

What's in a frame?

Social organisation, risk perception and the sociology of
knowledge

by

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Abstract

A central problem in the sociology of knowledge has been to show that sane people can intelligibly have quite different alternative understandings of the same problem, such as a kind of risk, without abandoning the idea that there is a real problem about which to disagree, and to show the social basis of both plurality and viability. In recent decades, attempts to make this problem tractable have focused on the idea of a “frame”. Theories of frames offer accounts of the range of *content*, as distinguished from theories of processes of diffusion, of which risk amplification theory is the best known example. In this article, several theories of frames – those of Goffman, D’Andrade, Moscovici, Gamson, Schön and Rein, and of prospect theory – are found to be inadequate, because of their lack of clarity and plausibility in their answers to four key questions: “what is the relationship between sense-making and bias?”, “how frames are to be individuated?”, “where do frames come from?”, and “how far and how can people move between frames?”. The article makes the case for a neo-Durkheimian institutional theory developed by Douglas and others. This approach derives frames as concrete applications to specific contexts from thought styles which are in turn the product of solidarities or institutional styles of social organisation, because it can offer clear, testable, parsimonious hypotheses with which to answer these four questions. The theory therefore provides an account of the institutional logic of framing, and presents reasons for preferring this to non-institutional approaches such as the various kinds of cognitivism. The article offers three conceptual innovations with which to develop the neo-Durkheimian theory, in order better to deal with the crucial fourth question about the scope for mobility between frames. These innovations and some specific hypotheses about the scope for mobility between frames are supported by consideration of some exploratory qualitative empirical research on privacy risk perception. The theory provides a more satisfactory strategy for tackling the core problem than most others, by showing plurality to be limited, by showing clear and specific social bases for plurality of frames, by neither wholly endorsing nor wholly rejecting any basic bias, and by showing that their conflictual and systemic interdependence is what makes for viability.

Introduction

The sociology of knowledge has always faced a core dilemma. On the one hand, it is important to show how intelligible and even rational for sane people to understand even common-or-garden problems – such as risks – quite differently from one another. On the other, we should prefer to avoid ending up with explanations which imply, implausibly, that any ideas whatsoever will serve equally well in understanding, or that anyone *can* conceive any problem or risk in any way whatsoever. The menu of ways of dealing with the dilemma has not grown very greatly since Durkheim (1995 [1912]) was wrestling with it almost century ago, or since Merton magisterially reviewed work on it over half a century ago (Merton 1996 [1945]; see also Zerubavel, 1997). The main options are still the following:

1. don't boil down plurality at all: give up altogether and say anyone can with equal sanity believe almost anything (extreme socially constructionism);
2. boil down plurality all the way: deny the pluralism, show that “underneath” we all think the same way (some forms of evolutionary psychology e.g. Bruner, 1996, some kinds of rational choice theory, some forms of materialist theory e.g. Bloch, 1977);
3. promise that even if we can't boil down plurality all the way, better cooks than we are will be able to do it: scientific method will sooner or later enable intellectuals, if not the *hoi polloi*, to sort out truth from error (Mannheim 1936 [1929, 1931]);
4. boil down and be sure to leave something solid in the pot: accept pluralism for the periphery of workaday concepts, but protect a core of supposedly solid “categories of the understanding” (space, time, causality, force, etc) from it by showing them to be at once universally used, basically correct representations of how things are and basic to any periphery at all (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]; Kant, 1929 [1787]);
5. split the mix into a pot to be boiled away entirely and a pot not to be boiled at all: allow a near-indefinite variety of sane ideas, but insist asymmetrically on some ideas still just being errors (Goodman, 1978);
6. boil down to leave a very few not quite solid pieces of cognitive food at once nutritious in modest quantities, but poisonous if even eaten to excess: show that there is a defined number of mutually dependent alternatives, rather than indefinite variety of ideas or biases, which genuinely

are alternative views of what really is the same problem, none of which is wholly right or wholly wrong, but which are provisionally capable of sustaining socially viable organisation.

This article is a defence of the sixth strategy. There is not space here for a detailed critique of all the alternatives 1 through 5. However, their weaknesses are well known (see e.g. Hacking, 1999). The implausibilities of extreme social constructionism on empirical grounds alone are well-rehearsed. Essentially, it does not appear to be true that anyone can or does believe anything under any circumstances. In practice, the range of biases seems to be limited. The “better cooks” approach always looked a little arrogant, and indeed the better cooks never seem to arrive. The strategy of protecting categories, or insisting on the distinction between epistemology and the sociology of knowledge (Rawls, 1996), has never been carried through convincingly: there remains too much variation that can’t be boiled away even on basic ideas of time and space (Rayner, 1982), but which doesn’t seem to incapacitate anyone in organising viable societies. Moreover, many of these approaches are idealistic, in the sense that they implausibly propose that ideas (frames) – about risk, for example – are independent variables: this ignores a vast body of empirical work on the social and institutional roots of cognition.

To change metaphor, in the last twenty five or thirty years, the focus of the conflict between these strategies has been a battle for some strategically important high ground – the concept of a “frame”. Psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and even some adventurous economists have become interested in looking at variety of beliefs as rival ways of “framing” problems. It has become generally accepted that, expert or lay, we all use *some* frame or other in order to think about and recognise risks (see e.g. Morgan *et al*, 2001).

This article is concerned with questions about the available range of content in framing risks. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive sociological theory of risk. For example, it will not address the mechanisms by which frames, having been adopted by some people, then diffuse through populations. It is for this reason that risk amplification theory (Kasperson, 1992; Kasperson *et al*, 1998; Burns *et al*, 1993) and its recent derivation, stigma theory (Flynn *et al*, 2001) are not discussed here.¹

Of course, at the empirical level, there are innumerable ways of thinking about a given risk. However, one of the purposes of theory is to model, which requires abstraction from empirical variety, and requires

explanation to focus instead on categories which are posited to be *elementary forms*, underlying the empirically observable variety.

It should also be stated that the present argument carried no implication that any particular framing or style of frame is generally more likely to be correct than any other, or generally superior, or more “scientific”. In that sense, the argument has no consequences for risk analysis, in the strict sense. Its implications for risk communication, therefore, are entirely conditional: it provides a way for risk communicators to understand the range of possible variation in ways of framing risks, prior to their efforts having whatever impact can reasonably be expected of them, but it does not offer them any generally superior strategy for communication, still less tell them *what* to try to communicate.

First, the article reviews the main theoretical approaches to the question, “what’s in frame?”. It uses the empirical problem of risk perception – how dangerous is something? of all the things that might be dangerous, how do different people decide what to worry about most? – as a good case on which to study framing. For many of the wider debates about framing in the study of the roots of social movements and social conflict necessarily involve rival biases in the perception of risks. Next, it sets out the basic institutionalist theory exemplifying the sixth strategy, which, it will be argued, descends from other central elements in Durkheim’s *oeuvre* than his theory of the categories. The article then presents arguments for two new and distinctive twists to this theory. Finally, with a brief discussion of some recent small scale empirical work, it shows how this approach would explain the quite different ways in which people in different institutional locations frame risks to their privacy. The theory is shown to be able to make good sense of the ways in which, under certain defined circumstances, people can shift between frames. The conclusion summarises the implications for the sociology of knowledge.

Theoretical understandings of “frames”

There are perhaps four or five basic and main theoretical accounts of “frames”, each to be considered in this section, in which the concept provides a measure of the variety of ways people can understand the same problem. One is micro-sociological, one was developed in psychological anthropology and social psychology, one derives from meso-level political sociology, and one derives from cognitive psychology. Running through these accounts, we can distinguish two functions that frames perform. First, frames organise experience; that is to say, they enable people to recognise what is going on, they provide

boundaries, define what counts as an event or a feature; crucially, frames define what counts as relevant for attention and assessment. Secondly, they bias for action; that is to say, they represent people's worlds in ways that already call for particular styles of decision or of behavioural response. Because recognising phenomena as risks requires both these functions, it provides a good case against which accounts of frames can be appraised.

