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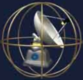

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Empirical Approaches to Social Representations

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4 An ethnographic approach to social representations

Gerard Duveen and Barbara Lloyd

Introduction

A characteristic of much contemporary social and developmental psychology is the desire to analyse psychological activities in relation to the contexts in which they occur. From this point of view, a purely formal account of psychological, or cognitive, processes is inadequate, and new procedures need to be developed which are capable of expressing the relations between psychological processes and their contexts, as well as clarifying the notion of context itself. Whatever else the context may include, it certainly incorporates collective systems of meaning, and the growing interest in social representations centres on the possibilities that this concept offers for a description of the psychological structure and influence of collective systems of meaning. However, social psychologists are still not clear about the ways in which the notion of social representations may be conceptualized, articulated, and incorporated into empirical research. There is a general idea of the role which the concept ought to play, but we are still struggling to make the transition from programmatic statements to substantive accounts.

The methods to be used for describing social representations have presented a recurrent problem. Moscovici has maintained that the theoretical concept ought not to be tied to any particular empirical procedure; rather, he suggests that the theory needs to encompass a 'methodological polytheism' (Moscovici 1982; compare Hearnshaw 1987). While there is an admirable clarity in this empirical liberalism, there is also the corollary that each research project needs to establish in its own terms which methods for describing social representations are appropriate to the specific object of research. In our present research, we have felt it necessary to produce an ethnographic description as part of our investigation of social representations of gender in primary school.

In this chapter, we review the reasons which led us to this decision and illustrate the role that it has played in the project as a whole. First, we present the theoretical background to our research. We then describe our project in more detail and explain the framework we have developed for organizing our ethnographic material. Next, we consider the relationship between ethnographic and socio-psychological investigations; ethnography may also have more general applicability for the description of social representations. In the conclusion, we consider the circumstances in which it may be appropriate.

Social representations

Moscovici defines a social representation as '. . . a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function'. On the one hand, social representations establish a consensual order among phenomena and on the other they enable 'communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange' (Moscovici 1973, p. xiii). Thus, social representations constitute collective systems of meaning which may be expressed, or whose effects may be observed, in values, ideas, and practices.

The notion of 'ideas' which Moscovici includes in his definition of social representations requires some clarification. For many psychologists, particularly contemporary cognitive psychologists, ideas are understood as having a propositional structure with a verifiable truth value. This is not at all the conception which Moscovici intends. The ideational component of social representations is combined with the evaluative component in beliefs of one kind and another. In his recent work on *The Age of the Crowd*, Moscovici (1985) clarifies what he takes to be the nature of beliefs. 'Beliefs', he notes, 'act as forms' (Moscovici 1985, p. 115) capable of organizing groups of people. Because of this social-psychological role, beliefs are not open to empirical validation, nor does their articulation respect the law of non-contradiction. Moscovici identifies the essential features of beliefs as 'dogmatism and utopianism' (Moscovici 1985, p. 119). There is a closer similarity, between beliefs and the classical Freudian description of unconscious ideas, than between beliefs and any notion of ideas as propositional structures. Beliefs may include inconsistent and mutually contradictory elements; and in analysing social representations we cannot assume from the outset any primary motivation for logical consistency in the expression of beliefs. Nevertheless, beliefs serve to organize groups of people; indeed, what makes a group is the existence of a shared set of beliefs among its members, beliefs which will be expressed in the practices of the group, whether these are linguistic practices, preferences, activities of one kind or another, and so on.

The developmental dynamics of social representations can be considered from two points of view. First there is the process through which novel social representations emerge, or through which existing social representations are modified or transformed: here, development concerns the structure of the social representations themselves, and the relevant concepts are those of objectification and anchoring discussed by Moscovici (1981). But, there is also the process through which non-group members come to share the characteristic social representations of a group: here, development concerns transformations in the representational structures of individuals as they adapt to existing social representations. This process can be investigated in adult contexts (see, for example, De Paolis 1990), but it is also a central problem in the study of development through childhood. It is this latter problem with which we have been particularly concerned.

In an earlier paper (Duveen and Lloyd 1986), we linked the concept of social identity to Moscovici's notion of social representations. Social representations are collective products, the properties of groups. As such they pre-exist the birth of the human infant, and to become able to participate in social life the child must gain access to these collectively-held social representations. That is, social representations are internalized by individuals in the course of their development, a process which enables people to locate themselves in relation to groups, as well as furnishing them with an interpretive framework for construing the world. We proposed that as social representations are internalized, individuals gain access to social identities which enable them to situate themselves in relation to social groups and to participate in social life.

