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THE RISE OF LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

Nicole C. Raeburn, M.A.

* * * *

The Ohio State University
2000

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ABSTRACT

Despite the ongoing backlash against lesbian and gay rights, a rapidly growing number of corporations are adopting gay-inclusive policies and practices. The question arises as to why such policies are being instituted in some corporations and not others. I argue that the answer requires a synthesis of two previously separate theoretical traditions: new institutional approaches that focus on the role that isomorphic processes play in the diffusion of a policy innovation among similarly situated organizations; and social movement perspectives that accentuate the impact of political opportunities and the role of mobilized constituencies as agents of social change. My analysis focuses on the mobilization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee networks over the past decade to win domestic partner benefits in "Fortune 1000" companies. My multimethod approach utilizes surveys of 98 corporations with and without gay networks, intensive interviews with vice presidents of human resources and gay employee activists, and a small number of case studies.

I offer a multilevel institutional opportunity framework that delineates the key dimensions of opportunity that challengers face in attempting to transform their organization's policies and practices. I adapt political opportunity theory to identify the organizational- or corporate-level variables that explain variations in activist success, and I
draw from neoinstitutional approaches to understand the policy impact of isomorphic processes in the larger organizational field and sociopolitical environment. Adapting new social movement theory and other cultural approaches, I also examine how activist variations in framing and identity-oriented strategies effect policy outcomes. Findings show that resources and strategic decisions matter, even if larger institutional factors mediate success. Results also suggest that although in the vast majority of cases the workplace movement spearheaded corporate transformation, following the first waves of adoption, institutional processes came into greater play such that the presence of a gay activist group is now less necessary for policy change.
Dedicated to my mother, my first and best teacher,

and to my father, my first and best study partner
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Given the often contentious intersection between advocates for change and profit-oriented companies, a central question is how the rights of various groups are negotiated and secured in the workplace. Despite the backlash against gay and lesbian rights occurring in cities and states across the U.S., a rapidly expanding number of corporations are including sexual orientation in nondiscrimination policies, adding sexual orientation to diversity training, and extending health insurance and other benefits to domestic partners of gay employees. My study of "Fortune 1000" companies reveals that the majority of equitable benefits adopters instituted this policy change only after facing internal pressure from mobilized groups of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees (see also Baker, Strub, and Henning 1995).

Yet not all employee groups have succeeded in their fight for gay-inclusive policies, and some companies have instituted these changes in the absence of employee activism. How, then, do we account for variation in companies' willingness to adopt such policies? That question provides the grounding point for this dissertation. My analysis focuses on the emergence and outcomes of the workplace movement, as it is typically called by activists. I concentrate particularly on the mobilization of gay, lesbian, and
bisexual employee networks over the past decade to win domestic partner benefits in Fortune 1000 companies. My multimethod approach utilizes surveys of 94 corporations with and without gay networks, intensive interviews with vice presidents of human resources and gay employee activists, and a small number of case studies.

Research shows that in 1990 just three corporations provided family and bereavement leave for lesbian and gay employees (Mickens 1994b), and none provided health insurance coverage for domestic partners (Baker et al. 1995; Navarro 1995). In contrast, nearly 600 major companies now offer these benefits (HRC 2000c). According to the most recent figures provided by HRC's WorkNet project, as of April 20, 2000, 92 Fortune 500 companies (18 percent) have instituted equitable benefits, along with 505 other private companies, nonprofit organizations, and unions (HRC 2000c). The numbers of adopters in the university and government sectors are 104 and 85, respectively. In all then, at least 786 employers have extended their benefits policies. The rate of adoption among major employers is now almost two per week (Herrschaft 1999).

