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Abstract

Field theory offers a radically alternative view of social life. It is concerned with how a set of actors orienting their actions to one another do so within a meso-level social order. Fields, once formed, are the arenas where the sociological game of jockeying for position constantly plays out. Our purpose is to review contemporary field theory as articulated in three major theoretical statements in sociology. We discuss field theory's intellectual roots, paying particular attention to the influences of Max Weber and Kurt Lewin, but also phenomenology and symbolic interaction. We next provide an overview of three of the most developed elaborations of field theory from the last half-century – Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields (1992), the neo-institutional approach to organizational fields (DiMaggio and Powell, *Am Socio Rev* 48(2):147–160, 1983), and the theory of strategic action fields recently proposed by Fligstein and McAdam, *A theory of fields*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.. We follow these overviews with more a detailed examination of how each of these theories addresses two of the most fundamental problems in sociological theory: (1) how to conceive of agency and actors in fields, and (2) how social fields emerge, reproduce, and change. We spend the bulk of our essay discussing key differences between the three approaches on these issues. We end by suggesting the next steps forward in elaborating field theory.

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Keywords (separated  
by “ - ”)

Field theory - Strategic action fields - Meso-level social theory - Organizational fields - Bourdieu

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Daniel N. Kluttz and Neil Fligstein

**10.1 Introduction**

The explanation of social action in sociological theory has traditionally focused on either macro- or micro-level analyses. Field theory offers an alternative view of social life. It is concerned with how a set of actors orienting their actions to one another do so in a meso-level social order. Field theory implies that there is something at stake in such an order, that there are rules governing the order, that actors have positions and resources, and that actors have an understanding of the order that allows them to interpret the actions of others and frame a response. Fields, once formed, are the arenas where the sociological game of jockeying for position constantly plays out.

Our purpose in this chapter is to review contemporary field theory as articulated in three major theoretical statements in sociology.<sup>1</sup> We begin with a brief description of the core tenets of any contemporary sociological field theory. We

then discuss field theory's intellectual roots, paying particular attention to the influences of Max Weber and Kurt Lewin but also phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. We next provide an overview of three of the most developed elaborations of field theory from the last half-century – Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields (1992), the neo-institutional approach to "organizational fields" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), and the model of "strategic action fields" recently proposed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012). We follow these overviews with a more detailed examination of how each of these theories addresses two of the most fundamental problems in sociological theory: (1) how social fields emerge, reproduce, and change, and (2) how to conceive of agency and actors.

We spend the bulk of our essay discussing key differences between the three approaches on these issues. Although there are some commonalities across the varieties of field theory, there are also some clear differences of opinion. Drawing its model of social action from Berger and Luckmann (1967) and phenomenology, foundational neo-institutional theory downplays the exercise of power in fields and offers us a view of actors who tend towards habit and conformity in their actions and rely on cues from the field to legitimate their actions. In contrast,

<sup>1</sup>We only review theories that explicitly invoke the field concept. There are a great many perspectives in sociology that appear compatible with field theory, for example, network analysis (White 1992) and the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al. 2012). But these perspectives eschew field as a central concept and are not discussed in this chapter.

D.N. Kluttz (✉) • N. Fligstein  
University of California, Berkeley,  
Berkeley, CA, USA  
e-mail: [dkluttz@berkeley.edu](mailto:dkluttz@berkeley.edu); [fligst@berkeley.edu](mailto:fligst@berkeley.edu)

54 Bourdieu’s theory emphasizes the role of power  
 55 in field construction and focuses on how the  
 56 structuring of the field gives more powerful  
 57 actors the tools by which to consistently win the  
 58 game. He develops a sophisticated model of  
 59 action predicated on “habitus,” which is a con-  
 60 cept to explain how people form cultural frames  
 61 that inform their ability to interpret the actions of  
 62 others. While there are clear affinities between  
 63 the model of actors in Bourdieu and classic neo-  
 64 institutional theory, Bourdieu’s model focuses on  
 65 how actors use their existing cognitive frames to  
 66 engage in strategic yet socially structured action.

67 On the questions of field emergence and  
 68 change, Bourdieu and neo-institutional theory  
 69 focus mostly on the reproducibility of field struc-  
 70 ture as the outcome of social action. Fligstein and  
 71 McAdam (2012) theorize emergence and change  
 72 more explicitly and offer the most fluid and polit-  
 73 ical view of field dynamics. They suggest that  
 74 even stable fields are constantly undergoing  
 75 change, as contestation over all aspects of the  
 76 field is part of the ongoing field project. Fligstein  
 77 and McAdam advance the idea that fields are  
 78 embedded in systems of fields that greatly influ-  
 79 ence the ability of actors to create and reproduce  
 80 stable worlds. They also provide insight into field  
 81 emergence and transformation by viewing these  
 82 as situations in which all aspects of field forma-  
 83 tion are up for grabs. Finally, they develop the  
 84 evocative concept of social skill to explain how  
 85 actors influence, dominate, or cooperate with  
 86 others to produce and sustain meso-level social  
 87 order.

88 We clarify these differences of opinion to sug-  
 89 gest two future lines of work. First, it is possible  
 90 that each of these perspectives captures some-  
 91 thing plausible about how the world works. What  
 92 is left unspecified is the scope conditions under  
 93 which one or the other of these perspectives  
 94 should be deployed. Second, it may turn out that  
 95 one of these perspectives in fact offers a better  
 96 empirical way to make sense of meso-level social  
 97 orders. Establishing their differences allows  
 98 scholars to construct tests by which the validity  
 99 of one or the other of these perspectives can be  
 100 established. The promise of field theory is its

potential to explain interactions in a wide variety  
 of social settings. It offers a set of conceptual  
 tools that can be deployed for many of the most  
 important sociological questions. Progress will  
 be made only by sharpening our understanding of  
 the differences in field theories in order to better  
 understand how they can be profitably used.

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## 10.2 Common Themes in Field Theories

The main idea in field theory is that most of social  
 life occurs in arenas where actors take one  
 another into account in their actions. These inter-  
 actions occur where something is at stake. But  
 fields also imply a stable order, one that allows  
 for the reproduction of the actors and their social  
 positions over time. This general formulation of a  
 field is sometimes described as a meso-level  
 social order. The term “meso” refers to the fact  
 that actors are taking each other into account in  
 framing actions within some theoretically or  
 empirically defined social arena. This means that  
 the explanation of social action is done in the  
 context of the field. This does not mean that all  
 actors are individuals. Instead, field theory con-  
 ceives of actors as including individuals, groups,  
 subunits of organizations, organizations, firms,  
 and states. Examples of meso-level social orders  
 made up of both individual and collective actors  
 include groups of individuals who work in an  
 office and cooperate over a task, subunits of orga-  
 nizations that vie for organizational resources,  
 firms that compete with one another to dominate  
 a market, and states that come together to negoti-  
 ate treaties. The primary unit of analysis is nei-  
 ther a macro-social process that contains some  
 underlying structural logic operating independ-  
 ently of actors (e.g., social class) nor is it a  
 micro-social process that focuses on the idiosyn-  
 cratic preferences and motivations of individual  
 actors.

Field theorists share a spatial, relational  
 approach to understanding how actors interact  
 with one another. Actors are located in a social  
 space (the field), which is a socially constructed

145 arena in which actors are oriented toward one  
 146 another over a common practice, institution,  
 147 issue, or goal. Being oriented toward one another,  
 148 field actors frame their actions and identities vis-  
 149 à-vis one another (i.e., relationally). Actors  
 150 within a field recognize (if not always follow)  
 151 shared meanings, rules, and norms that guide  
 152 their interactions. Fields structure actors' inter-  
 153 ests and influence them to think and act in accord-  
 154 dance with the rules and expectations of the field.  
 155 Nevertheless, field actors have the agentic capac-  
 156 ity (again, to varying degrees depending on the  
 157 version of the theory) to accumulate resources  
 158 and/or seek advantages vis-à-vis others. Such  
 159 resources and advantages can include legitimacy,  
 160 the accumulation of various forms of capital in  
 161 order to exert power over others, and the building  
 162 of political coalitions to further collective  
 163 interests.

164 Field theorists use the field construct to make  
 165 sense of how and why social orders can be repro-  
 166 duced. They have increasingly become interested  
 167 in how fields emerge and are transformed.  
 168 Underlying this formulation is the idea that a  
 169 field is an ongoing game where actors have to  
 170 understand what others are doing in order to  
 171 frame their action. This has caused field theorists  
 172 to consider issues of agency and action and to  
 173 develop sociological views of how cognition  
 174 works, focusing on issues of culture, framing,  
 175 identity, habit, and socialization. Finally, while  
 176 the role of actors varies across formulations of  
 177 field theories, such theories explicitly reject ratio-  
 178 nal actor models and instead rely on phenome-  
 179 nology and symbolic interactionism to understand  
 180 what actors do under varying field conditions.

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### 181 **10.3 Classical Roots** 182 **of Contemporary** 183 **Sociological Field Theory**

184 We trace the classical roots of contemporary  
 185 sociological field theory to two primary influ-  
 186 ences, Max Weber and Kurt Lewin. Then we  
 187 briefly discuss how phenomenology and sym-  
 188 bolic interactionism have provided the founda-

189 tions of field theories' models of action. We  
 190 direct the reader to Mey (1972) and Martin (2003)  
 191 for more detailed accounts of the classical  
 192 foundations of field theory that draw from many  
 193 more theoretical lines of inquiry. In particular,  
 194 Martin (2003) provides a concise review of field  
 195 theory's roots in the physical sciences (particu-  
 196 larly classical electro-magnetism), the contribu-  
 197 tions of the Gestalt school of psychology apart  
 198 from Lewin, and the contributions of other intel-  
 199 lectual ancestors not discussed here, most nota-  
 200 bly Ernst Cassirer, Karl Mannheim, and Friedrich  
 201 Fürstenberg.

