Abstract

From Struggle to Settlement:
The Crystallization of a Field of Lesbian/Gay Organizations in San Francisco, 1969-1973

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Many scholars have noted that organizational sociology has not been very successful in accounting for organizational change (McAdam and Scott 2001). Drawing insights from social movement scholarship, organizational sociologists are currently attempting to develop better explanations for the origins and transformation of organizational fields. A number of scholars have observed that competition between multiple possible ways to organize an arena tends to occur immediately before a new framing of a field locks in (Fligstein 2001). This paper focuses on how moments of creativity or crisis come to a close thus producing a new "institutional settlement" (Zysman 1994). I argue that successfully arriving at a new institutional settlement depends less on the social skill of actors (Fligstein 2001) than on actors simply having workable cultural materials in hand at precisely the right moment. I argue that moments during which new fields can crystallize tend to be quite short-lived. Institutionalization of a new form depends heavily upon timing, particularly whether or not a mobilized group of entrepreneurs with a viable project happen to be in the right place at this moment. I illustrate this by showing how the rapid demise of the New Left created one of these moments of opportunity, and that gay activists were better situated to be able to exploit this moment than some of their fellow activists in related movements.