My study reveals the crucial role of the workplace movement in bringing about this sea change. Of the 20 private employers who first adopted equitable benefits, at least 16 did so in response to internal mobilization (Baker et al. 1995). Nevertheless, while employee activists clearly spearheaded this major corporate transformation, institutional processes have since come into greater play such that the presence of an employee network is now less necessary for policy change. This progression is detailed in Table 1.1 below, which focuses on equitable benefits adoption among the Fortune 1000 by year and by presence of a gay employee group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Fortune 1000 Adopters</th>
<th>Number (and Percent) of Adopters with Gay Employee Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period 1 Subtotal</strong> (1991-1993)</td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period 2 Subtotal</strong> (1994-1997)</td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>21 (72%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period 3 Subtotal</strong> (1998-1999)</td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>24 (56%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Total</strong> (1991-1999)</td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
<td><strong>56 (67%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted with permission from the WorkNet database of the Human Rights Campaign.

Table 1.1: The Adoption of Domestic Partner Benefits among the Fortune 1000 by Year and by Presence of a Gay Employee Network

3
As shown in Table 1.1, between 1991 and 1993, all nine of the Fortune 1000 adopters changed their policies in response to pressure from gay employee networks. Between 1994 and 1997, 72 percent of new adopters (21 out of 29) had faced internal mobilization. In contrast, between 1998 and 1999, only 56 percent of new adopters (24 out of 43) had been pressured by organized groups of gay and lesbian employees. Although corporations with activist networks still constituted two-thirds of Fortune adopters as of 1999 (56 out of 83, or 67 percent), over time the presence of a gay employee group has become less necessary for gay-inclusive policy change. Institutional theorists would attribute this shift to mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a,b): as leading organizations adopted equitable benefits, others began to follow suit in order to remain competitive.

Among institutional scholars, a key theoretical and empirical question centers on institutionalization, or how particular policies or practices diffuse within and across organizational fields and become invested with legitimacy and eventually taken for granted (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1977, 1983; Abell 1995; Scott 1995; Scott and Christensen 1995; Tolbert and Zucker 1996; Fligstein 1997; Scully and Creed 1998). Clearly the adoption of equitable benefits has not yet reached a taken-for-granted status. On the contrary, it is still a highly contentious issue. It is this very point that makes the topic both theoretically interesting and practically important.

How is it possible that, amidst widespread backlash against gay rights in the United States, a rapidly increasing number of corporations are instituting gay-inclusive policies and practices? Indeed, companies far outpace nonprofit, educational, municipal, and state
employers in offering equitable benefits to the partners of lesbian and gay employees. How has this remarkable change come about? To help answer this question, I first situate the workplace movement in a wider historical context, documenting the quiet and cautious beginnings of workplace mobilization by activists who organized outside the walls of the corporation. I then turn to the social movement and institutional literatures for theoretical guidance in understanding the emergence and outcomes of internal mobilization. Finally, I close the chapter with a brief discussion of my data and methods and an outline of chapters.

EARLY BATTLES AGAINST ANTI-GAY EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

Quiet and Cautious Beginnings

The struggle for gay rights in the United States began with the emergence of the homophile movement in the early 1950s and was transformed by the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, which scholars typically use to mark the start of the gay liberation movement (D'Emilio 1983; Adam 1995). To varying degrees, activists in both of these periods targeted anti-gay employment policies. Given the McCarthy era's witch-hunts against homosexuals in government and other employment sectors, few would question the quiet, accommodationist stance of the early homophile movement (D'Emilio 1983). Functioning largely as self-help groups to counter the prevailing images of homosexuality as sick or immoral, homophile organizations in the 1950s attempted to provide members with support and affirmation by inviting sympathetic professionals as speakers (Valocchi 1999).