Our particular focus has been the gender system (Lloyd 1987; Lloyd and Duveen 1989). In all human societies, physical sex differences are given meanings associated with the social categories of male and female, that is, they are elaborated as social representations of gender. At birth, it is obligatory to assign an individual to one of the two mutually-exclusive gender categories. All individuals develop *social gender identities* which locate them in relation to the gender system of their culture. Initially, these social gender identities are held by the adults and others around the child; they are the ones who locate the infant in society, and whose social representations of gender provide the scaffolding which enables the infant to internalize a social gender identity. Through this social-developmental process children gain access to a particular gender system and acquire the resources which enable them to participate independently in social life. The assertion of gender-marked social identities indicates that children have internalized the social representations of gender in their community, and are able to mobilize these resources for social interaction.

The concept of social-gender identities takes a more sociological view of the phenomena which are discussed in the psychological literature as gender- or sex-role stereotypes. Moscovici's (1976, 1981) criticism of the notions of opinion and attitude in traditional social psychology parallels the reasons we prefer to talk of social gender identities rather than stereotypes. The notion of stereotype has come to mean a way of processing information through which category membership implies specific characteristics. Such schemata are construed as the property of individuals. What we have been concerned to stress is that such processes are always located in the wider context of the individual's participation in social life. Individual psychological processes need to be understood in terms of the social relations in which the individual participates rather than as autonomous sets of information-processing rules. In addition, the concept of stereotypes has been considered as a process invoked by individuals to categorize others, particularly in situations where there is a minimum of information available. As internalized social representations, social identities provide interpretive rules for the actor's understanding of themselves as well as of others.

The impact of schooling on the development of social gender identities

As a societal institution, the school presents a set of social representations of gender to children, and it does so in ways which distinguish the school from the family as an ecological context for children. It may be helpful to consider the contrast between these two contexts in terms of Habermas's theory of communicative action (compare Habermas 1984; Furth 1983). Habermas distinguishes the field of communicative action, which is personal and consensus-orientated, from that of strategic action, which is systematic and success-orientated. He also suggests that a central developmental process is the uncoupling of systematic strategic action from personal communicative action.

It would be an oversimplification to associate the family exclusively with the field of communicative action, and the school with the field of strategic action. There are systematic aspects to family life, and also communicative aspects to school experience. Nevertheless, from the developmental point of view, that is with respect to the the process through which gender is uncoupled as a system from the field of personal communicative action, the school has a particular role to play. As an institution, the school not only represents gender to children as a 'system of values, ideas, and practices', but it also legitimizes this social representation of gender in relation to the social world beyond the family. Categorizations which remained implicit within the personal relationships of the family nexus become explicitly elaborated in the context of the school.

The contrast between home and school as ecological contexts for the child suggests that the period of children's entry into formal education may be a particularly interesting moment in the development of social gender identities. Of course, children bring to school the social gender identities which they have already developed. The guiding hypothesis for our project is that as they enter formal schooling, children encounter social representations of gender embedded in novel contexts, and that children need to adapt to these social representations in the course of their first year at school. Our project aimed, therefore, to examine the reconstruction of social gender identities through the first year of formal schooling (see Lloyd and Duveen 1992).

To achieve this aim, we needed a description of the ways in which gender functioned as an organizer of classroom activities. Our first objective, therefore, was to describe the social representations of gender presented to children in primary schools. This is a task for which the more usual interview- or questionnaire-based methods seemed inappropriate for two reasons. Firstly, communicative competence is itself developmentally organized, so that only very limited types of discourse can be elicited from young children. Secondly, our research interests focussed not only on the ways in which teachers and other adults connected to the school might speak about gender to us as interviewers, but, more importantly, the ways in which gender featured in their ordinary activity and discourse within the classroom. Consequently, ethnography appeared to offer the most appropriate approach to describing the ways in which gender is articulated in the beliefs and practices associated with school.

There is a considerable body of ethnographically-inspired research on schools (Burgess 1984 and Hammersley 1986 provide two collections of studies), though for our purposes this material was limited in two important respects. For the most part, this research concentrated on junior and secondary schools, where classroom organization is much more formal than in the context of the primary school. The focus for a good deal of this work has been the analysis of classroom interaction, and specifically the processes of instruction and learning (for example Streeck 1983; Edwards and Mercer 1987). While gender has been a theme in some of this ethnographic research (compare Delamont 1980; Delamont and Hamilton 1984; Wilcox 1982), the organization of the junior or secondary school classroom presents a significantly different context from the reception classes in primary schools.