In Goffman's (1986 [1974]) account (see also Manning, 1992, ch.6), the emphasis in the theoretical statements on the role of a frame is firmly toward the first function of organising experience: a frame is a more or less coherently integrated set of "basic elements" or "principles of organisation which govern events" (p.10). Goffman is clear that frames are social institutions, "organisational premises", "not something cognition creates or generates" (p.247), but which nonetheless constitute "schemata of interpretation" (p.21). The most important frames are "primary social frameworks", the full set of which constitute the central repertoire of a society's "culture" (p.27). This is because they comprise rules of various kinds (p.24) and so organise expectations and order everyday ritual. His main interest is in the ways in which frames can be "keyed" and rekeyed, by being transposed in something else patterned upon but independent of the primary frame (p.43ff). For example, people can frame the same strip of bodily behaviours as flirting, pretending to flirt as a joke, parodying the flirting of particular others, and so on. For Goffman, there are five keys: the make-believe, the contest, the ceremonial, the technical redoing (e.g. rehearsal, demonstration) and the regrouping in which another motive is substituted. The conflicts that interest him arise where frames are fabricated and where people have different understandings of which key is being used, for example, where one actor deceives another about what key the activity is to be conducted in. Although Goffman does recognise the biasing function, only in his work on gender is he interested in frames as explanations of very radical conflict of understandings. Rather, his interest in their perspectival role lies in the role of frames in foregrounding into attention, the most relevant and salient features of the interaction for the criteria they present, and conversely, background other features (cf. Zerubavel, 1997, 37ff). The central weakness of his account is its inability to handle radically different understandings of the same problem in the same key within the same society; secondly, no thematic taxonomy can be derived of the range of frames.

Because it begins with sequences of everyday stereotyped behaviour, Goffman's frame resembles D'Andrade's concept of a "schema", which is defined as "a procedure by which objects or events can be identified on the basis of simplified pattern recognition" (D'Andrade, 1992, 28: see also March and Olsen, 1989, ch.2, on "scripts" or "routines"). For D'Andrade, schemas and scripts are taken to be almost indefinitely various among people in the same institutional setting, let alone between settings. His concept of a schema is part of a theory explicitly designed to counter the social models of the production of cognition with psychological account. Scholars working in its inspiration have developed the concept until it encompasses a potentially indefinitely large number of associations, connotations, memories attached to almost any concept (Strauss and Quinn, 1997, ch.3). But allowing such indefinite variety largely strips the concept of any explanatory or ordering function, leaving it little more than descriptive. No thematic taxonomy can be offered.

The same problems infect Moscovici's (2000) concept of "social representations", used by many authors (e.g. Breakwell and Canter, 1993). Although social representation theory does allow both key functions, it is overtly idealist in character, and it provides no way of distinguishing representations from each other by content, predicting when each type will be observed, or determining whether or not there are indefinite numbers of possible social representations. In short, the "social" element has largely disappeared from Moscovici's account.

In Gamson's (1992) usage, "frames" take a step back from everyday strips of behaviour, and become organisers of loosely clustered bodies of more or less basic attitudes, biases, views or ideas, which are related to action only secondarily much by making sense of current individual or bilateral experience, but primarily by motivating or demotivating styles and possibilities of collective action (Gamson, 1992, 6-8 and 1995, 89-90; Johnston, 1995). In short, for Gamson, the biasing function of a frame is more important than the function of organising experience, and the action bias is for the group. Moreover, for Gamson, each frame is defined by a single overarching abstract concept or "implicit organising idea" (Gamson, 1992, 3: cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In this way, his frames are closer to Bloor's (1991 [1976]) "social images" or "underlying social metaphors" than they are to Goffman's frames (Gamson, 1992, Appendix C). For Gamson, frames can be adequately analysed by looking at three "components", which specify their moral stance toward the subject matter (e.g. a "justice component" in the particular

field for 1992 book), their conception of the possibility of collective action, and the conception of collective identity with some shared interests or values. However, this conception of frames also offers no high level taxonomic approach to enable us to tell whether frames are indefinitely various. Gamson's account of how and when people move between frames, as one would expect for a meso-level theory, relies not so much on micro-level mechanisms such as keying and anchoring, as on individual and collective strategies for handling alternative frames on offer from the media or from the communications of formal organisations such as governments, companies and social movement organisations. Gamson too gives us no reason to be sure that his taxonomy of basic frames is exhaustive.

A refinement of Gamson's conception of frames as overarching taken-for-granted concepts is offered by Schön and Rein (1994). These authors define frames as "underlying structures of belief, perception and appreciation" (p.23), but they attempt to balance the functions by specifying their narrative character, which organises experience (pp. 23-28), with their persuasive or rhetorical role and their role in shaping action, which constitute bias. Schön and Rein, moreover, explicitly state that frames are the achievements of institutions, that they shape interests as much as being selected by interests. They recognise that frames cluster together because of these institutional affiliations, and that frames are hierarchically ordered in their generality, and that the more specific are derived from applying the more general (p. 33ff). However, they offer no account of how many general (or, in their terms, "institutional" and "metacultural") frames there are, or how to derive frames from particular levels of institutions, and they rather oddly allow some frames to be only organising or only biasing in function, although some may do both.

Finally, we may consider the development of an account of framing in cognitive psychology, from a largely individualistic perspective, but oriented to cognition about issues of the kinds with which Gamson's meso-level approach is concerned, such as the perception of risks. Kahneman and Tversky's "prospect theory" treats frames as accounts of context that skew individual judgment (Kahneman and Tversky, 2000; Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky, 1982). Prospect theory was developed to explain the experimentally observed fact that most people make judgments and decisions about risk in ways that do not conform to expected utility theory, that different descriptions of the "same" gamble elicit different choices, etc. Their initial definition of "a decision frame" was straightforwardly "a decision maker's conception of the acts,

outcomes, and contingencies associated with a particular choice” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). Frames, in this account, specify the initial reference point or definition of the *status quo*, against which the alternative limbs of a gamble are judged to count as gains or losses, and therefore when risk aversion, risk neutrality and risk willingness are appropriate (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984), and (presumably) they must do this by specifying which descriptions are recognised as offering options that are counted as salient and available or acceptable. What frames explain are non-linearities, concavities and convexities of preference functions in risky choices. The tradition is, however, much more interested in measuring the size of the concavity and convexity effects than in specifying what frames consist in or where frames come from. In some of the experiments conducted, frames seem to be related to expectations, for when the axiom of the irrelevance of independent alternatives is violated, this may be in part because the presence of the independent alternative constitutes a cue for expectations about what else might be available (Tversky and Simonson, 1993). Frames also seem to be related to the narrative of a person’s life, for they seem to explain why certain preferences change (or perhaps stabilise) when a certain life event is posited to have taken place (Shafir, Simonson and Tversky, 1993). Little advance has been made on the simple assertion of an origin in the problem environment and in individual psychology made by (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981): “The frame that a decision maker adopts is controlled partly by the formulation of the problem and partly by the norms, habits and personal characteristics of the decision maker.”. Why some people but not others find some problem formulations compelling, and where norms come from, are apparently questions of limited interest to this tradition. Emotions are attached to beliefs about risk in this view, but they seem to be almost incidentally related, by contrast with Gamson’s or Goffman’s accounts in which emotional charge is fundamental. Nor does the tradition have much interest in explaining the minorities reported in its literature whose responses show less standard effects: one looks in vain for any segmentation of the effects of frames by problems or situations or even by psychological variables. Moreover, the tradition has no real interest in asking whether there are an indefinite number of frames, how and why people might move between frames, for its interest is almost exclusively in the question of their effect on a single variable about willingness to bear risk. Frames are biases in the first instance, and although they seem to be founded upon sense-making (narrative of the life course,

expectations, memory, etc.), that sense-making is largely about the self, neither about social interaction nor about collective action.

