

Cabecinhas, R. & Abadia, L. (eds.) (2013)
Narratives and social memory: theoretical and methodological approaches
Braga: University of Minho
ISBN: 978-989-8600-04-2
pp. 11 -24

Narratives and Social Memory from the Perspective of Social Representations of History

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Abstract

Social representations theory strives to build the connective tissue between the methodologically individualist natural science epistemology of cognitive science and neuropsychology with the inter-subjective and/or social constructionist epistemology of the social sciences and humanities. This chapter describes how the study of social representations of history (SRH) has used quantitative methods to provide empirical building blocks that I) assist in the process of cumulative hermeneutic interpretation, and II) operationalize social representations in new and sophisticated ways as a symbolic interface between individuals and groups. I) SRHs can be treated as narrative where a sequence of events provides the plot, and figures and groups provide heroes and villains central to a story about the making of an ingroup. Different spatial configurations of representations of the prevalence of events and figures in world history from different countries provide different *narrative inference potentials* (i.e., ability to generate conjectures about group-based narratives). They can be treated as points of dialogue rather than descriptive facts, employed in the full awareness that their meaning changes with context, but nonetheless signify some inter-subjective consensus worth talking through. II) Alternatively, along more quantitative lines of inquiry, Latent Class Analysis is described as a technique that can 1) describe the numerical prevalence of a given representation, while 2) mapping alternatives and positioning an individual precisely vis-à-vis these alternatives without relying on pre-existing social categories that can then 3) be mapped onto other systems, including institutional, relational, occupational, or demographic systems. The analysis of figures in SRH is described using data from around the world.

Keywords

Social representations; world history; collective remembering; narrative; social memory

Michael Bamberg (2007) argues in his introduction to *Narrative – State of the Art* that two methodological and theoretical strands are responsible for the popularity of narrative in the social sciences and humanities: “the former, which I would like to call the ‘*person*’ or ‘*subjectivity-centered*’ approach to narrative, is interested in the exploration of narratives as personal ways to impose order on an otherwise chaotic scenario of life and experience” (p. 2); “a second view of narrative started with the assumption that narratives are pre-existing meaningful templates that carry social, cultural, and communal currency for the process of identity formation. This orientation, which I call a *social* or *plot orientation*, centers more

strongly on the communal ordering principles that seem to be handed down from generation to generation in the form of communally-shared plot lines, making their way into the lives of ordinary people and their stories of personal experience” (Bamberg, 2007, p. 3). It is this second strand that I would like to draw into a conversation with social representations theory (SRT) and social representations of history (SRH). For it is the complex relationship between individuals, their communities, and society that SRT is designed to address, and I would like to consider how narratives and social memory may be part of this relationship.

The dominant literature on narratives is both interdisciplinary and, according to Josselson (2007), qualitative: “narrative research, rooted in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, strives to preserve the complexity of what it means to be human and to locate its observations of people and phenomena in society, history, and time”...“the practice of narrative research, rooted in postmodernism, is always interpretive, at every stage” (p. 7). She struggles, however, with the problem of how to “add up” narrative studies and their accompanying interpretations, putting together a “joint multilayered jigsaw puzzle” rather than “a gallery of finely wrought miniatures.” The “question that occupies me, though, is how do we build a knowledge base out of these proliferating [narrative] studies?” (p. 8).

In fact, the third chapter of the volume opened by Bamberg and Josselson is written by Dan McAdams (2007), a personality psychologist who is comfortable with both quantitative techniques and their interpretation as well as more qualitative methods. He has developed a significant cumulative body of research (McAdams, 2006) examining the structure of individual stories and their relationship to a grander narrative of redemption that serves as a “plot orientation” for American culture in Bamberg’s (2007) terms.

