# The Intersection of Conversation, Cognitions, and Campaigns: The Social Representation of Organ Donation

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*Social representations theory has been underutilized in the communication field.  This theory helps to explain the interrelationships between interpersonal communication, cognition, and the mass media, particularly in situations where a new phenomenon emerges that requires some kind of social response.  Because organ donation is still poorly understood by the public, in large part because of entertainment television, social representations theory is well-suited to helping researchers and practitioners understand the complex interplay of factors within a population(s) that contribute to reluctance to donate organs after death.  In this paper, it is argued that public communication campaigns should include strategies to provoke interpersonal communication about the topic as a means of creating social representations that promote behaviors which support public health.*

How many of us confess to others how much television we actually watch?  More importantly, what determines whether we share what we have seen on television with other people?  Each week's unfolding action on reality shows are frequently discussed at work among people who share an often-secret addition to a particular show, such as *America's Next Top Model* or *Project Runway*.  Similarly, a New York Times series exposing political corruption would be discussed among like-minded colleagues and friends, both in person as well as through email.  Such behavior is hardly unusual.  However, communication scholars might attempt to make meaning of these behaviors in a variety of different ways, depending on their theoretical and methodological preferences.  Some might examine mass media content in order to speculate about what made a certain show or coverage of an event so provocative that it warranted discussion.  Other scholars might qualitatively analyze our one-on-one discourse about these media events within the framework of one or more theories of interpersonal communication.  Social network scholars likely would be interested in who talks to whom about a particular topic that might have been featured prominently in the mass media.  But for all of the talk within the social sciences about the importance of interdisciplinary research and multiple methodologies, how many scholars try to create meaning in a holistic way, without resorting to the arbitrary divisions between interpersonal and mass communication scholarship?

The problem may lie, in part, on the dearth of broad yet empirically verifiable theories that help us to understand how (and under what circumstances) media content influence interpersonal communication processes and practices.  Whether information is formally organized into a deliberate behavior change campaign or is the coincidental convergence of frames used by both news and entertainment media, it is difficult to overestimate the full weight of the ultimate influence of interpersonal discussions about media content on public attitudes and behaviors.  Although social representations theory (Moscovici, 1983, 1984, 1988; Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983) has been used only rarely outside of European social

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psychological scholarship (Markus & Plaut, 2001), it offers a unique framework for the social scientific study of how groups of people communicate about and make sense of emerging or novel phenomena (the social element in "social representations"), as covered by the mass media, and how these resulting frames ("representations") shape the subsequent behaviors of individuals who belong to these social groups.  Because this theory explicitly recognizes the intertwining roles of both the mass media and interpersonal communication it allows scholars to understand how the elements of a "perfect storm" (media coverage, individual attitudes and cognitions, and interpersonal communication) combine to create a much larger societal impact through the formation of social representations of a phenomenon, which ultimately will shape the behaviors of both individuals and the communities to which they belong.

The purpose of this paper is first to review social representations theory, which can provide an organizing force for the development of studies using multiple methodologies to study the convergence of the effects of the mass media and the content of interpersonal communication for a wide variety of phenomena.  Second, this paper will demonstrate how social representations theory has resulted in a richer understanding of the emergence of individual and social behaviors regarding organ donation willingness through multiple, programmatic studies in both Australia and the United States.  Although many individual studies could be used to piece together a sense of what the social representation of organ donation might be, with few exceptions these individual studies do not acknowledge implicitly or explicitly the influence of the mass media on observed interpersonal communication phenomena or even the influence of other elements of the contexts in which interpersonal communication occurs.  Thus, it is the goal of this paper to provide an overview of the structural framework that social representations theory provides for the comprehensive study of important, socially-relevant attitude objects and to provide a working case study that illustrates the symbiotic effect of the mass media/campaigns, cognition, and interpersonal communication on individual and group behaviors.