Another important psychological development has been the work of Fischhoff and his colleagues on the concept of mental models, which are essentially models of lay assumptions about the connections between concepts, and which have some similarity with frames in the Gamson sense (Morgan *et al*, 2001), although the mental models methodology does not lead to the definition of models by reference to a single overarching concept. Again, the assumption of the approach is that there is no reason to think that there is not an indefinite number of such models. Others within the psychometric tradition have recently become more interested in the effect of overarching concepts, under the rubric of “worldviews” (derived from Wildavsky and Dake, 1990: this approach is discussed in more detail below), but typically, these are seen (rather oddly) as variables that are independent of frames in the prospect theoretic sense (Slovic, 1997).

Each of these approaches has strengths and weaknesses. Some do better with the organising of experience, others with biasing for action; few can specify principles of taxonomy, or show how some frames come to be more fundamental than others, or how people move between frames. From Goffman, we should surely preserve the insight that frames organise *social* interaction: they are not merely abstract ideas but lived practices. From Gamson, we ought to accept that frames are often organised thematically, and that these themes are typically specific concepts, that they carry serious moral freight and are fundamentally emotional in character, and that they organise commitments to make collective action possible or impossible. From Schön and Rein, we should surely preserve the recognition that frames are derived from institutions, and that the same institution generates a cluster of ordered frames for different problems. However, D’Andrade and the psychological anthropologists are surely right that patterns must play an important role in the way in which frames do their work. From prospect theory, we ought surely to take seriously the idea that frames will shape and influence the perception of risk.

Neo-Durkheimian institutional theory

The most promising strategy, this section will argue, is to draw upon and develop the neo-Durkheimian tradition, which respects these insights but which goes further toward meeting the challenges identified

above. For reasons of space, only the barest essentials of this rich body of theoretical work will be presented below?

The theory posits that cognition is powerfully shaped in semantic content, not only in style, by styles or patterns in social organisation (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963 [1902-3]; Douglas, 1972, 1993). A strong form of the claim would be that the core content of the fundamental categories is a kind of literal transposition of features of social organisation (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963 [1902-1903]). However, this is probably a very special case. Only the weaker claim is required for the present argument, that the selection (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982) of concepts, focusing upon them, their salience and relevance, the affect attached to them (Douglas, 1966, 1992) are all powerfully shaped (determined might be too mechanistic a description of the causal process) by crucial features of social organisation.

The theory also posits (as did Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: see Lukes, 462-477) that this selection, focus, salience, relevance, and affect are also *functional* for particular institutional forms of social organisation, and that the contribution of thought styles (Douglas, 1996; Mannheim, 1936 [1929, 1931]) to the workings of those institutional forms is causal. However, the theory specifically rejects *functionalism*, for it holds that the thought styles support both the peculiar organisational weaknesses and self-disorganising tendencies of the forms of social organisation, as well as their peculiar strengths.

Contrary to common misunderstandings (e.g. Shrader-Frechette, 1991), this is not a relativistic theory. For relativism, one would need to add the additional hypotheses that (a) that the forms of social organisation are indefinite in number, (b) the cognition associated with concepts in and by different forms of social organisation are incommensurable (e.g. Feyerabend, 1970) and therefore cannot really directly conflict, and (c) that there is no way of telling whether there is any determinate reality about which they are genuinely in conflict. However, these are specifically rejected by Durkheim (1983 [1913-14] *passim*; 1995 [1912], 17-18; see also Schmaus, 1994, ch.9; Cladis, 1992, ch.4; Měštrovic, 1993 [1988], ch.5; Stedman Jones, 2001, ch.7) and by Douglas (e.g. 1990, 8; see also Bloor, 1996). On this view, there is limited plurality; the commensurability and the underlying reality is demonstrated by the institutional viability of the social organisation that these thought styles sustain. If there is anything substantive to disagree about – as in the case of many social fears – this will show up in the nature of the “surprises”

that experience can spring upon people using different frames (Thompson *et al*, 1990, ch.4), and hence the vulnerability of these forms of social organisation to disorganising external shocks.

What features of social organisation, then, matter and why are so few in number? To answer this question, the neo-Durkheimian approach offers a matrix (Figure 1). Despite the controversy this has raised, it has proven extremely robust and fruitful in explaining a wide variety of empirical findings (see e.g. Coyle and Ellis, 1993; Mars, 1982; Rayner, 1982; Thompson *et al*, 1999; Price and Thompson, 1997; Bale, 1997; Thompson and Gyawali, 1999). The first dimension is what Durkheim 1951 [1897] first called “social regulation”, and later (1961 [1925]) termed “discipline”. (It was relabelled “grid” by Douglas (1970, 1982a [1978], 1992). This refers to the extent to which one’s situation is set one about with constraints of rules, roles and facts that have, practically speaking, to be taken as given, or at the other end of the dimension, the extent to which these constraints are relaxed to allow a measure of voluntary choice. In effect, it measures the degree to which social relations are experienced as principally *involuntary*, or *constraining*. The second dimension is that of “social integration” (Durkheim 1951 [1897]) or “attachment” (Durkheim 1961 [1925]: this was relabelled “group” by Douglas, 1970, 1982a [1978], 1992). This measures the degree to which social relations require the accountability of the individual to a bounded group, or allow comparatively unaccountable and autonomous individual action; that is, it measures the extent to which bonds to others structure action and understanding. Cross-tabulating these – first done by Douglas (1970) and subsequently developed and refined in the neo-Durkheimian tradition (Douglas, 1982a [1978], 1982b, 1992; Thompson *et al*, 1990; Schwarz and Thompson, 1990; Fardon, 1999, ch. 10) – yields provides four basic institutional styles of social organisation, each of which is predicted to produce distinct styles of cognition, thought styles or *consciences collectives* (Figure 1).

<Figure 1 about here>

The strongly regulated and strongly integrated context is that of *hierarchy*, with asymmetric relationships but highly structured responsibilities and accountability and clearly defined boundaries, social ties between people being of different densities and strengths according to their relative status. At the opposite end of the diagonal from hierarchy is the social world of the weakly regulated, weakly integrated. This is immediately recognisable as *individualism*, with its limited accountability, its fluid boundaries, and weak or loose social ties adopted and used instrumentally. The strongly regulated but

weakly integrated world is that of the *isolate*, largely at the mercy of the pressures and disciplines created by other forms of social organisation, but following a coping strategy for survival with whatever opportunities come by to deal with the problems and restrictions that flow from the same constraints, where social ties are few, casual and hard to rely upon. Finally, the strongly integrated but weakly regulated world is that of the *enclave*, where a relatively *internally* egalitarian structure is necessary in order to sustain people motivated in membership for effective discipline is very difficult, but with a strong boundary that sustains inegalitarian relations with others outside the enclave, so that the dense social ties within the enclave must be matched by the relatively weak bonds to those outside. Each of these is a solidarity – a form of social organisation with its distinctive style of institutions. In practice, few contexts are pure cases of only one of these: many are hybrids, or settlements between two or more. These basic forms of social organisation are found in any society – for example as markets, hierarchies and clubs or “clans” or “networks” (Williamson, 1985; Pitelis, 1991; Cornes and Sandler, 1986; Ouchi, 1980; Powell, 1990); isolate forms are well known to sociology in the guise of “amoral familism” (Banfield with Banfield, 1958). Some other forms are sometimes identified, but they can nearly always be resolved into one of these or hybrids, combinations or uneasy settlements between these four basic forms (cf. Fiske, 1991).