202 Max Weber argued that social relationships  
 203 require meaningful action between two or more  
 204 actors whose actions are based on an awareness  
 205 of and orientation to the other (Weber 1978:  
 206 28–30). Weber also took the position that social  
 207 relationships can scale up to higher levels (e.g.,  
 208 organizations, associations, etc.) and become a  
 209 social order that encompasses a multitude of  
 210 actors. A social order can simultaneously be its  
 211 own complex of meaning and part of a broader  
 212 complex of meaning. Weber identified a small  
 213 number of orders present in every society: legal,  
 214 social, economic, political, and religious. He  
 215 thought that something different is at stake in  
 216 each order and the struggles over a particular  
 217 order could only be interpreted from the perspec-  
 218 tive of groups vying for advantage in that order  
 219 (1978). For example, honor or status is at stake in  
 220 the social order, power in the political order, the  
 221 saving of souls in the religious order, and eco-  
 222 nomic advantage in the economic order. Weber  
 223 thought that power in one order could bring about  
 224 power in another. So, for example, economic suc-  
 225 cess could spill over to social honor or esteem.  
 226 However, Weber also thought that the relation-  
 227 ship between orders was the product of history.  
 228 For example, in a theocracy, the religious order  
 229 could dominate the political and economic order.  
 230 With his emphasis on the symbolic in addition to  
 231 the material dimension of relations, Weber was of  
 232 fundamental importance to field theorists' con-  
 233 ceptions of fields as socially constructed arenas  
 234 of action.

235 As a social psychologist with a background in  
 236 Gestalt psychology, it was Kurt Lewin who most  
 237 directly transferred the ideas of field theory from  
 238 the physical sciences into the social sciences.  
 239 Lewin applied Gestalt concepts of perception –  
 240 that stimuli are not perceived as individual parts  
 241 but by their relation to the whole field of percep-  
 242 tion – to social psychology and, in particular,  
 243 human motivation and how social situations  
 244 influence cognition (Mohr 2005). Lewin (1951:  
 245 240) also developed formal models to represent  
 246 fields, which he defined as the “totality of coex-  
 247 isting facts which are conceived of as mutually  
 248 interdependent,” and the life space, defined as  
 249 “the person and the psychological environment  
 250 as it exists for him” (1951: 57).

251 For Lewin, the individual’s phenomenological  
 252 apprehension of the world could be simultane-  
 253 ously influenced by the field environment and  
 254 his/her navigation of the life space. The life space  
 255 is made up of regions of experience, the meaning  
 256 of each being defined by its relations to other  
 257 regions. And because one’s apprehension of a  
 258 field also influences the field itself, the effects of  
 259 one on the other are reciprocal. Individual behav-  
 260 ior, then, could be explained only by considering  
 261 the totality of the interaction between the indi-  
 262 vidual’s navigation of the life space and the envi-  
 263 ronment. Although Lewin has been criticized for,  
 264 among other things, his ultimately unworkable  
 265 topological formalizations (see Martin 2003:  
 266 18–19), his explicit use of the field metaphor and  
 267 his emphasis on the co-constitution of fields and  
 268 actors served as an important foundation on  
 269 which contemporary sociological field theories  
 270 were built.

271 Field theorists have used a variety of sources  
 272 to construct their model of the actor. For exam-  
 273 ple, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus has many  
 274 sources – some in philosophy like Husserl,  
 275 Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty as well as sociol-  
 276 ogists who were philosophically inclined and  
 277 influenced by phenomenology, like Mauss and  
 278 Elias.<sup>2</sup> Mauss (1934) defined habitus as those

279 aspects of culture that are anchored in the body or  
 280 daily practices of individuals, groups, societies,  
 281 and nations. It includes the totality of learned  
 282 habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, and other  
 283 forms of non-discursive knowledge that might be  
 284 said to “go without saying” for a specific group.  
 285 Elias used the habitus concept to make sense of  
 286 the changes in personality he detailed in *The*  
 287 *Civilizing Process* (1939).

288 Neo-institutionalists rely heavily on Berger  
 289 and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of*  
 290 *Reality* (1967) for their model of actors (Powell  
 291 and DiMaggio 1991). Berger and Luckmann  
 292 drew their inspiration from Alfred Schutz, a soci-  
 293 ologist who was trained in phenomenology.  
 294 Berger and Luckmann argued that the world is a  
 295 social construction. It requires effort for this to  
 296 emerge, effort that implied institutionalization  
 297 and legitimation. Like the habitus for Bourdieu,  
 298 an existing social world gets internalized via  
 299 socialization.

300 Compared to the neo-institutional elaboration  
 301 of organizational fields, Fligstein and McAdam  
 302 (2012) draw more heavily on Mead’s (1934)  
 303 symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interaction-  
 304 ism is a perspective grounded in American prag-  
 305 matist philosophy (Menand 2001). It bears many  
 306 resemblances to phenomenology, viewing the  
 307 social world as a construction and socialization  
 308 as the main way in which that world is inculcated  
 309 in individuals. But Mead’s symbolic interaction-  
 310 ism also proposes that one of the main goals of  
 311 social action is for actors to help shape and create  
 312 their worlds. At the core of interaction is the idea  
 313 that we have identities that we share with others.  
 314 These identities provide the basis for our coop-  
 315 eration with others. Bourdieu also cites symbolic  
 316 interaction as a source for his view of social  
 317 action. Because he was interested in how power  
 318 was actually experienced in interaction, he saw  
 319 symbolic interaction as a way to frame how the  
 320 less powerful accepted their fate in interaction  
 321 with the more powerful.

<sup>2</sup>Crossley (2004) provides a lengthy discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s deep influences on Bourdieu’s theoretic-

cal framework. Interestingly, it was also through Merleau-Ponty’s work that Bourdieu first encountered Weber (Bourdieu et al. 2013: 112).

## 322 10.4 Contemporary Elaborations 323 of Sociological Field Theory

### 324 10.4.1 Bourdieu's Field Theory

325 Pierre Bourdieu is the contemporary sociologist  
326 most often associated with field theory. Bourdieu  
327 deployed the idea of field as part of a more com-  
328 plex theoretical framework that included two  
329 other major concepts, capital and habitus (see  
330 generally Bourdieu 1977, 1986; Bourdieu and  
331 Wacquant 1992). For Bourdieu, social life takes  
332 place in fields. Fields are arenas of struggle, and  
333 Bourdieu frequently uses the game metaphor to  
334 describe how action takes place in fields. In  
335 fields, players occupy positions relative to one  
336 another but have a shared sense of the socially  
337 constructed, centralized framework of meaning,  
338 or what is at stake in the field. Bourdieu's fields  
339 are relatively autonomous, meaning each tends to  
340 have its own logic (or "rules of the game") and  
341 history. Players compete with one another for  
342 resources, status, and, most fundamentally, over  
343 the very definition of the "rules of the game" that  
344 govern field relations. Relations within  
345 Bourdieu's fields are mostly hierarchical, with  
346 dominant individuals or groups imposing their  
347 power over dominated groups as a result of their  
348 ability to control the field, what is at stake, and  
349 what counts as rules and resources.

350 The main source of power for dominant actors  
351 is the capital that they bring to the field. Actors  
352 within a field are endowed with physical (or eco-  
353 nomic), social, human, and cultural capital  
354 (Bourdieu 1986, 1989: 17).<sup>3</sup> One's position in a  
355 field is defined by the volume and form of capital  
356 one possesses. Those with similar volumes and  
357 forms of capital tend to cluster in similar posi-  
358 tions in a field. Actors within a field wield capital  
359 in order to improve or maintain their field posi-  
360 tions. A field is thus the site where actors carry

361 out and reproduce power relations over others  
362 based on their capital endowments.

363 Habitus is the "strategy-generating principle"  
364 that enables actors to apprehend, navigate, and  
365 act in the social world (Bourdieu 1977: 78; see  
366 also Bourdieu 1990: 53).<sup>4</sup> It is subjective in that it  
367 represents the bundle of cognitive and evaluative  
368 capacities that make up one's perceptions, judg-  
369 ments, tastes, and strategies for actions. But habi-  
370 tus is not simply produced or employed  
371 subjectively. It is a highly structured system of  
372 dispositions. Strategies and actions generated by  
373 habitus are not products of motivations for future  
374 goals so much as products of past experience  
375 (Bourdieu 1977: 72). Habitus is internalized via  
376 (mostly early) socialization. But habitus is nei-  
377 ther wholly static nor deterministic. It can change  
378 as one traverses the life course and interacts  
379 within different fields. Because an actor's  
380 habitus-generated perceptions and strategies lead  
381 to practices, they have real impacts on capital  
382 allocations and field structure. The habitus of  
383 actors is both constituted by and constitutive of  
384 the social structure of the field.

