious practices (Fraser, 1994) and community relationships (Jodelet, 1991). They are not 'simply' cognitive phenomena, as Parker (1987) and Harré (1984) have claimed; they do not 'simply' inform social practices – but *are*, in fact, one-and-the-same as social practice (Wagner, 1998).

A rather sobering example of this is given by Farr (1996) in the observation that Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin 'were prepared to act on the basis of Le Bon's portrayal of the psychology of the masses and so alter the course of history' (p.350). If we are going to argue that social representations constitute social actions, are we not going back to the work done on attitude-behaviour consistency models? To argue this would be to misunderstand the nature of the influence: holding a particular social representation does *not* dictate one particular behavioural response. Social representations operate in relation to other social representations in constantly changing and unique ways and via social debate and dialogue. This means that in order to understand why someone reacts in a particular way, one needs to understand the social representations that this person holds *and* the social representations 'going on' around them – embedded in particular organisational and institutionalised cultures, social histories and ideological relations. The relationship envisaged between social representations and

behaviour is much more interactive and mutually constitutive, than is possible in the framework of attitudes (Costalat-Foureau, 1999). Thus social representations are formed in the course of inter-individual communication, co-operation and contestation – and are found in talk, text *and* practice.

A second function of social representations is 'to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history' (Moscovici, 1973, p.xiii). Part and parcel of individuals communicating their shared realities, is interpreting and re-interpreting and so living these realities. Just *how* re-presentation occurs, on a simultaneously social and individual level, is through objectification and anchoring (Moscovici, 1984). The unfamiliar thus becomes absorbed into a system of already established and well-known meanings which make up our community cultures and traditions (Howarth, 2001). An example of this would be social representations of Brixton (a culturally diverse area in South London) which are anchored in racist representations of blackness that thereby construct Brixton as black, dangerous and 'other' (Howarth, 2002a). These inform not only how outsiders 'see' and experience Brixton, but also inform insiders' understanding and experience of their own community and so themselves.

Another function of social representations is that of *prescription.* Moscovici (1984) has described how they impose themselves on us with an irresistible force. Social representations are shared in many ways and enter into the minds of all. This is an aspect of the theory that has been heavily criticised. If representations are so compelling how are differences in those representations possible, and how is it possible for representations to change? The point is that while representations are *relatively* resistant to change, conflict within and between representations can and does lead to social transformation (Krause, 2002: Moloney and Walker, 2002). What is 'irresistible' about social representations is the *process* of re-presentation itself. It is not possible to think, communicate and debate in society without

re-presentation. In addition there are also hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988), what Duveen (2001) might call 'imperative' representations that are such central aspects of our cultures that we cannot dismiss them in our common sense-making. Examples include gendered representations (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992), racialising representations (Howarth, 2004) and representations of the individual (Farr, 1991).

Thus far one could be forgiven for thinking that the theory of social representations lacked a notion of free will and the possibilities of resistance and social change. Abrams and Hogg (1990), for example, argue that in social representations researchers' quest to re-introduce the social to psychology, they have thrown the baby (the individual) out with the bath-water. If these shared stocks of knowledge and practice orient our understanding of that knowledge, then surely there would be conformity in common sense-making and our conceptions of reality (Parker, 1987)? Augoustinos (1991), for example, assumes that this would mean consensus across social representations will increase in social groups with age. This suggestion is based on a misinterpretation of Moscovici's theory. In order for social representations to exist and to circulate in dynamic and constantly changing ways individuals must interpret and *re-interpret* each and every representation open to them. Hence, representations may contain as much conflict and contradictions as conformity or consensus (Wagner, Duveen, Themel and Verna, 1999). As Rose, Effraim, Joffe, Jovchelovitch and Morant (1995) have stated a representational field 'allows 'contradiction, fragmentation, negotiation and debate' and is characterised by 'incoherence, tension and ambivalence' but through which presides a *consensual reality'* (p. 4). Indeed, this is one of the central aspects of the theory: the conceptualisation of cognitive polyphasia (Marková, 1996; Moscovici, 2000). This not only allows for inconsistencies in representations both 'used' and 'managed' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), but theorises such contradiction as central to communication, interaction and social practice. This dialogical understanding of re-presentation parallels Billig's (1996) concept of rhetorical thought and argumentation (Moloney and Walker, 2002).