The matrix provides only a taxonomy, not an explanation. The underlying sociological theory of knowledge, also rooted in Durkheim, provides the static element of the explanatory model. The proposition is that the frames through which people understand issues and risks are ones that are systematically produced by these forms of social organisation. It is therefore (*contra* e.g. Boholm, 1996) a complete misunderstanding of the theory to represent it as an idealist model that explains particular risk perceptions by reference to worldviews: rather, it explains worldviews by reference to institutional forms of social organisation (Douglas, 1986; it is for this reason that it is better called a neo-Durkheimian institutional theory, rather than a “cultural theory”).

The dynamic theory holds that each institutional solidarity only exists in contradistinction and in conflict with the others. Each springs up in some part in reactive response to the demands of the others, and each depends on the others (Thompson, 1992; Thompson *et al*, 1999). The “impossibility theorem” – an application of the principle of requisite variety – states that any viable unit of social organisation will

give just enough recognition to each of the four solidarities to prevent other solidarities from undermining the structure by backsliding (isolate), defection (individualism), revolt (enclave), reassertion of control (hierarchy) (Thompson *et al*, 1990).

We should expect that within hierarchy, we would observe issues to be framed to have most salience and relevance that can readily be represented either as furthering the commitment to an order of rule-governed, defined role, or that are readily represented as threatening it. Problems will become recognised risks, where they can be seen as representing subversion of the ordered system of accountability. For example, where claim is made to be exempt from accountability to rule and role, this will be represented as a serious risk to the regulated order. Within individualism, issues will be of most salience that represent opportunities for those who see themselves as beneficiaries of the individualist order, as brokers and entrepreneurs, or else that represent threats, potential limitations upon their freedom, or that represent obstacles to the instrumental pursuit of goals. Issues will be seen as risks that would lead others to seek to impose collective accountability beyond the necessary minimum (e.g. enforcement of defined private property rights). In the enclave world, issues will be of greatest salience that can be used either to reinforce the fragile and difficult to sustain boundaries of the community typically by enabling the enclave to blame other forms of social organisation for crises and problems to which the principles around which the enclave is organised can be represented as solutions, or else that bring threats of schism and defection from the enclave or that undermine such limited accountability as it can bring to bear upon its members. In the world of the isolate, issues will be of greatest salience that can readily be represented as affecting the capacity of the isolated individual to cope, to survive, to sustain whatever fragile and minimal personal control or dignity they might be able to hang on to, under the constraints they operate under but are so very aware of not being able to control. Social organisation then selects priorities in what we fear, identifies what counts as relevant to worry about, and provides frames through which high and low priority social fears are represented.

In each of these solidarities, then, we should also expect different stylised ways of thinking about how the social and the natural world is, for each requires the world to be amenable to treatment by its peculiar style of organisation. For the isolate, systems are capricious. For hierarchy, within certain bounds, systems are stable and amenable to judicious and balanced regulation, but beyond those bounds, they are liable to

collapse and create dangers. For individualism, formal, regulated systems are intrusive and also unnecessary; the only systems that are desirable are those loosely coupled ones which are the product of the spontaneous order and the hidden hand that gives coherence to purely voluntary action, and for these, the world is a cornucopia of opportunity. For enclave, both the ordered systems of hierarchy and the loosely coupled systems of individualism are both unavoidable (for only in reaction to them does the enclave exist) but also oppressive, and systems are only welcome when they protect and are accountable to the enclave. The world is seen as prison in the one mode, and a haven in the other. These “myths”, too, only exist in reaction to each other (Schwarz and Thompson, 1990; Adams, 1995).

Because the theory posits that social organisation rather than worldview or psychological type is the most important causal factor, it follows that, correctly understood, it would predict that the individuals, when they are different located in social organisation at different times or in different contexts, will think differently, and perhaps even inconsistently (Rayner, 1992). Therefore, the body of attitudinal survey research conducted apparently supporting (Wildavsky and Dake, 1990; Grendstad and Selle, 1997; Ellis and F. Thompson, 1997; Slovic, 1997) or apparently contradicting the theory (Sjöberg, 1997, Brenot, Bonnefous and Marris, 1998) should be read with extreme caution. Most research of this kind examines the *dependent* variable of the theory only, and administers questions in as context-free a setting as can be achieved, thus missing the key issue. Ideally, one would only use survey research only in the context of a multi-strategy programme of data collection involving ethnographic participant observation, long interviews with individuals and other methods (Gross and Rayner, 1985).

Additional elements: frames, moderate and extreme forms, primary and secondary locations

At least some and perhaps many individuals in almost any society are likely to be located in different solidarities in different contexts. Few people can expect to live lives of total consistency between all the contexts of home, work, leisure, local community of residence, religious and political affiliations, etc (Mars, 2001). Therefore, the theory must predict, cognition styles will differ between context for many individuals. This is known as the “mobility hypothesis” (Rayner, 1992).

A second complication is required to fill out the hypothesis of mobility between contexts. So far, social location has been discussed meaning what will now be called an individual’s *primary* location in social organisation in a given context – their membership of an enclave, their isolate status, their position

in the competitive organisation of individualists, their status in a hierarchy. The primary location is a person's long term, underlying position that they occupy in relation to the major institutionalised forces in their society, such as the labour market, the housing market, public services, key suppliers of goods and services, their peers as colleagues, friends and acquaintances, fundamental institutions such as religion, family organisation and the like – in short, the basic systems of accountability. *Contexts* are distinct institutional spheres of activity in which one presents information to others under specific institutional rules, such as shopping, working, worshipping, relaxing with friends, playing team sports. The *secondary* location is one's relationship to others in a conversation where the interlocutor frames an issue differently and there is a possibility of an attempt by one to persuade the other to shift frame (6, 2001, 2002b). In conversation, the locations of others impinge powerfully, and one has to respond to the ways they understand and present their experience, and in some kinds of conversations one must exchange with people whose own primary location is in some other solidarity from one's own primary location for the focal context of the situation. For conversation is a kind of temporary accountability. In that situation, where one is under at least temporary pressure to recognise the imperatives of another's primary location, as represented in conversation, there may be reasons why one might modify one's own thinking. Mostly, as conversations end, we will tend – this modification to the theory predicts – to revert back to the thought style that reflects our primary location. Sometimes, however, the pressures of accountability in the secondary situation may so great as to have lasting effects: in short, one changes one's mind in response to the conversational presentation of a “surprise” or incontrovertible information that undermines a frame (this is a special case of the theory of surprises presented in Thompson *et al*, 1990, ch. 4); this can sometimes contribute to change in the primary situation. Thus, there is one kind of individual mobility in cognition, perhaps frequently undergone and sustained over long periods, between contexts under the pressure of several primary locations, and there is another kinds of mobility, either fleeting or lasting, that takes place under the pressure of secondary locations.

The key question is, just how much mobility will there be? Consider first the mobility of someone facing different primary locations. What would have to be the case for the same individual in the same stage of their life to be, and *viable* be, a traditional Victorian paterfamilias with their children and to order their home with rigid allocation of uses for each strictly tidy and meticulously decorated room (hierarchy),

work as a member of a collective in a radical environmentalist bookshop (enclave), be utterly directionless with their personal finances, neither systematically saving nor borrowing nor keeping accounts and seeing little point in doing any such thing (isolate), and also spend their free time speculating on the stock market (individualism)? Whatever the psychological conditions might be, some very complicated social institutions would have to protect each of these contexts from imposing their respective styles of accountability upon the person, and doing so without deception (which would hardly be viable) but by some settled limitation. And what additional institutions would have to be in place for many people to live like this? It is not easy for someone who is not an anthropologist to answer this, because in general, the ways in which settlements are sustained between these rival institutional claims for accountability in western Europe and north America do not usually allow readily for the co-existence of such stark forms within a single person's life.