385 Bourdieu uses these concepts of field, capital,  
386 and habitus to understand why, in general, fields'  
387 structures of dominance tend to be reproduced.  
388 Given a field that contains a set of rules and play-  
389 ers with fixed capital, the "game" will generally  
390 be rigged. Actors will perceive what others are  
391 doing and respond to their actions by deploying  
392 their capital in such a way as to preserve their  
393 current position as much as possible. In this way,  
394 both dominant and dominated actors play the  
395 game to the best of their abilities, but in doing so  
396 tend to reproduce their field positions. The reflex-  
397 ive field-capital-habitus relation gives Bourdieu  
398 powerful theoretical leverage to include both  
399 agency and structure in his explanation of social  
400 order. Bourdieu himself suggests that it gives him  
401 the ability to reject what he sees as false antimo-  
402 nies between objectivism and subjectivism  
403 (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

<sup>3</sup>All of these forms of capital, when perceived or recog-  
nized by others as legitimate, confer symbolic capital  
(akin to prestige or honor) and thus the ability to exercise  
symbolic power over others (Bourdieu 1986, 1989).

<sup>4</sup>For an extended discussion of Bourdieu's habitus, see  
Lizardo (2004).

## 10.4.2 Neo-institutional Theory of Fields

Scholars across disciplines, most notably sociology, political science, and economics, have developed substantial lines of inquiry, many sharing affinities with field-based approaches, under the broad umbrella of “new institutionalism” (for reviews, see Hall and Taylor 1996; Fligstein 2008). In order to avoid confusion, and in the interest of space, when we discuss “neo-institutional” theories of fields, we limit our discussions to neo-institutional theory in organizational sociology. Even within sociological neo-institutional organizational scholarship, there is considerable variation in approaches, emphases, and analytical techniques (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Scott 2013). We focus here on classic neo-institutional formulations of organizational fields (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), first contextualizing when and why neo-institutional scholars formulated the concept then explaining the essential characteristics of organizational fields.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, neo-institutional sociologists began explicitly incorporating field-based principles to theorize the connection between organizations and their environments. Departing from organizational ecologists (e.g., Hannan and Freeman 1977a, b), whose fundamental motivating question was to examine why organizations within populations differ from one another, neo-institutional scholars asked why organizations within fields tend to exhibit similar forms, practices, or cultures. Although others employed similar constructs such as “institutional environment” (Meyer and Rowan 1977) and “societal sector” (Scott and Meyer 1983), “organizational field” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) is the most widely accepted term used to denote an environment made up of organizations that interact around a given issue and affect one another via institutional processes.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 148) define an organizational field as “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and

other organizations that produce similar services or products.” Theirs is a broad definition of fields, encompassing “the totality of relevant actors” in an “institutionally defined” arena of organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 148). Their account of organizational fields draws primarily on phenomenology (Berger and Luckmann 1967), the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (1979), and network-based ideas of connectedness (Laumann et al. 1978) and structural equivalence (White et al. 1976).

For DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the answer to the question of why organizations within fields tend to look the same is that organizations, once they are part of an organizational field, are usually driven more by institutional concerns (e.g., legitimacy) than by other factors, such as competition. Institutions, defined as “social patterns that, when chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes (Jepperson 1991: 145),” confer legitimacy. Over the course of institutionalization, such self-sustaining patterns become more legitimate and stable, eliciting shared meanings and providing cultural models for organizing and acting (Zucker 1977; Suchman 1995; Berger and Luckmann 1967).

As a field undergoes structuration (see Giddens 1979), organizations within the field tend to become isomorphic, meaning that they become more similar. They do this because the imperative of an institutionalized field is to appear legitimate (Suchman 1995). For neoinstitutional scholars, legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995: 574). Mechanisms of isomorphism include coercive force from authorities or resource dependencies, normative sanctioning from experts or professional associations, and mimetic pressure to copy what others are doing, particularly during times of uncertainty (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2013). Regardless of the mechanism, as something becomes increasingly institutionalized, it takes on an increasingly rule-like or taken-for-granted status. Thus, it becomes

499 increasingly legitimate in the eyes of the field  
500 actors, which serves to reinforce and accelerate  
501 its being followed and reproduced by organiza-  
502 tions in the field.

### 503 10.4.3 Strategic Action Fields

504 The most recent elaboration of field theory is the  
505 theory of strategic action fields proposed by  
506 Fligstein and McAdam (2012). Fligstein and  
507 McAdam work to synthesize neo-institutionalist  
508 insights about fields as being driven by actors  
509 who live in murky worlds and seek legitimacy  
510 with Bourdieu's ideas about contestation within  
511 fields that reflect mainly the power of dominant  
512 actors. Fligstein and McAdam (2012: 9) thus  
513 define a "strategic action field" (hereinafter SAF)  
514 as "a constructed meso-level social order in  
515 which actors (who can be individual or collec-  
516 tive) are attuned to and interact with one another  
517 on the basis of shared (which is not to say cons-  
518ensual) understandings about the purposes of  
519 the field, relationships to others in the field  
520 (including who has power and why), and the  
521 rules governing legitimate action in the field." As  
522 with the prior two versions of field theory dis-  
523cussed above, the theory of SAFs places utmost  
524 importance on understanding how actors, who  
525 occupy positions within a socially constructed  
526 order, relate to one another within that space.

527 SAFs are socially constructed in that (1) mem-  
528bership is based more on subjective than any  
529 objective criteria, (2) boundaries of the field can  
530 shift based on the definition of the situation and  
531 the issue at stake, and (3) fields turn on shared  
532 understandings fashioned over time by members  
533 of the field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 12–13).  
534 These shared understandings are of four kinds.  
535 First, actors share a sense of what is at stake in  
536 the field (a shared sense of what actors are vying  
537 for or the central issue around which the field  
538 revolves). Second, actors have a shared sense of  
539 the positions of others in the SAF (a recognition  
540 of which actors in the field have more or less  
541 power and who occupies which roles). Third,  
542 they have a shared understanding of the "rules"  
543 that guide what is considered legitimate action in

the field. Finally, actors in certain positions 544  
within the field share interpretative frames (these 545  
frames vary within the field but are shared by 546  
actors in similar locations). 547

Importantly, Fligstein and McAdam propose 548  
that the degree of consensus and contention inter- 549  
nal to a field is constantly changing. Bracketing a 550  
description of how SAFs themselves emerge and 551  
change for now (we discuss this in Sect. 10.6.3), 552[AU3]  
the degree of consensus in a SAF depends on the 553  
degree to which a field is settled. Contrary to a 554  
neo-institutional account of highly institutional- 555  
ized organizational fields, SAFs are rarely orga- 556  
nized around a taken-for-granted "reality." 557  
Although there is more consensual perception of 558  
opportunities and constraints in highly settled 559  
SAFs, actors constantly jockey for position even 560  
in settled fields. Contention is highest when SAFs 561  
are unsettled, most often when a field is emerging 562  
or when a field undergoes crisis. 563

Similar to Bourdieu's fields, SAF membership 564  
is structured along incumbent/challenger dynam- 565  
ics, with actors possessing varying resource 566  
endowments and vying for advantage. Incumbents 567  
claim a disproportionate share of the material and 568  
symbolic resources in the field, and their interests 569  
and views tend to be disproportionately reflected 570  
in the rules and organization of the field. 571  
Challengers usually conform to the prevailing 572  
order of the field by taking what the system gives 573  
them, but they can also usually articulate an alter- 574  
native vision of the field. Importantly, although 575  
SAFs have incumbents and challengers who 576  
always compete, SAFs are not necessarily 577  
marked by extreme hierarchy and conflict. SAFs 578  
can also have coalitions and cooperation. 579  
Fligstein and McAdam suggest that the higher 580  
the degree of inequality in the distribution of ini- 581  
tial resources at field formation, the more likely 582  
the field will be organized hierarchically, with 583  
incumbents exerting their dominance over 584  
challengers. 585

Fligstein and McAdam introduce an important 586  
new actor to their fields – "internal governance 587  
units." These actors, often present within SAFs, 588  
generally serve to maintain order within the field. 589  
In practice, they usually serve to reinforce the 590  
position of the incumbents in the field, whether it 591



592 be to stabilize a field settlement, respond to crises  
 593 in order to produce stability, or act as a liaison to  
 594 other fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:  
 595 94–96). Examples of internal governance units  
 596 include certification boards set up by profes-  
 597 sional organizations in a newly formed SAF, the  
 598 World Bank, which often disproportionately  
 599 serves the interests of more developed econom-  
 600 ies, and a trade association that lobbies on an  
 601 industry's behalf.

602 Fligstein and McAdam (2012: 34–56) also  
 603 propose a novel micro-foundation of action based  
 604 on collective meaning-making and belonging-  
 605 ness. This foundation is what they term the “exis-  
 606 tential function of the social” – the profoundly  
 607 human need to create meaningful social worlds  
 608 and feelings of belongingness. In order to build  
 609 political coalitions, forge identities, and fashion  
 610 interests in service of that need, actors in SAFs  
 611 use “social skill” (Fligstein 2001) to appeal to  
 612 shared meanings and empathetically relate to  
 613 others so as to induce cooperation and engage in  
 614 collective action.