It is at this juncture between the individual and society, between the quantitative and the qualitative, between the life-worlds experienced by ordinary people and scientific micro-worlds constructed by social scientists that social representations reside (Moscovici, 1961). Social representations theorists strive to build the connective tissue between the natural science epistemology of psychological science and the inter-subjective epistemology of narrative research (see Ho, Peng, Lai, Chan, 2001). In Doise, Spini, & Clémence’s (1999) terms, “SR can be considered as organizing principles of symbolic relationships between individuals and groups” (p. 2) consisting of three basic principles: first, that “various members of a population share common views about a given issue” and therefore “An important phase in each study of SR therefore is a search for a common cognitive organization of the issues at stake in a given system of social relations.” Second “differences in individual positioning are organized... we search for the organizing principles of individual differences in a representational field.” Third, “such systematic variations are anchored in collective symbolic realities... Individual positionings in representational fields cannot be exhaustively studied without analyzing their anchoring in other social systems of symbolic relationships” (p. 2).

The purpose of this chapter is to narrate how I have studied social representations of history (SRH) using quantitative methods to provide empirical building blocks that function to 1) assist in the process of cumulative hermeneutic interpretation and 2) operationalize social representation in new and sophisticated ways as a symbolic interface between individuals, their groups, and society.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HISTORY (SRH) AS NARRATIVE PHENOMENA?

A burgeoning literature on social representations of history has emerged in recent years (see Liu & Sibley, 2012b; Hilton & Liu, 2008 for reviews). A seminal publication was Pennebaker, Paez, and Rimé's (1997) edited volume on the *Collective Memory of Political Events*. At this stage, there was not yet a literature on social representations of history *per se*, but rather the book signaled the emergence of a psychological perspective on history (which, as Liu and colleagues (2005, 2009) have remarked, in world history is popularly represented as a story about politics and war). The term collective remembering is derived from an older literature in sociology following Halbwachs (1950/1980). This literature, reviewed by Olick and Robbins (1998) is qualitative, and in accord with sociological traditions, emphasizes institutional forces in the production of social memory. The collective remembering of smaller, perhaps dissident groups in society is investigated side-by-side with officially promulgated discourses using primarily archival resources (see Schwartz, 1997 for example). Recently, Paez and Liu (2011) have attempted a practical synthesis of the two literatures, one more qualitative and the other more quantitative, in the applied domain of conflict resolution. Despite a gulf with respect to methodology, academic pedigree, and the conceptual terms used to express ideas, the core theoretical positions adopted by scholars in SRH and collective remembering/social memory are generally compatible. But they are investigated in different ways and put their emphasis on different features.

Liu and Hilton (2005) have argued that "A group's representation of its history will condition its sense of what it was, is, can and should be, and is thus central to the construction of its identity, norms, and values" (p. 537). This is very compatible with Schwartz's (1997) ideas about the changing ways Abraham Lincoln has been "keyed" into the American psyche over the years (people forget he was one of the most unpopular and controversial Presidents in American history in his own lifetime). Everyone agrees that historical narratives involve stability amidst change. The strands of historical narrative keep changing in psychologically predictable ways even as they maintain connections between the past, present, and future within a community of people.

One way this is achieved is through reinterpretation of the same events and people. History typically involves events and characters enmeshed in a temporal sequence where a plot unfolds over time, giving rise to certain themes. Unlike say, human rights, SRHs easily take the form of a narrative (Liu & László, 2007). Events provide the plot, and figures supply heroes and villains central to a story about the making of an ingroup. Historical events have been investigated by Wertsch (2002) as providing a narrative template for the Russian people and by László (2008) as providing historical plotlines for the Hungarian people. These carry lessons that can be invoked by identity entrepreneurs (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005) to justify political action and an agenda for the future (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Liu & Hilton, 2005). László (2008) has been most forceful in calling for a narrative turn in the study of historical representations, particularly through examining agency in historical textbooks or other writing via scientific textual analysis. Following this lead, Liu and Sibley (2012a) write that "History can be regarded representationally as a narrative, with events signalling a plot

unfolding over time, characters symbolizing group values in action, and themes recurring that can enable group agendas for the future.”

