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## The past and present of triangulation and social representations theory: A crossed history

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines some of the main processes in the evolution of triangulation in qualitative research (QR) and social representations theory (SRT) in social psychology in recent decades. By adopting a cross-historical approach, we seek to outline how SRT can strengthen its epistemological approach by embracing triangulation, and to highlight that an examination of past and current debates on SRT can provide relevant insights for QR in psychology. We show how, progressively over time, in both fields (SRT and QR), discrepancies between data obtained by different methods were no longer considered a threat to scientific validity of the data but as a way to deepen understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, developing systematic triangulation, which combines the various epistemological, theoretical, and methodological backgrounds of different methods (data collection and/or analysis), enables SRT to fulfill its potential even more in contributing to a *societal* social psychology. Reciprocally, SRT provides a framework in which QR can develop some of its full potential, for example, in the areas of multi-method studies, multidisciplinary, and engagement with social change.

### KEYWORDS

Social representations;  
triangulation; sociogenesis;  
cognitive polyphasia;  
validity

This paper focuses on past and present definitions of triangulation, broadly defined as the use of multiple methods, and its more recent use in social representations theory (SRT) in France. Adopting a cross-historical approach to the concept of triangulation in qualitative research (QR) and to SRT, this article highlights the epistemological issues and their management in both spheres of research, first simultaneously and then jointly, in order to demonstrate how SRT and QR can continue to mutually strengthen each other.

Psychology is at the forefront of the epistemological and methodological battle opposing qualitative and quantitative methods. Situated at the intersection of social and natural sciences, psychology can be regarded as one of the historical catalysts for the construction of the divide between the natural sciences and humanities. The former is defined as nomothetic, seeking for explaining and resorting to experimental methods, while the latter is

considered idiographic, seeking for understanding through qualitative methods (Bouterse & Karstens, 2015). The recent formal entry of QR in the American Psychological Association may reorganise the divide and compel psychology to consider from a fresh perspective how some of the field's "founding fathers" (e. g., Wundt, Piaget) employed both qualitative and quantitative methods (Brinkmann, Jacobsen &, Kristiansen, 2014). Moreover, it opens the way for QR to assume its full potential: combining multiple methods and endorsing multidisciplinary, and contributing to social change by understanding and diminishing the boundaries between social groups (Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015).

Certainly, the tensions characterizing psychology are all the more accentuated - and therefore best observed - in social psychology, a discipline situated at the intersection between the individual and the social. Indeed, on the one hand, social psychology is defined as a nomothetic and experimental science where the social is an external context in which individuals act. On the other hand, some authors have developed a more *societal* social psychology, considering the very object of the discipline as the study of the inherent conflict between and the mutual constitution of the social and the individual (Moscovici, 2012, 2013). Historically, the proponents of the first approach were almost American, whereas the second was developed by Europeans. SRT, among other theories (Himmelweit & Gaskell, 1990), has contributed to the development of this more *societal* social psychology and constitutes an epistemological turning point in the discipline (Lopes & Gaskell, 2015). SRT primarily looks at social knowledge and practices, how they are constructed, and how they evolve when moving from one lifeworld to another.

The first summary of research practices in the emerging field of social representations (SR) was outlined by Jodelet in 1982 (cf. Jodelet, 2015), laying the groundwork for a socio-genetic and anthropological perspective. At that time, these studies were situated in "the area of study of SR in the real environment.". This socio-genetic approach is characterised by two specific features: a) the type of objects chosen as targets of representation (situated, holistic, or complex objects or systems, e.g., a scientific theory, culture, women, children, health, body, justice, etc.) and; b) the methods for studying them (oral, spontaneous, interviews, pictorial, documentary, epistolary, etc.) (Kalampalikis & Apostolidis, 2019).