615 Another novel contribution of the theory of  
 616 SAFs is its deep conceptualization of inter-field  
 617 relations. Instead of attempting to explain only  
 618 the internal dynamics of fields, Fligstein and  
 619 McAdam (2012: 59) conceive of fields as embed-  
 620 ded in complex, multi-dimensional webs of  
 621 dependence with other fields. Such linkages most  
 622 often result from resource dependencies or from  
 623 formal legal or bureaucratic authority. These ties  
 624 are also multi-dimensional. First, like a Russian  
 625 doll, fields can be nested hierarchically within  
 626 broader fields, meaning that the nested field is  
 627 highly dependent on the broader field. Second,  
 628 fields can also be linked via interdependencies,  
 629 meaning that the fields are roughly equally  
 630 dependent. Third, fields can be tied to any num-  
 631 ber of other fields. Of course, a field need not be  
 632 connected to another field at all. The extent of  
 633 dependency and quantity of ties can have impli-  
 634 cations for field emergence, stability, and change,  
 635 which we discuss later in the chapter.

## 10.5 Agency and Actors 636

### 10.5.1 Bourdieu's Field Theory 637

638 Bourdieu's theoretical project has a complicated  
 639 relationship with agency and actors. Although we  
 640 are sympathetic to the difficulty of trying to  
 641 account for structure and agency within social  
 642 fields, we contend that Bourdieu's theory of fields  
 643 is more deterministic than he was willing to  
 644 admit. Ours is not an oversimplified, oft-repeated  
 645 charge of determinism and, as we discuss below,  
 646 Bourdieu's account of agency, via the habitus, is  
 647 richer than classic statements in neo-institutional  
 648 theory. (If we were to rank the three theories we  
 649 discuss based on the agency they accord to field  
 650 actors, we would place Bourdieu's actors some-  
 651 where between neo-institutional field actors on  
 652 the low end and actors in SAFs on the high end.)

653 In Bourdieu's words, agents are “bearers of  
 654 capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on  
 655 the position they occupy on the field ... they have  
 656 a propensity to orient themselves actively either  
 657 toward the preservation of the distribution of cap-  
 658 ital or toward the subversion of this distribution”  
 659 (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 108–109).  
 660 Indeed, his field actors do have their own goals  
 661 and do act to further their own interests vis-à-vis  
 662 others in the field. Thus, actors in his fields do act  
 663 strategically and engage in meaningful action.

664 Nevertheless, actors in Bourdieu's theory are  
 665 not particularly reflective nor are they very capa-  
 666 ble of going against the constraining structural  
 667 forces of the field. The “rules of the game” and  
 668 what is at stake in the field are a product of social  
 669 structure and are tacitly agreed upon by members  
 670 of the field (what Bourdieu calls the *illusio*).  
 671 Field actors' interests are defined by their posi-  
 672 tion in the field (i.e., their capital endowment)  
 673 and the historical trajectory that led them to the  
 674 field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 117). Most  
 675 field actors “know their place,” and if they engage  
 676 in competition with others, they are more likely  
 677 to compete with those who are closest to them in  
 678 social space than try to change the underlying  
 679 social order (Bourdieu 1984).

680 Moreover, the habitus, which Bourdieu  
681 invokes to account for subjectivity and agency, is  
682 itself an *embodied, structured* set of dispositions  
683 that operates somewhere below the level of con-  
684 sciousness. It is socially structured as a function  
685 of one's field position, and it is passed on to sub-  
686 sequent generations through mostly non-  
687 conscious relations and processes of cultural  
688 transmission. Habitus tends to be durable and, if  
689 it does change, tends to align (or correspond)  
690 with one's field position and the field's particular  
691 logic.

692 True, Bourdieu's actors do have the ability to  
693 transpose their habitus to other fields, but even  
694 here, the habitus tends to correspond to that of  
695 homologous positions in other fields. Indeed,  
696 Bourdieu's individuals tend to become embedded  
697 within habitus classes, "the system of disposi-  
698 tions (partially) common to all products of the  
699 same structures" (Bourdieu 1977: 85). Thus, habi-  
700 tus, and as a consequence actors themselves, will  
701 usually operate to reproduce the very structures  
702 from which it arises (Bourdieu 1977: 78;  
703 Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 121–22).<sup>5</sup>

## 704 10.5.2 Neo-institutional Field Theory

705 Classic neo-institutional accounts of organiza-  
706 tional fields provide a rich account of institutional

<sup>5</sup>This point should not be overstated. For Bourdieu, although habitus tends to align with the logic and expectations of the field, it is not necessarily a perfect alignment. The extent to which it does align is a matter of degree. Bourdieu's concept of "hysteresis," for example, accounts for situations in which one's habitus becomes mismatched or lags behind the logic of a field (Bourdieu 2000:160–161). This is exemplified in the character of Don Quixote, whose antiquated knightly disposition no longer fits in his contemporary world. However, other than a vague nod to crisis as a possible necessary condition (see our discussion of crisis below), Bourdieu does not systematically theorize the causes or consequences of such hysteresis. Why and when do some experience the disjuncture when others align? Why might some experience the disjuncture when, at other moments of field succession, they can align? Under what conditions does hysteresis lead to active efforts to hold on to the misaligned habitus? When might it lead to efforts to change the logic of a field rather than adapt the habitus to fit the different logic? For a similar critique, see Burawoy and Von Holdt (2012:38–39).

707 persistence and constraint on actors, but they  
708 under-theorize how actors who are subject to  
709 institutional effects could nevertheless enact  
710 agency to affect those institutions. Neo-  
711 institutional scholars identified this problem rela-  
712 tively early on (see DiMaggio 1988; DiMaggio  
713 and Powell 1991). Others have termed it the 'par-  
714 adox of embedded agency' inherent in neo-  
715 institutional theory. That is, if action in a field is  
716 constrained by the prescriptive, taken-for-granted  
717 scripts and rules of the institution in which actors  
718 are embedded, then how can actors conceive of,  
719 contest, and enact endogenous change to a field  
720 (see Battilana 2006)?

721 Responding to this criticism, a second wave of  
722 neo-institutionalists began to develop a literature  
723 on actors with the agency to initiate institutional  
724 change. The earliest and most developed idea of  
725 actors and agency within fields is the concept of  
726 institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio 1988,  
727 1991). In general, an institutional entrepreneur is  
728 some actor (whether individual or collective)  
729 who initiates and participates in change to an  
730 institution.

731 Although DiMaggio (1988) is frequently cited  
732 as inspiration for the idea of institutional entre-  
733 preneurs, its main argument is that the neo-  
734 institutional theory of Meyer and Rowan (1977)  
735 and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) lacks an ade-  
736 quate theory of agency, power, and conflict.  
737 DiMaggio (1988) posits the idea of an institu-  
738 tional entrepreneur because he is trying to make  
739 sense of how a field comes into existence or  
740 experiences dramatic transformation. He sug-  
741 gests institutional entrepreneurship occurs when  
742 someone (or some group) comes along and fig-  
743 ures out how to do something new and is able to  
744 convince others to go along with them. For  
745 DiMaggio (1988), institutional entrepreneurs are  
746 especially important early on in the institutional-  
747 ization process, when organizational fields are  
748 being constructed. Then, as institutionalization  
749 takes hold, field participants usually settle down  
750 to playing their part as actors who operate mostly  
751 by habit or by watching and imitating others.

752 Scholarly interest in institutional entrepre-  
753 neurship has grown considerably since  
754 DiMaggio's (1988) formulation, particularly

755 among organizational sociologists and manage- 803  
 756 ment scholars. Neoinstitutionalists have con- 804  
 757 ducted numerous empirical studies across 805  
 758 domains and made important theoretical advances 806  
 759 on the concept (for recent reviews, see Garud 807  
 760 et al.'s (2007) introduction to a journal issue on 808  
 761 institutional entrepreneurship; Hardy and 809  
 762 Maguire 2008; Battilana et al. 2009). However, 810  
 763 we take the position that institutional entrepre-  
 764 neurship has become a concept so all-  
 765 encompassing with regard to agency and change  
 766 that it is not the most useful concept to employ to  
 767 theorize agency within and across fields. As  
 768 Suddaby (2010: 15) noted of the current state of  
 769 the literature: "Any change, however slight, is  
 770 now 'institutional' and any change agent is an  
 771 'institutional entrepreneur.'"

772 Indeed, as contemporary neoinstitutional 812  
 773 scholars have pointed out (e.g., Powell and 813  
 774 Colyvas 2008: 277; Lawrence et al. 2011: 52), 814  
 775 the institutional entrepreneurship literature now 815  
 776 tends to replace the actors of foundational neo- 816  
 777 institutional theory – over-socialized and with 817  
 778 relatively little reflexivity and agency – with 818  
 779 actors who seem to have prescient views about 819  
 780 new possible worlds, the motivation to contest 820  
 781 institutional arrangements, and the power to 821  
 782 enact change. In addition, institutional entrepre- 822  
 783 neurship's focus on divergent institutional change 823  
 784 has resulted in a tendency to conflate agency with 824  
 785 wholesale field-level change. Consequently, there 825  
 786 is a selection bias in the institutional entrepre- 826  
 787 neurship literature of analyzing only situations in 827  
 788 which contestation leads to change (Denrell and 828  
 789 Kovács 2008). This produces a strange concep- 829  
 790 tion of institutional agency: actors are thought of 830  
 791 as agentic only when they "successfully" form 831  
 792 new fields or change existing ones, and only a 832  
 793 few such actors really matter for field-level 833  
 794 change. This idea flies in the face of common- 834  
 795 sense experience, where we see people acting 835  
 796 strategically all of the time. 836

797 Finally, institutional entrepreneurship's overly 837  
 798 heroic view of actors tends to shift focus away 838  
 799 from fields and avoid questions such as what 839  
 800 alternative paths fields might take, why entrepre- 840  
 801 neurs choose the strategies of field contestation 841  
 802 that they do, and what field-building projects are

likely to win and lose. In essence, we submit that  
 despite its substantial theoretical development  
 over the last three decades, the concept of institu-  
 tional entrepreneur lacks an adequate conceptual-  
 ization of *fields* that would explain structural  
 conditions enabling agency within and across dif-  
 ferent types of fields and during different stages  
 of a field's existence.