Since the early homophiles relied on outside "experts" to educate the rest of society, groups would also urge unsympathetic professionals to attend their meetings so
that they could open a dialogue with authorities, whom they hoped would change their opinions of homosexuality when faced with the "reasonableness" of members (D'Emilio 1983:109). Public events, if held at all, were mostly designed to convince others that homosexuals were "just like any other good citizens" (Faderman 1991:190). To demonstrate civic-mindedness, for example, homophile groups would hold charity events or sponsor blood drives (D'Emilio 1983; Valocchi 1999). Desperately seeking respectability for the sexual "variant," many leaders of the two earliest homophile organizations in the U.S., the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis, criticized gay bars and other aspects of gay subculture and encouraged members to adopt conservative styles of dress and comportment (D'Emilio 1983; Faderman 1991). In the early 1960s, however, deeply affected by civil rights demonstrations, some segments of the homophile movement began to adopt a more militant stance.

A Brave New Approach

After losing an extended court battle against wrongful discharge from his civil service job, Dr. Frank Kameny decided to join the movement and became one of its most visible leaders. He urged homophiles to abandon accommodationist strategies, fight for equal rights, and take up direct action tactics (D'Emilio 1983). Influenced by Kameny and other activists who favored a confrontational approach, in the early '60s the Homophile League of New York staged the first gay rights protest in the country by picketing outside an induction center, carrying signs that read, "If you don't want us don't take us, but don't ruin our lives" (Faderman 1991:191).
While some in the homophile movement avoided protests out of fear or distaste for contentious politics, others borrowed from the strategies and master frame of the civil rights movement (Snow and Benford 1992) and began to target the anti-gay employment policies of the federal government and civil service sector. By 1964, lesbians in dresses and gay men in suits were picketing outside the White House, the Pentagon, and other governmental buildings with signs bearing messages such as "End employment policies against homosexuals," "Homosexual Americans demand their civil rights," and "Discrimination against homosexuals is immoral" (Out of the Past 1997; Faderman 1991:87, 191). Despite the bravery of these homophiles, however, very few tangible gains were made in the fight for equal rights (D'Emilio 1983).

Then suddenly, beginning on June 27, 1969, gay rights were catapulted to a far more prominent position in the country's consciousness. That night at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, several gay, lesbian, and drag queen patrons fought back against what was supposed to have been a routine police raid. Their resistance drew a crowd of more than 2000 sympathetic protestors who confronted over 400 police officers with chants of "Gay Power!" (D'Emilio 1983:232). Thus began the gay liberation movement. Diffusing rapidly through networks of activists who were already radicalized by their participation in the New Left, "gay liberation fronts" soon appeared on college campuses and in cities across the country (D'Emilio 1983; Adam 1995). Drawing on the energy, strategies, and ideologies of other radical movements of the day, particularly black power, women's liberation, and the New Left generally, gay liberationists adopted direct action tactics and proffered collective action frames that called for gay power and sexual
liberation while simultaneously criticizing heterosexism and the interrelated nature of multiple oppressions (Valocchi 1999).

Zapping the Corporate Pigs

Although their approach was a bold break from the accommodationist tactics of the homophiles, in many ways early gay liberationists faced a cultural context that varied little from that of their predecessors. Placed in an unenviable but familiar position, activists in the late '60s and early '70s were attempting to win gay-inclusive change in a society that viewed homosexuality as pathological. But while early homophiles largely sought the acceptance of society through contact with individual professionals in the psychiatric and psychological communities, gay liberationists took a sharply different tack.

As movement scholar Steve Valocchi (1999:69) put it, the "post-Stonewall assault....called into question the values and principles of the broader society and connected the psychiatrists' oppressiveness to that of other powerful institutions."

Quoting the San Francisco Gay Liberation Front during one its "zap actions" at the national meetings of the American Psychiatric Association, Valocchi (1999:69) described how liberationists drew from the revolutionary narratives of the New Left to attack the interlocking and institutional nature of oppression:

You [psychiatrists] are the pigs who make it possible for the cops to beat homosexuals; they call us queer; you—so politely—call us sick. But it's the same thing. You make possible the beatings and rapes in prisons. You are implicated in the torturous cures perpetuated on desperate homosexuals (originally quoted in Teal 1971:274-275).