The second limitation of existing research was apparent in the few ethnographic studies of primary schools which do exist. While the influence of a number of social categories has been considered, gender as a systematic influence disappears from most accounts. Despite its absence, it is clear from some of the recorded comments that gender does have an importance and significance in primary schools. In Ronald King's (1978) book, for instance, he reported that a number of teachers explained to him that that they always try to deal with children as particular individuals rather than as boys and girls. Nevertheless, when he examined these same teachers' various ratings of their pupils, it was clear that on a number of dimensions they divided the children between boys and girls, In other words, gender was an organizing feature of classrooms. King (1978, p. 68) also reported that teachers explained the educational and behavioural problems of boys in terms of 'taken-for-granted natural sex differences'. It appears that gender-related patterns are so pervasive and expected that they are absorbed into the realm of the natural, rather than the cultural. (An exception to the systematic neglect of gender is Corsaro's (1985) ethnography of peer relations in an American kindergarten, which does consider questions of gender. However, the ethnographic context for this study, is quite distinct from that of British primary schools.)

The disappearance of gender from ethnographic accounts is a particular instance of a well-known feature of ideologies; cultural phenomena are represented as natural facts. However interesting this may be for a consideration of social representations of gender in primary school, it also means that existing ethnographies offered us very little in the way of description relevant to our interests. By force of circumstance, therefore, we took on the role of ethnographers. An advantage of doing so was the possibility of grounding our observations of children's practices in a detailed ethnographic account of the contexts for these activities.

The project as a whole was divided into two phases. The first phase consisted of observations of the first year of school with the aim of generating a description of the potential resources available to children for the organization and regulation of their social-gender identities. The second phase consisted of quantitative observations which provided a longitudinal study of social gender identities through the first year of school. Questions about individual and group variations in the use of resources for social gender identities are more adequately addressed through an analysis of this quantitative data. The present chapter concentrates on the first phase, and later we present some of our qualitative data describing the potential resources available to children for the expression of social gender identities.

Both phases of our work were located in two different schools. Although only a few kilometres apart they present contrasting sociological characteristics. One school (A) serves primarily a middle-class community and is housed in modern buildings; it is also a large school, with three classes in each year. The other school (B) is set in a predominantly working-class area and housed in an older, Victorian building. In this school there is only one class in each year.

The policy of the local education authority allows children to enter school in September if they will be five years old by the end of the following August, though they are only able to attend full-time from the beginning of the term in which they will be five. In school A, the three first-year classes are divided according to age, so that one class consists of children attending full-time in September, another of those children who become full-time in January, and the third of those who do not attend full-time until after Easter. It is this third class which we have observed. For the first two terms the children are divided into two groups, with one attending the morning session and the other the afternoon session. In school B the first-year class consists of some children who attend full-time from the beginning of the year in September, and others who attend the morning sessions only at first, and become full-time in either the spring or summer terms.

The class in school A consisted of 18 children in each of the groups during the first two terms, though when they were combined into a single full-time class some children were transferred into other first-year classes, leaving a total of 32 children for the summer term, 18 girls and 14 boys. The teacher for this class was female; an auxiliary helper, also female, was present for most of the time. In the class in school B there were 24 children, 11 girls and 13 boys; in addition to the class teacher, a woman, a female student teacher was also frequently present.

Motivated ethnography

Our ethnographic description assumes that social life revolves around collective systems of meaning, and that it is through the interrogation of the beliefs and practices of a community that these systems can be analysed. These presuppositions are also common to the theory of social representations; it is this common ground which establishes ethnographic description as appropriate for the study of social representations.

It is possible to argue that all psychological research proceeds from some ethnographic interpretation on the part of the investigators, that they begin with some intuition about psychological processes drawn from participation in their own culture. Generally, this ethnographic moment remains hidden in formal accounts of research procedures (Herzlich 1972 makes a similar point about the unacknowledged role of social representations in psychological research). What is novel in our research is that this ethnographic moment has not only become explicit, but also systematic. Indeed, the research project as a whole was dependent on the autonomous ethnographic study of social representations of gender within the school. It provided the descriptive framework which made possible the interpretation and assessment of individual actions.

In contemporary usage, especially by sociologists, ethnography has been taken to refer to participant observations combined with interviews undertaken in field settings. From these observations and their work with informants, ethnographers construct an interpretation of events. Through the course of their fieldwork, ethnographers also seek to test the adequacy of their interpretations through triangulation, in which emerging interpretations are re-presented to informants for comment and discussion. However, as Agar (1986) makes clear, this enterprise has been conducted using many different interpretive procedures and many different terminologies for describing the process.