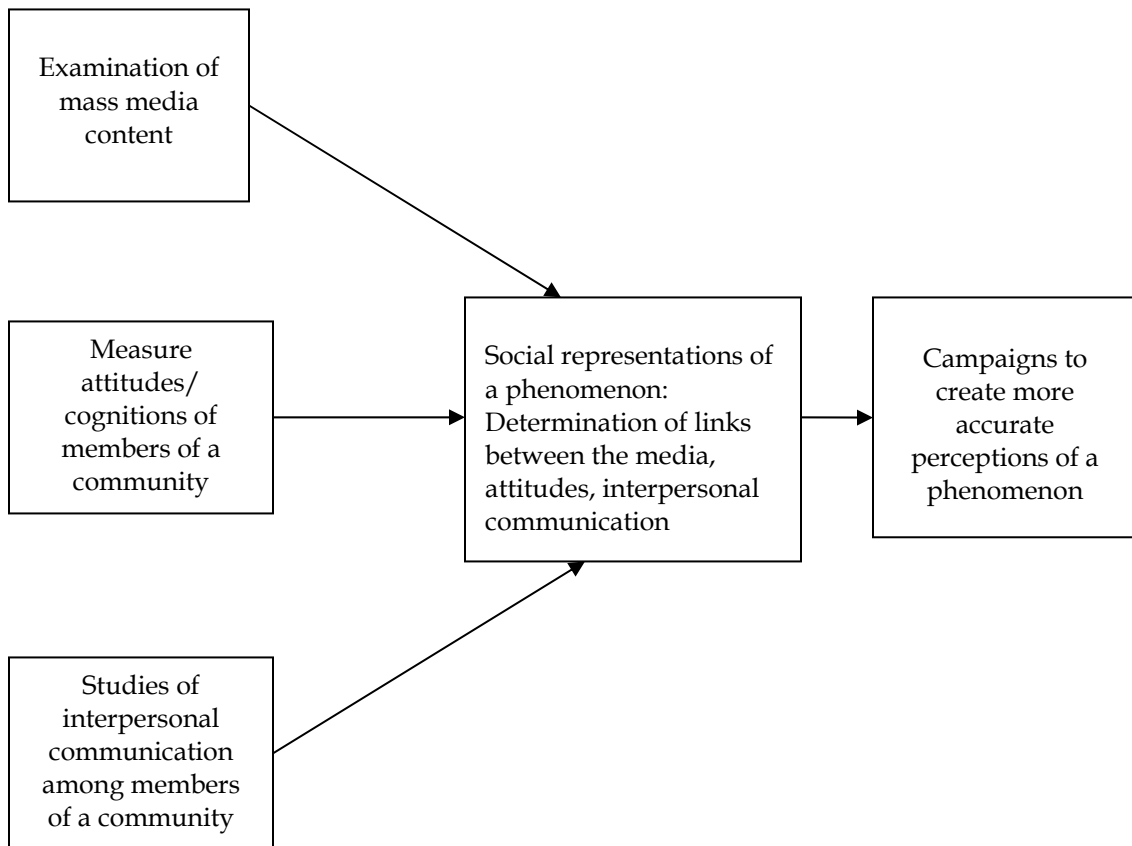## Social representations theory

Social representations theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 1983, 1984, 1988; Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983) is uniquely well-positioned to help scholars understand the role of the mass media, interpersonal communication, and cognition in shaping a wide variety of behaviors, particularly those that require (implicitly or explicitly) an individual and/or community response to a novel or previously mysterious phenomenon (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the process of social representations). A social representation is "a system of values, ideas, and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it, and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history" (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii). Perhaps more simply put, "social representations are more or less popular cognitive representations of relevant … [novel] phenomena" (Sommer, 1998, p.186).

While the theory does imply that there is a progression from mass media representation to cognition to interpersonal communication to social representation, other researchers assert that the progression is by no means unidirectional (Joffe, 2003; Lupton, 1994).  Many scientists, for example, begin new investigations based on everyday understandings of the natural world.

Although their findings may lead them in unexpected directions, these new directions in turn become "commonsense" and thus become the basis of further investigations. Similarly, when individuals within communities protest mass media content and such content changes, new mass media representations will affect how people talk about these topics.

**Figure 1**
*Scholarship leading to the discovery of social representations*



Social representations theory (SRT) has been used widely as a loose theoretical framework over the last few decades, but generally in a piecemeal fashion. This is likely because of the broad scope of the theory and the range of methodologies required to conduct the set of converging studies needed to reveal the nature of a social representation of a phenomenon in its entirety. However, SRT has been used with considerable success to reveal the full nature of the social representations of a surprisingly wide range of social and scientific topics, including stem cell research (Jones & McMahon, 2004), biotechnology (Wagner & Kronberer, 2001;Gaskell, 2001), the emergence of the European Union (Menendez-Alarcon, 2004), riots for immigrant rights (van Dijk, 2000), the so-called hospital "superbug" antibiotic resistant bacteria (Washer & Joffe, 2006), and the willingness to donate organs (Maloney, Hall & Walker, 2005; Maloney & Walker, 2000, 2002; Morgan, Harrison, Afifi, et al., 2005; Morgan, Harrison, Chewning, DiCorcia, & Davis, 2007a; Morgan, Harrison, Chewning & Habib, 2006). These studies not only reveal the nature of the social representation of these phenomena but

discuss, if not demonstrate, actual shifts in population-based behaviors as a result of the development of a social representation.  For example, because of the general population's limited direct exposure to immigrants, the media's shifting frames of immigrants as invaders rather than as hard-working people in difficult circumstances led to increasing resentment of the population toward immigrants and political responses such as the proposal of policies to halt immigration (van Dijk, 2000).

The van Dijk (2000) study underscores the importance that SRT places on the timing of an issue and/or whether a population has had direct exposure to information about a relevant issue.  Early in the lifecycle of a new phenomenon (or at least awareness of the phenomenon), people will be highly motivated to make sense of something so unfamiliar (Harre, 1998; Moscovici, 1998).  Issues that are not necessarily new per se, such as organ donation, may become of heightened interest as the issue becomes more relevant to the population.  For example, it has only been in recent years that the majority of states have adopted statewide donor registries; unlike the not-so-distant past when the issue of organ donation could be wholly ignored, individuals are now confronted with the decision about whether they wish to donate their organs every time they get or renew a driver's license.  The novelty of the relevance of this issue may have resulted in renewed media interest in organ donation.  As Potter and Wetherell (1998) assert, it is the mass media that provides us with simplified images which can form the basis of social representations when we are confronted by unfamiliar issues that make us feel uncomfortable.  Certainly, not all studies using a social representations framework focus on "strange and troubling phenomena" (Moscovici, 1998, p. 241).  However, it is one of the central tenets of social representations theory that an element of novelty be present with the subject of study.