Hence, unlike attitudes, there is nothing inherently problematic about the existence of contradictory representations as Potter and Litton (1985) have wrongly assumed.

So, although *what* theories of attitude and theories of social representation study in terms of *content* is similar*,* their *perspective* could not be more different. The starting point for 'attitudes' is the individual, the starting point for 'social representations' is social knowledge (Gaskell, 2001). This distinction is central to the whole argument. Social representations are different to attitudes in that they exist outside the individual as well as in the mind of the individual. Joffe has demonstrated how the theory 'maps the processes whereby sociocultural, historical and group-specific forces becomes sedimented in inner experiences, how 'we' becomes contained in the responses of 'I'' (Joffe, 2003, p. 60). As Duveen and Lloyd (1986) have illustrated, social representations pre-exist the birth of a child, provide the 'scaffolding' for the child's re-construction of reality, may be altered by the child, and outlive the child. As such, they are crucial to our ongoing (re)construction and re-presentation of social identities in dialogue with others (Howarth, 2002b). By contrast, attitudes are seen as the personal property of the individual, who is more-or-less totally responsible for the existence of their attitudes.

Changes in the conceptualisation of attitudes

It is the different conceptions of the individual/society interface that make the concepts of attitudes and social representations incompatible. These two perspectives can be seen as having their origins in sociological social psychology (social representations) and psychological social psychology (present day attitudes). This divide in social psychology can be traced back to Wundt's (1916) conception of psychology. While he prescribed the development of both a distinctively experimental and a historical psychology, he believed

they necessitated each other.   Recent research done into attitudes fits more readily into the experimental, individual-focused perspective. But this has not always been the case: it is possible to go back to a point in history when attitudes can be seen as incompatible with current psychological forms of social psychology.

Thomas and Znaniecki (1918 - 1920) were two theorists who recognised the importance of studying the social dynamics that influence individuals. They were not interested in individual differences, but *group* differences. They saw 'social attitudes' as a reflection of the individual's social world. They explored the processes of social disorganisation and reorganization of social attitudes amongst immigrants from rural Poland as they adjusted to urban life in America. They looked at how 'new' attitudes such as individualism and success-seeking arise and become part of a particular culture's structure, and defined the task of social psychology as being to understand and account for these uniformities in feeling, belief, or volition. The main question was 'Why do so many people develop similar or shared views'.

Attitudes, in this point in time, were seen as shared subjective interpretations of the objective social reality (Jaspers and Fraser, 1984). This seems to be close to the description of social representations given above. At this time could we say that attitudes and social representations are one and the same? Farr (1987) and Murray (2002) both agree they can.

However, this focus on the social nature of attitudes has been lost in the individualistic psychology which gained ascendancy in America this century. Jaspers and Fraser cite F.Allport (1924) as being responsible for presenting the concept of attitude in a more individualistic light than previously conceived, by selectively editing out the social and collective components of the various definitions of the term that he considered. Graumann (1986) saw Allport's text as a 'choice point' in the development of an increasingly experimental and non-social science. It is a turning point in the history of psychology not only because it changed the focus in the subject, but because *it changed the nature of the subject itself.*

Fraser and Gaskell (1990) have looked at what they call 'the individualisation of the attitude concept'. Questions have moved from a) how attitudes may be measured (e.g. Thurstone, 1928; Likert, 1932), to b) the relationship between attitudes and behaviour (e.g., Wicker, 1969), and how attitudes may be changed (e.g. Fishbein, 1967) and c) to how attitudes are internally organised (McGuire, 1986). Each of these four main stages in history of attitude study can be criticised for their individualistic approach. For example, McGuire has stated that the basic deficiency of the period of attitude scaling (1920's to 1930's) was the measurement of 'individual variables in isolation without appreciating the need for simultaneous scaling of several variables and the relationship between them' (1986, p.92). An examination of the measurement procedures used (the galvanic skin response and the facial electromyogram, for instance) illustrates how exclusively individualistic the focus was. The 'social' is thus reduced to the 'individual'.[v] Graumann (1986) has called this 'the individualization of the social and the desocialization of the individual' (p.97).