How, then, should ethnography be characterized? We can consider the practices of ethnographers themselves. Their activities can be described in two ways. First we could describe the activities of the ethnographer in the field, observing the society under study and interviewing informants, but ethnography is more than the academic poking of a nose into other people's cultures. The ethnographer is aiming through these procedures to describe the collective life of a society – to articulate, among other things, the beliefs which are shared by the members of this culture.

The two kinds of description contained in this brief account may be contrasted using the distinction drawn by Gilbert Ryle (1971) between *thin* and *thick* descriptions. The former description portrays the observable activities of the ethnographer, and in this sense is thin. The latter description highlights the intentionality of the ethnographer's endeavour and to that extent is a thicker description. (It is also the case that the thick description may not correspond to anything observable, or it may be something which the ethnographer does while sitting in a tent, at the office, or even at home. The ethnographer would then resemble more closely Rodin's sculpture *Le Penseur*, which is the example given by Ryle.) Clearly the notion of thin description as pure observation is an ideal type. All description implies some interpretation, however minimal it may be. Equally, there can be no single thick description which exhausts the interpretive possibilities for any given situation. In a practical sense, it is only possible to distinguish degrees of thickness in particular descriptions. Nevertheless, this contrast between thin and thick descriptions has been used by Geertz (1973) to characterize ethnography as an interpretive procedure aimed at generating thick descriptions of a culture, which will articulate the collective systems of meaning that sustain a culture as a particular set of social relations.

In his discussion of ethnography, Geertz stresses the interpretive (or hermeneutic) aspect of this activity. Starting from their observations and interviews with informants, ethnographers generate various accounts which form the basis for interpretation. Very often, as Geertz notes, this actually means that they are dealing with second- or third-hand accounts passed on to them by their informants. All of this is to be expected, but it does strike a warning note as well as indicating the need for ethnographic research to range across a variety of sources. The situation of ethnographers becomes more complex, however, when they undertake field work within their own culture. They can no longer maintain the fiction of being outsiders trying to gain an insider's view; on the contrary, they are insiders with an interest in gaining an outsider's sense of wholeness.

Ethnography, then, can be characterized as the description of social phenomena and, in Geertz's terms, the more interpretive the description becomes the thicker it will be. As such, ethnography is not tied to a specific methodology. While participant observations and interviews with informants have been the most common sources of data, ethnographic descriptions have also been derived from textual sources, both historical and contemporary. Our own ethnography drew primarily on observations of classroom life, our conversations with children in the classroom, and discussions with teachers. From these data we constructed an interpretation of the role of gender in the organization of social relations in the classroom. In considering ethnography as an empirical approach to social representations, we take it to refer to an interpretive description based on observational and conversational data. As with any interpretive procedure which aims to recover the intentions informing the activities of social actors, no claim for objectivity can be sustained for ethnographic accounts. Intentionality is not an objective phenomena; it cannot be directly observed, so that any event is open to a multiplicity of interpretations. It is possible, however, to consider the adequacy of the interpretation offered by an ethnographic account. As well as providing a coherent and consistent account, an adequate interpretation needs to refer to a specified range of social phenomena; the account ought to provide a means for distinguishing relevant from irrelevant phenomena.

The setting for our research was primary schools, and the children in them were a particular focus for our work. This raised some special problems. As a social institution the school is a focus for diverse representations. There are those held by the parents, as well as those held by the local authority, and so on. All of these impinge in some way on social life within the school and the social relations within the classroom, and need to be considered in an ethnographic study. It would be impossible to give a description of children's culture which did not incorporate elements of the adult community in which the children lived. One characteristic of adult communities is that a part of their culture consists of representations of children, that is, expectations of how children will behave at different ages, of what they will be able to understand, and of the communicative competence to be expected at each age level (compare Chombart de Lauwe 1984: D'Alessio 1990). It would be misleading to give the impression that representations of childhood form a kind of monolithic block within our own culture; they do not. Like every representation, they exist within the context of other representations and are influenced by them. We noted above that in our two schools there are differences in the representations of childhood. We also noted that teachers' representations of children differentiate between the genders, though this differentiation is more apparent in the practice of teachers towards children than in their discourse about childhood and education (indeed, gender is often described as a hidden curriculum in education).