Although social representations theory does not have the straightforward predictive power per se of many of the cognition-based theories currently favored by social scientists such as theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), its breadth may ultimately enrich and even surpass the explanatory power of other theories.  With roots harkening back to Durkheim's (1893/1984) theorizing on the nature of the collective conscious, social representations theory at its most basic states that social and individual views of a topic will be a function of a combination of mass media framing, individuals' cognitions about the topic (largely a function of information provided by the mass media, though heavily influenced by the "commonsense" of an individual's community regarding similar topics), and interpersonal, everyday communication regarding the topic.

The influence of an individual's own communities on patterns of the development of social representations should be taken into account.  Social representations do not necessarily develop in some monolithic form throughout society as a whole.  For example, while African Americans are certainly not the only community to be affected by distrust of the medical system, certain experiences within the African American community make medical mistrust especially salient.  The Tuskegee studies which documented the progression of syphilis in untreated African American men ended only in the 1970s, long after a cure had been discovered, has had profound impact on the willingness to pursue important medical treatments and health care in general (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008).  Thus, the social distribution of knowledge depends on the social group(s) to which people belong (Flick, 1998).  In the case of organ donation worksite campaigns, information disseminated to the social network represented by an organization's employees will likely remain largely within that network.  In fact, social groups themselves can be defined by the content of their "everyday

knowledge."  However, knowing *how* people acquire information is as important as knowledge about their specific beliefs (Flick, 1998).  The dissemination of information relevant to the development of social representations is of particular interest to some social representations scholars (Echabe & Castro, 1998; Flick, 1998), who point to the potential usefulness of studying how individual memory of facts works in combination with communication with others to create network diffusion within a group.  Kruglanski (2001) recommends that studies of social representations focus both on a wide variety of topics and how a single topic is represented within diverse communities and sub-communities; differences in knowledge (or memory of particular facts) will vary among groups because of differences in norms, values and identities (Sommer, 1998).  For example, the discovery of a right-wing political figure's closeted homosexuality is "big news" in some communities (the gay community, the conservative Christian community) and will continue to be the subject of ongoing discussion long after late-night television comedians have played out the scandal's entertainment value.

The capacity of social representations to make the unfamiliar familiar, to explain, and to create meaning (Harre, 1998; Moscovici, 1998) make the study of the process of the creation of social representations highly compelling.  The process of generating meaning is social; however, the information used as the raw material from which meaning is made must come from somewhere.  In Western societies where much value is placed on scientific fact, the source of information for the general public about the scientific facts about a novel phenomenon is almost always the mass media.

## The role of the mass media in the creation of a social representation

Information originating from the mass media plays a central role in the theory of social representations.  Few members of the public have individual access to knowledge about scientific advances, for example, except through the mass media (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983), so it is natural that a study of social representations generally begins with an explication of the content and nature of information being disseminated through the media. Usually, social representations researchers tend to focus on either television news (Harrison, Morgan, & Chewning, 2008; Matesanz, 2002; Morgan, Harrison, Chewning & Habib, 2006) or newspapers (Hewstone & Augoustinos, 1998; Lupton, 1994; Maloney & Walker, 2000; Washer & Joffe, 2006; Wagner & Kronberger, 2001), though at least one study has focused on entertainment television framing as well (see Morgan, Harrison, Chewning, DiCorcia & Davis, 2007a).  As Gaskell (2001) points out, when a new phenomenon arises, people do not simply sit alone to wonder about the nature of the phenomenon and what it might mean to them or the communities to which they belong.  The majority of people will first rely on the media for information and then turn to conversations with family and acquaintances (Gaskell, 2001; Southwell & Torres, 2006).  It is then that the phenomenon "becomes a reality through images, metaphors and ideas taken from films and reporting…" (Gaskell, 2001, p. 233).

The importance of mass media images has been given special attention by several SRT researchers, though relatively few have attempted an empirical analysis of the images pertaining to a particular topic or of the impact that such images might have on behaviors regarding that topic (Sommer, 1998).  Harre (1998) and others (Augoustinos, 1998; Joffe, 2003; Lauri & Lauri, 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1998; Wagner & Kronberger, 2001) assert that visual images assist the process of anchoring a new phenomenon to something more familiar.  For example, a number of scientific and medical innovations including stem cell research, the use of

biotechnology in food production, and organ donation have all been framed using "Frankenstein" imagery.  Specifically, non-living organ donation has been subjected to influential media images depicting it as something quite monstrous and unnatural (Matesanz, 2002; Maloney & Walker, 2000) and as a process subject to the whims of corrupt health institutions and medical professionals (Morgan, et al., 2007a) eager to dissect the bodies of (frequently still living) donors in the pursuit of nefarious goals.  Sharp (2006), however, provides other examples of metaphorical images used to depict organ transfer, including a Rorschak-type set of images that merges the profiles of two people (representing an organ donor and recipient) or an image of a person overlapped with a pig (representing xenotransplantation) , which emphasizes how our culture thinks of transplanted organs as not simply "spare parts" but as a process that can fundamentally transform a human being into a state of hybridity.