More recently, attitude models have been refashioned to sit within the dominant social cognition paradigm with research focussing on how information is processed, how attitudes are structured and how memory works in relation to attitude formation and attitude change (Hogg and Vaughan, 2002). For example current research focuses on intra-attitudinal consistency (Chaiken, Pomerantz, Giner-Sorolla, 1995), attitude accessibility (Fazio, 1995), individual differences in attitude structure (Huskinson and Haddock, 2004) and the role of affective and cognitive information in guiding attitudes (Edwards, 1990). The individual is conceived of as a 'thinking machine' rather than a social being embedded in a historical and cultural context.

It is a reaction against this culture of the individual that has led to the development of the theory of social representations. Drawing on Durkheim's neglected concept of collective representations[vi], the theory of social representations is intended to move social psychology away from its fixation with the individual. Clearly, the theory can and does do just this.

However, one could ask - is this necessary? Could not a more social perspective be brought into the study of attitudes?

There are, as I mentioned above, attempts to socialise attitudes. Here one could look at developments in the field including Asch's (1952) work on attitudes and social influence, Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA) which takes into account 'social' factors such as 'societal norms', or Bentler and Speckart's (1979) inclusion of 'past behaviour' into TRA. However, these appear to be attempts to tack the social onto a theory of attitude based on entirely individual perspective. To understand the constitutive role that the social plays in what is seen as 'individual' behaviour, we need a more radical change in perspective. Lalljee, Brown and Ginsburg's (1984) notion of 'communicative acts' does move away from an individualistic focus by challenging two main assumptions of tradition attitude theory:-

1) Attitudes are internal dispositions that strongly influence behaviour

2) Attitudes are fixed and enduring

He does follow tradition in attitude theory by maintaining that attitudes are evaluative: he defines attitudes as 'communicative acts that imply favourable or unfavourable evaluations about a class of objects, persons or events' (Lalljee *et al*, 1984, p.242). What is of particular importance is the assertion that attitudes derive their meaning from their source and the context in which they are expressed.

Does this succeed in 'socialising' attitudes? The social is recognised in terms of content, in terms of origins, but are the underlying processes social? Are the processes that go on 'inside the heads' of the individuals explained in relation to the social world that the individual interacts with? This is precisely what makes social representations social. Moscovici (1963) has stated - 'It is not enough to consider the content of an attitude, the broader structure which integrates this content must also be taken into account'. That is, it is not enough to accept that there is a social world in which an individual lives and may

influence the way the individual behaves. Rather we need to understand how 'society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood: each is interpenetrated by the other' (Sampson, 1988, p. 17). This is something that Lalljee *et al* do not fully achieve.

To date there are no recognised examples of work in the field of 'attitudes' that incorporate the interactive and mutually constitutive relationship between what we understand as the 'individual' and the 'social' that is central to the theory of social representations. While does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to integrate the concepts, I shall argue that this would not be useful in the development of a rigorously *social* psychology.

From the consensual to the reified: social representations *of* attitudes

Although, what we understand as attitudes and social representations today are very different, clearly this has not always been the case. Are there some underlying principles that can be drawn on to integrate the two concepts? Is it possible to see attitudes as the underlying cognitive structure of a representation? Perhaps an attitude is an expression of a social representation? There seems to be some support for these ideas in the literature (Jahoda, 1988). For example, Hogg and Vaughan (2002) suggest that 'specific attitudes are framed by, and embedded within, wider representational structures' (p. 175). Himmelweit and Gaskell see attitude and social representations as two distinct and equally valuable concepts:-

Attitudes derive from society and are reworked by individuals as part and parcel of their experiences and as a function of their correspondence with existing social representations.

Himmelweit and Gaskell (1990, p. 41)

Moliner and Tafini (1997) have demonstrated this relationship in their research into the evaluative elements of both attitudes and social representations. Hence, this may seem a good compromise. It is clear that there are at least points of convergence between social representations and attitudes. However, I argue that there are particular dangers in seeing the concepts as complementary. The individualising assumptions that have became meshed into our understanding of 'attitude' cannot be easily reconciled with the inherently social nature of 'social representations' and therefore cannot be easily dismissed.

To understand these basic underlying assumptions it is necessary to look more carefully at the individual/social interface. Farr (1987) has described how psychology was born in the context of a Cartesian dualism of mind/body, self/other, individual/society. Here mind is conceived as separate not only to body, but also its material and social world. Within this paradigm it is not possible to discuss the social mind or the social self (Mead, 1972; Marková, 1982). The study of 'an asocial self', a decontextualised individual, has characterised science carried out within this paradigm and was based in part on the early Enlightenment's search for universal laws of a 'pure' human nature (Cushman,1990).

