

Representations of everyday life: a proposal for capturing social values from the Marxist perspective of knowledge production*

REPRESENTAÇÕES COTIDIANAS: UMA PROPOSTA DE APREENSÃO DE VALORES SOCIAIS NA VERTENTE MARXISTA DE PRODUÇÃO DO CONHECIMENTO

REPRESENTACIONES COTIDIANAS: UNA PROPUESTA DE APRENDIZAJE DE VALORES SOCIALES EN LA VERTIENTE MARXISTA DE PRODUCCIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO

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ABSTRACT

We propose from the Marxist perspective of the construction of knowledge, a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding social values by capturing everyday representations. We assume that scientific research brings together different dimensions: epistemological, theoretical and methodological that consistently to the other instances, proposes a set of operating procedures and techniques for capturing and analyzing the reality under study in order to expose the investigated object. The study of values reveals the essentiality of the formation of judgments and choices, there are values that reflect the dominant ideology, spanning all social classes, but there are values that reflect class interests, these are not universal, they are formed in relationships and social activities. Basing on the Marxist theory of consciousness, representations are discursive formulations of everyday life – opinion or conviction - issued by subjects about their reality, being a coherent way of understanding and exposure social values: focus groups show is suitable for grasping opinions while interviews show potential to expose convictions.

DESCRIPTORS

Communism
Social values
Qualitative research

RESUMO

Propõe-se um arcabouço teórico-metodológico, na vertente marxista de construção do conhecimento, para compreensão de valores sociais pela captação de representações cotidianas. Pressupõe-se que a investigação científica congrega diferentes instâncias: epistemológica, teórica e metodológica, que coerentemente às demais instâncias propõem um conjunto de procedimentos e técnicas operacionais de apreensão e análise da realidade em estudo, expondo o objeto investigado. O estudo de valores revela a essencialidade da formação de juízos e escolhas; há valores que refletem a ideologia dominante, perpassando todas as classes sociais, mas também há valores que refletem os interesses de classe, esses não são universais, são constituídos nas relações e atividades sociais. Fundamentando-se na teoria marxista da consciência, as representações cotidianas constituem formulações discursivas, opinativas ou de convicção, emitidas por sujeitos sobre sua realidade, mostrando-se coerente forma de compreensão e exposição de valores sociais: grupos focais mostram-se apropriados para apreender opiniões enquanto entrevistas demonstram potencialidades para expor convicções.

DESCRIPTORES

Comunismo
Valores sociais
Pesquisa qualitativa

RESUMEN

Se propone marco teórico-metodológico, en vertiente marxista de producción de conocimiento, para comprensión de valores sociales por captación de representaciones cotidianas. Se presupone que la investigación científica incluye instancias epistemológicas, teóricas y metodológicas que, conjuntamente con otras instancias, proponen procedimientos y técnicas operativas de aprendizaje y análisis de la realidad estudiada exponiendo el objeto investigado. El estudio revela la esencialidad de formación de juicios y elecciones; hay valores que reflejan la ideología dominante, atravesando todas las clases sociales, pero también hay valores que reflejan intereses de clase, esos no son universales, sino constituídos en las relaciones y actividades sociales. Fundamentándose en la teoría marxista de la conciencia, las representaciones cotidianas constituyen formulaciones discursivas, de opinión o de convicción, emitidas por sujetos sobre su realidad, constituyendo una forma de comprensión y exposición de valores sociales: los grupos focales son apropiados para aprender opiniones mientras las entrevistas muestran potencialidad para exponer convicciones.

DESCRIPTORES

Comunismo
Valores sociales
Investigación cualitativa

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INTRODUCTION

In this present study, scientific investigation is assumed to comprise different scopes that should be coherent among themselves: epistemological, concerning the understanding of knowledge production; the theoretical dimension, proposing an explaining theory for the phenomenon under study, activating analysis categories; and the methodological scope, proposing a combination of procedures and techniques for acquiring and analyzing the reality in this study, attempting to expose the investigated object and maintaining coherence with other scopes⁽¹⁾.

The objective of this study is to propose a methodological-theoretical structure, under a Marxist scope of knowledge construction, with the aim of understanding social values through the acquisition of daily representations. First, the implications for guiding this research towards a Marxist scope will be discussed, including dialectic and historic materialism; following, social values coherent with the same scope will be conceived in order to discuss their pertinence in an effort to understand them in terms of acquiring and analyzing daily representations. Lastly, the potential of two research qualitative techniques for learning social values will be discussed.

The Marxist scope as an epistemological basis for knowledge production in the Collective Health sector

The existence of a current and historic social reality, with an investigation process consisting of social practice and performed by subjects who have values and make choices is acknowledged. Therefore, learning about reality is not performed through a neutral feature investigation. Knowledge is constructed according to possibilities where reality must be learned, much of the time by the leaders among the classes they dominate and those who are their subjects. The purpose of the investigation process is to produce knowledge from the uncovering of reality and criticism, inevitably guiding them towards the transformation of the reality found⁽¹⁾.