Illustrating how images can be used to better understand cognitions and emotions about media representations, Lauri and Lauri (2005) asked research participants to engage in a "photolanguage exercise," where they sorted photos of people taken from magazines into groups that would be likely to be willing to become organ donors and those who would not.  Not surprisingly, especially in light of Morgan et al.'s (2007a) corroborating research which shows that organ donors are depicted as "good people" in entertainment media, participants rationalized their decisions to group images of "donors" or "nondonors" based on whether they interpreted the photographs as representing educated, generous, or religious people, or alternately as conservative or uncaring.  The Morgan et al. (2007a) comprehensive two-year content analysis of major network entertainment television programming revealed a number of frames that predominate, all but one of which depict organ donation negatively.  In addition to portraying the organ allocation system as unfair (favoring the rich, powerful, and well-connected) and the medical system as corrupt, including vulture-like doctors, non-living donors themselves were shown as little more than as sources of spare parts for people in need of a transplant.  Morgan, Movius, and Cody (2008) demonstrated that  entertainment media narratives and images depicting black markets for organs (supplied by victims murdered for their lucrative life-saving organs) and corrupt doctors prematurely declaring death of still-living potential donors had a direct effect on the beliefs of viewers about organ donation that directly corresponded to the content of those episodes.

These images do appear to translate directly into cognition (Augoustinos, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1998; Wagner & Kronberger, 2001).  In a study of over 1,000 people in each of 15 countries, Wagner and Kronberger (2001) showed that readers of more restrained mainstream media exhibited less extreme reactions to biotechnology than readers of the tabloid media.  One popular image of food and biotechnology that appeared in a popular tabloid newspaper featured scientists in white coats injecting an unknown substance into a tomato, which then grows to monstrous size and explodes all over the scientists.  This image, the researchers argue, helps readers understand what biotechnology is and how it works, ultimately creating a Frankenstein-ish "mad scientist" image not unlike those created by media for other medical or scientific advances (Maloney & Walker, 2000; Jones & McMahon, 2004).  The power of such images cannot be overestimated, particularly when viewers do not have personal experience with the subject in question or if the phenomena are not fully understood.  In particular, because television has sound and motion, it "gives the impression of something authentic and verifiable by one's own eyes" (Sommer, 1998, p. 188).  In this way, watching a story unfold on television (whether on the news or within the context of entertainment media) serves as a proxy for direct experience and indeed may have the same cognitive and emotional force as direct

experience (Joffe, 2003; Morgan, Movius, & Cody, 2008). In fact, Moscovici (1998) argued that once a social representation is formed, its power will actually supersede individuals' own direct experience with a phenomenon.

The use of specific language in the media likewise has been the subject of a number of investigations, including AIDS (Lupton, 1994), the hospital "superbug" (Washer & Joffe, 2006), and organ donation (Maloney & Walker, 2000). van Dijk (2000) presents a compelling analysis of the language used by news media to describe legal and illegal immigrants, populations with which many citizens have little direct experience. Through the use of metaphor, hyperbole, "us vs. we" language, and other devices, the media exacerbate, if not create, powerful mental images that can provoke some populations to act in ways that would be incomprehensible to those not exposed to media coverage of an issue.

## The role of cognition in the creation of a social representation

As we have seen, language and images from the mass media have a powerful impact on cognition. Language itself plays a key role in anchoring the less familiar aspects of an attitude object into existing schemas (Gaskell, 2001).

> "[T]he reason for framing… [social] representations is the desire to familiarize ourselves with the unfamiliar. Every violation of existing rules, an extraordinary phenomenon or ideas such as those produced by science or technology, unusual events which unsettle what appears to be the normal and stable course of things, all of this fascinates us at the same time as it alarms us. Every deviation from the familiar, every rupture of ordinary experience, everything for which the explanation is not obvious creates a supplementary meaning and sets in motion a search for the meaning, and the explanation of what strikes us as strange and troubling" (Moscovici, 1998, p. 241).

Importantly, it is language that allows us to create a frame for an issue that is new or disturbing to us in some way, thus merging it into a more familiar schema which helps to provide a blueprint for appropriate behavior with regard to the phenomenon.