It is from a desire to overcome the Cartesian dualism that prevents a complete understanding of the relationship between the self and his or her own society that Moscovici has formulated the theory of social representations. This concept fits better into a Hegelian paradigm (Wells, 1987). Hegel's conception of dialectics allowed that contradictions are sublated into a synthesis that involves a process of qualitative transformation. This means it is necessary to think of self/other, individual/society as a contradictory unit working towards transcendence rather than an opposition. Individual thought processes and social reality must be understood as mutually interdependent, constitutive and transformative. Mead's (1972) ideas are illustrative of this kind of understanding. Here the individual is a product of her/his social environment, and produces that environment is constantly changing and dynamic ways.

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Dewey's (1896) distinction between mechanistic and organic conceptions of society can also be used to elaborate on this difference in perspective. Mechanistic conceptions see the organism and the environment as separate parts in isolation, existing independently of one another. Attitude theories (as opposed to social attitude theories) fit into this conception of the organism (the individual) existing independently from its context (the environment) and forming attitudes towards his or her environment in the course of response to it. Organic conceptions see the organism and the environment operating in a system of mutual influences by which the 'parts' all determine one another's characteristics and functions. Theories of social representations draw on this conception of the mutually constitutive relationship between the individual and the world in which they live. This is what Moscovici meant when he said that 'social psychology is a science of culture' (1981, p. viii).[vii]

In order to understand how and *why* it is that contemporary attitude theories and those of social representations do not and cannot complement each other, this philosophical perspective is necessary. Attitude and social representation theorists come from different paradigms and so almost have different languages for discussing the individual/society interface. For sociological social psychologists (that is, from a Hegelian standpoint) the conceptualisation of the individual and society as two distinct objects existing in nature is a category mistake. They should rather be seen as human constructions that can only exist in relation to each other. And it is possible to study how our own cultural representations of this interface change over time and culture (Foucault, 1970). Duveen and Lloyd argue that failure to recognise this seriously limits a theory:-

> Individuals are so inextricably interwoven in a fabric of social relations within
> their lives are lived that a representation or the 'individual' divorced from the
> 'social' is theoretically inadequate. There is no pure individuality which can be
> apprehended independently of social relations.
>
> Duveen and Lloyd, 1986, p.219

It is for these reasons that current conceptions of attitude provide a partial understanding of how attitudes relate to the individual/society interface. Because of the adoption of Cartesian dualism, attitude theorists cannot properly analyse the interactive and mutually constitutive relationship between individuals and their social worlds. And again it is for these reasons that attempts to 'socialise' attitudes have failed.

So am I suggesting that we not use the attitude concept today? In terms of its limited focus this would seem a sensible thing to do. But a troubling point is that attitudes are constantly used in everyday interaction. Common sense tells us that not only do attitudes exist, but they exist in very individualised ways. As Parker (1991) has also discussed, psychological concepts such as attitudes have been proliferated and disseminated throughout society, and so psychology has 'the power to create the very forms of thinking that it attempts to identify' (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995, p. 283). Attitudes are clearly a part of our everyday realities, so surely we would not suggest social psychologists can avoid theorising the concept – whatever the criticisms concerning its limited focus. Even Moscovici uses the term 'attitude' in his work. For example, he has stated that social representations are not simply 'attitudes towards' the social world (Moscovici, 1973). If they are *more* than attitudes, then attitudes themselves must exist. We have challenged the *concept* of attitude in the reified field of social psychology, but surely it has standing in the social world? If the concept of attitude is meaningful in everyday interaction, then would social psychologists lose something by eliminating the term from their work? I argue that they would.

That is, while we need to critique attitude theories, we do still need to theorise attitudes as part of our everyday sense-making. Hence we need to examine the social knowledge or *social representations of attitudes* themselves. Our social representation of attitudes determines the way we explain the thoughts and actions of ourselves and of others. Attitudes seem 'real' because they are a salient social representation, and social representations do, after all, constitute our realities (Moscovici, 1990; Wagner, 1998). Social representations form an environment of thought which orientate understanding and actions.