From the perspective of a more qualitative and critical psychology, Schiff (2007) has theorized that “an ideological commitment to the priority of intention and meaning in human lives and interactions is fundamental to the definition of narrative psychology.” (p. 29). He reasons that “Narrative psychology must take a critical stance toward mainstream methods of study and the production of scientific knowledge. However, I am convinced that we must argue that narrative is scientific” (p. 31). Schiff (2007), as Josselson (2007) before him in the same volume, is not concrete about how narrative is to be scientific, but he does offer a tantalizing glimpse of connection between empiricism and hermeneutics that we will draw upon in this chapter as a unifying theme: “Quantitative methods can only describe co-occurrence. We might have a notion that a person is thinking about something and know that they also think other things (i.e., they are correlated)... Using quantitative data, it is just speculation to say that we know how these thoughts fit in a person’s life or why they think the way that they do. In order to observe this, as science mandates, you would have to talk to a person and let them make the connections for you” (p. 35).

It appears that it is disciplinary lines, marked by methodological and epistemological issues are what separate SRH from the literature originating in sociology on collective remembering and social memory, and Schiff (2007) and Josselson’s (2007) critical approach to narrative psychology. Therefore it would be useful to comment on some of the strengths and limitations of using quantitative data to investigate narrative phenomena. This is illustrated by research on social representations of world history. As Schiff (2007) argues, quantitative data is good at detecting relationships between variables, but it has difficulty articulating how a particular relationship between two variables plays a role in the life-world of a person, thus giving rise to accounts of agency and the potential for social and personal change. In other words, the mechanical worldview of mainstream psychology, dominated by relationships between variables, is not necessarily *meaningful* to an individual or a cultural group seeking narrative agency over outcomes in their lives. I would like to propose that what Liu and Sibley (2012a) have described as “ordinal representations” of history may be considered as empirical building blocks that offer both foundations and constraint for the work of inter-subjective interpretation. They might be used as a link between empiricist and hermeneutic lines of scholarship.

USING ORDINAL (NAMING PREVALENCE) REPRESENTATIONS AS A TOOL FOR NARRATIVE INQUIRY

My work in SRH began with a method of open-ended nominations asking participants for answers to two questions: 1) What are the most important events in [world/national] history, and 2) Which figures have had the most impact on [world/national] history, good or bad? Around the world, in studies spanning 24 societies (e.g., Liu *et al.*, 2005, 2009), the answers that come back are typically simple one or two word answers that are easy to code into discrete categories that are tallied and presented in tables listing in rank order the 10 most frequently nominated events and figures for a given sample (see Table 1 for example).

Such ordinal representations are highly descriptive, but also amenable to detailed analysis for such quantifiable characteristics as thematic content, region of origin, time, etc. They have been widely disseminated in publications in cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Liu *et al.*, 2005, 2009), international psychology (e.g., Liu, 1999; Cabecinhas, Liu, Licata, Klein, Mendes, Feijó & Niyubahwe, 2011), and Asian (e.g., Liu, Lawrence, Ward, & Abraham, 2002; Huang, Liu, & Chang, 2004; Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011), and European social psychology (Liu, Wilson, McClure & Higgins, 1999). They offer generalizations about a population from which inferences can be drawn with regard to narrative phenomenology. Liu *et al.* (1999) for example, reported that New Zealanders, university aged and older, of both European and Maori origins (4 tables were provided), typically nominated events in the nation's history that could be characterized as bicultural (involving the nation's two founding peoples) or liberal (concerning the rise of European modes of civilization in NZ). As scientists, Liu *et al.* (1999) conjectured that these events could be easily configured as either a bicultural narrative (with interactions between Maori and Europeans forming the basis for the nation's current social contract) or as a liberal narrative (with the rise of European modes of civilization being viewed as the inevitable or best of all worlds).

In the publications referenced above, relatively little has been theorized about the narrative phenomenology of ordinal representations; in accord with epistemological and methodological conventions prevailing in psychology, the data have been presented more as descriptive facts than as suggestive evidence for underlying processes of social construction (see White, 1981 for example). Here, we highlight some of the narrative processes involved in the generation of ordinal representations and their subsequent interpretation.