There are both structural aspects to social representations, including the actual quantity and quality of information or knowledge about the attitude object that is being represented (generally through the mass media), as well as dynamic processes, which include objectification and anchoring. The process of objectification is central to the development of a social representation. Objectification is a process whereby "catchy" elements are selected and joined together to create a new schema. The anchoring process is helpful because it links current language, images, and ideas about the phenomenon to more familiar images and ideas through analogical reasoning. The choice of words is of critical importance because they activate entire systems of meaning (Markus & Plaut, 2001). This, of course, can be for better or for worse. The threat of both SARS and the avian flu has been likened to the Black Death (bubonic plague) (Washer & Joffe, 2006), a comparison neither has lived up to, at least as of this writing. Sontag's (1978, 1989) influential observations that the language used to describe cancer and AIDS, both in the mass media as well as everyday conversations, has a direct impact on the way our schemas for those diseases develop and in turn, our interpersonal behaviors toward people who are afflicted with these diseases. For example, Sontag (1978) argues that using war metaphors

when describing the process of "fighting" a disease causes society to view those affected by a disease as "harboring an enemy." Because the enemy lives within the body and must be at all costs defeated, she argues that chemotherapy, an especially toxic and potentially fatal treatment becomes wholly acceptable to both patients and society and spurs greater research into new forms of chemotherapy[1]. In essence, both public and private discourses have influences that are remarkably reflexive.

It should be noted, however, the dynamic processes of meaning-making through objectification and anchoring may not be rational or even possible to put into words (Jost & Ignatow, 2001; Joffe, 2003, Maloney & Walker, 2002; Morgan et al., 2008). In fact, social representations can be fraught with internal contradictions, as can be clearly seen with the case of organ donation. On one hand, it is seen as the ultimate altruistic gesture, a sacrifice of one's body (which to some poses certain existential risks) so that another person can live. There appears to be social consensus that those who donate or who sign a donor card are "good people" (Lauri & Lauri, 2005; Maloney, Hall & Walker, 2005; Morgan, et al., 2007). On the other hand, organ donation is seen as frightening, a process where an unsuspecting donor could easily be the victim of a villainous medical system that dissects and dissembles the still-living in order to gain power and profit. SRT allows for and even expects these apparent contradictions. Social representations theory "is a theory about social beings creative enough to mix and conciliate ideas that could be contradictory, as well as to use different beliefs and different types of rationality… [This contradiction] allows for the co-existence, in a same representational field, of normative and functional beliefs" (Castro, 2006, p. 253). These contradictory ideas will naturally be expressed in the language used to describe a phenomenon. Markus and Plaut (2001) recommend that researchers pay particularly close attention to language that references concepts of the self, race, freedom, God, age—anything that might be considered the most centrally important concepts in a community—for clues about what can be most easily "primed" for the further development of a social representation of a new phenomenon. Gaskell's (2000) study of biotechnology illustrates the importance of this type of conceptual framing. His semantic network analysis results show that when people think about genetically modified (GM) foods, fears that scientists were "playing God" and "tampering with nature," were activated, which ultimately generated the archetypal dichotomy of good vs. evil. Interestingly, participants in this study connected these concepts with organ donation as well.

Similarly, in a study using word association tasks, Maloney, Hall, and Walker (2005) were able to uncover the type of schemas participants have for organ donation. The overall cognitive frameworks that contrast a mechanistic view of the body with the "gift of life" that organ transplants represent were further analyzed through multidimensional scaling. Their results reveal that terms around an altruistic view of helping others through organ donation figure strongly against terms that paint an image of a greedy and corrupt medical system that ultimately seeks to procure organs from people before they are actually dead. This method of assessing individuals' cognitions about organ donation requires participants to use "non-reflexive thought," not unlike brainstorming techniques. Traditional population-based surveys have generated similar findings about individuals' cognitions about organ donation (Gallup, 2005), but the triangulation of findings through multiple methods strengthens arguments that depictions of organ donation in the media (the only source of information about donation for most people) are indeed impacting cognition. Although it should be acknowledged that the

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[1] New forms of treatment for cancer no longer necessarily centers solely on chemotherapy. However, at the time of Sontag's writing, chemotherapy was standard of care practice.

*raison d'être* of the news media is not merely to inform but to create stories designed to generate controversy (Lupton, 1994), it is the inflammatory nature of these stories that help to shape cognitions about lesser known phenomena and eventually provoke interpersonal communication about the topics that generate the most discomfort or outrage.  Thus, language and cognition become key features shaping the nature of interpersonal communication about a given phenomenon between family, friends, and other members of individuals' own communities.

## The role of interpersonal communication in the creation of a social representation

Social representations theory places great emphasis on the role of everyday, even mundane conversations on the ultimate creation of social representations (Potter & Wetherell, 1998).  In fact, this is generally seen as the most critical stage in the process of the emergence of a social representation; information from the mass media or individuals' own cognitions about what they have seen or heard in the media are not sufficient to form the basis of individual or group action regarding a novel phenomenon.  It is only when information is repeated, discussed, or otherwise "translated" in interpersonal communication contexts that media depictions have an important impact on individual and group behaviors vis a vis the social representations that are subsequently created (Southwell & Torres, 2006Wagner & Kronberger, 2001).

Castro (2006) describes three communication modalities used in interpersonal discourse that shapes social representations: 1. diffusion, which is used to simply repeat and disseminate information; 2. propagation, which serves to integrate existing norms with new information and appears to advocate for a moderate stance with regard to the phenomenon; and 3. propaganda, which focuses on advocating for a particular course of behavior (or behavior change) within the context of a forced dichotomy.  Thus, it is not surprising that studies by Morgan and colleagues (2005) and Pitts, Raup-Krieger, Kundrat, & Nussbaum (in press) show that family members adopt exactly these sort of strategies when communicating about organ donation.  While some interactants simply convey facts about donation, others quite vociferously advocate for organ donation, often implying that a family member who refuses to become a potential donor is cold and uncaring or even irrational (Pitts, Raup-Krieger, Kundrat, & Nussbaum, in press).