We explain our behaviour and the behaviour of others through our representations of attitudes and how they may or may not relate to behaviour. Social psychologists have been exposed to these representations, come to share and extend them, and contribute to their transformation over time. As Kelley (1992) has argued:

> We are all members of the common culture and users of the common language long before we become scientific psychologists. Insofar as we address our scientific efforts to the behavioural phenomena encompassed by common terms and beliefs, they inevitably influence the concepts and theories we develop for our scientific purposes (p. 4).

As Gergen (1973), Sampson (1988) and Parker (1990) have all pointed out, we need to recognise the social, historical and ideological origins of psychological concepts. Common-sense representations have, I am arguing, influenced the scientific construction of the attitude concept. Thus our representations of attitudes from the consensual sphere have passed into psychology and influenced the assumptions and research interests of people working within the reified sphere of psychology. Attitudes, therefore, are significant as a social representation that informs both common sense and social science. This, of course, is not a one-way relationship: the relationship between academic and common sense understandings of attitudes must be seen as dialectical.

This argument could to be seen to contradict Moscovici's descriptions of social representations as the transformation of *scientific* knowledge into our common-sense understandings of our worlds, from the reified universe of science to the consensual universe of everyday common-sense making.[viii] For example, Moscovici's (1961) own study of how psychoanalysis had diffuses throughout Parisian society and so became a part of that society.

Purkhardt (1993) discusses this point in detail. She claims that Moscovici did not 'push his social thesis of knowledge to its logical conclusion' (p.83). He, she suggests, is wrong to see social representations as only the diffusion of scientific knowledge into the consensual world of understanding. The point is that all knowledge, not only common-sense

knowledge, is socially constructed. She describes the formation and transformation of representations as occurring both from the reified universe of science (the sphere of claims to objective truth and certainty) to the consensual universe of common-sense (the everyday sphere of symbolism and context-dependent meaning) and *vice versa.* Thus scientific knowledge can be, and is, influenced by common-sense. The construction of knowledge, therefore, is more of a two-way process. Augoustinos and Walker recognise:

> This implies that scientists too must rely on social representations to construct reality and to imbue their activities with meaning. They, therefore, must inevitably draw upon social representations when engaged in scientific work.
>
> Augoustinos and Walker (1995, p. 161).

I would argue Augoustinous, Walker and Purkhardt are right to illuminate this aspect of social representations. All knowledge, including science, is influenced by social representations. However, I think they are wrong in saying that Moscovici did not allow for this. He does claim that in traditional societies the transformation of knowledge was more from the consensual to the reified, and that in modern societies common sense is science made common - that is, science is assimilated into the consensual universe. I understand this as a description of a common trend, not a uniform structure.

Social representations of attitudes stem directly from social representations of the individual. The individualization of the attitude concept has gone hand-in-hand with the individualization of psychology. This obscures the social dynamics of psychological concepts and so limits an analysis of socio-historical influences at play in social cognition. As Moscovici (1990) has pointed out the problem of the individual involves a social representation 'anchored in our value system and objectified in the institutions that reproduce it' (p.76). He continues, 'social psychology contributes to this process by regarding the traits particular to a given representation as if they were traits of human nature and thus universal' (*ibid*). Cushman (1990) has described how many researchers have treated self-contained

individualism as an unquestioned value and the current concept of the self - the bounded, masterful self as an unchangeable, transhistorical entity. The tendency in Europe and America to see the individual as responsible for his or her own behaviour, deserving praise for successful actions and criticism for failures is a reflection of the centrality of the Western capitalist conception of individuality (Ichheiser, 1949; Geertz, 1973). Kitzinger (1992) describes this as one of our most cherished values, structuring our vision of the world in our everyday lives, in our political thought, and in our formal psychological theorizing.