Table 1 represents data extracted from previously published data from Liu *et al.* (2009) in the most important events and figures in world history, presented in a new context. Liu and Sibley (2012a) note that "The key features of this ordinal representation are 1) it establishes nominal prevalence: the names of important historical figures [or events] are prominent, because the extent of people nominating them is displayed both numerically (in terms of percentages) and ordinally.... 2) It is contextual: the names of the figures [and events] nominated by different societies are in close visual proximity with one another, inviting comparison and interpretation". The spatial configuration provided here highlights the narrative inference potential of the data by putting the ordinal representations of figures and events together. In the original paper, these data were presented as analytically separate, but here, the goal is to invite narrative inferences about the data.

China and India were chosen because they are the two most populous states in the world, and two rising non-Western powers that history has not been kind to over the past 200 years. Events are spatially represented at the top of Table 1 because in our view it is easier to grasp the plot of a narrative first and then see how the figures fit into the temporal structure of the plot. What is most salient to my eyes in Table 1 is that all of the events nominated are within the last two hundred or so years, possibly following the arc of a narrative from colonization to decolonization. I shall narrate these events as a sequence, rather than in the ordinal form of Table 1.

Rank	China (N=115)	Pct	Eval	India (N=100)	Pct	Eval
1	WW II	81%	2.0	WW II	61%	2.8
2	Foundation of PR China	48%	5.3	9-11 WTC	49%	3.1
3	WW I	40%	2.2	Indian Independence	42%	6.3
4	Industrial Revolution	36%	5.2	WW I	37%	2.8
5	Technological Development	33%	5.5	Cold War	20%	4.0
6	Fall of Communism	24%	3.2	India-Pakistan War	18%	3.7
7	Man on Moon	20%	5.5	both World Wars	15%	2.5
8	Colonization	20%	4.3	Partition India-Pakistan	15%	2.6
9	Sino-Japanese War	17%	4.2	Iraq War	14%	2.7
10	Atomic Bomb	16%	3.0	Asian Tsunami	14%	2.4
10=	Opium War	16%	2.2			

Rank	China (N=115)	Pct	Eval	India (N=100)	Pct	Eval
1	Mao	64%	4.7	Gandhi	75%	4.9
2	Hitler	58%	3.0	Hitler	61%	3.6
3	Einstein	42%	5.5	Osama bin Laden	25%	5.6
4	Marx	40%	4.7	Mother Teresa	22%	5.8
5	Deng Xiaoping	36%	5.6	Bhagat Singh	19%	6.2
6	Napoleon	28%	4.6	Shivaji Bhonsle	18%	5.8
7	Zhou Enlai	21%	5.8	Einstein	16%	5.8
8	Newton	16%	4.9	Subhas C. Bose	11%	6.8
9	Sun Yatsen	10%	5.3	Lincoln	16%	5.6
10	Confucius	10%	5.0	George Bush Jr	11%	2.0

Table 1. The most important events and figures in world history according to university students in China and India (adapted from Liu *et al.*, 2009; evaluations ranged from 1- extremely negative to 7- extremely positive)

The Chinese sequence begins with the Industrial Revolution in Europe, followed by the Opium War of 1839-1940 in which Great Britain used the technological might of its navy to promote its commercial interests and impose a humiliating defeat on China. Colonization is a more general phenomenon, but takes place in China throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, with the European powers and then Japan taking turns at cutting territorial concessions out of China. Following World War I, Japan becomes the main colonizer of China. Open warfare erupts in 1937 with the Sino-Japanese War that leads directly into World War II. WWII ends with the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After WWII comes the Foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. America puts a Man on the Moon in 1969, and the financial and technological edge of the West leads to the Fall of Soviet-led Communism in 1990. Technological Development occurs throughout the 20th and 21st centuries in China. This is a highly *interpretable* series of events, with the opening move being the Industrial Revolution in the West leading to the colonization of China. The technical climax of this narrative is victory in WWII and the Foundation of the PRC soon after. Technological development is a driving force of the entire plot, from colonization to decolonization.