Like Wagner and Kronberg (2001) and Gaskell (2001) who studied the social representations of biotechnology, Morgan and colleagues (2005, 2007) and Maloney and Walker (2002, 2005) found a remarkable degree of convergence in the ways in which people talked about organ donation and the content of the mass media.  For example, the concerns about organ donation expressed by 78 family dyads (Morgan, Harrison, Afifi, Long, Stephenson & Reichert, 2005; Morgan, Harrison, Long, Afifi & Stephenson, 2007), including fears about a corrupt medical and organ allocation system as well as concerns about a black market for organs, directly mirrored the myths about organ donation presented in entertainment media during a similar timeframe (Morgan, et al., 2007).  Further, the individuals engaging in family discussions in this study often recited plots from movies and entertainment media, particularly when they were attempting to justify negative views about donation (Morgan et al., 2005). Similarly, Maloney and Walker's (2000) content analysis of the media revealed a set of frames for organ donation that were echoed by participants in a later focus-group based study (2002).

The framing of an issue in the media does not merely help to shape cognitions but influences the way information is communicated between individuals and within groups.

It is clear, then, that social representations theory is a particularly useful framework for understanding public reactions to organ donation and individuals' willingness to become potential organ donors (i.e. signing an organ donor card or joining a donor registry). However, as has been shown here, the process of the creation of a social representation is multi-staged. It should also be said that not all phenomena are well-suited for examination through this theoretical lens. Ideally, studies of social representations should focus on phenomena that are novel (that is, there should be no concrete existing common wisdom about that particular object, though it may end up being likened to some other thing to which a response has been already formed—and this response will then be transferred), and have a "magical" or mysterious quality (Jones & McMahon, 2004). Further, studies must be triangulated through mass media content analyses, attitude/cognition studies, and empirical examinations of the interpersonal communication surrounding the topic (Castro, 2006; Joffe, 2003; Melendez-Alarcon, 2004; Tsoukalas, 2006). (See Figure 1 for an illustration of how social representations studies can triangulate.) Although there is ample evidence that interpersonal communication enhances or detracts from the effectiveness of media campaigns (Southwell & Torres; Southwell & Yzer, 2007), virtually no studies using a social representations framework have examined interpersonal communicative responses to mass media campaigns or empirically assessed the ways in which interpersonal communication would have had an impact on campaign outcomes. Fortunately, preliminary observations about these outcomes are now possible because of the burgeoning literature on organ donation campaigns.

## Organ donation campaigns and the connection to interpersonal communication

There are remarkably few evaluated organ donation campaigns anywhere in the world, including the United States. A nationwide public campaign to increase donation in Australia was evaluated by conducting public opinion polls before and after the campaign, but there were no significant effects in improving the willingness to donate after death (Matesanz, 2002). In the U.S., most systematic campaigns are federally funded through the Division of Transplantation, which have provided the opportunity to demonstrate, rather surprisingly, that many theories of behavior change that have been used successfully in campaigns for other types of health issues are not nearly as effective with organ donation (Morgan, Stephenson, et al., 2008). This, however, should not come as a surprise because organ donation is unlike other health issues because donating organs after death does not benefit the donor in any tangible way and further, requires people to contemplate their own mortality as a condition of engaging in the recommended behavior (Morgan, 2004, 2006; Morgan & Miller, 2002a; Morse, et al., in press). Moreover, past policies have required that campaigns promote not only the willingness to donate organs but family discussions about organ donation. While some families readily discuss death as part of pre-planning funerals, preparing wills, and the like, it is likely that most individuals and families avoid any talk of the eventual death of a loved one (Afifi, et al., 2006;

Morgan, Stephenson, et al., 2007), which has created a distinct barrier to achieving this particular campaign goal[2].

This is not to say that organ donation campaigns have not been successful. However, structural equation modeling and path analyses of how well existing theories predict increases in the willingness to donate (or to discuss organ donation with loved ones) have often yielded less than impressive results (Morgan et al., 2008). Because the theory of social representations situates individuals' reactions to a topic within the communities to which a person belongs, it is quite likely that many researchers have been overlooking a vital form of audience segmentation: social and thought communities. This may help to explain why campaigns targeting university communities, workplaces, and medical personnel have shown more success than most other campaigns (The Institute for Campaign Research and Evaluation, 2005): individuals within these communities are in greater social and physical proximity to one another than members of the general public.

There are several examples of successful organ donation promotion campaigns that use social context as a central feature of the strategic campaign planning process. In these campaigns, interpersonal communication becomes not only a goal of the campaign, but a vital tool for achieving those goals. For example, the earliest systematic worksite organ donation campaign which was conducted at a large package delivery company (Morgan & Miller, 2000a, 2000b) featured stories about one employee's own experience of being a donor husband in mass media materials distributed to other employees as a way to generate interest in the topic in the hopes that this would translate to "water cooler conversations." Additionally, staff and volunteers who were transplant recipients provided ample opportunities and incentives (mostly in the form of small giveaways) for employees to ask direct questions about organ donation. Although this early campaign was not able to separate the effects of the media components of the campaign from the interpersonal components, the campaign was successful in increasing the rate of interpersonal family discussions about organ donation among employees (Morgan & Miller, 2002b)[3].

