Social representations and emotions : Individuals' emotional state following a threat to the system of beliefs

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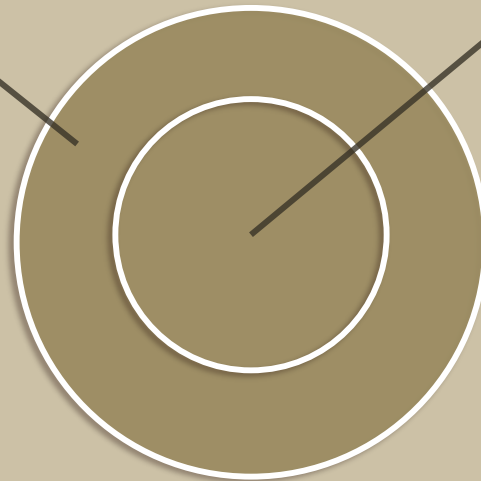# The structural approach of social representations (SR)

- A SR is composed of 2 specific groups of cognitions (Abric, 1976) :

Peripheral system

- Defensive function

- Characterized by interindividual variations

Central core

- Consensual

- Stable, rigid

- Resists to change

- Independant from the immediate context

Will the consequences of a change be the same, depending on the type of cognition affected ?

Structural approach & representational dynamic

- Due to its normative dimension the central core is linked to our values and our ideological beliefs.

- CC also generates the meaning of SRs

- It takes a long time to change central cognitions (Guimelli, 1988).

Given the fact that it implies a potential change of the system of beliefs, a threat characterizing central cognitions would have a more important impact on individuals.

Social representations & emotions

- This impact could be measured :

  ▪ Through individuals' emotional state,
  ▪ Through the propensity to share these emotions (Rimé, 2005).

- Guimelli and Rimé (2009) :
  ▪ *« Emotional experience is part of the construction of the meaning attributed to the object »* (p. 166).
  ▪ Interactions are at the origin of focalisation on some aspects of the object, and notably the emotional aspects

- Emotion could constitute a vector of representational change.

- H1 : A threat to the elements of a given SR could have an impact on individuals' emotional state.

- H2 : A threat to central cognitions would lead to more negative/intense emotions than a threat to peripheral cognitions.

- H3 : There would be a stronger propensity for individuals to share their emotions following a threat to a central element than to a peripheral one.

Sample & procedure

Introduction

Hypothesis

Methodology

Results

Discussion

- 100 students from the University of Provence (M_{age} = 20.05 ; *SD* = 4.92).

- 3 steps procedure :

1st measure of the emotions

Invalidation or confirmation

(Mugny, Moliner & Flament, 1997)

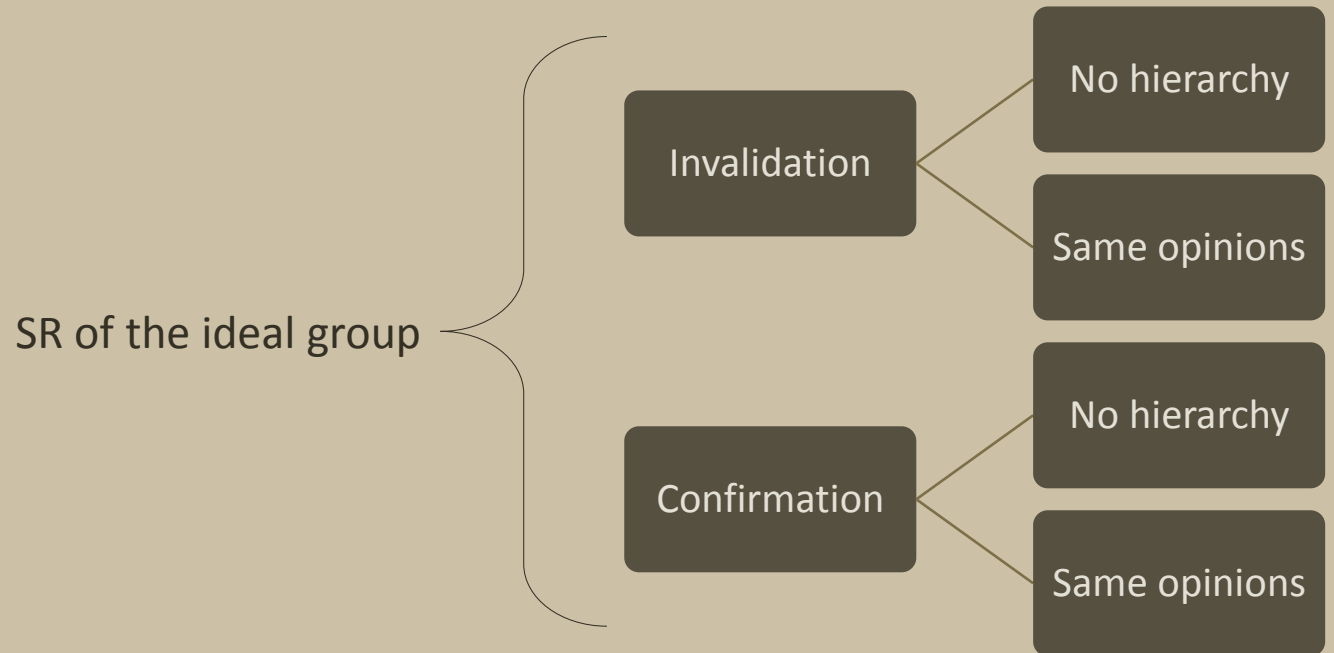**2nd measure of the emotions**

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Social sharing of the emotions

Mugny, Moliner & Flament (1997)

- The 3 steps of the original research :

  ▪ **Pretest :** Initial measure of the SR of the ideal group
  ▪ **Influence phase :** Presentation of a fictitious study

SR of the ideal group

Invalidation — No hierarchy / Same opinions

Confirmation — No hierarchy / Same opinions

  ▪ **Post-test :** Final measure of the SR of the ideal group

The measure of the emotions

- Brief Mood Introspection Scale (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988) :

    - 16 emotions measured on scales from 1 to 7.
    - Happy, sad, melancholic, surprised, etc.