### 10.5.3 Strategic Action Fields

812 Fligstein and McAdam's addition of "strategic 812  
 813 action" to the term "fields" is an important theo- 813  
 814 retical development, as it incorporates Fligstein's 814  
 815 (2001) concept of "social skill" into their theory 815  
 816 of action and therefore provides a new, more sys- 816  
 817 tematic way to think about agency, actors, and 817  
 818 field relations. Strategic action is "the attempt by 818  
 819 social actors to create and maintain stable social 819  
 820 worlds by securing the cooperation of others" 820  
 821 (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 17). The primary 821  
 822 micro-level mechanism through which fields are 822  
 823 constructed, transformed, and even maintained is 823  
 824 "social skill," which is the cognitive capacity for 824  
 825 reading people and environments, framing lines 825  
 826 of action, and mobilizing people in the service of 826  
 827 broader conceptions of the world and of them- 827  
 828 selves (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 17). Some 828  
 829 are endowed with greater social skill than others 829  
 830 and are thus more likely than others, all else 830  
 831 being equal (which of course, in reality, is hardly 831  
 832 the case), to realize their interests and exert control 832  
 833 vis-à-vis others in a field.<sup>6</sup> 833

834 This may beg the question of why social skill 834  
 835 is so important as a driver of field relations. In 835  
 836 other words, if social skill is the *mechanism* for 836  
 837 stepping into the shoes of the other and mobiliz- 837  
 838 ing collective action, what is the *motivation* for 838  
 839 doing so? Like Bourdieu, Fligstein and McAdam 839  
 840 recognize that actors pursue their interests in the 840  
 841 name of power. Indeed, SAFs are organized 841

<sup>6</sup>It remains an empirical question as to the distribution of social skill in given fields or across the population. Fligstein and McAdam (2012: 17) only offer an unsupported speculation that social skill could be distributed normally across the population.

842 along incumbent/challenger dimensions and are 884  
 843 sites of struggles for power and influence. 885  
 844 However, their answer is not simply that actors 886  
 845 draw on social skill in the pursuit of material 887  
 846 self-interest.<sup>7</sup> 888

847 Fligstein and McAdam provide a second, 889  
 848 deeper motivation that is deeply rooted in our 890  
 849 evolutionary psychology – the basic human need 891  
 850 to fashion a meaningful world for oneself and to 892  
 851 engage in collective action. They call this the 893  
 852 “existential function of the social.” They argue 894  
 853 that even the exercise of power and conflict with 895  
 854 others are often manifestations of the more fun- 896  
 855 damental pursuit of collective meaning-making, 897  
 856 identity, and belongingness. Innumerable exam- 898  
 857 ples of this abound. To list a few of the more 899  
 858 extreme ones, the various religious crusades and 900  
 859 wars waged throughout history were fundamen- 901  
 860 tally about identity (“I am a Christian; I am a holy 902  
 861 warrior.”) and meaning-making and belonging- 903  
 862 ness (“This is a battle between good (us) vs. evil 904  
 863 (them)). However repulsive Nazism is from a 905  
 864 moral standpoint to most in society, there is no 906  
 865 question that Hitler was a supremely skilled 907  
 866 social actor who could frame unambiguous 908  
 867 “truths” in ways that valorized the lives of belie- 909  
 868 vers and serviced his interest in attaining power. 910  
 869 Of course, the focus on intersubjectivity, collabor- 911  
 870 ative meaning-making, identity, and collective 912  
 871 mobilization does not mean that power relations, 913  
 872 conflict, preferences, and the pursuit of those 914  
 873 preferences (whether or not to the exclusion of 915  
 874 others pursuing theirs) are not characteristic of 916  
 875 SAFs. The point is that social skill is deployed 917  
 876 for both kinds of pursuits. 918

877 The dual motivations in SAFs of the pursuit of 919  
 878 material interests and the existential function of 920  
 879 the social represent a key point of departure from 921  
 880 neo-institutional and Bourdieu’s explanations of 922  
 881 what drives field relations. For neo- 923  
 882 institutionalists, the basic driver of action within 924  
 883 institutionalized organizational fields is the con- 925

cern for legitimacy (Suchman 1995). Whether 884  
 through coercive force, normative influence, or 885  
 mimetic pressure to follow others in times of 886  
 uncertainty, organizational field actors tend to act 887  
 similarly in order to appear legitimate (DiMaggio 888  
 and Powell 1983). Fligstein and McAdam agree 889  
 with neo-institutional theorists that field actors 890  
 tend to cohere in their actions, but instead of 891  
 arguing that this is due to a mostly unreflective 892  
 concern for legitimacy, they posit this is due to 893  
 the existential function of the social. By combin- 894  
 ing symbolic interactionist approaches to empa- 895  
 thetic understanding and identity (Mead 1934; 896  
 Goffman 1974) with social movement theory’s 897  
 insights into framing processes as a path to col- 898  
 lective action (e.g., Snow et al. 1986; Snow and 899  
 Benford 1988), Fligstein and McAdam provide 900  
 an answer to the “paradox of embedded agency” 901  
 that has plagued neo-institutional accounts while 902  
 managing to avoid the overly heroic correctives 903  
 proposed by theories of institutional 904  
 entrepreneurship. 905

906 Importantly, however, Fligstein and McAdam 906  
 (2012: 109–110) do not reject outright the idea of 907  
 institutional entrepreneurs. Instead, they situate 908  
 the role of institutional entrepreneur within the 909  
 broader SAF environment and theorize that in the 910  
 moment of field emergence or transformation 911  
 when things are more or less up for grabs, such 912  
 actors may emerge to help create a field. 913  
 Institutional entrepreneur is thus a role that 914  
 highly skilled social actors can play in unorgan- 915  
 ized social space to help produce a field. They 916  
 do so by convincing others to accept their own 917  
 cultural conception (via an appeal that resonates 918  
 with others’ identities or meaning), fashion polit- 919  
 ical coalitions of disparate groups, and establish 920  
 new institutions around which a field is ordered. 921  
 If a field is in a more settled state, incumbents, 922  
 who set the rules of the game and exert their 923  
 power to reproduce the social order, are more 924  
 likely to thwart attempts by an institutional entre- 925  
 preneur to usurp the established field order. That 926  
 said, actors even in settled SAFs are able to con- 927  
 struct alternative understandings of the dominant 928  
 field order and can act strategically to identify 929  
 with others and engage in collective action. 930

<sup>7</sup> Here, they join Bourdieu in his critique of Marxist materialist conceptions of interaction. Like Bourdieu, they argue that interests themselves only have meaning because they are socially constructed and thus have symbolic meaning to field participants.

931 The theory of SAFs also differs from  
 932 Bourdieu's in its conception of actors and agency.  
 933 For Bourdieu, fields are sites of conflict, striving,  
 934 and the pursuit of one's interests over another's.  
 935 True, Bourdieu recognizes that what one's interests  
 936 are and how they are pursued are outcomes  
 937 of social dynamics; they correspond to the one's  
 938 position in the field, one's own habitus, and one's  
 939 unique allocation of forms of capital. But the  
 940 defining features of internal field relations for  
 941 Bourdieu are no doubt conflict and domination.  
 942 The theory of SAFs shares Bourdieu's concep-  
 943 tion of fields as sites of struggle between incum-  
 944 bents and challengers over resources and the  
 945 ability to define the "rules of the game," but it  
 946 goes further to make room for the crucial micro-  
 947 foundations of meaning, identity, cooperation,  
 948 and collective action that are pursued by socially  
 949 skilled actors. Actors can both engage in struggle  
 950 and fashion cooperative coalitions. Fligstein and  
 951 McAdam (2012) thus present a more agentic  
 952 actor than the other two theories of fields dis-  
 953 cussed here.