In addition to targeting the mental health establishment and the state, gay liberationists set their sites on the anti-gay policies of corporate America. In what appears
to be the earliest protest ever staged against a major corporation, gay liberationists in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York picketed ABC in the spring of 1970 after a San Francisco station fired an employee who had joined the "gay militant movement" (*The Advocate* 1970a:9).

Other gay liberation fronts began to survey companies about their policies toward gays and lesbians. In 1970, FREE (Fight Repression of Erotic Expression), a liberationist group at the University of Minnesota, combined their survey approach with a warning. In their letters to the 12 largest companies in the Twin Cities area, the group promised to "act against" those employers who discriminate (*The Advocate* 1970b:2, 4). Leaving no room for companies that wished to avoid protest by lying or simply not participating in the survey, the letter informed recipients that FREE was planning test cases to see if openly gay applicants would be turned down and that members would interpret a nonresponse to the survey as discrimination.

In a striking reminder of the cultural constraints under which gay liberationists operated, FREE made sure to discuss in their letter a report submitted to the National Institute of Mental Health by Evelyn Hooker, whose research showed that homosexuality was not a "mental health problem." The tone then quickly shifted as the letter writers moved from a psychiatric frame to a cooptation of corporate discourse. In perhaps the earliest documented example of what I call an *ideology of profits*, FREE argued that motivation and productivity suffer if employees have to keep their sexual orientation a secret. Citing both positive and negative incentives, the letter touched on the recruitment advantages of gay-inclusive policies and the costs of anti-gay practices. Members
informed companies that survey results would be given to graduating seniors and that
FREE would urge the university to break off all ties with discriminatory employers, whose
names would be forwarded to the Minnesota Human Rights Commission.

When a vice president at Honeywell corporation responded to the survey by
writing, "We would not employ a known homosexual," a graduate student member of
FREE filed a bias charge against the company, citing the University of Minnesota's policy
against discrimination by recruiters (*The Advocate* 1973a:8). Unfazed, Honeywell
maintained its anti-gay stance until almost one year later when, upon the retirement of the
aforementioned vice president, his replacement adopted a policy of nondiscrimination
(Bjornson 1974). Activist success thus depended on an opening of what I call
*institutional opportunities*. Similar to Sidney Tarrow's (1989, 1998) discussion of
political realignments as a key component of the political opportunity structure,
organizational realignments that derive from elite turnover can help turn the tables for
challengers.

Rather than surveying corporations, other gay liberation fronts took a decidedly
more aggressive approach. In the fall of 1971, when a spokesperson for Pacific Telephone
and Telegraph said that the company would "not knowingly hire a homosexual," the Gay
Activists Alliance picketed both PT&T and parent company AT&T (*The Advocate*
1971:5). Although San Francisco instituted a nondiscrimination ordinance against anti-
gay bias among city contractors in 1972, PT&T still refused to sign a hiring pledge against
discrimination based on sexual orientation (*The Advocate* 1972a,b).
After gay activists in the Pride Foundation filed a complaint the following year, the city attorney ruled that the company was not mandated to comply since it operated in an industry that was regulated by the Public Utilities Commission. In the face of continued intransigence, gay liberationists staged a highly dramatic Good Friday zap action that featured a young gay man dragging a heavy "cross" made from a telephone pole, which he carried through the downtown area to the PT&T premises (*The Advocate* 1973b). A couple of weeks later, protestors held another rally, but to no avail.

During that same summer of 1973, gay liberationists picketed and leafleted for six days outside Northwestern Bell in Minnesota after the AT&T subsidiary announced on the front page of the newspaper that it would not hire "admitted homosexuals" (*The Advocate* 1973c:14). Although the Minnesota ACLU filed suit against parent company AT&T in 1973, it was not until May 1974, with the lawsuit still pending, that Northwestern Bell rescinded its anti-gay policy (*The Advocate* 1973d, 1974a). The change was preceded three days earlier by the passage of a gay rights ordinance in Minneapolis. While similar laws elsewhere had not persuaded other affiliates to add sexual orientation to their nondiscrimination policies, it seems likely that the gay rights ordinance, paired with the ACLU lawsuit, worked to tip the scales.