Despite the fact that social psychology is multifaceted in practice, a recent study clearly highlights that *societal* social psychology is largely underrepresented in one of the main European journals on social psychology. This absence creates an image of social psychology as being exclusively experimental (Rizzoli, et al, 2018). This underrepresentation can be explained by different reasons, one being that despite the fact that QR occupies an important place in research on SR, the epistemological and methodological debates surrounding QR were ignored by social psychology for a long time

(Flick, 2001; Flick & Foster, 2008), leading to any recognition of the value of QR in social psychology being excluded. This is not to say that these debates were not taken seriously by SRT right from its beginning. For example, most studies in the field implemented different methods in the same research study in order to strengthen their study design, all the while ignoring the concept of triangulation and its evolution (Caillaud & Flick, 2016), and ignoring the epistemological and ontological debates that characterizes QR and its inherent diversity (Wertz, 2014; Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014). Furthermore, SRT, and more broadly *societal* social psychology, may strengthen its position by tackling these epistemological debates and by fully assuming its methodological position in terms of triangulation.

This article seeks to: 1- outline how SRT can strengthen its epistemological and theoretical approaches by embracing triangulation and 2- to highlight that an examination of past and current debates on SRT can provide relevant insights for QR in psychology. The originality of this paper lies in the fact that it pursues these goals by adopting a cross-historical perspective on triangulation, a concept stemming from QR, and SRT. We will first explain the epistemological context nestled within the origins of each approach, (first historical period), how both approaches developed before they finally met (second period), and how their encounter led to their mutually reinforcement of epistemological positions (third period). As we will see, in both fields, the epistemological turning point was not immediate. It involved a long process whereby researchers first had to make do with the, methodological tools available to them, trying to meet the scientific criteria of their respective discipline at the time, and then little by little engaging ever more in a new epistemological perspective. We will present different published studies which will illustrate concretely how QR was and is practiced in the field of SRT when triangulation is employed. Finally, we will discuss 1-the possibilities offered by triangulation to enable SRT to become fully engaged in *societal* social psychology and 2- how SRT can help QR reach some of its full potential.

## **The first period: time for new proposals**

### **1.1 The initial studies**

In France, in the 1950s, vivid tensions opposed the proponents of an experimental psychology and a more philosophical psychology interested in psychoanalysis (Ohayon, 1956). Moscovici, a student from Daniel Lagache, partisan of the unity of psychology, embarked on large-scale research in order to understand how a new scientific theory (psychoanalysis) moved into the sphere of everyday knowledge and was appropriated by different social groups : SRT was born. During the “founding moment,” the first proponents of SRT “tried to do

two things at once: to direct social psychology epistemologically as a discipline and, at the same time, give it a specific subject matter, an epistemological horizon, deepening the theory on social knowledge” (Kalampalikis, 2013, p. 8). Indeed, SRT seeks to understand how the multitudinous forms of knowledge and beliefs with which we deal every day are the result of numerous transformations taking place during social interactions. Moscovici later explained that in order to counter the criticism that everyday knowledge lacks logic, “the only way to understand everyday knowledge and beliefs was to reimmerge them in the actual social laboratory where they take shape, namely the social setting of communication” (1988, p. 215). Furthermore, Moscovici (1961a) considered that “a study of a population of individuals and a content analysis of a population of documents are the techniques best suited to the scientific examination of social representations” (1961a, p. 15). He therefore used three methodological tools (the diary-questionnaire, the interview, and press analysis) on a large stratified sample. Moscovici developed a whole list of arguments for the need to combine psychosocial methods in the *in vivo* analysis of a contemporary phenomenon, by borrowing group observation techniques from the fields of anthropology and ethnography. The presentation of his results was organized into two separate parts: results from the interviews and the questionnaires in the first part, and the results from a media analysis in the second.

By situating the processes of knowledge and belief transformation in the *social setting of communication*, Moscovici called for a holistic approach to the phenomenon under study, and therefore used observational methods rather than an experimental method, the latter only enabling partial analysis of some very specific elements of knowledge transformation. Very concerned by the issue of validity and the shortcomings of observation, in his afterword, Moscovici again underlined the lack of *technical* solutions to explore the processes by which humans construct their everyday knowledge and beliefs. In his opinion (1961a, p. 22), the limits of observational methods (such as interviews, surveys, and media analyses) may be overcome by comparison with other similar studies or by confirmation through experimentation. Finally, this research enabled Moscovici to draw up some of the general principles that characterize everyday knowledge and common sense, principles that still guide and inspire social psychologists in this field today. Cognitive polyphasia, which we present later, is one of these.