Marxism has grown as a result of criticizing positivism and questioning prior scientific conjectures in the search for truth – the regularity and linearity of social facts and the unrestricted adoption of natural sciences foundations for studying the objects of social science. Hence, it gradually appropriated categories of contradiction for the purpose of criticizing logical formalism, reductionism and a-historicity in acquiring the dynamics of social reality. The dialectic of Marxism seeks to freeze reality and criticism of epistemology, searching for the truth in laboratory reproduction with a *bias control*⁽¹⁾.

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Adopting a dialectic perspective analysis in a research does not mean abandoning rational reality acquisition, performed from *regular and fortuitous features* in order to understand the reality being captured and analyzed⁽²⁾. It regards a strict and articulated process with the objective of finding the meaning of the phenomenon studied in this research⁽¹⁾.

While we propose to discuss the connections between the phenomenon in this research and the social totality through analysis categories, the Marxist dialectic looks to capture contradictions regarding the phenomenon in this research, exposing its essence and not just its appearance. The challenge lies in developing tools that can improve and better explain the relationships between the constituted historical-social knowledge compound and the reproduction of subjects and groups' social living routines. When facing a research question in which the dominant explanation generates little or no satisfaction, a methodological challenge is proposed, especially since there are many techniques that can be used that belong to different involved disciplinary fields and, therefore, must be re-articulated within a new perspective⁽³⁾.

Collective Health constitutes a knowledge and practice field that attempts to include the Marxist approach to foundations, primarily supported by Garcia's⁽⁴⁾ teachings, followed by many other scientists who constructed and continue to construct this interdisciplinary field⁽⁵⁾. For this reason, a considerable part of the research developed by Collective Health demonstrates a Marxist guideline of knowledge production as reference and continues to accept the challenge to promote research that demonstrates coherence with the epistemological, theoretical and methodological scopes⁽¹⁾.

Social values: theoretical dimension

Social values are understood in this research as being mediators of social awareness, the basis for choices and positioning regarding the reality in which different social groups socialize. They are historically and socially constructed and are the basis for social practices, including choices made by real subjects in their routine of living⁽⁶⁾. They may be incorporated in the continuous process of dominant ideology dissemination, constituting dominant opinions that permeate all social classes, influencing the choices in all groups. In addition, they can represent convictions within social classes formulated from the real material conditions at work and in life. Therefore, social construction contradictions generate the formulation of criticisms⁽⁷⁾.

These values are not purely mentally constructed on the part of individual subjects; instead, they exist within a certain time and space and are constituted in social re-

lations that are established from a specific mode of production. Therefore, Marx postulated that *value* means the work incorporated and transfigured into goods, and learning the value can only be accomplished by an abstraction process requiring a theoretical effort through the dialectic method. In the scope of relationship and social interactions, senses and perceptions immediately perceive only the appearance of the goods, or in other words, its expression as an exchange value and as something that *satisfies all types of human needs*, and its value of use⁽⁸⁾.

Within this context, people interact mediated by consumption and the need to exchange various goods. Obtaining specific products has become the reason for living in a society that values acquisition accumulation, appearance and the appearance of objects. Needs are also vitally connected to the metamorphic process of value, determined by the production system that has the objective of achieving certain goods through the system of consumption and exchange. These transforming processes within capitalism significantly contribute to defining a private valuing system that marks new subjectivities and impacts the way of life⁽⁹⁾.

The intermediation between awareness and social reality occurs through representations we perceive regarding objects and things. Things have a value according to what they represent and apparently are. Awareness is unable to comprehend or abstract what things really are regarding their function and constitution in the totality of social life. Therefore, people's values can refer to something closer to their true reality of life in addition to reproducing the dominant ideology in society. In other words, the awareness of social reality can be manifested as a narrow vision of things or can reveal contradictions that are present in social life. Hence, the production of ideas, representations and awareness are directly related to material life and conditioned to a determined development of productive forces and the way of corresponding relationships⁽⁹⁾.

Social values mostly correspond to economic values, consolidating the modern ways of life, complete with values of competition, individualism and the accumulation of private assets. Within the modern context, the combination of values experienced by different social subjects and groups constructs modern capitalism⁽¹⁰⁾, marking subjectivities in a particular way⁽¹¹⁾, therefore producing a specific way of life⁽¹²⁾.

These values can refer to both the reproduction of a dominant social pattern (axiology) and a compound of values with a view towards the emancipation of men, means of oppression and social domination (axionomy). There is an established dialectic: on the one hand, the *necessary means of regulating the maintenance of antagonistic relations*, which support social domination and exploration and, on the other hand, ways of resistance that have the objective of transforming these relations. Therefore, there

is a dominant valuing system presented as a dominant ideology (a false awareness of reality) and valuing systems connected to the interested subjects in the socially dominated and oppressed groups⁽⁷⁾.

Daily representations: methodological dimension of values acquisition

This regards the methodological-theoretical construction that evaluates the acritical and descriptive readings of reality, identified by social representations, which is a commonly used construction in qualitative researches, particularly in the health sector, which is invariably disconnected from the *social totality perception* that is seen only as a background for the studied phenomena. From this conception, social representations approach translates into a naive conception of daily knowledge, reproducing mistakes and procedures within the phenomenological perspective of knowledge production⁽¹²⁾.