This seems an especially plausible interpretation given the fact that AT&T had just recently settled a highly publicized class action suit for discrimination against women. In January of 1973, the company had agreed to pay the women plaintiffs $38 million in back pay and increased wages (Freeman 1975:189). This decision came after a damning investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which had concluded
that "the Bell monolith is, without doubt, the largest oppressor of women workers in the United States" (ibid).

Thus it is not surprising that in May 1974 Northwestern Bell, faced with both a lawsuit and a newly passed nondiscrimination ordinance, officially ended its anti-gay policy, thereby demonstrating the power of what institutional theorists have called coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). Approximately three months later, parent company AT&T announced in an issue of AT&T News, framed in response to a reader's question, that the corporation would not discriminate against gays and lesbians (The Advocate 1974b). The CEO also sent a letter to the National Gay Task Force, which had contacted the company, to verify the inclusion of sexual orientation in the corporate nondiscrimination policy.

**Summary.** These early examples of gay-inclusive policy change illustrate the importance of movement processes, organizational realignments inside the corporation, and coercive institutional pressures in the wider legal environment. The cases also demonstrate the significance of "early risers" who open up opportunities for later challengers (Tarrow 1998). For example, gay liberationists were able to win an inclusive hiring policy at AT&T only after the women's movement had convinced the corporate giant that employment discrimination, when legally prohibited, could be costly. Despite these early victories, however, lesbians and gay men were reluctant to mobilize within the workplace.
Holding Off on Mobilization within Corporations

By the mid seventies, gay and lesbian caucuses had sprung up in a handful of professional associations (Gregory-Lewis 1976; see also Taylor and Raeburn 1995), but these submerged networks did not form within—or did they target the anti-gay policies of—particular workplaces. This is hardly surprising given the complete lack of legal protection against discrimination at the state or federal level and the open hostility that was expressed toward gays by many employers in the public and private sectors. Early issues of *The Advocate* (1967 to 1982), the national news magazine of the gay and lesbian movement, are replete with stories about blatant discrimination by major corporations (for an index, see Ridinger 1987).

In 1976, the co-executive director of the National Gay Task Force commented on the fears that prevented lesbians and gays from joining a national gay rights organization (Gregory-Lewis 1976:7): "About 75 percent of the problem is that a lot of people are afraid to make out checks to gay organizations or to have their names on gay mailing lists." How much stronger those fears must have been when it came to organizing in one's own place of work.

It is also possible that gay men and lesbians were avoiding the risks of workplace activism because they were hopeful about the prospects of federal legislation that had been introduced by Bella Abzug and Edward Koch in 1974 (Thompson 1994:97). As the first gay rights bill ever considered by Congress, the measure would have outlawed employment discrimination. While in retrospect this optimism seems incredibly naïve (the Employment Non-Discrimination Act has yet to pass), at that time lesbians and gays had
reason to believe that change was on its way. By the mid 1970s there were already a
number of cities that had passed gay rights ordinances, and by early 1975, there were eight
states that were considering similar bills (The Advocate 1975). The hopes of gay and
lesbian people were buoyed as well by the American Psychiatric Association's removal of
homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders in 1973 (Adam 1995).

**Summary.** Pinning their hopes on continued progress in the formal political arena,
lesbians and gay men avoided mobilization in their own places of work. Indeed, it wasn't
until 1978 that the first gay employee network formed inside the walls of a Fortune 1000
corporation. And given the powerful right-wing backlash that arose against gay rights in
the late '70s, it would take another decade before the number of corporate networks
approached two handfuls. This slow and cautious start of the workplace movement makes
its successes in the 1990s all the more surprising. How, despite these hesitant beginnings,
did the workplace movement achieve such startling victories in the Fortune 500, not only
winning nondiscrimination protections in over half but also equitable benefits in almost
one-fifth of these 500 giants by the end of the '90s (HRC 2000c)?