To be sure, there may well be some people who live in this way (Mars, 2001 reports on a smartly dressed senior corporate manager who operated well in a large hierarchical corporation during the day but went back each evening to live in a very egalitarian squat). But they are surely the limit case. Much more common, surely, might be, a mix of reasonably entrepreneurial self-employment and employment in a mildly enclaved group in, say, a certain kind of academic department, knowing but a couple of people one might risk calling friends, and attending a rather high Anglican mass as much out of a sense of tradition as for any literal or dogmatic belief in the creed. This would indeed be a life that contained primary locations of all four kinds in different contexts, but one could imagine institutions of accountability between the church, the university, the meetings with friends, and the client companies that would at least respect the operations of other institutions in their context. In this case, the styles of cognition induced by these institutions could be, if not consistent with each other, at least in manageable tension, and perhaps even in creative tension. Indeed, recent empirical studies have found that many people do live with moderate plurality in their primary situations, and this does show up in the variety of their biases and framings (e.g. Mars and Mars, forthcoming; 6, 2002a,b)

If this is correct, then an additional and very important development or modification of the theory is required. In order to make more explicable, the possibility of settlements and coalitions between institutional styles, and in order to explain a wide range of data on behaviour and attitudes, we need

distinction between *moderate* and *extreme* forms of the four solidarities, at least at the level of the *secondary* situation. If we treat the four basic solidarities as “attractors” in the sense recognised by non-linear dynamic theory (as proposed by Thompson, 1996), then the question arises whether the shape of the “basins” is such as to drag every social phenomenon into the heart of each attractor (as would be the case if the gradients were all represented as smooth, as is the case in conventional representations of attractors in non-linear dynamics: see e.g. Kauffman 1995, p.102 or Gleick, 1988, 140), or whether there might be, as it were, a shallower lip to the basins, where some social phenomena might remain open, perhaps to the pull of other attractors, at least at the level of the secondary situation. Modelling the structure of the attractors in this way would enable an explanation of what seem to be more moderate forms, including findings in attitudinal research (see next section). In this case, the two dimensions of social regulation and social integration could be treated not simply as binary variables as “discontinuist” theorists in this tradition do (Thompson, 1992; Thompson *et al*, 1990). On the other hand, the integrity of the institutional pressures of the basic solidarities requires that one reject the too simple alternative that the dimensions would be *continuously* differentiable (as Gross and Rayner’s 1985 interpretation did). The distinction between moderate and extreme is surely not sharply bounded, and there must be a spectrum here, but on the other, some “shallow lip” or “notches on the slopes” are necessary to explain why the combination of more moderate forms might be viable.³

It is now becomes clear why it helps introduce the concept of the frame, for it both provides a tool by which the general institutional processes described by neo-Durkheimian theory can be given specific empirical and predictive content for each institutional context, and provides a means by which moderate and extreme forms of the thought style elicited by primary locations can be distinguished. Conversely, without the neo-Durkheimian architecture, as we have seen in the examination of Goffman, Gamson, D’Andrade and prospect theory, the concept largely lacks theoretical anchoring.

In the neo-Durkheimian theoretical context, then, the frame is the dependent variable produced by the independent institutional variables of the solidarities. The frame can be defined as *the overarching or organising concept that represents the application to a specific context, of the general cognitive commitments of a given solidarity, in its more moderate or more extreme form*. Such an overarching concept will be derived from the concrete application of the basic thought style of the solidarity to a particular field of experience and

endeavour, and it will colour both the way in which the world is understood – that is to say, sense-making or the organisation of experience – and the way in which norms for action are appreciated (in Vickers' 1995 [1962] sense of "appreciation") – that is to say, bias. Therefore, in line with its general strategy, the theory would predict that the relationship between sense-making and action bias in frames is a functional one: solidarities elicit sense-making in particular thought styles in order to elicit action (or inaction) of the kinds that sustain their institutional and organisational commitments. The reason why the framing of risk perception is such an important measure of the social organisation of cognition, then, is precisely that risk perception provides one important aspects of the functional linkage between sense-making and action bias.

It was argued above the other available theories of frames fail to provide clear and determinate, testable, answers to the four questions, "what is the relationship between sense-making and bias?", "how frames are to be individuated?", "where do frames come from?", and "how far and how can people move between frames?". The neo-Durkheimian theory, as explicated so far and with the additional machinery of the concepts of primary and secondary location in social organisation, frames and the qualification of the standard binary reading of the two dimensions, does therefore offer clear answers to the first three of these questions. The remainder of this article is devoted to developing a richer answer to the fourth.

The case of privacy risk perception: exploring mobility between frames

In order to explore how much mobility might be possible between frames, it is helpful to consider a small and exploratory piece of empirical research using focus groups to explore on the perception and framing of privacy risk – specifically, the perception of risks around the collection, use, sharing and exchange by public sector organisations in the UK, of personal information about individual citizens. This was not designed to test the neo-Durkheimian theory; however, it was used to explore the developments to the neo-Durkheimian approach presented above. It is not presented as a test of the theory, nor even as a full exploration of its power. Rather, its role in the present argument is to be suggestive and illustrative of the theoretical argument. Some details of the research are provided in a note.⁴ It will be argued that the theory performs well in this case. However, this is not likely to be because there is anything special about privacy risk perception: the theory has been shown to explain empirical findings in a wide variety of other fields

of risk perception and framing: see Coyle and Ellis, 1993; Mars, 1982; Rayner, 1982; Thompson *et al*, 1999; Price and Thompson, 1997; Bale, 1997; Thompson and Gyawali, 1999.

Although this is a rich data set, for the present purpose, we need only consider the findings on framing of risk perception. Because of the small numbers of groups and participants, the interpretations offered here should of course be treated with caution, as being no more than suggestive of the theoretical hypotheses offered, and certainly not as constituting a definitive test.

Five basic frames were identified empirically in the transcripts, and each group was typically more likely to adopt one of these as its basic point of reference. These were the *indignity*, *lack of control*, *injustice*, *inconvenience*, and “*nothing to hide*” frames. Although the remaining three of the full set of eight were not observed, this is explained as the consequence of the sampling strategy, for no recruitment was (for budgetary reasons) attempted among those whose primary location might have yielded the other three frames. However, the results on the other frames are strongly suggestive that the framework is helpful.

In the indignity frame, the key tropes are ones of depersonalisation and powerlessness, and the key emotion is one of resentment, generalised anxiety and reduced expectations. A common phrase that marks the operation of this frame was “you’re just a number to them”.

The lack of control frame is a rather weaker form of the indignity frame, in which the key trope was often the idea of the slippery slope, that the data subject was not entirely powerless, but their chances of exercising power over the use of their personal data were limited, and the system was apt to shift beyond their control. In this frame, people think that their data are already shared widely and used freely. The key affect here tends to be one of stoic endurance.

The injustice frame is marked by anger, indignation and demands for redress rather than passive resentment. The telltale signs are talks of quite specific wrongs rather than generalised abuse, demands for specific changes, uses of such language as “shouldn’t” or “should be enforced”.

The inconvenience frame is one in which the key affect is that of frustration or annoyance at what are seen as comparatively minor wrongs, but a belief in one’s ability to secure their correction. A common expression for violations of data protection principles was “it drives you up the wall”. Like the injustice frame, inconvenience directs attention to specific wrongs rather than – as in the indignity frame – a view of a grand system of domination.