The Indian events nominated do not follow a clear sequence as the Chinese events do. They begin temporally with WWI and II, moving to Indian Independence, the Partition

of India and Pakistan, and the Wars between India and Pakistan. This core sequence lacks an opening move (i.e., the colonization of India by Great Britain), but the technical climax, as in the Chinese sequence, is the foundation of the current state (by far the most highly evaluated event in both lists). The Indians also nominated the Cold War, 9-11, the Iraq War, and the Asian Tsunami, a set of events signaling diachronic salience rather than a synchronic and integrated story structure. The proximity of the Chinese ordinal representations gives the Indian representations the *feeling*, or an inter-subjective interpretation, of being less story-structured.

It is highly salient that in neither list is there even one event nominated from the glorious ancient histories of the two of the world's oldest civilizations. When examining historical figures, one in ten of the Chinese sample do nominate Confucius, and another 16% Newton (representative of science and technological development), but all the other nominations for both states are historical figures active in the last two centuries. The most prevalent nominations are for Mao and Gandhi, who are probably regarded as the figures most responsible for the foundation of their current respective states. They are accompanied by the most famous figure in social representations of history around the world, Adolf Hitler (Liu *et al.*, 2009). Most of the other figures nominated can be narrated around the technical climax of the founding of the contemporary state, and for the most part are associated with politics and war.

The choice of ordinal representations for two nations that share similar arcs of historical development facilitates interpretive moves centered around emphasizing coherence and similarity. But alternatively, Liu and Sibley (2012a) selected ordinal representations of figures from six highly diverse societies, making the extraction of meaning more difficult and obscuring the possibilities for generalization. This highlighted the open-endedness of the research enterprise, offering an answer to Josselson's (2007) query about "how to advance to the level of theory without reifying or losing the richness of the narrative data base?" (p. 8). Liu and Sibley (2012a) argued that such a "technique of cut and paste... is only possible after the accumulation of representational data from multiple sources, and can always be revisited by adding samples (including using within nation demographics as age or gender to undermine or delimit previous conclusions) and juxtaposing other representations to give new interpretive insight." The lack of ancient history and mythological elements so characteristic of broader narratives of Indian history (see for example Nehru, 1946; Sen & Wagner, 2005) is almost certainly a product of the narrow university sample used by Liu *et al.*, (2009). The Indian ordinal representation presented here begs for more qualitative orientation in terms of meaning and more quantitative contextualizing in terms of less educated samples.

The level of reification involved in Liu *et al.*'s (2009) conclusion from the representation of world history in 24 societies that world history was "a story about politics and war", centered around the event of World War II and the individual Hitler, focused on the near past resulting in Eurocentrism tempered by nationalism is probably unacceptable to qualitative theorists like Josselson and Schiff.

This certainly glosses over the mythological elements of Indian historical representations mentioned previously, and might not account for minority views within a given state.

Liu and Sibley's (2012a) comment that Liu *et al.* (2009) "were unable to specify the temporal structure of the plot or detail interactions between the figures within such a story: the inferential leaps required for such a construction fly too high over the data to provide much clarity, and need to be complemented by other, probably more qualitative methods" might be more acceptable to qualitative narrative theorists.

In the current example, a story structure can be inferred from the Chinese ordinal representations that is coherent and largely congruent with the PRC government's emphasis on pragmatic technological development (Coase & Wang, 2012). It may be thus actively produced by hegemonic institutions characteristic of a relatively authoritarian state (see Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010). From such a base, the analyst could examine the social forces responsible for the contrasting story structure or lack thereof in the Chinese and Indian samples reported by Liu *et al.* (2009). At a more micro-level, such ordinal representations could be used as conversational elements in interviews or focus groups analysing the impact of Chinese historical master narratives on the lives of individuals. The narratives inferred from them could be implicated in choices in people's lives like joining the armed forces or exhibiting a high level of patriotism in dealing with the disputed Senkaku or Diaoyutai Islands claimed by China and Japan (in such an enterprise, ordinal representations of world history from Japan, reported in Liu *et al.* (2005), that studiously avoid mention of Japan's colonizing actions in China and Korea could also be brought into the conversation). In such a research enterprise, the ordinal representations become points of dialogue rather than descriptive facts, employed in the full awareness that their meaning changes with context, but nonetheless signify some degree of inter-subjective consensus that is worth talking through to reveal the connection between the individual and the group (see Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007 for example).