954 Finally, the theory of SAFs differs from both  
 955 neo-institutional and Bourdieusian accounts of  
 956 field actors in that it explicitly accounts for indi-  
 957 viduals *and* collectivities as field actors and  
 958 expressly theorizes each of their roles within  
 959 their fields. Neo-institutional field theory, being  
 960 born out of organizational theory, tends to focus  
 961 on organizations as the actors within a field space.  
 962 As such, neo-institutional accounts of organiza-  
 963 tional fields care very little about individuals'  
 964 positions in fields and must abstract up to the  
 965 organizational level when explaining an "actor's"  
 966 subjective orientations, strategies for obtaining  
 967 legitimacy, struggles for resources, etc. Although  
 968 we take no issue with this abstraction (we very  
 969 much view organizations as actors in social  
 970 space), we recognize that it is less intuitive to  
 971 think only of organizations as social actors in a  
 972 field. Bourdieu's theory of fields, on the other  
 973 hand, deals primarily with individuals as field  
 974 actors and locates dispositions and practices pri-  
 975 marily in individuals' trajectories through social  
 976 space.<sup>8</sup> The consequences for the theory of SAF's

flexibility in scaling up or down is non-trivial, as 977  
 it forces Fligstein and McAdam (2012) to develop 978  
 a more general, yet still workable, theory of rela- 979  
 tions between field actors, no matter whether 980  
 they are individuals or organizations. 981

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## 10.6 Field Emergence, Stability, and Change 982

We turn now to a discussion of how each theory 984  
 deals with field-level emergence, stability, and 985  
 change. In short, Fligstein and McAdam's theory 986  
 of SAFs depicts fields as more changeable than 987  
 neo-institutional field theory or Bourdieu's the- 988  
 ory of fields. Moreover, we argue that, compared 989  
 to the other accounts, the theory of SAFs pro- 990  
 vides the most comprehensive, systematic con- 991  
 ceptualization of field emergence, stability, and 992  
 change. As with the prior section, we develop 993  
 these arguments by first analyzing how Bourdieu 994  
 and neo-institutional theorists deal with the issue 995  
 then juxtaposing those accounts against the the- 996  
 ory of SAFs. 997

### 10.6.1 Bourdieu's Field Theory 998

Bourdieu's theory of fields is primarily one of 999  
 social stability and reproduction. This is inten- 1000  
 tional, as it is Bourdieu's goal to understand and 1001  
 solve the agent-structure problem by positing 1002  
 how both actors (whether consciously or uncon- 1003  
 consciously) and structures correspond to one 1004  
 another and are complicit in the reproduction of 1005  
 social order. For Bourdieu, although fields are the 1006  
 sites of constant struggle and competition 1007  
 between the dominant and dominated, the social 1008  
 order ultimately tends to be reproduced. True, it 1009  
 is not uncommon for groups to succeed their 1010  
 prior equivalent group in terms of their place in 1011  
 the social order; this is what Bourdieu calls the 1012  
 "order of successions." (Bourdieu 1984: 163). 1013  
 The key here, however, is that relations between 1014

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example, he identifies firms as the key players in the eco-  
 nomic field and speaks of the importance of their interac-  
 tions with the state (Bourdieu 2005). He also links elite  
 universities, corporations, and the state to the field of  
 power (Bourdieu 1996a).

<sup>8</sup>We acknowledge that Bourdieu did not *solely* study fields in which individuals were the primary participants. For

1015 groups in a field (i.e., the social distance between  
1016 them) remain mostly unchanged.

1017 Bourdieu touches upon the conditions for how  
1018 field logics could change when he mentions crisis  
1019 as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for  
1020 the questioning of *doxa*. *Doxa* is the undiscussed,  
1021 taken-for-granted aspect of the social world.  
1022 Within it are those systems of classification, tra-  
1023 ditions, and rules for interaction that are so legiti-  
1024 mate and ingrained that they are taken for granted  
1025 as self-evident ‘truths’ about the world (Bourdieu  
1026 1977: 169).<sup>9</sup> Crisis can lead to the arbitrariness of  
1027 the *doxa* being revealed to field actors’ con-  
1028 sciousness and thereby finding its way into the  
1029 universe of discourse, where orthodox and het-  
1030 erodox opinions can be expressed and contested.  
1031 However, Bourdieu does not systematically theo-  
1032 rize what brings about such moments of crisis,  
1033 nor does he explicitly theorize the additional  
1034 condition(s) besides crisis that result in a critical  
1035 discourse.

1036 Even when the *doxa* is brought into the uni-  
1037 verse of discourse, such questioning does not  
1038 necessarily lead to challengers displacing the  
1039 dominant class at the top of the field hierarchy.  
1040 Indeed, challengers with heterodox views of the  
1041 world rarely displace the dominant group, who  
1042 work to preserve the “official” ways of thinking  
1043 and speaking about the world and who aim to  
1044 censor heterodox views. Finally, and most impor-  
1045 tantly, on the rare occasions that challengers *do*  
1046 manage to displace incumbents as the dominant  
1047 actors in a field (e.g., Bourdieu 1996b), they tend  
1048 to do so by using, and therefore reproducing, the  
1049 underlying “rules of the game” on which the field  
1050 is based. For example, in Bourdieu’s studies of  
1051 the fields of cultural production (e.g., art, litera-  
1052 ture, theatre), one of the most fundamental prin-  
1053 ciples of these fields, especially for the dominant,  
1054 is an outward indifference to or disavowal of the  
1055 profit motive. Not coincidentally, the best strat-  
1056 egy for challenger groups to unseat the dominant  
1057 cultural producers within the field is to disavow

1058 the commercial and promote their own activities  
1059 and products as “purer” art than that of the domi-  
1060 nant group. In doing so, however, the fundamen-  
1061 tal logic of the field only gets reinforced. “Thus,”  
1062 Bourdieu writes, “[challengers’] revolutions are  
1063 only ever partial ones, which displace the censor-  
1064 ships and transgress the conventions but do so in  
1065 the name of the same underlying principles”  
1066 (Bourdieu 1993: 83–84).

### 10.6.2 Neo-institutional Field Theory 1067

1068 Although recent efforts by institutional scholars  
1069 have improved the situation, the neo-institutional  
1070 theory of organizational fields continues to lack a  
1071 well-developed and empirically tested theory of  
1072 field emergence and change. The majority of  
1073 neo-institutional research on organizational fields  
1074 since DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) seminal  
1075 article has pertained to how isomorphism among  
1076 organizations occurs *after* an organizational field  
1077 exists and, relatedly, how fields are stable and  
1078 reproducible. In our view, then, the neo-  
1079 institutional formulation of field theory has  
1080 accounted for field stability and field reproduc-  
1081 tion quite well. However, from the outset, it  
1082 lacked a systematic theory of field emergence  
1083 and divergent field-level transformation.<sup>10</sup> A new  
1084 generation of neo-institutional scholars has partly  
1085 corrected for these limitations by proposing that  
1086 institutional change can occur by way of institu-  
1087 tional entrepreneurship, but, as we have argued,  
1088 this is less a systematic theory of field change and  
1089 more a thinly veiled “heroic man” theory of  
1090 change that does not link entrepreneur-led change  
1091 to broader field conditions.

1092 The under-development of theories of field  
1093 emergence and divergent change can be traced  
1094 back to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) all-too-  
1095 brief discussion of the formation of an organiza-  
1096 tional field (or in their words, how it is that a set  
1097 of organizations come to be “institutionally  
1098 defined”). Using Giddens’s (1979) terminology,  
1099 they propose that a set of organizations comes to

<sup>9</sup>We note the affinities between Bourdieu’s *doxa* and a highly objectivated and internalized social reality, as defined by Berger and Luckmann (1967), or a highly institutionalized social institution (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Jepperson 1993).

<sup>10</sup>Neo-institutional scholars have provided a wealth of theoretical and empirical insights into convergent change (i.e., isomorphism) once a field exists.

1100 be a field through a process of “structuration:” (1)  
 1101 interaction among organizations involved in  
 1102 some area of social life increases, (2) hierarchies  
 1103 and coalitions develop, (3) the amount of infor-  
 1104 mation with which field members must contend  
 1105 increases, and (4) awareness among field mem-  
 1106 bers that they are involved in a common enter-  
 1107 prise develops. However, the remaining focus of  
 1108 their article centers around institutional isomor-  
 1109 phism in an already-existing organizational field  
 1110 and, as a corollary, how actors follow rules or  
 1111 scripts, either consciously by imitation or coer-  
 1112 cion or unconsciously by tacit agreement  
 1113 (Jepperson 1991).

1114 Of course, we do not mean to say that neo-  
 1115 institutional literature has failed to elaborate any  
 1116 other concepts of field emergence and change  
 1117 after DiMaggio’s (1988, 1991) seminal works on  
 1118 institutional entrepreneurship. Indeed, since that  
 1119 time, several subfields within the neo-  
 1120 institutionalist literature have developed lines of  
 1121 inquiry that account for the possibility of institu-  
 1122 tional contestation and change. Examples include  
 1123 the continued development of the aforementioned  
 1124 institutional entrepreneurship literature as well as  
 1125 the institutional work (Lawrence et al. 2009) and  
 1126 institutional logics (Thornton et al. 2012) per-  
 1127 spectives. There has also been a concurrent  
 1128 increase in empirical studies of institutional  
 1129 change (for reviews, see Clemens and Cook  
 1130 1999; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006: 217–220).  
 1131 However, we maintain that a field theory of field  
 1132 emergence and divergent field change, cast spe-  
 1133 cifically within the classic neo-institutionalist  
 1134 framework of organizational fields, is underde-  
 1135 veloped compared to its theories of field stability  
 1136 and isomorphic field change.

1137 One particularly promising avenue for cor-  
 1138 recting this weakness, however, has been the inte-  
 1139 gration of social movement theory with  
 1140 neo-institutional theories of organizations. A few  
 1141 sociologists have bridged social movements and  
 1142 organizational analysis for decades (Zald and  
 1143 Ash 1966; see Zald and McCarthy 1987).  
 1144 Moreover, some of the classic works in the social  
 1145 movement literature took field-like approaches  
 1146 even if they did not cite field theories at the time.  
 1147 For example, McCarthy and Zald (1977) devel-

1148 oped a multi-leveled approach to social move-  
 1149 ment organizations and theorized meso-level  
 1150 “social movement industries” (McCarthy and  
 1151 Zald 1977), which are like fields of social move-  
 1152 ment organizations oriented to the same general  
 1153 social issue. Additionally, McAdam (1999) took  
 1154 a field-like analytic strategy by situating the  
 1155 American civil rights movement within the  
 1156 broader political and economic environments in  
 1157 which it was embedded and the institutions that  
 1158 fostered black protest.