In our own case, this kind of reflexivity of representations goes a step further. As developmental psychologists we hold some specific representations about children which have consequences for how we approach ethnographic research. A particular issue concerns children's ability to achieve in practice solutions to problems which they are not able to explain theoretically, a phenomenon which Piaget (1977) described as the grasp of consciousness. As developmental psychologists, then, one of our representations of children suggests that there are developmental limits to their cognitive ability to communicate an adequate understanding of their practice. This clearly has ethnographic significance, for it means that we did not expect children to be in a position to act as ethnographic informants about their culture in the same way as adult informants. Indeed, this representation of childhood has been translated into our strategy for ethnographic work. A large part of our ethnographic work was observational; we kept diary records of what we had seen and of the interactions to which we had been party.

Our work also differs from traditional ethnographic procedures in that it is motivated by two specific concerns. First, we selected gender *a priori* as the theme of our observations; we did not go to the field ready to work on whatever material came up in the course of research. We went to the field with the belief that gender was a significant phenomenon in the organization of social life within the school, and our knowledge of contemporary collective representations of gender in our culture provided the initial framework for our interpretations of events in the school. Secondly, in terms of the project as a whole, the ethnographic work was instrumental to the development of psychological instruments. We were looking, as it were, for gendered phenomena which would provide suitable material for the construction of observation schedules and interview questions. Because of these concerns, we describe our method as *motivated ethnography*.

For the research project as a whole, the motivated ethnography served a dual function. In the first place it aimed to bring into view the phenomena we wished to investigate by providing a descriptive account of social representations of gender in the primary school. An essential strand of this account was the description of the activities and processes through which these social representations are articulated or made manifest. We refer to the collection of these activities and processes as the resources available for the expression of social gender identities. The second function of motivated ethnography follows on from the first: the ethnographic description also provided the basis for constructing psychological instruments capable of evaluating hypotheses about individual and group variations in the development of children's use of such resources. In the language of psychological research methodology, this second function can be expressed by saying that the ethnography provided the external, or ecological, validation for these measures. These two functions of ethnography correspond to the two phases of the research project, and in the following section we give some further details about these two phases.

Ethnography of gender marking

The aim of our ethnographic work was to provide a description of the structure of the social representation of gender in the classroom as it is articulated in the marking of various aspects of the setting. Wherever gender is marked, the possibility exists for the expression of a social gender identity, and in this section we present an analysis of the means through which gender is marked within the classroom. As well as the persons involved and the relations between them, a description of settings also needs to take account of the kind of activities being undertaken, the objects being used, the spatial location, and so on. In order to organize our ethnographic material, we tried to construct a taxonomy which distinguishes those different aspects of settings which can be used to mark gender. The semiotics of the gender system are such that different elements within settings are used to mark gender.

Before outlining this taxonomy we need to make two methodological comments. First, observational methods only allow us to record what children actually do. This tells us when they are able to mark gender in a particular manner. When gender is not marked, or when children disregard the rules of gender, we cannot conclude that they are ignorant of the conventions of the gender system. Thus, this analysis of our ethnographic material provides an overview of the potential resources available to children for marking gender. Secondly, although these observations concern the social practices of children and adults in the classroom, it is important to distinguish between different modes of activity in these practices. At times gender is marked in the practical activities of these people, at other times gender marking is primarily articulated through their verbal discourse. This verbal discourse may include reflections upon the gender system. Disjunctions may occur between the representations of gender articulated through these different modes of activity.

Each of the six aspects of settings which we identify below can be marked according to the rules of the gender system. In some cases, the marking of gender was explicitly made by the children and adults we observed; in other cases, the marking was made in our interpretation of an observation. Some of these aspects can also be marked in terms of other social categories (particularly age relationships). Although they do not form an exhaustive list, these aspects of settings do highlight those dimensions which allow children to express their knowledge of the gender system. These six aspects are not independent; many of our observations illustrate the interdependence among these aspects, but in some cases particular aspects are more salient than others. As a whole, these six aspects describe the parameters which we observed being used to mark gender, and thus provide potential opportunities for the expression of social-gender identities. The six aspects on which we focussed were: social categories, group composition, material culture, activities, space, and behavioural styles.

Social categories

In invoking social categories in the organization of interaction, although gender is a fundamental category (male, female), other categorizations are also salient, particularly age (child, adult). The cross-categorization of gender with age produces the four terms: boy, girl, man, and woman.

Categorization is a ubiquitous phenomenon of school life, with children being organized into groups for one reason or another. Although it is often the teacher who establishes the groups, children also categorize their peers. In some cases, the criteria used to define categories may be arbitrary (as, for example, when teachers organize children into groups on the basis of the kinds of shoes they are wearing), but they may also articulate some parameter of social organization in the classroom. Gender, of course, is an example of such a rational categorization, though other instances would be friendship groups, or work groups.