A follow-up set of campaigns at six universities in different areas of the country with diverse populations tested whether adding interpersonal communication elements to messages disseminated through traditional mass media would increase the effectiveness of these campaigns. Mass media messages centered on the stories of members of each university's community who had been touched by organ donation in some way in the hopes that mass media messages would increase community discussions about donation because the issue had affected "one of their own." These newspaper stories, ads, and billboards featuring students, faculty, and staff who had become donors after death as well as those who had received life-restoring organ or tissue transplants were also designed to motivate people to be more open to receiving additional fact-based information about donation and to increase their willingness to talk to available staff and volunteers about any remaining concerns they had about donation.

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[2] Campaigns to encourage family discussion have included simple statements asking the public to inform family of their wishes as well as actually providing scripts for discussion of donation family members. On the other hand, the barriers to becoming a potential donor are quite different and campaigns designed to increase rates of signed donor cards or donor registrations have typically focused on dispelling common myths about donation as well as a framing of donation as a heroic, altruistic act.

[3] It is important to encourage family discussions even though "First Person Consent" laws treat donor registration as legally binding because those who do not wish to join a formal registry can still express their intent to donate and those who do not wish to donate can likewise convey this position to family members who can, in turn, refuse the requests of organ transplant coordinators.

The results were quite clear: Adding an interpersonal communication component contributed significantly to participants' willingness to donate (Morgan, Stephenson, et al., 2008, Morgan, Stephenson, et al., under review). However, the interpersonal dimension of the campaign did not significantly increase the willingness to engage in family discussions about organ donation. Because members of university communities are generally better educated, have a higher socioeconomic status and more individualistic than the general public, another sequence of campaigns was developed to reach a more representative population.

Worksite campaigns at 45 companies with 100 or more employees in industries ranging from manufacturing and distribution plants to pharmaceutical research and development were conducted over a 2 ½ year period (Morgan, Harrison, Chewning, et al., 2007). Results from nearly 10,000 participants mirrored those of the previous two campaigns. Having staff and volunteers on site to talk with about organ donation resulted in greater willingness to become an organ donor. However, a more complex, enlightening pattern of results emerged as a result of careful process evaluation over this large number of campaigns. When organizations set up information tables in central locations where large numbers of employees passed by and when larger numbers of employees gathered around the table, employees spoke not only to staff members but to each other. Rather than wait for staff members to witness their donor cards or donor registry forms, they asked each other to sign their forms. Thus, it appears that a sense of community and ease of access to contexts fostering interpersonal communication, not only with campaign staff but with other members of the workplace community, facilitated the process of declaring an individuals' willingness to donate. Interestingly, in this campaign the interpersonal communication component did significantly increase the rate of employees' discussion with family members. The difference between this set of campaigns and those conducted at universities may be the result of participants going home to their families each evening to discuss their workday activities. In contrast, at universities, a substantial number of participants were students who did not have immediate, daily access to family members. Whether the campaign encouraged communication among peers within each site is not known, unfortunately, but such a finding would have provided additional information about how an organized campaign can facilitate the dissemination of information within audience segments or social communities. Further, greater information about the frequency and tenor of communication within social networks would allow us to more clearly define campaign "success." Knowing that more favorable attitudes toward donation and positively valenced interpersonal discussions among wealthier, more educated Caucasian employees resulted from a campaign that simultaneously produced a boomerang effect among less educated Latino or African American employees (hypothetically as a function of portraying too many Caucasian transplant recipients to communities that perceive that Whites unfairly benefit from organ allocation procedures) would produce a far more sophisticated evaluation of a campaign.

Unfortunately, while we know that campaigns can be successful in getting people to talk about organ donation, it is not possible to know the content of employees' conversations with family members or peers. Whether media messages sparked general conversations about an individuals' willingness to donate or whether the content of the media messages became the actual subject of the conversation would be of great interest within a social representations theory framework. What *is* known is that the tenor of conversations about organ donation as a result of these campaigns is not always positive. It was reported that approximately 23% of people said that conversations with family did not make them more likely to want to donate their organs (Morgan, 2004). This is a significant irony for the organ procurement and transplantation community, which has been encouraging a public that is generally uneducated

about donation to "talk with your family about donation."  As it turns out, at least some of those media-fueled discussions may have had the unintended consequence of discouraging donation (see Cho & Salmon, 2007 for a discussion of unintended campaign effects).  As Southwell and Yzer (2007) point out, communication between members of a community can have a negative impact on the results of a campaign if members of the community hold unfavorable attitudes toward the topic.  Thus, researchers need to exhibit considerable caution when promoting a behavior when its social representation is not fully understood.