1159 Since the early 2000s, however, we have wit-  
 1160 nessed an increase in such scholarship (Davis  
 1161 et al. 2005). Because of that, what we may still  
 1162 label neo-institutional studies have increasingly  
 1163 incorporated ideas from social movement theory  
 1164 and have more directly linked *institutional* emer-  
 1165 gence to *field* emergence (Rao et al. 2000;  
 1166 Lounsbury et al. 2003; Morrill 2006). An exem-  
 1167 plar of this line of scholarship is Morrill’s (2006)  
 1168 analysis of the “interstitial emergence” of the  
 1169 court-based alternative dispute resolution field.<sup>11</sup>  
 1170 The key to the institutionalization of alternative  
 1171 dispute resolution was the innovation of prac-  
 1172 tices, mobilization of resources, and champion-  
 1173 ing of ideas by networks of actors who were  
 1174 located in overlapping fields. Their ideas and  
 1175 practices gained legitimacy because they reso-  
 1176 nated with different players across overlapping  
 1177 fields. As we discuss below, the importance of  
 1178 field linkages and borders to the emergence of  
 1179 new fields is an insight developed further in the  
 1180 theory of SAFs.

### 1181 10.6.3 Strategic Action Fields

1182 Of the three contemporary field theories dis-  
 1183 cussed here, the theory of SAFs provides the  
 1184 clearest yet most nuanced conceptualization of  
 1185 field emergence, stability, and change (see  
 1186 Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 84–113; Fligstein  
 1187 2013). Not only does it depict SAFs as sites of  
 1188 constant internal change due to conflict and jock-  
 1189 eying for position (similar to Bourdieu’s fields),

<sup>11</sup> Morrill borrows the term “interstitial emergence” from Mann (1986).

1190 it also sees entire field structures, especially at  
1191 certain points in their evolution, as being more  
1192 subject to change than the other two theories. We  
1193 discuss each of these issues in this section.

1194 SAFs emerge through a process akin to a  
1195 social movement. An emerging field is a socially  
1196 constructed arena in which two or more actors  
1197 orient their actions toward one another but have  
1198 not yet constructed a stable order with routinized  
1199 patterns of relations and commonly shared rules  
1200 for interaction. Similar to Morrill's (2006) inter-  
1201 stitial emergence thesis, SAFs begin to form typi-  
1202 cally after some kind of exogenous change, more  
1203 often than not in nearby proximate fields. This  
1204 happens through "emergent mobilization," a  
1205 social movement-like process in which actors  
1206 begin fashioning new lines of interaction and  
1207 shared understandings after (1) collectively  
1208 attributing a threat or opportunity, (2) appropriat-  
1209 ing organizational resources needed to mobilize  
1210 and sustain resources, and (3) collectively engag-  
1211 ing in innovative action that leads to sustained  
1212 interaction in previously unorganized social  
1213 space (McAdam 1999; McAdam et al. 2001).

1214 As it is at every stage in the life of a SAF,  
1215 social skill is vitally important here, as actors  
1216 fashion the shared understandings that we dis-  
1217 cussed in our overview of the theory of SAFs.  
1218 The state can also facilitate field emergence  
1219 through processes such as licensing, passing/  
1220 repealing laws, and the awarding of government  
1221 contracts. Internal governance units, also dis-  
1222 cussed earlier, can further encourage stability.  
1223 Actors organize the structure of their emerging  
1224 field along a continuum of cooperation and coal-  
1225 ition on one end and hierarchy and differences in  
1226 power on the other. Whether an emerging field  
1227 will become a stable, reproducible field depends,  
1228 in part, on how it gets organized; as one moves  
1229 toward either extreme of this continuum of field  
1230 organization, the likelihood of stability increases  
1231 because both extremes imply clear role structures  
1232 for the actors.

1233 A field becomes settled when its actors have a  
1234 general consensus regarding field rules and cul-  
1235 tural norms. Like highly institutionalized  
1236 organizational fields, highly settled SAFs typi-  
1237 cally get reproduced. Because incumbents and

challengers continue to engage in conflict even in  
1238 settled SAFs, however, they share more similari-  
1239 ties to Bourdieu's fields. Incumbents in such a  
1240 settled field will have an interest in maintaining  
1241 field stability. They will also have the resources  
1242 to exercise power over challengers and will enjoy  
1243 the benefit of the rules of the field, which they  
1244 likely constructed, being slanted in their favor.  
1245 Perhaps even more importantly, because actors in  
1246 settled fields are more likely than those in unset-  
1247 tled fields to share common understandings and  
1248 have similar conceptions of possible alternatives,  
1249 even challengers in these fields usually will not  
1250 mount serious challenges to the social order  
1251 absent an exogenous shock to the field. 1252

1253 However, not all SAFs are highly settled. In  
1254 the theory of SAFs, settlement is a matter of  
1255 degree. As the degree of settlement decreases,  
1256 SAFs become increasingly subject to change.  
1257 SAFs are subject to two distinct kinds of field-  
1258 level change: (1) continuous piecemeal change,  
1259 the more common situation in which change is  
1260 gradual and due to internal struggles and jockey-  
1261 ing for position, and (2) revolutionary change, in  
1262 which a new field emerges in unorganized social  
1263 space and/or displaces another field. Both kinds  
1264 of change occur, but under different conditions. 1264

1265 Change is constantly occurring within SAFs  
1266 because actors constantly jockey for position  
1267 within fields, whether through cooperation with  
1268 allies or conflict with adversaries. Actors can  
1269 occasionally shift strategies, forge subtle new  
1270 alliances, and make small gains or losses in their  
1271 position relative to others. However, from a field-  
1272 wide perspective, these are usually piecemeal  
1273 changes because incumbent field actors, who  
1274 have access to relatively more resources and con-  
1275 trol the "rules of the game" in a SAF, can usually  
1276 reinforce their positions and therefore reproduce  
1277 the field order. Fligstein and McAdam (2012:  
1278 103) do note, however, that these gradual incre-  
1279 mental changes, even if they usually result in  
1280 overall field reproduction, can have aggregate  
1281 effects. Eventually, they can undermine the social  
1282 order to a 'tipping point' and begin the process of  
1283 emergent mobilization discussed above or to  
1284 'episodes of contention,' in which the shared  
1285 understandings on which fields are based become 1285



1286 in flux and result in periods of sustained conten- 1334  
 1287 tious interaction among field actors. Change is 1335  
 1288 more possible in both situations than in settled 1336  
 1289 fields. 1337

1290 The more common sources of transformative 1338  
 1291 field change, however, come from outside of the 1339  
 1292 field. First, fields may be transformed by invad- 1340  
 1293 ing groups that had not previously been active 1341  
 1294 players in the focal field. These outsiders will not 1342  
 1295 be as bound by the conventional rules and under- 1343  
 1296 standings of the field as challengers who had 1344  
 1297 already been field players. The success of outsid- 1345  
 1298 ers at altering the field order may depend on 1346  
 1299 many factors, including their strength prior to 1347  
 1300 invasion, the proximity (in social space) of their 1348  
 1301 former field to the target field, and their social 1349  
 1302 skill in forging allies and mobilizing defectors. 1350  
 1303 Second, transformative change can be due to 1351  
 1304 large-scale, macro-level events that disrupt 1352  
 1305 numerous field linkages and lead to crises. These 1353  
 1306 often, but not always, involve the state. Examples 1354  
 1307 include economic depressions, wars, and regime 1355  
 1308 change. 1356

1309 The third and final exogenous source of trans- 1357  
 1310 formative change for SAFs emanates from 1358  
 1311 Fligstein and McAdam's emphasis on inter-field 1359  
 1312 linkages. The effects of a field's relations with 1360  
 1313 other fields traditionally have been under- 1361  
 1314 theorized, as field-level studies tend to examine 1362  
 1315 only the internal dynamics of a focal field or else 1363  
 1316 capture the structure of external field relations 1364  
 1317 without developing a general theoretical frame- 1365  
 1318 work for field interrelations. Bourdieu, for exam- 1366  
 1319 ple, stated: "I believe indeed that there are no 1367  
 1320 trans-historic laws of the relations between fields, 1368  
 1321 that we must investigate each historical case sep- 1369  
 1322 arately" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 109) 1370  
 1323 (emphasis in original). However, for Fligstein 1371  
 1324 and McAdam (2012: 18, 59, 100–101), fields are 1372  
 1325 not isolated social systems; they stand in relation 1373  
 1326 to other fields in a broader social space. These 1374  
 1327 relations play a key role in whether a field will 1375  
 1328 change or remain stable. The authors conceptual- 1376  
 1329 ize field-to-field linkages mostly based on the  
 1330 extent to which fields are dependent or interde-  
 1331 pendent with other fields in social space.

