

Book review forthcoming in *Contemporary Sociology*

Social Structure and Organizations Revisited, Vol. 19, Research in the Sociology of Organizations, edited by **Michael Lounsbury** and **Marc J. Ventresca**. Oxford: JAI/Elsevier, 2002. 433 pp. \$? cloth. ISBN: 0-7623-0872-9.

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Work, Organizations, and Markets (3)

The volume edited by Lounsbury and Ventresca provides a valuable collection of research studies and essays by scholars working on the exciting frontier in the overlap between the study of organizations and political action. The book avoids the problem many edited volumes have of the chapters not cohering by revisiting Arthur Stinchcombe's rich, much cited 1965 essay. Keep the original chapter handy in reading this volume; in a way, the chapters are exegesis, the authors taking a short passage from Stinchcombe and interpreting their empirical results in light of that text. The interpretations range from faintly critical of inconsistencies between "the two Stinchcombes"—the functional contingency theorist and the contextually sensitive sociologist (Schneiberg), to high praise for showing us the error of the widespread assumption that formal organizations erode solidarity when in fact they build common identities (Stevens). The most critical author of all is Stinchcombe himself, who modestly claims that the major accomplishment of his essay was to be written at an earlier time. In his lively 2002 essay, he makes the novel claim that there are three new contenders to challenge a rational choice mechanism of organizational action—1) the process of commensuration and competition between negotiated equals, 2) organizations' evangelism to spread the good news of their structure, and 3) the legitimacy of telling the

truth in organizational networks. Further, he makes the provocative claim that power is not a mechanism.

Empirical chapters that explain social movements and the organization of new structures with a fascinating array of research subjects constitute the heart of the volume. Radical hippie scientists performing ungentlemanly protests at professional meetings illustrate the ways that new organizational forms arise from the interactional level—people trying to make sense of broad social changes (Moore and Hala). Russian politicians' struggle to change privatization rules for investment funds in the 1990s shows how a key organizational battleground during revolutionary periods is in defining deviance (Spicer). Out gays and lesbians organizing bureaucratically to fight discrimination in the 1960s, then organizing informally to display identity in the 1970s, demonstrate the connection between political strategy and organizational form (Armstrong). Silicon Valley venture capitalists' assessment of entrepreneurs' reputations to decide which startups to fund reveals the way that politics create stratification among new organizations (Sacks). "Tempered" activists who exercise voice within the system at work display how political change can be piecemeal (Scully and Segal). An easily identifiable commonality in the chapters is the political struggle to define organizational goals. So, why is power not a mechanism in Stinchcombe's assessment of this work? Because, he argues, power is an outcome of, rather than a condition that generates organizational behavior. This line of argument takes the constructionist aspect of the "new structuralism" too far. What about the role of powerful opponents in motivating the organization of social movements?

The organizational ecology papers fit in less comfortably with the political theme of the volume. In ecological studies focused on measuring organizational variables across time and industries, the rich context of relationships and questions of who defines organizational agendas are lost. This problem may be partly methodological, as qualitative studies lend themselves more easily to addressing organizational politics. Fortunately, Brieger's essay and Schneiberg's study provide some leads for thinking about how we can retain the analytic precision of quantitative methods and at the same time move beyond narrow definitions of structure. In the introduction, the editors frame the volume as an expanded reading of Stinchcombe beyond the narrow conception of the "liability of newness," the most commonly cited concept from his 1965 essay. The liability is that new organizations and industries flounder because they have not yet gained legitimacy. Organizational ecologists have typically cited this concept to explain the high failure rate of new firms. The ecological chapters in the volume do inform us where some of the more interesting applications of the liability of newness are at currently. Burton et al., for example, show how successful new firms are often founded by entrepreneurs from successful old firms.

At the end of the three sections of empirical chapters are essays that reflect on themes within each section. The discussants ably raise further questions for scholars of organizations, politics, and culture. For example, why do some new organizational structures diffuse widely and others disappear (Clemens)? The questions posed by the essayists show that there is still plenty of room on this frontier for further knowledge development.

Each chapter reminds us to read Stinchcombe's essay and not just cite it for legitimacy, because it outlines good ideas on the institutional processes by which organizations are stratified. The volume tells us how things get done in organizations and social movements and engages a theoretical perspective that moves outside the dimensions of individual level stratification, and power as a rational exchange of resources. The authors have invested much in their chapters. It's worth it to invest in this volume.