Teachers frequently make gender salient to children as a social category by using gender groups to organize school life. The registers, for example, divide the children's names according to gender, so that when the teacher in school B called out the list of names it was the boys' names which were called first and the girls' names second. In both schools the categories of boys and girls were frequently invoked in the teachers' discourse to the children. A typical example comes from school B when the teacher was getting the children ready for playtime: 'Let's see if the girls are ready and the boys are ready.' Children also used these categories in their relations with their peers. An observation from school A provides an example. The class is lining up to go into assembly and, although the teacher has not organized the line according to gender, there is a group of five girls jostling with each other at the end of the line saying 'I don't want to be by a boy', because the girl at the front of this group would have to stand next to a boy.

Group composition

Interpersonal settings can be described in terms of the combinations of the social category memberships of the participants. The people engaged in a reading lesson, for instance, can be described as a woman, two boys, and a girl, or as a teacher and three pupils. The gender and age composition of groups can be a powerful influence on interaction. Consider, for example, the following observation from school A.

Two boys C and D are playing on the carpet with a game which consists of pieces which fit together to make a slide for marbles. The boys have been busy for a little while, but none of the other children, neither boys nor girls, have shown any interest in what they are doing. One of the boys runs across to the teacher to say 'Look what we've done', and the teacher comes across to see what they've been doing. While she's talking to them, two girls, R and G, come over and stand and listen. The teacher draws them into the game by encouraging one of the girls to take a turn at letting the marble drop. When the teacher leaves the two girls stay on and all four children play together. After a minute or two, however, one of the girls drifts off, but R stays. D is busy explaining to her just how the game works. The other boy, C, however, also leaves.

In this example the composition of two same gender groups was modified through the presence of the teacher. First of all the boys' group was changed with the arrival of the teacher, but her presence effected a second change with the subsequent arrival of the two girls. The teacher is often a source of attraction for children, and this instance also shows how the teacher often mediates between boys and girls. With her departure, the group of four children had only a limited stability and two of the children soon left. The teacher's participation had, however, modified the gender composition of the group, a modification which persisted after her departure.

Material culture

Examination of the material culture (toys, games, and so on) may yield information about gender marking. Objects such as baby dolls are usually construed as feminine, while guns and vehicles are often described as masculine.

An example of the marking of material culture came from school A. S, a boy, is dressing up in some of the clothes from the home corner. He selects an orange nightie, and although he has some trouble in putting it on he finally succeeds. He then picks up a white tutu which he tries to put on as well. This is much more difficult for him to manage. The only other child to take any notice of what he's doing is C, a girl, who is also in the home corner. She looks at him struggling to put on the white tutu and says 'It's not for you, S'. S looks a bit bemused but continues struggling with the tutu. Finally he takes it across to the teacher and asks her to put it on him. She responds by saying 'Oh no, S, that's the smallest dress we've got – you won't fit into it. Let's look for something else.' Together they return to the clothes rack and S selects a skirt. The teacher says 'That's nice', but also encourages him to put on a waistcoat.

In this example, S was persistent in his determination to dress up in women's clothes. This was an unusual event, since by and large the children dressed up only in clothes appropriate to their own gender. In this case the reason why S should want to assert a feminine identity at this point was not clear, but the reactions of others were. The girl, C, explicitly stated the inappropriateness of S dressing up in feminine-marked clothes. The teacher,

by contrast, avoided saying anything explicit about the appropriateness or otherwise of S's choice, but when she encouraged him to put on a waistcoat she was also encouraging him to add something marked as masculine to his outfit.

Activities

Activities, scripted play, and rituals may be marked for gender. The use of construction toys and the home corner, for instance, are often assumed to be marked respectively as masculine and feminine. The roles and objects evoked in scripted pretend play may also carry gender markings; roles are associated with social categories and objects form part of the material culture.

The most elaborate kinds of scripts these children produced were those which evoked domestic scenes, as in this example from school A. Two girls, H and S, are crawling about near the book corner. The observer asks them what they are playing, and they say 'Babies'. They take turns saying 'goo-goo'. A boy, F, comes over and says 'Don't be silly'. H says that F can be a baby, but he says that he's not a baby, he is a daddy. S says to him 'Good morning daddy. I am going out' and F replies 'Bye-bye'. Variations on this theme of greetings are repeated several times. Another boy, C, comes over and they agree that he can be the big brother.