Although the study by Moscovici (1961a) on *Psychoanalysis* is widely quoted, few readers are aware of his second study conducted in parallel with his thesis. The study attempted to provide keys to understanding the phenomenon of industrial reconversion within a small group (Moscovici, 1961b). The researchers investigated the role that the opinions and representations of the workers played in this process of conversion from a traditional, rewarding activity (hat-making factory) to a new activity (plastic panels) following the

demands of the economic market. This analysis required a monographic and multi-methodological approach: a) on-site observations, individual and group interviews with trade union representatives, managers, and technicians; b) a diary-questionnaire leading to individual interviews of workers at home, and a questionnaire for these same workers; and c) an economic and socio-demographic analysis of the region.

For the first time, Herzlich (1973), in her PhD's study on SR of health and illness, used exclusively qualitative methods by borrowing methods from sociology and anthropology (Herzlich, 2017). In the preface of Herzlich's book, Moscovici (1973), who supervised the PhD, warned the readers that they would "find no questionnaires, scales or statistical tests" and that "sophisticated methods may be, in a technical sense, more professionally *respectable*, but they have been less well adapted to the object of their inquiry and therefore make a less genuine contribution to the progress of science" (Moscovici, 1973, pp. xiii--xiv; see also Farr, 1977).

Therefore, since the very beginning of SRT, it has posed theoretical and methodological challenges which researchers try to tackle using different methods concomitantly.

## **1.2 Triangulation or how to manage the tensions between causal inferences and symbolic interactionism**

During effectively the same period, yet in a different geographical and academic setting (Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois), Denzin (1970/1978) introduced the concept of triangulation into the debate on the validity of QR. Although QR methods had been used for a long time in psychology, they were still marginalized (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Their reappearance was due to the lack of suitably of quantitative methods to answer certain research questions and a lack of relevant results using quantitative methods (Patton, 2002; Jodelet, 2003; Del Rio Carral & Santiago-Delefosse, 2017). Furthermore, in a context where quantitative methods and, - at least in psychology, - the experimental method, constituted the gold standards (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Willig et al, 2008), the revival of qualitative methods soon brought their validity into question. This led to criteria from quantitative research being applied for the first time to QR.

Denzin (1970/1978) developed the idea that every research method is a type of symbolic interaction (including experimental methods) and should therefore be analysed as an observational encounter. Two social interactants, - the observer and the observed, - meet in a specific situation during a time sequence and develop a relationship. Echoing Moscovici's theory, each research method creates, to a certain extent, a specific *social setting of communication*. All the elements of this encounter introduce potentially "distorting factors" which the researcher



needs to be aware of. In fact, according to Denzin, all research methods must provide answers to causal inferences and should therefore pay attention to rival causal factors. Furthermore, Denzin introduced new method evaluation guidelines without contesting the old ones: “by wedding the two (*the scientific method and the interactionist point of view*) a degree of rigor and precision may be added to the final set of evaluative principles” (1978, p. 21). Based on both sets of principles, he further described the strengths and limitations of the different methods as follows: experimentation is best suited to the principles of causal analysis whereas participant observation-based methods rank high on the principles of symbolic interactionism.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, as no method perfectly fits both principles, each research study should combine different methods, in order that the limitations of one method be counterbalanced by the strengths of another. Scientific validity is situated at the intersection between the two sets of principles. This *balance-checklist* approach of validity is termed triangulation (in reference to Webb et al, 1966). The term originates from the military and navigation contexts and describes a method to situate an object’s *exact* position by using at least two known points. Denzin also referred to Campbell and Fiske’s (1959) multitrait-multimethod matrix, (a combination of different methods measuring the same trait), in order to increase validity, and this created links between triangulation and correlation: results from one method are valid if they are similar (i.e., correlated) to results obtained using another method. Therefore, Denzin clearly developed triangulation as a strategy of validity. In the last part of his book, Denzin suggested different types of triangulation and provided some guidelines for planning triangulation.

To conclude, during this first historical period, both Denzin and Moscovici outlined the limitations of the experimental method, highlighting that it lacked the social dimension. Denzin’s point of departure was a reflection of methodology. He considered that it was imperative to take into account the specific social situation in which data are produced. Moscovici’s starting point was a new research question (the transformation of social knowledge). He called for the development of methods able to support analysis of the social setting of communication in which this phenomenon occurs. Moreover, both authors agreed that scientific validity can be achieved by comparing the results from different methods, and that valid results are therefore convergent.