BEYOND NARRATIVE INFERENCES AND TOWARDS AN EPIDEMIOLOGY OF REPRESENTATIONAL PROFILES

I have not in the main pursued the forms of qualitative inquiry suggested above, but I would like to see their potential addressed in the future. In recent years, I have rather been more involved in addressing questions central to cross-cultural and social psychology. One of the driving forces behind cross-cultural psychology is to ascertain whether any given pattern of thought, action, or emotion is universal versus culture-specific. To answer this question requires further quantification rather than further qualification of the ordinal data described previously. In recent years, my colleagues and I (Liu *et al.*, 2012, Hanke *et al.*, 2013) have developed the world history survey as a quantitative measure based on the ordinal data from Liu *et al.* (2005, 2009).

Any person or event making the list of the top ten events or figures in two or more of the 24 societies surveyed in published data on ordinal representations became an item for evaluation as to importance and valence. An inventory of 40 historical figures and 40 events was generated using this method, with some slight additions for theoretical purposes (e.g., Saladin was added because Islamic figures were under-represented in the inventory, Bill Gates was added as a symbol of recent technological advances, Global Warming was added

as a cautionary item about technological progress). Data was collected from university students in 30 to 40 societies using the World History Survey. The standard empirical techniques used to analyse these data are detailed in Liu *et al.* (2012) and described in less technical terms in Liu & Sibley (2012a). They need not concern us further here. What is worthy of consideration, however, is the statistical technique we turned to after failing to find evidence of substantial universality in ratings of either events (Liu *et al.*, 2012) or figures (Hanke *et al.*, 2013).

A cornerstone of social representations theory is that different communities may hold different, or perhaps even contested, social representations about the same topic (Moscovici, 1988; Doise *et al.*, 1993). This is especially likely when looking at cross-cultural data, but it is typical of points of view even within a single modern society. Homogeneity and fixity, as Moscovici (1961) has noted, are not typical of modern societies. A major question for the theory is thus the extent to which conventional statistical techniques such as factor analysis, which presumes a single continuous and normally distributed latent dimension underlying responses, are appropriate. Moscovici (1988) has argued for hegemonic (widely shared and agreed upon), polemical (opposing views in different communities), and emancipated (different views, but not in conflict with one another in different communities) representations; only hegemonic representations would obviously be fit for such statistics if not only the mean scores, but the structure of relationships between items differs across different populations. That is, polemical and emancipated representations might differ qualitatively in different populations, in which case it would be appropriate to use mixture modelling techniques, such as Latent Class Analysis (LCA).

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is a method that can be used to build typologies of response profiles where the group structure emerges empirically. That is, LCA can determine, based purely on the data rather than a priori assumptions, the likely number of subgroups (or different representational profiles) hidden within the data. The subgroups inferred from the data then represent a categorical latent variable (that is a set of distinct categories or subgroups of people) that are hypothesized to produce the overall pattern observed in the data (see Hagenaars & McCutcheon, 2002). These unobserved subgroups would be hypothesized to underlie polemical or emancipated representations; they might be *associated* with a priori groupings like nationality, ethnicity or age, but they are *not* identical to these known subgroups. They are latent classes, unlike the a priori groupings of data described previously for India and China. Sibley and Liu (in press) describe representational profiles as “discretely measurable and divergent patterns of attitudes that are bound together within a system of meaning used by that set of people to make sense of and communicate within a particular social context”.

To illustrate, Hanke *et al.* (2013) used LCA of ratings of positive versus negative evaluation of key figures in world history selected from a subset of the historical figures described previously. As can be seen in Figure 1, the four profiles each identified a statistically different pattern of evaluations of the historical figures in a complex but meaningful manner. Hanke *et al.* (2013) found the two most prevalent profiles in Western cultures (composing 90% of the sample) were Secular and Religious Idealists, who both rated Hitler, Saddam, and

Osama bin Laden very low, and scientific and democratic leaders and humanitarians very high. Secular Idealists were less extreme in their rating than Religious Idealists, and also rated religious founding figures moderately rather than very positively. Latin American and PostCommunist societies from Eastern Europe had similar profiles, but these made up only 75% rather than 90% of the total sample.