The “nothing to hide” frame is defined by its commitment to the principle that if one has “nothing to hide” – that is to say, if one is not a criminal or does not have some other disempowering characteristic that is relevant to the particular context of data gathering or sharing – then one should not be invoking claims for privacy, nor should one call for legal protections, for one should be prepared confidently to submit oneself to the accountability of being documented and profiled without fear of the consequences. It is in essence an exaggerated form of the inconvenience frame.

Findings

This section presents a brief selection of illustrative evidence from the nine hours worth of transcript material: transcription conventions used are explained in a note.⁵ As we might expect, for the Income Support (welfare benefit) claimants, the dominant frame was that of indignity, although other groups occasionally dropped into it in the course of their conversation. For the Income Support claimants, “computers” seemed to be a kind of collective agent which exercised power over them, and which depersonalised them. The trope of depersonalisation is a good indicator of an indignity frame. One of them puts the point graphically:

323. W: I know it is technology and everything but I think people are getting bst in all the computers and everything, you hardly speak to people any more, it is “Give me your insurance number or whatever and they will find out who you are”, why don’t you ask me?

Depersonalisation is an anxiety for some of the young school leavers:

289. Sameer: It could become invasive if they got a lot of information about an individual. There could be problems with that and putting people into different categories.

291. Sameer: Boxes.

The sharpest and simplest statement of the lack of control frame is given by Ron in the recently retired group:

302. W: Who wanted to know?

304. Ron: [*Name of local authority*]. I said I am not giving you that information. THEY TAKE BITS OF INFORMATION AND THEN IT IS PUT ON COMPUTER BUT WHO HAS CONTROL OVER IT?

Among the young school leavers, Ruth quite often draws upon the lack of control frame:

574. Ruth: That is the thing. (3.0) I think if all these groups are going to get together and find out information about you, then they are going to find out your past no matter how much you try and stop them, and I think that is something that can probably be avoided, and if it could be I wouldn't know.

It should be no surprise that long term benefit claimants, whose experience of government is of constant checking up on them, demanding more information from them, reach so readily for the indignity frame, for it reflects their primary location. The Income Support claimants lived in a situation of great constraint and regulation, not just by virtue of their poverty, but by virtue of their relationship to authority and to public services. Their position is one of involuntary use of services, and of being subject to authoritative decisions by bureaucratic bodies. For the recent school leavers, insecurely in the labour market on casual contracts, and for most of their lives subject to the authority of school and the examination system, it also reflects an entirely intelligible response to their primary social location.

The regular drivers were much more diverse, and could not settle on a single frame as a point of reference for their discussion. Two of them, however, display the injustice frame very powerfully: In a discussion of a suggestion that citizens should be notified every time government agencies share information about them, Eric and Tim produce clear injustice frame language and emphasis:

905. Eric: Well I think that should happen anyway already.

907. Tim: Yes. (Roger nods)

909. Moderator: That should happen?

911. Eric: THAT SHOULD HAPPEN, that should happen now.

In the injustice frame, the resigned view that data sharing is already conducted freely is specifically rejected. Some of the recent school leavers can easily reach this frame:

698. Moderator: It is not a question of setting up a big database, but just more people talking to each other, as I said, if one agency wants to find some information about you that is held by another agency, what sorts of things should be done. Should they be allowed to do that easily, or should they make it really difficult?

700. Liam: They shouldn't be able to do that, no.

As we would expect, the self-employed males, with their greater autonomy from government and other large organisations, regulated mainly by tax and property rights laws, tend to adopt the inconvenience frame, and show confidence in their ability to secure correction of abuses:

793. Moderator: Would you ever complain yourselves, would you think of yourselves as ever complaining?

795. Geoff: Yes I think if I have been hard done by I would like to complain. You need something like that to complain to. But I am not so sure at the end of the day it is advantageous, but I just think, just to air your opinion I think you know, that is a good idea.

Some of the regular drivers can operate within this frame too:

214. Roger: I had a similar experience, I sold mine. I sent mine off but the other guy never did. I had exactly the same but I had a letter through saying that the car had been involved in an accident. And that was frightening as far as at the end of the day I was still down as the registered owner. Someone was trying to sue the guy and it came to my address, that was annoying and inconvenient. It concerned me at the end of the day. You can write to the DVLA but they don't seem to listen or can't change their information. I even gave them the information of the guy who had the car.

As we would expect, it is one of the self-employed males who presents the "nothing to hide" frame most boldly.

187. Andrew: I think there are more advantages than disadvantages [*to data sharing*], personally, because it depends what side of the fence you are standing on. If you are a crook then the whole thing is a mine field, but if you look for the general, to stop fraudulent behaviour, and the general betterment of society, then you should have things open. And my contention is, that if you have got nothing to hide, then you have got nothing to worry about, as long as you are not doing anything illegal.

However, even he cannot consistently remain in this frame throughout the conversation, and he moves back through inconvenience to occasional forays into an injustice frame.

Discussion: hypotheses about the range of mobility between frames

It is clear from these findings on the association of baseline frames with the regulation and integration that characterise the primary locations, that we can explain the adoption of these frames by reference to the matrix in Figure 1. However, to do so rigorously, it will be important to attend to the distinction between extreme and moderate forms. Figure 2 shows how these frames are readily be mapped onto Figure 1.

<Figure 2 about here>

Figure 2 also displays the other frames that the theory, as developed here, would predict that we should detect, if groups using the same instrumentation were conducted with for example, members of the security forces, activists in civil liberties movements, and civil servants. Specifically, it predicts that people in these primary social locations would adopt as their baseline point of reference, respectively conspiracy, subversion and regulated balance frames. This is an hypothesis that can and should be tested in future research. For a conventional “Whitehall” view of privacy is one that requires a regulated balance of authority and rights, that privacy claims cannot override the duty of the police or the benefits authorities’ fraud investigators to examine the information they require. At the extreme of that position is the argument that government has the right and duty to engage in surveillance as and when necessary, so great is the threat of crime, abuse, fraud and so on (e.g. Denning, 1997).

In fact, there are brief hints of awareness of the existence of some of these frames at least as markers of the boundaries of one’s own frame, in the discussions of the six focus groups. We can even hear a short echo of the subversion frame, albeit not one that is sustained, in the regular drivers’ focus group, when Derek makes the following remark:

663. Derek: Bloody right. Get some public responsibility back into this country, because that is what it bloody needs.

At the opposite extreme is the position of some self-radicalising movements, that privacy risks represent a kind of conspiracy by governments, technologists and big companies to deprive and disadvantage populations. This is a frame that at least one of the focus group participants knows of, and

deeply disapproves. Andrew interrupts the flow of conversation among the self-employed men at one point, to ask

155. Andrew: Are you alluding to a conspiracy? [said to moderator]

157. Moderator: No not at all.

159. Andrew: You are not, because that is a very topical thing, conspiracy is. And it is the conception of most people that most men do think that there is a huge amount of conspiracy. But it is theoretical, it is not as realistic as people would have it be. But we are not going down that road?

Notice too, that, as the French proverb has it, “*les extrêmes se touchent*” along the diagonals (on the importance of attending to the links and tensions along the diagonals in this style of analysis, see Douglas, 1996, and Wildavsky, 1998, 204ff). The “nothing to hide” frame is exactly matched by the authoritarian’s view that there are *in fact* so many people with something to hide that should be controlled, that no one had better be permitted to keep anything private. It is this connection that sustains this as the diagonal along which policy makers tend to move most easily, when they move between frames.