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1. We use the terminology employed by Denzin himself: experiment is defined as a specific research design while observation is defined as a field strategy combining document analysis, interviewing, direct participation and introspection. Furthermore, observation is not, in his view, a method of data collection that can be used in an experimental design.



## The second period: developing a deeper and broader understanding

### 2.1 *Triangulation in Debate*

The criteria used for quantitative research methods soon proved to be unsuitable when judging the credibility of QR (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1965): QR looks at the points of view of the actors themselves, in the way they construct and continuously transform their social world. This is not to say that physical reality does not exist. However, QR does not seek to discover *one real reality*. Rather, it aims to understand *numerous social realities*, their constructions, and transformations. Validity criteria from quantitative research are not transposable to QR because of epistemological and ontological differences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Various attempts were made to develop suitable validity criteria specific to QR (for a review see Santiago-Delefosse et al, 2015). However, the wide diversity of QR made it impossible to propose well-defined criteria without the risk of excluding certain qualitative approaches. Furthermore, strategies to enhance *quality* were put forward instead of strategies for validity (Barbour, 2001; Parker, 2004; Rolfe, 2006; Flick, 2008).

Thus, criticism grew against the initial conceptualisation of triangulation by Denzin. Despite its interactionist approach, the first definition of triangulation postulated that the same object/phenomenon can be studied by different methods. It assumed the existence of one reality and ignored the fact that each method constructs the object under study (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). Despite eventually abandoning the idea of validity, Denzin (1989) still faced paradoxes (Flick, 1992a, b): he considered that triangulation seeks *deeper understanding* yet that it would raise sociologists above the *personal biases* that stem from single methodologies; interactionism seeks to *develop interpretations* and not to test hypotheses in a context where *objective reality* cannot be captured. Finally, at that time, triangulation was defined as the combination of two or more research strategies in the study of the *same empirical units*. It was used in a pragmatic way (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), i.e., implementing research methods that best suited the research questions at hand without considering their epistemological compatibility.

### 2.2 *Developing a sociogenetic approach to SR*

At the same time, in France, in the field of SR, the use of different methods was envisaged from a new perspective (Chombard de Lauwe, 1971; Kaës, 1968; Milgram & Jodelet, 1976). Denise Jodelet (1985, 1989, 2015) conducted a study on mental illness in Ainay-le-Château, a community where people with mental diseases were placed in foster homes and supervised by the hospital at the end of the 1970s. It is the emblematic example of the use of a multiple and interdisciplinary methodology in SRT, combining four types of approaches: ethnological (participant observation, community contacts),

sociological (surveys on the hospital institution, on all centres accommodating patients, on the placement and its function, and on residents' lifestyles), psychosocial (individual interviews with the people looking after the patients and sometimes with the patients themselves, observation of the interactions with the patients), and historical (analysis of hospital reports, press, etc.). Jodelet defended adopting a methodological stance which was multidisciplinary in nature and which was similar in style to the "community monograph" (1989). This approach, focussing on a limited social unit, aimed to understand "a system of representations which can be developed around its conditions of production and function" (1986). One of the best known results from this work is the apparent contradiction between the discourse about mental health (considered as not contagious) and observed daily practices (symbolic barriers being created between the mentally-ill and the host families as if the illness is contagious).

To conclude, during this second historical period, discrepancies and contradictions between results from different methods were no longer considered a threat to scientific validity, rather, they enabled a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied. More specifically, in order to gain more validity, methodological designs moved from a straightforward juxtaposition of methods to the pragmatic use of methods, in order to get a fuller picture of the phenomenon studied.

## **The third period: bringing SRT and triangulation together**

### **3.1 *The encounter***

Despite its multi-methodological approach, triangulation remained a foreign concept in the literature on SRT until 1992, when Sotirakopoulou & Breakwell called for the use of multi-methodological approaches in the study of the various components of SR (beliefs, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, feelings, images, etc.). Their strategy, similar to the pragmatic combination of methods, was to break down SR into different parts, with each of which is then investigated using different methods.