Based on Marx, according to Nildo Viana's works, daily representations constitute expressions of awareness individuals acquire in social relationships, which are subjected to the social division of work; in other words, if the individual has limited relationships due to his placement in society, his perception regarding reality will also be limited, which will result in him having a less false (or more accurate) perception of reality⁽¹²⁾.

Daily representations are the vehicle that translates the features of daily life, which, in its turn, is reproduced when naturalized without deep reflection regarding the world or the reality surrounding people⁽¹²⁾. Although daily life is different within each social class or group, it has a few common elements that are present in every social class; in other words, daily representations express ways of class awareness, in addition to presenting a *general element that is present in every social class*, since, despite all social insertions, *there is general sociability to all social classes*⁽¹²⁾.

Daily representations have a contradictory character within them, differentiating them from formal logic. The author searches for logic to explain the *internal coherences of daily representations*. The distinction described by Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby between conviction and opinion is used to explain that daily representations are constituted by a *nucleus* and by *peripheral elements*. The conviction is something profound, born from the reflection and choices that, combined, form the nucleus of daily representations. The opinion is something superficial, little explained, and would reflect the acceptance of socially shared ideas. As a peripheral element it manifests contradictions more clearly due to its fluid and unstable character. Therefore, opinions constitute more uncommitted ideas regarding reality than convictions, which are defined as solid formations incorporated into the individuals' character structure that can assume the shape of values⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾.

The proposal of the acquisition of values through daily representations is based on the search for convictions and not merely opinion discourses⁽¹²⁾.

Qualitative techniques for the acquisition of daily representations: potential features in exposing social values

In the present study, the presumption that the opinions expressed by the subjects better reflected the dominant ideology was used as the underlying basis, while convictions had more potential to expose social values that truly were the basis for guiding the subjects' choices.

Daily representations are defended here as being acquired by qualitative research techniques. The focal group technique and the group interview were more likely to better acquire opinions than the advanced interview technique. Also, setting the subjects within the context of their private life has demonstrated more potential in acquiring true convictions.

Hence, the compound analysis of contents in discourses acknowledging the subjects' reality is a powerful instrument to identify class values, as demonstrated by an empiric study with young subjects who acknowledged, from advanced interviews, the expression of different social values coherent with different social groups⁽¹⁴⁾. The advanced interview is a technique that allows for the subjects to reflect about their associations, rebuilding them throughout the interview.

The focal group technique, although a powerful tool to approach qualitative aspects of reality⁽¹⁵⁾, exposes opinions, since it does not allow ample deepening of the subjects' representations in such a way as to extract convictions; in other words, it does not allow for verifying the reasons and way of life of the subjects within their historic vagaries (to investigate why the subject has that opinion), permitting a link with the opinions broadly expressed within groups.

Under this perspective, opinions reflect and greatly reproduce society's dominant ideology, opposing the true reality of different social groups, making it possible to evaluate the contradictions presented in discourses.

The analysis of contradictions presented in opinions may contribute to revealing the participants' difficulties in face of the dominant ideology, naturalizing the ways of understanding social interactions and relations, creating a false or narrow awareness; at the same time it can contribute to revealing critical aspects regarding the real conditions of social life.

By using the daily representations theory we seek to overcome, in part, some methodology difficulties inherent in qualitative research based on epistemology under the Marxist scope. In this case, the research is drawn by its methodological-theoretical combination, which is the basis for choosing and employing techniques and data collection procedures that enable greater amplitude and coherence to the analysis.

The integral analysis of the subjects' discourses would be important, with no cuts within linguistics or theme categories, to enable finding the subjects' convictions possible, revealing their values and beliefs regarding the studied phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Under the Marxist scope of knowledge production, which greatly supports the Collective Health sector, the researchers consider that what is presented in reality is not natural, but is socially dependent on the society's process stages of production. Therefore, the phenomena studied by nursing in Collective Health must be seen as regarding the current social education, with an eye to detecting the best mediators between the broader social structure and the phenomenon, or object of this study.

Producing knowledge within this scope means not only the acquisition of reality in a descriptive and factual way, but also analyzing it critically from its surroundings and determining context, since the phenomena analyzed here will not be understood if viewed alone, with no connections shown to the other phenomena involved. The social meaning acquired in reality must always be detailed by a theory that, in its turn, offers an analysis category of the investigated phenomenon. This presumption indicates that researchers studying nursing in Collective Health may suggest analysis categories that can better explain the studied reality, and the following categories within this scope are fundamental: work, social class, values, ideology and needs, among many others that compose the Marxist theory charts and that are employed in health studies.

In order to capture reality, a variety of qualitative and quantifying methods of data collection are used, along with other procedures, comprising the methodological scope. Daily representations are presented as a coherent methodological resource to the acquisition and analysis of the reality found, recommending their usage in nursing studies in Collective Health, especially those proposing to capture reality by using qualitative techniques, including the advanced interview.

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