Psychology has been described as one of the clearest disciplinary expressions of individualism (Rose, 1999). We need to adopt a more social constructionist approach to our understanding of the individual if we are to appreciate how and why individualism has influenced our psychology. We need to open our categories for exploration and understand how psychologists' own understanding of such has led them down certain paths of inquiry. For an understanding of what a concept actually 'means' within psychology it is essential to understand how our history has constrained psychologists to focus on the individual and so limited our analyses. Perhaps we can say that psychologists are guilty of the same 'fundamental attribution error' that Jones and Nisbett (1972) discussed. This constitutes a divergence in perspective between the 'actor', who attributes her or his action to situational factors, and the observer, who attributes the actor's actions to personality dispositions. Augoustinos and Walker (1995) make a convincing case for this in terms of mainstream social psychological account of attribution; I suggest that we need a similar analysis of the role of representations of the individual within mainstream social psychological accounts of attitudes. Jahoda (1992) has drawn on the work of Foucault in suggesting that psychologists (as all theorists) are constrained within particular epistemes - intellectual frameworks which determines the conditions and the very possibility of kinds of knowledge in a particular place at a particular time. More work of this nature within attitude theories would be illuminating, as Joffe (2002) and Crossley (2000) have discussed in relation to health psychology.

To conclude: an example

This does not mean that attitude studies can be dismissed by a rigorously *social* psychologist. On the contrary, they are very rich sources of information about institutionalised representations of the person/self/individual in our culture. The social representation of attitudes is a way of 'seeing' and so constructing the individual. What is fascinating is the way these discourses have structured both (Western) psychology and society (Rose, 1999). The work in the field of racism illustrates the importance of this. As Garvey (2001) has discussed 'psychology's theories and concepts have practical consequences: they can either help to undermine and fight against racism, or they can contribute to its reproduction' (p. 54). Within an individualistic framework, for example, it is only possible to ask questions about the stability and consistency of racial attitudes (Nier, Mottola and Gaertner, 2000), why it may be that certain individuals hold 'more' racist attitudes than others (Heaven, 2001), or which research methods capture people's 'true' racial attitudes in the face of social desirability effects (Krysan and Couper, 2003). It is in this way that the psychology of racism has diverted attention away from structural questions in favour of examining personality dynamics of the 'racist' individual (Augoustinous and Reynolds, 2001). This does little to address and challenge the existence and consequence of different forms of racism in society. Hence we could argue, as some have (Leach, 2002), that the psychology of racist attitudes has actually helped maintain the existence of racism.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) suggest that we should move away from the study of racist attitudes to racist discourses. As discussed by LeCouteur and Augoustinos (2001) they have provided a powerful critique of social cognition research that looks for stability, consistency and order in people's attitudes; in fact Potter and Wetherell (1987) have challenged the epistemological status of the attitude concept itself. They prefer to refrain from assumptions of cognitive structures 'behind' what people say about their actions and values in

relation to 'race' and racism. Language – or discourse – is seen as constitutive of reality itself, performing different functions in different contexts and different interactions. Instead of problematising contradiction within attitudes (Festinger, 1957) they explore internal contradictions and ambivalence within people's accounts and 'do not expect that an individual's discourse will be consistent and coherent. Rather the focus is on the discourse *itself;* how it is organized and what it is doing.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 4, emphasis in the original). Using this discursive method Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000), for example, compared surveys on racial attitudes with 'racetalk' from interviews and found that new discourses of white supremacy are constructed through various semantic moves that appear to delegitimise racist attitudes. They conclude that traditional attitudinal surveys miss the ambiguity of new racist discourses and so underestimate the extent of racism in today's societies.

Similarly, social representations theorists would argue that we should examine the social and ideological construction of 'racial difference', looking at representations that construct and defend racial difference in social practices and institutional cultures. Elsewhere, for example, I have explored how racist and racialising representations are found in institutionalized practices, in community relations and in competing social knowledge systems (Howarth, 2002a). At school, for instance, institutionalized representations of Britishness may work to maintain racialised differences that marginalize and stigmatise particular communities (Howarth, 2004). Hence the practice of racialisation is found in 'what people communicate' (in talk, text and practice) rather then in what people say when asked about 'race' or racism. Both approaches – social representations and discourse analysis, therefore, stress the social origins and ideological consequences of discourses/representations of 'race', and move away from individualized accounts of racial attitudes.[ix]

We have seen that our everyday discourses on attitudes and the individual penetrate scientific discourses; we can also theorise the transmission of scientific concepts into common sense. Hence deconstructing 'the attitude' as an academic psychological construct could

impact everyday knowledge systems that maintain the ideology of the individual. This is also evident in representations on racism: as the critique of psychologising versions of racism (Leach, 2002) becomes more widely accepted with the reified discourses of psychology so too can we find a discussion of 'institutional racism' within public discourses and common sense-making that also moves away from an ideology of individualism. If common sense is science made common, therefore, we need to take seriously the social and political consequences of using different terms. As attitude theories stem from the ideology of individualism they divert attention away from questions of the institutionalisation of dominant ideas, the connections between attitudes and social relations and the possibilities for resistance and social change. Social representations theory, by contrast, focuses attention on these questions – exploring issues of ideology, participation, contestation and transformation (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000; Howarth *et al,* 2004; Krause, 2002; Moscovici, 1998). Hence social representations theory has the potential, at least, of being critical.