1332 Because fields are often tied, via dependencies  
 1333 or interdependencies, to other fields, a destabiliz-

ing change in one field is "like a stone thrown in 1334  
 a still pond, sending ripples outward to all prox- 1335  
 imate fields" (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 9). 1336  
 Usually, such a ripple is not so disruptive as to 1337  
 lead to an episode of contention within a field. 1338  
 But dependent field relationships yield unequal 1339  
 power relations and unidirectional influence by 1340  
 the dominant field, making a field particularly 1341  
 susceptible to change when there is rupture or 1342  
 crisis in the field on which it depends.<sup>12</sup> 1343

1344 In contrast to the idea of dependent field rela- 1344  
 tions leading to change to a focal field, interde- 1345  
 pendent field relations can also buffer *against* 1346  
 change to the focal field Fligstein and McAdam 1347  
 (2012: 59–61). This is because that field can 1348  
 count on the reciprocal legitimacy benefits and 1349  
 resource flows that it shares with related fields to 1350  
 resist change from within. Fligstein and McAdam 1351  
 (2012: 61) cite Bourdieu's (1996a) study of elite 1352  
 universities, corporations, and the state in France 1353  
 as an example of how fields depend on one 1354  
 another to reproduce their positions – elite uni- 1355  
 versities depend on the state and elite corpora- 1356  
 tions to hire their graduates into prestigious jobs, 1357  
 and the state and corporations depend on the cre- 1358  
 dentialing process that elite universities provide. 1359  
 We note, however, that Bourdieu's interdepend- 1360  
 encies here ultimately serve to reproduce order 1361  
 in an even-higher, more abstract field (the "field 1362  
 of power"); his is not a direct account of interde- 1363  
 pendencies buffering against change within a 1364  
 focal field. 1365

1366 In conclusion, Fligstein and McAdam (2012) 1366  
 provide a more detailed, systematic account of 1367  
 field emergence and divergent change than neo- 1368  
 institutional theorists of organizational fields. 1369  
 They are also much clearer than Bourdieu on the 1370  
 conditions under which field change can occur. 1371  
 Whereas Bourdieu really only points to rare 1372  
 times of crisis, in which the *doxa* may be revealed 1373  
 and questioned by the dominated members of a 1374  
 field (as discussed above), Fligstein and McAdam 1375  
 (2012) elaborate a clearer and more elegant 1376

<sup>12</sup>As we noted in our overview of the theory of SAFs, field dependencies can be based on legal or bureaucratic authority and on resource dependencies (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978).

1377 framework for the mechanisms of field stability  
1378 and change.

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1379 **10.7 Discussion and Conclusion**

1380 In this essay, we have pursued two goals. First,  
1381 we have tried to show that a general notion of  
1382 field can be gleaned from the work of neo-  
1383 institutionalists in organizational theory,  
1384 Bourdieu, and Fligstein and McAdam. That con-  
1385 sensus emphasizes the nature of fields as meso-  
1386 level social orders populated with actors who  
1387 take one another into account in their actions.  
1388 Second, while these ideal-typical versions of  
1389 field theories have many agreements, they differ  
1390 dramatically in terms of how they understand the  
1391 role of actors, power, consensus, and the dynam-  
1392 ics of fields.

1393 In order to make progress on understanding  
1394 the significance of these disagreements, our basic  
1395 message is that these differences should be con-  
1396 fronted and explored not just theoretically, but  
1397 empirically. Scholars should then be reflexive  
1398 about how to revise theory in light of the differ-  
1399 ences. Instead of treating these ideas as separate  
1400 schools of thought about fields, we should place  
1401 them more directly in conversation with one  
1402 another by examining which way of thinking  
1403 about fields makes more sense in certain kinds of  
1404 situations.

1405 It is useful to consider how to proceed to adju-  
1406 dicate these differences of opinion. What should  
1407 be done next is both conceptual and empirical.  
1408 The concepts of field theory have been fleshed  
1409 out in an abstract manner. The degree to which  
1410 they differ needs to be made more explicit in  
1411 order for them to be empirically useful. At the  
1412 same time, while we have many studies that  
1413 employ field theory in one form or another, we  
1414 have very little general sense of how to produce  
1415 measurement and comparability in observation in  
1416 order to evaluate the conceptual disagreements.  
1417 So, for example, Bourdieu published *Distinction*  
1418 in English in 1984. Thirty years on, it remains  
1419 one of the few comprehensive field-level studies  
1420 of social life. The issues it raises have simply not  
1421 been addressed consistently from a specifically

field-theoretic point of view. Instead, scholars 1422  
have picked and chosen aspects of Bourdieu's 1423  
framework and ignored the general issue of the 1424  
degree to which such a field of cultural produc- 1425  
tion exists and how stable it may be across time 1426  
and place (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). 1427

Moreover, scholars should clarify whether or 1428  
not the disagreements between field theories is a 1429  
matter of specifying more clearly the possible 1430  
scope conditions of each of these perspectives or 1431  
of their fundamental incompatibility. Again, this 1432  
issue is both conceptual and empirical. From a 1433  
conceptual point of view, it may be that there are 1434  
conditions where one or the other perspective 1435  
operates to make better sense of the world. Our 1436  
ability to specify the mechanisms by which these 1437  
concepts actually operate need to be clarified. 1438  
This is certainly also an empirical question. So, 1439  
for example, figuring out how to tell if a particu- 1440  
lar field is more driven by legitimacy, power and 1441  
dominance, or identify and cooperation, is a dif- 1442  
ficult question that we have little experience in 1443  
working with empirically. 1444

Field theory also can occupy an ambiguous 1445  
epistemological status. On the one hand, field 1446  
theorists may assume that fields are real, they can 1447  
be measured, and their effects discerned. This 1448  
would imply a more positivist or realist approach 1449  
to fields that would emphasize common struc- 1450  
tures and mechanisms that researchers could look 1451  
for and model across settings. But, one can also 1452  
view field theory as a set of concepts, ideal types 1453  
that help researchers make sense of some histori- 1454  
cal situation. Here, analysts deploy the sparse 1455  
ideas of which field theory consists to help them 1456  
put a structure onto empirical materials, be they 1457  
historical, ethnographic, or quantitative. We are 1458  
comfortable with either version of field theory. 1459  
But some scholars will find it difficult to take 1460  
seriously those who opt for one or the other view 1461  
of fields. 1462

Field theory also makes very general claims 1463  
about its empirical scope. Given our view that 1464  
one can observe fields in most of organized social 1465  
life, it is necessary to consider what field theory 1466  
does and does not apply to. Indeed, one can see 1467  
field theory as a nascent attempt at a general the- 1468  
ory of society. While Bourdieu tried to maintain 1469

1470 his perspective was not such a theory, it is difficult  
1471 given the wide-ranging character of his work  
1472 and the myriad topics he investigated not to see  
1473 field theory in this way. The theory of SAFs is a  
1474 useful model because it builds upon not only the  
1475 other field theories discussed in this chapter but  
1476 also incorporates other lines of inquiry like social  
1477 movement theory, social psychology, and identity  
1478 theory to create a novel and general theory of  
1479 action and structure.

1480 Another way to test the generalizability of  
1481 field theory is to engage other perspectives that  
1482 posit processes that occur at the meso-level but  
1483 do not use the field idea. We have only mentioned  
1484 network analysis and the institutional logics per-  
1485 spectives. But there are others. For example, pop-  
1486 ulation ecology in organizational theory, with its  
1487 conception of constructed organizational popula-  
1488 tions, shares affinities with field theory (see  
1489 Haveman and Kluttz 2015). Additionally, much  
1490 of the work done on policy domains and policy  
1491 entrepreneurs in sociology and political science  
1492 could also fit into the field perspective (e.g.,  
1493 Kingdon 1984; Laumann and Knoke 1987).

1494 There are two logical possibilities here. First,  
1495 field theory might aid other perspectives by pro-  
1496 viding them with a well-conceived concept of a  
1497 meso-level social arena that would make such  
1498 theories richer. Situating one's analysis of the  
1499 social world at this meso-level has distinct advan-  
1500 tages. To say that action and meaning occurs in  
1501 fields – social orders made up of individual and  
1502 collective actors in discernible social positions  
1503 and centered around mutually recognized  
1504 resources, issues, and/or goals – gives the theorist  
1505 an orienting lens with which to test field-level  
1506 hypotheses or explain social phenomena within a  
1507 conceptually or empirically bounded arena. Such  
1508 a meso-level framework recognizes the impor-  
1509 tance of both macro-level structural influences  
1510 and micro-level exchange and meaning-making  
1511 processes without favoring one to the exclusion  
1512 of the other.

1513 Alternatively, ideas from other theories might  
1514 also enrich field theory. Take, for example, recent  
1515 literature on institutional logics (see Thornton  
1516 et al. 2012). A blind spot of field theory is how  
1517 ideas move across fields. The role of ideas or

1518 institutional logics has been a focus of work in  
1519 political science and organizational theory. But  
1520 this literature tends to reify ideas or logics in a  
1521 way that makes it difficult to tell what they are  
1522 and how they are or are not transported into new  
1523 arenas of action. Many of these discussions also  
1524 underspecify the conditions under which this is  
1525 likely to happen or not. Field theory, with its  
1526 ideas about the institutionalization (or settle-  
1527 ment) of social spaces and how they work, offers  
1528 researchers social structures that can be used to  
1529 identify when logics may or may not transfer  
1530 across such spaces. It would be profitable to think  
1531 through how field theory and the institutional  
1532 logics perspective are complementary.

1533 In conclusion, field theory is one of the most  
1534 general theoretical accomplishments of the past  
1535 40 years in sociology. Although the complemen-  
1536 tarities between versions of field theories out-  
1537 number the differences, we should allow for  
1538 recombination and synthesis in order to build on  
1539 those complementarities and reconcile the differ-  
1540 ences. In doing so, we can avoid the theory frag-  
1541 mentation that has characterized sociological  
1542 subfields over the last several decades and con-  
1543 tinue our path toward a comprehensive, contem-  
1544 porary theory of fields. As we hope we have  
1545 shown, we are closer now to such a theory than  
1546 ever before.

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