At the same time, Flick was developing his ideas about the concept of triangulation (1991, 1992a). He commented on the paper by Sotirakopoulou & Breakwell in a review about SRT. To our knowledge, this was the first time that triangulation was explicitly used in literature on SRT. Flick (1992b) turned to the proposal by Fielding and Fielding (1986), which suggested combining theories and methods carefully and purposefully for the purpose of adding greater breadth and depth to the analysis as opposed to pursuing objective truth or to a pragmatic approach. He suggested going a step further in order to face two critical questions: 1-how should results from different methods be gathered (especially when they are discrepancies and contradictions)? and 2-how different

are the methods which are used in reality? (e.g., interviews and surveys too provide access to feelings, knowledge, beliefs, etc.)? He found concrete solutions in Jodelet's work (1989): e.g. for example, the content of SR was investigated by interviews, while the processes of SR (their social effects and functions in social life) were investigated by observations. Also, Flick (1992a, b) suggested that the full potential for triangulation is reached when the different methods embody different theoretical perspectives: when constructing a research study design based on triangulation, the methods employed should be systematically combined because of the different theoretical perspectives they embody, and not (only) because of pragmatic reasons. Furthermore, their compatibility on an epistemological level should be considered to ensure that results stemming from different methods will be combined and not just accumulated. Accordingly, triangulation becomes a source of *extra knowledge*: the use of different methods reflecting different theoretical perspectives, seeking to include complementary and contradictory results. It is an *extension* of the research programme, not just a way to confirm results from other methods (Flick, 2017). Recently, he characterized this approach as a "systematic triangulation of perspectives" (Flick, 2017), in other words, it refers to the triangulation of methodologies including methods and their theoretical and epistemological backgrounds. This type of triangulation can take place on the level of data collection and/or data analysis (Caillaud, 2015). Figure 1 summarizes the main differences between the different approaches to triangulation.

### 3.2 Why is a systematic triangulation relevant for SRT?

Before outlining how triangulation can strengthen specific theoretical aspects, we shall first illustrate, through Kalampalikis's monographic study

	60-70	80	90
TRIANGULATION	triangulation as a strategy of validity	Pragmatic use of methods	Systematic triangulation of perspectives
- WHAT IS IT?	- a criteria of validity	- a step to more knowledge	- an extension of the research program
- HOW IS IT PLANNED?	- combining qualitative methods with quantitative methods	- a pragmatic combination of methods (one method per research question)	- systematic selection of methods and linking them to different theoretical perspectives
- HOW ARE RESULTS CONSIDERED?	- convergence as a criteria of validity	- discrepancies and contradictions should be included	- a source of extra knowledge

Figure 1. Main differences between the different triangulation approaches.

(2002, 2007, 2019), how a systematic triangulation is vital to developing a holistic approach to SR. The study deals with the antagonism over the use of a name between two national groups. The recent history of the dispute began with the independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991. This political act sparked strong reactions from its neighbouring country Greece, which refused to recognise it by that name, claiming that the name Macedonia belonged exclusively to Greek cultural heritage. Only in 2018 did the two countries come to a political agreement to change the name to the Republic of North Macedonia in order to facilitate its application to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. However, despite this recent diplomatic agreement, there is still a great deal of antagonism over the issue, with public protests and political fallout often featuring in the headlines, revealing quite a palpable identity and symbolic threat between the two national groups, effectively the perceived threat of identity indifferenciation. In Greece, these stormy reactions are expressed through the use of arguments based on the ancient history of the region.

Kalampalikis's study is inspired by the desire to find meaning, to analyse and to interpret a complex and intense social phenomenon. The demonstration essentially drew on accumulated and validated knowledge in qualitative social psychology studies while attempting, when necessary, to broaden the scope of its investigation to the other social disciplines of– anthropology, sociology, and history – with the exclusive aim of acquiring a better understanding of the reality of the phenomenon. Triangulation operated between the “objective” culture (press analysis), institutional culture (analysis of history school books), and “subjective” culture (association cards, semi-structured individual interviews, and focus groups). In this way, the author sought to have access to three different versions of the same phenomenon: the *subjective* version, the *institutional* version, and finally, the *historical* version. According to Jodelet (2007, p. 7), despite the injunctions of the pioneers in the discipline, Kalampalikis's study is one of these rare cases where a “psychosocial focus” (a psychosocial point of view) is applied to clarify history in the making.