As discussed above, while some employers now play "follow the leader" and adopt
domestic partner benefits in the absence of internal pressure, it is gay employee activists
who deserve credit for the entire first wave of corporate adoptions and for the majority of
policy extensions even still. Having finally found the courage to mobilize inside the walls
of their own workplaces, lesbian and gay employees achieved groundbreaking changes
that eventually began to ripple through the wider business world. The early and continued
success of these inside agitators demonstrates the power of social movements, particularly
those which mobilize within institutions rather than—or in addition to—the formal political arena.

ATTENDING TO THE POWER OF UNOBTRUSIVE MOBILIZATION

Almost 30 years ago Zald and Berger ([1971] 1987) issued a cogent yet seldom heeded reminder that social movements can take place in organizations and not just in or toward nation-states. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee activism is a powerful case in point. Emerging from the intersection of organizations and social movements, the adoption of gay-inclusive corporate policies represents the latest expansion in the definition of workers' rights, yet to date there are no scholarly analyses of this recent phenomenon. I argue that to understand both the rise and spread of these policies requires a synthesis of two previously separate theoretical traditions: social movement perspectives that accentuate the impact of political opportunities and the role of mobilized constituencies as agents of social change; and new institutional approaches that focus on the role that isomorphic processes play in the diffusion of a policy innovation among similarly situated organizations.

Emphasizing the multiple sites of contention in late modern societies, Taylor (2000) echoes the call of Zald and Berger by reminding movement scholars once again that challengers do not always target the state. The struggle for change is waged in a wide variety of institutional arenas, including the workplace, education, medicine, religion, and the military (Katzenstein 1990, 1998; D'Emilio 1992; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Taylor 1996; Taylor and Van Willigen 1996; Epstein 1996; McNaron 1997; Meyer and Tarrow 1998).
Offering a similar reminder to scholars who study the workplace, Hodson (1996) calls for more attention to the role of internal resistance in shaping organizational policies and practices. Describing the workplace as "contested terrain," Hodson argues, "Resistance, struggle, and effort bargaining are important components of everyday life in the workplace. Yet workers' strategies of autonomous activity are given little weight in most theoretical models of the workplace" (p. 719). Part of the reason for this oversight is the fact that "workers' strategies are often subtle and situationally specific" (ibid; see also Hodson 1995; Jermier, Knight, and Nord 1994). Attempting to correct for these gaps in the theoretical and empirical literature, I cast much needed light on a form of resistance that has gone unnoticed by both movement and workplace scholars: namely, the workplace movement for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights.

Unobtrusive Mobilization, Tempered Radicalism, and Institutional Activism

In her study of progressive activism in the Catholic church and the military, Katzenstein (1990, 1998) refers to "unobtrusive mobilization" and "protest inside institutions" as important sources of organizational change. Gay employee groups provide a good example of what she calls "institution-based organizations" (1998:9). Such networks, unlike more autonomous groups, are "beholden" to the "institutions they intend to influence" (ibid). Though often invisible to the wider public, these unobtrusive activists can effect significant changes in the institutional landscape.

Highlighting the distinctive position of such activists as "outsiders within" (see also Collins 1990, 2000), Meyerson and Scully (1995) coin the term "tempered radicalism." They define tempered radicals as "individuals who identify with and are committed to their
organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization' (p. 586). In his editorial introduction to Meyerson and Scully's article, Peter Frost (p. 585) comments on the motivations and strategic decisions of tempered radicals:

Their radicalism stimulates them to challenge the status quo. Their temperedness reflects the way they have been toughened by challenges, angered by what they see as injustices or ineffectiveness, and inclined to seek moderation in their interactions with members closer to the centre of organizational values and orientations.