We have seen how representations of attitudes transformed from a sociological social psychological concept (and one complementary to social representations theory) to a psychological social psychological concept (one incompatible with social representations). Without a paradigmatic shift within social psychology as we know it today, it is difficult to see how the attitude concept can be integrated into a truly *social* framework. Where does this leave us? Hopefully with a better understanding of the conceptual and political consequences of using the different concepts. It is only through an understanding of these that any meaningful discussion on attitudes and social representations can take place. What I hope this discussion has illustrated is that a study of the representations held by psychologists and operating within the discipline uncovers certain unspoken assumptions about the social-psychological interface that predetermine lines of enquiry and possibilities of interpretation. Most crucially, the individualism sustained within attitude theories deflects attention away from the role of power, oppression and resistance in our psychology. Thus, I argue, the concept of 'attitudes', in both the reified realm of academic psychological theorising and in

the consensual realm of common-sense making, limits the potential for critique and hence social change at the interface between academic and everyday discourses.

Acknowledgements

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[i] There have also been informative comparisons between attitude theories and discourse analysis (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). While these are pertinent to our debate and so discussed in the text, the primary aim here is to explore possible connections and tensions between social representations and attitude theories.

[ii] However, this way of understanding 'attitudes' is relatively recent. For example, in the 18th and 19th centuries 'to strike an attitude' meant to make a posture or expression that revealed what the speaker was thinking; previously in the 15th and 16th centuries attitude referred to the poses of figures in art (Potter, 1996).

[iii] I use a hyphen when discussing the practice of social re-presentation to highlight the fact that representations are constantly re-interpreted, re-thought, re-presented.

[iv] However, the name 'social representation' is in some ways problematic. This is because it implies that some representations may be non-social or *individual* in origin and/or constitution. Some theorists have indeed suggested that there are 'individual representations' or 'private knowledge' and 'personal attitudes' (Fraser, 1994; Wagner, 1994). I find this problematic, partly for reasons of terminology and partly for paradigmatic reasons. To speak of 'individual representations' suggests that 'social representations' are less individual by comparison. I agree that the *content* of some representations may be less 'social' in terms of being less consensual, but the process of social re-presentation is always fundamentally a social one.

[v] This is by no means a recent criticism of social psychology. Baldwin, for example, in 1911, argued against the individualistic theories that had predominated in the social sciences, and for an analysis which started from the level of the societal, not the individual (Marková and Wilkie, 1987).

[vi] The differences between Durkheim's collective representations and Moscovici's social representations are important (Moscovici and Marková, 1998; Scott, 2000). The latter are more dynamic, fluid and subject to change (Moloney and Walker, 2002). Collective

representations are more static and resilient to change, and derive from 'social facts' which are exterior to and constraining for the individual.

[vii]Hegel, Mead and Dewey do all conceptualise the interrelatedness of the subject and the object, of the self and the environment, and of the parts of organic society, while diverging widely on epistemological and historical-philosophical issues.

[viii]This is an area in the theory which is somewhat confusing. Farr (1987), Joffe (2002), McKinlay and Potter (1987), and Wells (1987) all have made the point that it may not be easy to distinguish between the reified and the consensual universes as Moscovici supposes. Knowledge, Moscovici argues, is socially constructed. Is this knowledge concerning the reified and consenual universes also constructed? I would argue that it has to be; that is, it is a social construction in itself.

[ix] Social representations theory differs from discourse analysis in its focus on the intersubjective nature of representations and the simultaneously collective/historical and individual/subjective nature of our interactions and communication. This reveals a tension at the core of social representations – between consensus and resistance, between conflict and cooperation (Moscovici and Markova, 1998) and invites questions of power, dominance and contestation.