In this evocation of domestic life, both F and the two girls recognized that F has chosen a domestic role congruent with had membership of the male gender category. As we have noted elsewhere (Duveen and Lloyd 1988), the scripted pretend play of young children is more elaborate when they evoke domestic rather than occupational scenes. While they may know about many occupations, children at this age have only limited knowledge of what people actually do in performing these roles.

Space

Space can be used as a sign denoting gender, although this may be the most fluid aspect of gender marking. While there may be very few, if any, fixed markings of spaces for gender within the classroom, the use of particular areas for particular activities involving specific objects may lead to the recognition of certain areas as gender marked. There may be a temporal dimension to the way in which spatial locations are marked for gender; the marking may persist only as long as a particular activity continues.

This example comes from school B. The teacher sends five boys to play in the playroom adjoining the classroom. No girls go, none ask to go, and none are sent. A few minutes later when one of the girls does ask to go the teacher says to her 'No, not yet. Let the boys finish first'. A few minutes later, there is a complete gender separation between the two rooms. All seven boys are now in the playroom where they are running around playing with the trucks or engaged in rough and tumble play. In the classroom, all the six girls are on the carpet with the teacher giving a tea party for the dolls.

In this instance, it was the teacher who initiated and sustained a division of space according to gender, a division which the children completed.

Behavioural styles

Behavioural styles are also given gender meanings. Thus, forceful or assertive activities are often labelled masculine, while passivity or compliance are construed as feminine. Our observations included many instances of both boys and girls acting in masculine and feminine styles. In these cases, the marking of behaviour styles for gender is a feature of our interpretation, though the following example from school A illustrates adults explicitly marking behavioural styles.

Several children are building a rocket from the wood blocks in the space by the door. As well as several boys there are also two girls involved in this group, K and Z. Z is so frequently involved in these games with the boys that she is recognized by both the teacher and the children as a tomboy. Both the teacher and the auxiliary are with other children in the main part of the room and they do not have a clear view of the rocket game. Both of them ask the the rocket group to be quieter. The auxiliary finally gets up and goes across to see what's going on. She comes back and says to the teacher 'It's K and Z as well.' The teacher replies 'K as well? I knew it was Z. Why do we always think it's the boys?' The auxiliary grins in recognition.

From ethnography to psychology

As a semiotic system, gender is realized through the signifying practices of children, teachers, and other adults in the context of the school. It is these practices which were the focus of our ethnographic investigations, and we interpreted these practices as expressions of social gender identities, that is, as expressions of children's internalizations of social representations of gender. Our ethnography provided a description of the potential resources available for marking gender in the social life of the classroom. These resources constituted the elements available for the expression of social gender identities, and the second phase of our research consisted of a study in how these potential resources were actually used, and particularly of variations in their use between individuals and groups through the course of the first year of school.

The study in the second phase required the construction of measures sensitive to individual variations in the use of resources for marking gender. From our ethnography, it was also apparent that such measures needed to take account of the different modalities of action which could be employed in marking gender. To meet these requirements we elaborated a series of three interlinked measures. These consisted of (i) spot observations of each child's activity at a given moment; (ii) detailed written observations of interactions within the classroom which could be coded for the various aspects outlined above; and (iii) interviews with children in which they were presented with tasks requiring them to reconstruct the use of particular resources. The first of these measures provided an overview of individual children's engagements with other children and adults, where these interactions were located, the material objects used, patterns of talk, and the degree to which activities were coordinated among children. The second measure provided more detailed information about the way in which different resources were employed in the various modalities to express social gender identities in particular interactions. The third measure concerned children's ability to represent (in the strictest sense of the term) the use of resources to mark gender. These measures were employed in a longitudinal study of the first-year classes in both of the schools. They provided data for evaluating our hypotheses by allowing us to examine changes in the organization of social gender identities through the first year of schooling.

Each of the measures we have devised draws directly on our ethnographic work. The categories for the spot observations, the coding frame for the written observations, and the themes for the interview task all found their external validation in that ethnography. This is the solution which we found for the problem of moving from ethnographic to psychological modes of investigation. In some respects, this solution is specific to the particular research problem with which we were concerned. Different techniques of psychological investigation might be more appropriate in other cases. In general, though, it would be the case that ethnography plays the same dual role as it has for our own research. Ethnographic research should bring the social phenomena under investigation into view, and thereby provide external validation for the appropriate psychological methods.