- 2 « general » measures :

    - The emotion i feel is :

    Negative   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●   Positive

    - This emotion has :

    A weak intensity   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●   A strong intensity

Replication of
Mugny, Moliner & Flament (1997)

- Initial SR of the ideal group :

« ... Pierre, Olivier, Jean-Jacques, François and Marc are a group of very close friends and they're satisfied to be together. Moreover, they're very likeable and each of them have the feeling to be in a very fulfilling relation with the others... ».

82% of the subjects think that it's an ideal group.

Replication of
Mugny, Moliner & Flament (1997)

- Calling into question :
  - *« It appears that, very often, many members of the group , Pierre et Olivier, give orders to the other and that these ones are following these orders. Finally, we can say that there is a clear hierarchy in this group… »*

  - *« […] don't share the same opinions and that there is strong differences of opinions in this group… »*

Answer	Hierarchy		Opinion differencies	
	confirmation	invalidation	confirmation	invalidation
1	7	11	8	11
2	2 } 36%	6 } 68%	7 } 60%	8 } 76%
3	11	4	10	6
4	5	4	0	0

Effect of the exposition to the source (χ^2 = 3.926, *p* < .05)

No significant difference (χ^2 < 1)

Emotional impact
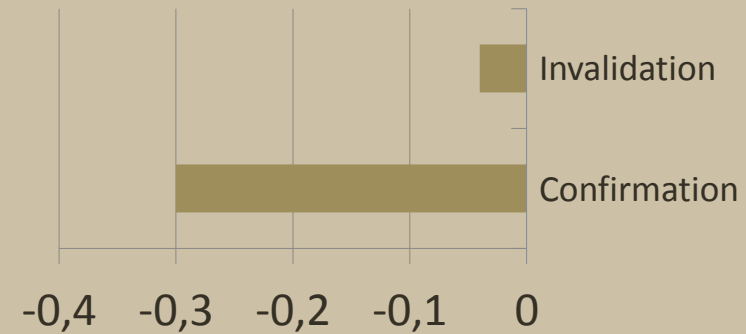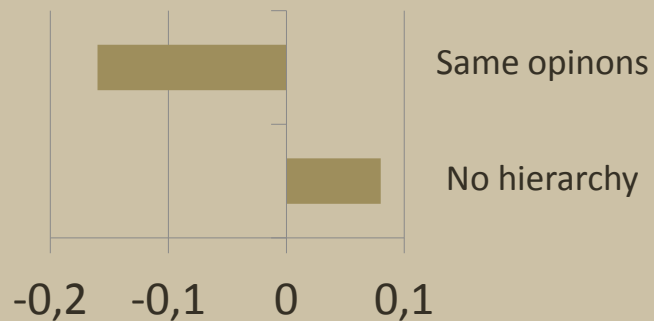
- Simple effect of the Invalidation/confirmation variable on **sadness** :

  - $F(1, 98) = 3.57$, $p = .06$

- Simple effect of the structural status on **happiness** :

  - $F(1, 98) = 3.18$, $p = .08$

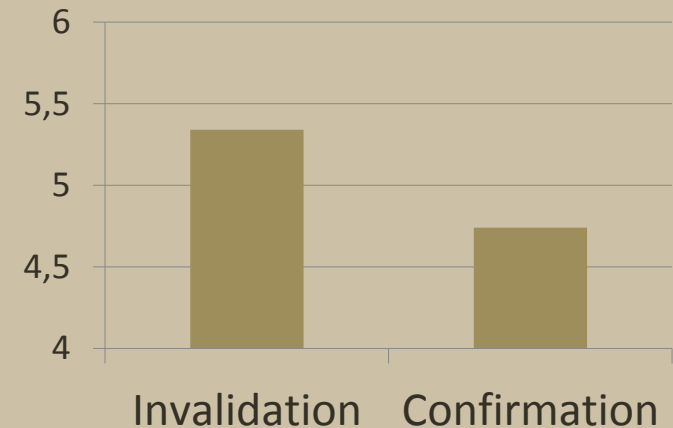|	Same opinions	No hierarchy
Invalidation	-.08	.00
Confirmation	-.24	.16*

Social sharing of emotions

- How many people would you talk to about this experiment ?

    ▪ $F(1, 98) = 4.62$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$

- However, subjects are more opposed to the diffusion of the information concerning the invalidation of the central element ($M = 4.44$) than to the information concerning the invalidation of the peripheral one ($M = 5.64$; $F(1, 48) = 4.55$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$).

- The invalidation of beliefs doesn't have the same impact on individuals' emotional state than their confirmation.

- Still, no mediation effect between emotional state and the propensity to social sharing of emotions.

- Toward more accurate results…

  ▪ Implicit measures of emotions
  ▪ Behavioral measures of social sharing of emotions

Merci pour votre attention