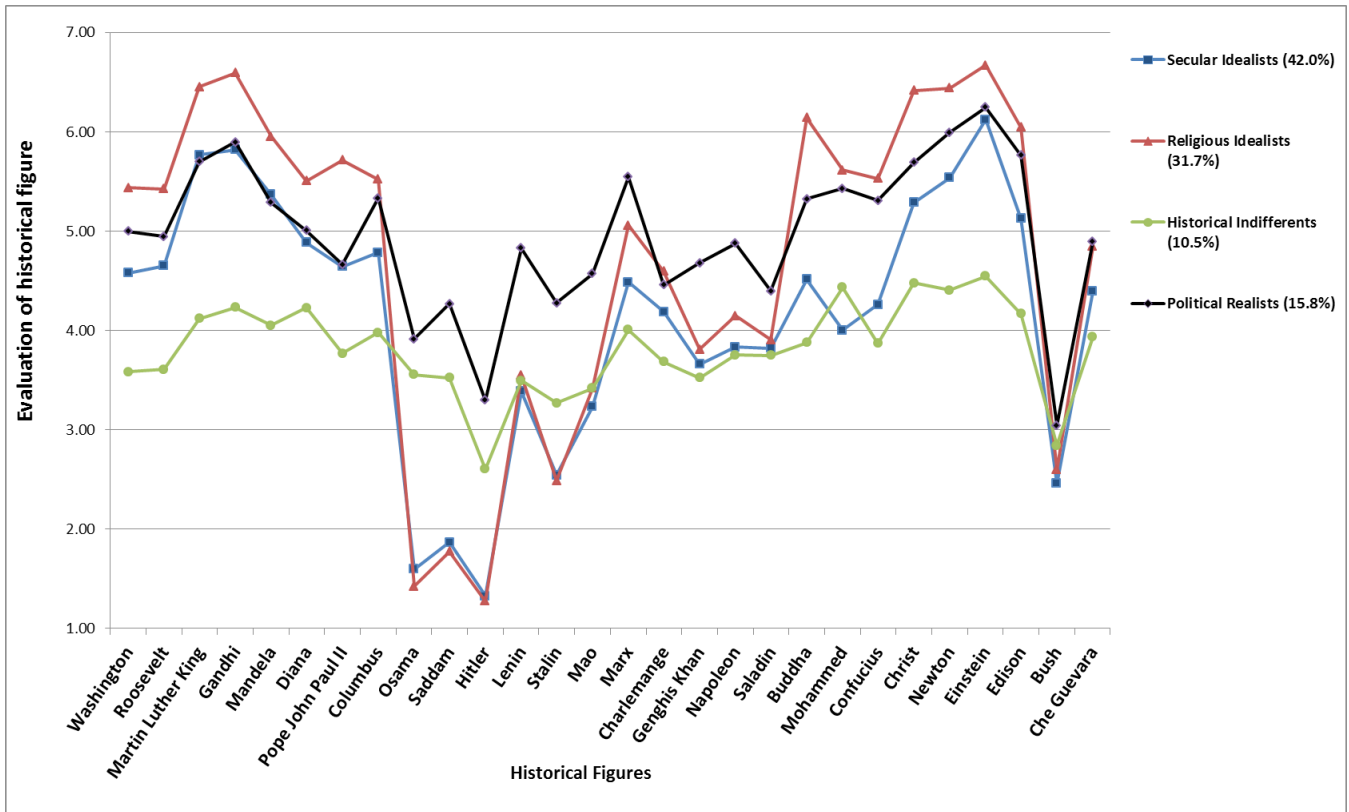


Figure 1. Estimated means for a four-profile Latent Class Analysis evaluation of historical figures (from Hanke *et al.*, 2013; evaluations ranged from 1-extremely negative to 7 extremely positive).