Conclusions

As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, the theory of social representations adopts a 'methodological polytheism' rather than specifying particular methodological procedures. In commenting on Moscovici's proposal, Hearnshaw notes that this implies a 'certain methodological diversity and tolerance . . . embracing at one end precise quantitative techniques and at the other shading off into the weighing of evidence and the hermeneutical interpretation of meanings' (1987, p. 302). Ethnography is concerned with not only the interpretation of meanings, but also the description of the social practices through which meanings are constructed and communicated. We have indicated the role which ethnography played in our own research concerned with social representations of gender. In this conclusion, we want to consider the wider issue of the use of ethnography in the investigation of social representations.

Most studies of social representations have analysed the structure of representations through the medium of verbal or written discourse; typically these analyses have considered responses to interviews or questionnaires, or the content analysis of newspapers and periodicals. By focusing on practical activity as a modality of social practice, the use of observation to construct an ethnographic description of social representations expands the range of media accessible to analysis. In the particular case of our research, a consideration of practical activities was, in part, necessitated by the limited capacity of young children for reflection and self expression in verbal discourse. Analysing social representations through the medium of practical activities has the benefit of emphasizing the significance of this modality within the ensemble of social practices through which social representations are articulated.

The systematic investigation of practical activities from the perspective of social representations raises some important issues; in particular it demands a more interpretive approach to observational data than has generally been the case in psychology. As with any hermeneutic procedure, the objectivity and generality of an interpretation is always open to question. While the internal coherence and consistency of an interpretation is always open to rational criticism, the adequacy of an interpretation as an account of the phenomena can only be assessed through a continuing confrontation with the data. In social anthropology, this latter question has usually been treated through various triangulation techniques within the fieldwork itself. In such cases, both the interpretation and its triangulation are undertaken by the same investigators. However, the adequacy of an interpretation could also be examined by different investigators undertaking studies of similar phenomena. While it would be difficult to undertake a replication in the strict sense of the term, studies of similar phenomena in different contexts create the possibility for examining the generality of any particular interpretation.

Clearly, the use of ethnography in the description of social representations depends upon the practical activities associated with the representation being accessible to the investigator. This is not always the case: there may be instances where practical activities are simply inaccessible to an investigator, or it may be the case that a social representation carries no practical consequences for the expression of social identities. This consideration raises the problem of making distinctions between types, or varieties, of social representations, an issue which has not yet been tackled by the theory of social representations.

There are, for example, important differences between social representations of, say, gender, and those of psychoanalysis. One way of contrasting these two types of social representation is to note that, whereas in relation to psychoanalysis individuals can exercise a choice in the degree to which they become involved with psychoanalytic themes, no such choice is possible in relation to gender. Membership in certain social categories is an inescapable part of social life. One cannot be just a human being, one is either young or old, male or female, and so on; and these categories provide social locations for individual subjects which are among the most basic prerequisites for participation in social life. One could choose to have nothing to do with psychoanalysis, but one would then have no basis for participating in the professional life of psychoanalytical societies. With gender there is no choice: to become human means to become male or female.

Thus, social *gender* identities are always an active element in everyday life, and hence readily open to observation. These circumstances contrast with the voluntary engagement of individuals with psychoanalysis. People may develop social identities in relation to social representations of psychoanalysis, but there is no compulsion. In his study of psychoanalysis, Moscovici (1976) employed questionnaires and the content analysis of magazines as his tools. One could imagine that for some of his communist or catholic subjects psychoanalysis may also have been an observable feature of their daily life. They too might have had their daily 50-minute hour. But, for the most part, psychoanalysis would have had no identifiable part to play in the daily lives of these people; they would have no active social identity in relation to social representations of psychoanalysis. This is not to say that an ethnography of social representations of psychoanalysis based on observations would be impossible, only that it would have to be restricted to those groups for whom psychoanalysis figured as a daily reality. There would remain, however, the problem of the accessibility of psychoanalytic practice to a prospective investigator. Janet Malcolm (1982, 1984), for instance, presents accounts of psychoanalytic practice and relations between psychoanalysts. As an ethnographic study of the social representations of psychoanalysis held by analysts themselves, these books draw on her interviews with various informants.

The minimum conditions for an ethnographic description of social representations can, then, be stated as follows. Wherever individuals actively assert a social identity, ethnography can provide an appropriate way of reconstructing the social representations informing their activities. Where particular social representations are not articulated in active social identities, ethnography will yield little descriptive information. Equally, where the practical activities through which social identities are expressed remain inaccessible to an investigator, ethnography based upon observation and interview would not be a suitable approach for investigating the social representations held by the participants themselves.

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