Consider now the diagonal that runs from indignity to conspiracy. The affinity that these two extremes have for each other is remarkable. Many of the most extreme radical privacy movement writings sometimes sound as fatalistic about technology, business and government as the Income Support claimants feel (e.g. Davies, 1996). Again, extremes connect, but along the diagonals. Radical movements tend to recruit support from the isolates, just as governments look to support from the business world.

For we have seen that some frames are more accessible to and from each other, than are others. We saw above that groups could move between injustice and inconvenience, or injustice and lack of control, much more easily than they could move into or out of indignity frames. Figure 2 shows quite clearly why this is the case. For indignity is a frame that grows out of an extreme situation, and the others are frames that arise from moderate situations. However, it is much easier to move between some extreme positions and some moderate positions, provided one is moving along the diagonals, either within a quadrant or diagonally to the opposite quadrant than it is to move vertically or horizontally.

In fact, on the basis of this analysis of the focus group transcripts, we can propose three distinct hypotheses about the relative ease of movement between frames:

A. Moves from one extreme to the other extreme of either diagonal face lower hurdles than do vertical and horizontal moves.

For example, one reason why some business and law enforcement interests can sometimes ally on privacy issues, is that there is an affinity between the extremes along the positive diagonal. Some business leaders, for example, take the view that “if you have nothing to hide, then you shouldn’t care about privacy”: it became clear in the study discussed above that this is a stance typically used to mark out oneself as a decent person and to challenge others to put themselves in clear by agreeing: in short, it functions as a blame-deflection tool. The law enforcement agents who take the view that unknown but large numbers of people do indeed have something to hide and that is precisely why privacy should not be protected can therefore ally with those who work with the “nothing to hide” frame, for each is principally interested in sorting sheep from goats among potentially suspect populations. Conversely, the “conspiracy” frame of the privacy activists and their deterministic view of information technology as intrinsically oppressive has an affinity with the “indignity” frame’s view that large organisations necessarily exploit people: in effect, the affinity reflects the blame-mobilising role of these extreme frames (Douglas, 1992). These affinities make moves between these frames easier to make, in certain kinds of conversations, than certain other moves.

B. Moves along diagonals within quadrants face lower hurdles when they are moves outward than when they are moves inward toward the centre, where the primary situation makes for any vulnerability in the anchoring to the reference frame.

Where, for example, people are insecurely situated in the labour market, it is much easier for them to move from a “lack of control” frame about their privacy vis-à-vis employers and government bodies to an “indignity” frame, when they are put into the secondary situation of a conversation with others whose reference is frame is that of indignity. Likewise, those who are insecurely situated in their community of residence and feel under surveillance can move more easily from an injustice to a conspiracy frame if they are in conversation with less moderately enclaved persons than themselves.

C. Vertical and horizontal moves between any of the moderate positions are easier than moves between a moderate form of any quadrant and the extreme form of another quadrant related horizontally or vertically (i.e. not diagonally), for a group for whom the baseline or reference frame is anchored reasonably secured as a moderate one.

In the study discussed, there were some focus groups in which people came from relatively diverse primary situations. In conversation together, many of them were able to move relatively smoothly between, for example, “lack of control” and “injustice” frames, but in no case did we observe people move from “indignity” to “inconvenience” frames. However, some of the income support claimants were able, after a lot of work together, occasionally to reach along the diagonal to speak from an “injustice” frame.

These hypotheses are derived from the distinction between the greater force of the primary location in social organisation over the imperative of the secondary. The secondary location in particular conversation can indeed induce shifts from a baseline point of reference that is explained by the primary location. But the distance and the direction of moves that can be elicited by developments in the secondary situation are both limited.

Conclusion

The theory presented in this article is a genuinely sociological account of framing of issues that are recognised in some frames as risks, and therefore provides a rich and institutional account of where frames come from, that psychological theories cannot. It represents an improvement upon the other sociological traditions reviewed above, because it can offer a clear account of how many basic frames are available, and it enables the analyst to understand how context-specific frames can be derived from basic ones. With the additional hypotheses offered, the theory offers something that other sociological approaches do not, namely an institutional account of how and why people may move between frames. This provides some of the basic elements of a theory of persuasion (6, 2001a).

If this is accepted, then it represents a significant contribution to tackling the central dilemma in the sociology of knowledge, for it provides a credible underpinning for the sixth strategy in the menu offered in the introduction. The theory shows how the organisation of experience and the biasing for individual and collective action functions are performed in a fully integrated manner. It shows how it can be true that there is not, contrary to the postmodernist view, an indefinite variety of sane ways to think about any

issue or problem, but rather a very limited plurality, which will show up within any viable society and at any scale of social organisation. The fact that these basic frames spring up in any society, that they are so interdependent, that their rivalry is so constant and that they support viable ways of organising, is strong evidence that they are genuinely disagreements about the same things, that none is *necessarily* either basically right or fundamentally wrong, but that they provide the very structure into an account of thought styles that is required if the aspirations of the sociology of knowledge are to be fulfilled.

In addition to its contribution to the sociology of knowledge, the theory is of relevance to risk communication. Clearly, it is not possible to persuade anyone of anything (Simons *et al*, 2001). In addition to any objective limitations on persuadability, the present theory suggests that there are socially set limitations to the scope for persuasion, because of the greater importance of the primary situation, but that these do not entirely remove power from persuasion in the secondary situation. Risk communicators would do well to pay attention, not only to the “mental models” (Morgan *et al*, 2001) they detect among particular populations, but to the social roots of the variation they observe, for only thereby will they be able to determine just elements of framing may be more and which less robust against persuasion. Finally, the theses offered here about the range of possible moves may serve to indicate what may be reasonable expectations for persuasion about risk, given the starting points of particular groups and individuals, rooted in their primary location in social organisation.

Notes

¹ Recent work in the risk amplification on the concept of stigma in the risk field has identified a generally negative cluster of frames of which stigma is an extreme case produced by amplification, and a generally milder category produced by attenuation processes. However, the tradition is less interested in identifying and distinguishing the menu of available frames than it is in documenting the positive feedback (or “contagion”) processes by which media, social movements, and informal conversation diffuse and fix frames, wherever those frames come from. The theory to be defended in this paper offers a more complex classification than the relatively simple spectrum from positive to negative views, and it also proposes a more complex set of dynamic forces than the positive feedback dynamic which underlies risk amplification and attenuation. However, the phenomena picked out by risk amplification theory are recognised as special cases.

² For more detail, the reader should consult the following key works: Douglas, 1970; 1982a, [1978], 1982b, 1986, 1992; Ellis and Thompson, 1999; Fardon, 1999; Mars, 1982; Rayner, 1992; Thompson *et al*, 1990, Thompson *et al*, 1999; Adams, 1995; 6, 1999; Wildavsky, 1998; Schwarz and Thompson, 1990; Coyle and Ellis, 1993; Gross and Rayner, 1985; Hood, 1998.

³ Binarist interpretations of the two dimensions such as Thompson’s can account for phenomena of the kind in question here, but the explanation is slightly cumbersome. Such accounts typically posit that what looks like an extreme form is in fact, the “normal” form of a solidarity, and that all that controls it to the point where it might look a “moderate” form is in fact some coalition or settlement with other solidarities. One problem with this epicycle to the theory is that, without some workarounds, it risks circularity. For the possibility of coalition or settlement is precisely what is to be explained. To prevent the circularity, the discontinuist must posit that there is some mechanism in the process of coalescence or settlement that is not itself one of moderating solidarities, but which makes viability possible in ways that produce something that might look, at first sight, like moderation. That this can be done, need not be doubted. However, it seems rather a cumbersome way to preserve the binary reading of the dimensions. The present argument accepts some loss of some parsimony at the level of the dimensions in order to preserve parsimony in the mechanisms. The discontinuist argument makes exact the reverse trade-off. It seems more appropriate to allow loss of parsimony in the interpretation of the dimensions, than to allow it in the basic explanatory structure of the theory.