In Asian and Islamic societies, two other representational profiles were also common: Political Realists, and Historical Indifferents. Political Realists were not as harsh in rating dictators, generals and terrorists. They admired Communists like Marx and Lenin. But their ratings of the heroes of science, democracy, and human rights highly, just like the Idealists. Citizens in the developing world, where survival might be a regular concern (see Inglehart & Baker, 2000), are probably more likely see the world as a place where powerful and authoritarian figures are necessary in order to maintain societal security. The most typical profiles in Asian societies were Political Realists and Secular Idealists – and these may be compatible (or emancipated) representations. Islamic societies had many people classified as Historical Indifferents – that is, most of their ratings hovered around the midpoint, likely because few of the figures rated in the World History Survey came from the Muslim world.

Mapping the causes of the distribution of representational profiles in global society and tracking longitudinal changes in them is a vibrant topic for future research that Sibley and Liu (in press) describe as “an epidemiology of representations”. The representational profile approach using LCA has the potential to solve major problems that have troubled

empirical approaches to the study of social representations since the seminal work of Doise, Clémence, and Lorenzi-Cioldi (1993) identified three basic principles of SRs. LCA has the ability to 1) describe the extent of commonality or prevalence of a representation, while simultaneously 2) mapping alternatives and positioning an individual precisely vis-à-vis these alternatives while without relying on pre-existing social categories. The representational profiles that emerge from LCA can then 3) be mapped onto other systems, including institutional, relational, occupational, or demographic systems.

Furthermore, LCA is an eminently contextual tool, just as representational profiles are contextual concepts. For instance, if we were to do an LCA on Asian countries only or on China only, even given the same set of historical figures we would not anticipate the same or even similar representational profiles emerging. Each profile is part of a system of communication, and conceptually the profiles presented in Figure 1 are part of the context of global discourses about heroes and villains in world history. Different conversational contexts and systems of meaning are likely to be prevalent at the regional versus national or local levels.

Hence, understanding the situated meaning systems articulated in these profiles would be an important topic for narrative inquiry. First of all, it took considerable wrangling and discussion for our research team just to name the profiles. This is an eminently narrative task. Furthermore, the pattern of evaluations for each representational profile of historical figures is likely to be associated with different narratives, like those of social and economic development versus security, for example. Each profile could be unpackaged into more finely tuned discourses: for example, are historical indifferents truly indifferent about history, or is it just the selected figures they are indifferent about? Or is it the survey task they are indifferent towards? In what conversational settings and on what topics are the Secular and Religious Idealists polemical versus compatible with one another? One might imagine that during the American Presidential Election, for example, that Republicans might invoke heroes and villains in a manner consistent with the Religious Idealist representational profile, whereas Democrats might adopt positions consistent with a Secular Idealist profile. But after 9-11, both these classes were probably united against the common enemy of so-called “Islamic terrorism”. Is one group more likely than another to invoke historical arguments to justify current political behaviour? Finally, the combination of Political Realists and Secular Idealists were most prevalent in Asia – is this part of the reason for the region’s spectacular economic advancement in recent decades, the finely balanced debates between groups with different ways of looking at figures in world history, but each with important elements to add to a society’s success? And are there particular social settings where these configurations of ideas about historical figures are likely to be brought out? Are there particular story forms (including visual media) where these figures are likely to be invoked?

These are hopefully exciting questions for future research, pitched at a finer and more theoretically precise level than the narrative inferences described in the previous section for ordinal representations. The critical theoretical element of all this is of course, context, both in terms of external, ecological or environmental contexts, and inter-subjective, socially shared contexts like narrative formats or stories.

CONCLUSIONS

SRH have been a vibrant area of research in recent years, but their study has been restricted mainly to the methodology and epistemology of cross-cultural and social psychology. With the growing interest in narrative inquiry and social memory across the social sciences and humanities, there is no reason why more qualitative methods grounded in more social constructionist epistemologies could not make important and fresh new contributions to the area. SRs are squarely situated between the individual, their groups, and society, and thus epistemologically and theoretically have much in common with what is valued in narrative inquiry. The empirical building blocks assembled by SRT are just that, building blocks rather than finished, discrete products, and I for one would welcome qualitative researchers making use of them as tools for refining their narrative inquiries. It is my hope that this chapter goes some ways towards stimulating interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary conversations and collaborations in the future.

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