Having looked at the epistemological reasons (holistic approach) why triangulation is relevant for SRT, we shall now turn our attention to theory-related aspects. The first aspect we shall discuss relates to cognitive polyphasia. As human beings belong to different groups, SR thrives on different sources of knowledge (common sense, scientific knowledge, ideology, etc.) and from different kinds of rationalities (Kalampalikis, 2007; Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008; Provencher, 2011). Therefore, it would seem that SR are constituted by contradictory knowledge. For example, in Jodelet's study (1989), the observed daily practice of excluding people with mental diseases is the expression of past common sense knowledge (mental illness is contagious), while in the discourse on illness, it is scientific/medical discourse which is

expressed (mental illness is not contagious). This juxtaposition of the two types of knowledge (scientific and common sense) reflects cognitive polyphasia. Furthermore, these apparent contradictions between both are expressed through the different dimensions of SR (e.g., discourse and practices). By providing the different theoretical perspectives each method embodies, Jodelet (1989) gives us with a framework for interpreting the functions which these apparent contradictions perform.

The second aspect to discuss is that SR are also defined as a process, i.e. as the construction and transformation of social knowledge. The genesis of SR occurs at different levels (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). Different methods of data collection and/or data analysis are appropriated at each of these levels. Triangulation is useful to theoretically interpret similarities and differences at these different levels.

One recent research study exploring the SR of gamete donation in France focused on the controversial question of anonymous donation (Doumergue, 2016). It was a multi-level study of the processes of symbolic appropriation of these practices at the institutional (specifically, analysis of parliamentary actors' discourses) and experiential (subjective accounts from interviews with people who became parents thanks to a sperm donation) levels. The analysis of the parliamentarian and parental constructions of anonymity highlighted the same common sense logic in both: the idea that if the child knew the donor's name, this would constitute kinship, or even make legally established filiation possible (which is not legally the case and does not come under the scope of the law in question). Therefore, the reified rationality of Law is supplanted by a logic of common sense, attached to the mainstream model of Western kinship, even in the parliamentarians' discourse: anonymity is built to protect this model, from the perspective of the exclusivity of kinship (no parents other than the parents). For two thirds of the parents in the study, anonymity ensured the total absence of the donor and established the father's paternity. The similarities between these two representational sociogeneses thus emphasize the almost hegemonic nature of the ideological and normative social expectations in terms of kinship. Furthermore, this outcome, which is the result of triangulation, ensures that the analysis of parental constructions cannot be simply reduced to the psychological level (where favouring anonymity would simply be interpreted in terms of incomplete mourning of male sterility).

Finally, triangulation can also be used to outline how SR of the same object by different groups bears the traces of specific group relationships and/or social identity stakes. A study conducted on the role played by psychological information in the evaluation and compensation of children's disabilities, will help us illustrate this point (Caillaud & Haas, 2017). In accordance with a law passed in France in 2005, the assessment and subsequent compensation (i.e., benefits, care, specialist schooling etc.) for disabilities are no longer

performed on the sole basis of biomedical elements but, rather in accordance with a global approach to the individual that includes, among other elements, the psychological dimension. Disabilities are assessed and compensated by multidisciplinary groups of professionals on the basis of reports written by various professionals (physicians, psychologists, teachers, etc.). Ten years after the introduction of the new law, the study investigated both the representations and expectations these professionals had of psychology (using focus groups and a survey) and the representations of psychology conveyed by psychological reports addressed to the multidisciplinary groups. The findings from focus groups and the survey shed light on tensions between the old biomedical approach (where the psychologist was only able to measure cognitive deficiencies) and the new global approach (where the psychologist is considered to be able to analyse the cognitive, affective and social dimensions of the situation) that were widespread in the multidisciplinary groups in charge of compensation. In this context, where the contribution of psychology was still questioned and its professional identity threatened, psychologists provided reports which reproduced the historical duality between qualitative and quantitative psychology. This was interpreted as a strategy both to be considered legitimate — in an identity threatening context — through confirmation of the central importance of quantitative elements (indeed, the discourse about IQ is the most representative of all reports' conclusions) and to support the idea of a more global approach in psychology.