## Conclusion

Social representations theory has been relatively slow to catch on in the United States as compared to Europe probably because of the primary importance placed on the individual within our culture (Markus & Plaut, 2001).  Americans seem to cherish the notion that individual behavior is a consequence of individual cognition and agency.  Social representations theory, by contrast, emphasizes the role of connections between individuals as well as between individuals and their larger communities as determinants of the behavior as a function of social representations.  SRT provides a richer, more complex view of the important ways in which the media, cognition, and interpersonal communication intersect and influence one another—and provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why the media may not result in interpersonal conversations and/or consequential behavior change.  The conditions under which social representations are formed are quite specific, according to SRT.  As stated earlier, a phenomenon first has to be unfamiliar, as in the case of a scientific breakthrough (e.g. cloning, stem cell research) (Harre, 1998; Jones & McMahon, 2004).  Only when we can be reasonably assured that the only practical source of information about the phenomenon for the general population is the mass media can we track how information moves and is transformed by cognitive and communicative processes.  Second, a phenomenon must have a certain magical quality (Jones & McMahon, 2004; Moscovici, 1988).  The medical advances that make it possible to take the organs from a dead person and transplant them into the dying in order to "resurrect" them would certainly qualify as seeming quite magical.  Third, a phenomenon must have potential consequences to the individual and society (Moscovici, 1998; Sommer, 1998).  For example, what does it mean to society if human beings can be cloned?  Can a person who is an organ donor go to heaven without all of their "parts"?  It is under these three conditions that a phenomenon is especially well-suited for study using SRT as an organizing framework for empirical investigations.  The right object of study provides the opportunity to track interpersonal communication as a function of the mass media and then to examine the impact on individual behaviors as a function of the social meaning-making process.

In light of the complex nature of social representations and the process of their evolution, it should come as no surprise that there have been many methodological exhortations issued by a wide variety of authors. The most consistent caution has been to triangulate studies before proclaiming that the social representation of a phenomenon has been discovered (Abric, 2001; Castro, 2006; Gaskell, 2001; Joffe, 2003).  Although few journals would provide enough space to present in a single article the results of a mass media content analysis, a study of individual cognitions and attitudes, as well as the results of a study of interpersonal communication within existing social groups, researchers can and do publish a sequence of articles or book chapters following this prescribed means of triangulation (c.f., Gaskell, 2001; research by Morgan and colleagues; research by Maloney and Walker and colleagues). Another

caution presented by researchers is to avoid bias toward reflexive methods which tend to force research participants to be rational in their expression of their views on a topic (Joffe, 2003; Tsoukalas, 2006).  Word association tasks and brainstorming-like techniques have been recommended as a way of tapping deeper associations of a phenomenon with existing schema or images.

The benefit of creating such extensive studies in order to tap social representations and the processes by which they are created is that such studies can provide a more sophisticated view of the relationship between the mass media and interpersonal communication.  The development of the communication field necessitates moving beyond the two-step flow model of the influence of the mass media to create a more sophisticated view of these multiple, dynamic processes.  Although the mass media alone do not create social representations, the media's power to frame organ donation through the use of specific language or the valence of that language (Feeley & Vincent, 2007; Reinhart, Marshall, Feeley, and Tutzauer, 2007) or by selectively focusing on some aspects of donation at the expense of other possible dimensions (Feeley & Vincent, 2007), or downright inaccurate and inflammatory treatments of the topic (Morgan, Harrison, Chewning, DiCorcia, & Davis, 2007) will ultimately impact both individual cognitions as well as interpersonal communication about the topic, which are far more likely to influence behavior.  This is truly a case where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Whether a mass media campaign provokes interpersonal discussion may be vital to the evaluation of a campaign's success (Southwell & Yzer, 2007). The absence of such communication may offer an important possible explanation for the lack of effects from the national multimedia Australian organ donation campaign mentioned earlier in this paper (Matesanz, 2002). By contrast, huge scandals in Europe—the type that are the most likely to generate conversations about the topic, including organs being procured without family consent and controversies over whether donors were actually dead when their organs were procured—resulted in immediate, prolonged drops in donation rates in the countries in which those scandals occurred (Matesanz, 2002).  Unlike far too many organized campaigns that focus on statistics about the need for organs for transplant-- which are unlikely to be compelling enough for people to rush home to talk about with family and friends-- such scandalous stories create enough emotional arousal and generalized horror that they are much more likely to spur interpersonal conversations, which as we have seen, are a necessary requirement for views of organ donation to change.

The good and bad news about social representations is how difficult they are to change once they have been established (Moscovici, 1998).  Scholars in the areas of health communication, science communication, and the media would do well to keep an eye on the horizon for emerging innovations—not only because they represent an excellent opportunity for research, but because in their earliest stages, the development of social representations can be influenced through careful interventions (with particular attention to language, including metaphors and analogies) in the media. False or misleading analogies can create potentially indelible impressions on the public imagination, affecting their subsequent discourse and behaviors regarding technologies that hold promise for saving or improving human lives.  The pursuit of driving questions about media, cognitive, and interpersonal communicative processes and practices demands that we engage in inter-subdisciplinary research using multiple methods across multiple studies as part of a systematic program of research in order to broaden our view of the "big picture" of a phenomenon and its potential impact on society.

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