Thompson’s argument for a strictly binarist view rests in part on his view that the solidarities are patterns (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990, 11-13. Thompson, 1996, 49-57), and that something either conforms fully to a pattern or it does not. However, it is not necessary to take this on/off view of patterns: indeed, it seems to be more a matter of definition than an empirical claim. In ordinary usage, there are often gradations between patterns.

Gradations between patterns of faces of apparently opposing politicians are the stock in trade of newspaper cartoonists during general elections. Gradations of patterns from very pure forms to less pure forms are the stock-in-trade of textile designers - think of the gradations that lie between the checks on kilts and simple checks, or between true waffle textures and other less starkly textured materials.

Another reason that Thompson's account resists any acceptance of a moderate-extreme distinction is that his model uses the centre of the matrix for a fifth solidarity, that of the hermit (Thompson, 1982). However, as Douglas, 1982a argued, there may be reasons for regarding the hermit form as "off the map" entirely, rather than located at the centre.

None of this should be taken as denying Thompson's central insight that the taxonomy is no mere heuristic device but that it is a representation of a dynamic, non-linear disequilibrium model of social organisation, and hence of the production of thought styles. The point of the present argument about the secondary situation and the shape of the "attractors" is to add to that insight, not to detract from it.

The present model is in full agreement with Thompson in regarding the "extreme" forms as the product of institutional self-reinforcing, self-radicalising tendencies of positive feedback dynamics within the solidarities, which tend to self-disorganisation.

⁴ For a full account, see 6, 2001b. The study was commissioned by the Performance and Innovation Unit in the Cabinet Office in London, which is the long range policy think tank reporting to the British Prime Minister, in order to support a larger policy project on the tension between privacy concerns and the aspirations for more "joined-up" government (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002; 6, 1997, 6 *et al.*, 1999, 2001), which typically involves sharing of personal data about citizens between departments, agencies and tiers of government. Although there is a body of empirical work on privacy risk perception (reviewed in 6 with Lasky and Fletcher, 1998b, ch.1 and in Raab and Bennett, 1998) and a smaller body of work on trust in data controllers (6 with Lasky and Fletcher, 1998b, chs. 4-7), this work is largely quantitative, uses some rather unsatisfactory segmentations of attitudes, and provides little guidance on how far there is mobility between frames. It was decided to conduct focus group research, in order to explore how far secondary locations can influence mobility between frames. For reasons of cost, only six focus groups were conducted. They were held in four locations around England between 9th and 15th January 2001 and consisted of about six people each. Therefore, the study should be treated as exploratory and illustrative, not as decisive. The participants were recruited because they fell into certain important categories of data subjects, in respect of whom data sharing is either currently being done or new sharing is proposed or might soon be proposed, either at a national or a local level:

Group A: Income Support claimants, Stockport, 9th January 2001.

Group B: Self-employed men, Dover, 15th January 2001.

Group C: School leavers in low paid or temporary work, Bristol, 11th January 2001.

Group D: Female recent immigrants and granted asylum, Southwark, 15th January 2001.

Group E: Recently retired people, West Wickham, 10th January 2001.

Group F: Regular drivers, Bristol, 11th January 2001.

These client groups do not provide a fully comprehensively representative sample of primary locations in social organisation in respect of personal information (nor, by definition, could any research sampling data subjects but not data controllers do so), but, as will be shown below, they do cover an important and revealing subset.

The question schedule and additional instrumentation of exercises, prompts etc, focused first on participants' understanding of what data sharing is done and why, then their perceptions of benefits, followed by their perception of risks, followed by their thoughts on the relationships between risk and benefit, their reasons for and extent of trust in public agencies handling of their personal information, and their views on several proposed measures that might be taken that might be seen as giving them additional reasons to trust that their information might be used in ways that were acceptable to them. The focus group transcripts (one group refused to allow tape recording and so only the moderator's and observer's notes were available) were analysed manually, using forty six index codes. These included codes for principles appealed to, tropes used and other evidence for the operation of frames. These codes were developed iteratively, by drawing on the wider privacy risk literature and studies, and from the transcript data. The results of the analysis, which was conducted by the author, were checked by the two moderators and the observer and accepted with only very minor amendments. Analysis of the transcript found that the six focus groups identified thirteen distinct privacy risks in total, with some groups identifying more than others.

⁵ The numbers are line numbers from the transcripts; all names are pseudonyms; "W" and "M" mean, respectively, an unidentified woman and man speaking. A reduced set of Silverman conventions are used in the transcripts: see Silverman, 1993, p118. Full transcripts are available on request from the author.

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Figure 1. Basic forms of the solidarities and their thought styles

Social regulation ↑	social relations are conceived as if they were principally involuntary tragic view of society ↑		
Individual autonomy should ⇐ not be held accountable	<p>Isolate</p> <p><i>Co-ordination:</i> none: all systems are capricious <i>Social network structure:</i> isolate; casual, shallow ties, occasion-bound networks <i>Value stance:</i> personal withdrawal (e.g. from others, social order, institutions), eclectic values <i>Institutions:</i> suspicious of the efficacy of any institutional design <i>World views:</i> fatalism at the bottom of society and despotism at the top of society <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> “no point” <i>Weakness:</i> tends to be poor in predicting and responding strategically to new situations, shocks, etc (this may not be seen as a problem since the basic belief is that there is little one can do about change)</p>	<p>Hierarchy / central community</p> <p><i>Co-ordination:</i> regulated systems are necessary: unregulated systems need management and deliberate action to give them stability and structure <i>Social network structure:</i> central community, controlled and managed network <i>Value stance:</i> affirmation (e.g. of social values, social order institutions) by rule-following and strong incorporation of individuals in social order <i>Institutions:</i> rational, steerage capacity, rule-dominant <i>World view:</i> hierarchy <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> violation of rule and role <i>Weakness:</i> tends to produce brittle systems and networks, vulnerable to unexpected shocks from other solidarities (this may not be seen as a problem since the basic belief is that other solidarities are essentially reactive, and the task is keep systems within bounds where vulnerability can be minimised)</p>	Individual autonomy ⇒ should be held accountable
	<p>Individualism</p> <p><i>Co-ordination:</i> spontaneous, hidden hand: regulated systems are unnecessary or harmful: effective system emerges spontaneously from individual action <i>Social network structure:</i> individualism, markets: open, configurations characterised by weak ties <i>Value stance:</i> affirmation (e.g. of social values, social order institutions) by personal entrepreneurial initiative <i>Institutions:</i> self-restricting, transparent, nonintrusive, guaranteeing basic property rights etc. <i>World view:</i> libertarianism <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> intrusion, disturbance of spontaneous process <i>Weakness:</i> tends to be poor in solving collective action problems (this may not be seen as a problem since collective action problems are not recognised as problems worth solving)</p>	<p>Enclave</p> <p><i>Co-ordination:</i> charismatic, mutual: regulated systems are oppressive – except when they protect <i>Social network structure:</i> enclave, sect, inward-looking <i>Value stance:</i> collective withdrawal (e.g. from perceived ‘mainstream’), dissidence, principled dissent <i>Institutions:</i> charismatic, value-dominant, solidaristic <i>World view:</i> egalitarianism <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> failure to protect, violation and pollution of fragile order <i>Weakness:</i> tends to schism in network structures (this may not be seen as a problem because the basic egalitarian belief is in small, tightly cohesive, transparent community)</p>	
	<p>↓</p> <p>heroic view of society <i>social relations are conceived as if they were principally voluntary</i></p>		⇒ Social integration

Figure 2: Framing privacy risk: the influence of location in social organisation on thought style