To conclude, by considering the theoretical perspective that underpins the use of different research methods, the researcher becomes aware of the specific 'in-between' spaces in which he studies SR in the making. Accordingly, triangulation offers a way to operationalize the idea that SR are "alive and dynamic – existing only in the encounter, in the in-between space we create in dialogue and negotiation with others" (Howarth, 2006, p. 68).

## Perspectives and challenges

Writing about history is not just about depicting the past. It is also a way to depict the present and to forecast the future (Brinkmann, Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2014). To conclude our work in this article, we outline how SRT can help to realize some of the full potential of QR (multiple methods, multidisciplinary and contributing to social change: Gergen, Josselson, & Freman, 2015) and how triangulation can help SRT to adopt a more *societal* social psychology.

The short history of the first conventional studies on SR illustrates the almost genetic relationship which links SRT studies to triangulation. As we described in this article, drawing on SRT, the concept of triangulation has

thus developed new perspectives to plan research designs based on multiple methods and allowing for the integration of contradictory results (e.g., Caillaud & Flick, 2013, 2017). Moreover, the psychology of SR is marked by an epistemological tension, therefore a force, positioning SRT as an interface between sociology, anthropology, and history. From this point of view, at least three forms of triangulation (theoretical, methodological, and interdisciplinary) are essential when examining the contents of representations and the construction of a social world object (Apostolidis, 2006; Kalampalikis & Apostolidis, 2019). Also, SRT furnishes a relevant theoretical and epistemological frame to promote the development of multimethods and multidisciplinary.

Triangulation may also contribute to the development of the critical potential of SRT (Howarth, 2006; Batel et al., Castro, Devine-Wright & Howarth, 2016; Caillaud, 2016), that is, going beyond simple descriptions of SR in order to develop a potentially transformative account. First, triangulation offers a means to legitimize the use of different knowledge systems by social actors: by moving from one method to another, the researcher moves from one local sphere of knowledge construction to another, and is engaged with SR produced in different contexts and/or by different groups whose validity is recognized locally. In this way, SR can take a critical stance; that is, the existing understandings of reality and the normative ways of producing this reality at the group level are questioned equally for all social groups/context. Moreover, triangulation, by moving from one method to the whole research study design, and from one local sphere of knowledge production to a global approach, can foster understanding of social and identity issues *between groups* and how they feed their knowledge. It can also help us understand how different SR compete in a “battle of ideas” whereby one group imposes its version of reality over another (Moscovici, 1998). In triangulation, power and group relationships are analysed and can explain not only why some SR impose themselves, and how and why some minorities may endorse dominant SR despite being negative for the minorities’ identities (see Joffe, 1995), but also how and why social change occurs. Furthermore, triangulation ensures that SRT provides a relevant theoretical framework to support QR in understanding and reducing boundaries between groups, and in fostering social change.

To conclude, in this paper, in order to highlight how QR and SRT can further strengthen each other, we analysed how SRT and the concept of triangulation in QR developed in parallel over the years before finally meeting each other. This cross-historical approach is unique and provides new perspectives (Werner & Zimmermann, 2006). By combining both a synchronic (comparing how epistemological and methodological issues are managed by SRT and by triangulation) and a diachronic (comparing different times) approach, the cross-historical perspective makes also salient



shifts in points of view that occurred during the encounter between SRT and triangulation (turning away from a strategy of validity to embrace a strategy of extra knowledge). Analysing these changes offers a way to recompose old elements and categorisations: the old divide between qualitative and quantitative methods may be reorganised and considered from a fresh perspective. Indeed, when one considers the theoretical and epistemological backgrounds of qualitative and quantitative methods, one can see their potential compatibility. Accordingly, we can reinvent ways of using both together, qualitative methods being more than just a way to explore a phenomenon while waiting for quantitative validation.

Using the concept of triangulation, authors developed reflections which constituted more concrete pathways to explore the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Kelle, 2006; Howe, 2011). This is not to say that the systematic use of both qualitative and quantitative methods should be advocated as the new gold standard (as is sometimes the case in mixed-methods research, see Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017). However, new research practices can be developed which take into account practices used in psychology in the past, when both methods were simultaneously used without one being deemed “more scientific” than the other (Brinkmann, et al, 2014). Effectively, it is about looking at the old from a new angle.

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