These tempered radicals resemble the 'institutional activists' described by Santoro and McGuire (1997), who challenge the widely held view that social movement participants are 'necessarily non-institutional actors' (see, e.g., Freeman 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Gamson 1990). Santoro and McGuire define institutional activists as individuals 'who occupy formal statuses within the government and who pursue social movement goals through conventional bureaucratic channels' (p. 503). Their research reveals the beneficial policy impact of these 'social movement insiders,' or 'activists who work as insiders on outsider issues' (ibid; see also Freeman 1975; Eisenstein 1995; Gagné 1996, 1998).

Since the fight for social change takes place in multiple institutional spheres, I expand the definition of institutional activism to include mobilization not simply within the government but also within corporations and other supposedly 'nonpolitical' arenas. I also broaden the concept in another important way. While Santoro and McGuire describe institutional activists as 'polity members' given their 'routine, low cost access to decision-makers' (p. 504), I use the term in a broader sense to encompass challengers who do not—
or do not yet—have this routine access. Indeed, many gay employee networks face an uphill battle in obtaining such access.

TOWARD A THEORY OF MOVEMENT SUCCESS

As Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander (1995) point out, aside from Gamson's ([1975] 1990) classic study, researchers in the field of social movements rarely direct their attention to the outcomes of activism (see also Staggenborg 1995). Punctuating their point, Burstein et al. cite the fact that McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988), in their well-known survey of the literature, "devote less than a page and half of their forty-two-page review to outcomes" (p. 276). Part of this empirical shortfall stems from larger theoretical gaps: "[D]espite great theoretical advances in the area as a whole, we still lack an overall theory of movement success" (ibid). Burstein and his colleagues then offer a simple but potent justification of their call for such a theory: "[T]he many studies of movement emergence, participation, and maintenance done since the 1970s mean little if movements never effect social change or if their successes are beyond participants' control" (p. 276).

THE NEED FOR THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS: COMBINING SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND NEW INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Accounting for the success or failure of institutional activists means attending to the multiple embeddedness of organizational challengers. Fligstein (1991) asserts that organizational actors are located in three institutional spheres that constrain or facilitate action: the current structure and strategy of the target organization; the organizational field comprising the complex of organizations that the focal organization deems relevant to its sphere of activity; and the state. Taking into account these three spheres, which I
conceptualize as "nested" levels of the environment, I offer a multilevel institutional opportunity framework that delineates the key dimensions of opportunity that challengers face in attempting to transform their organization's policies and practices. I adapt political opportunity theory to identify the organizational-level variables that explain variation in the adoption of inclusive policies, and I draw from neoinstitutional approaches to understand how isomorphic processes in the larger organizational field and sociopolitical environment effect policy outcomes.

**Cultivating Political Opportunity Theory: Shifting the Focus from the State to Other Institutional Arenas**

Taking the state as the site of contention, political process theory highlights how the shifting opportunities and constraints in the larger political environment impact the emergence, trajectory, and outcomes of social movements (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1983; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Tarrow 1989, 1998; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996a; Gamson and Meyer 1996). Tarrow (1998:76-77) defines political opportunity as "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure." Four key dimensions of political opportunity include increased access to the polity, electoral realignments, divided elites, and influential allies (Tarrow 1998:77-80). Comparative approaches reveal that these dimensions vary across political systems, issue domains, and over time, with some elements exhibiting relative stability and others volatility (Gamson and Meyer 1996).
Expanding the purview of political process theory, other movement scholars have called attention to the cultural or cognitive dimensions of opportunity, including ideational elements in the wider environment such as belief systems, values, political discourse, and media frames (McAdam 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Taylor 1996; Goodwin and Jasper forthcoming). McAdam (1994:39-43) highlights four types of "expanding cultural opportunities" that are likely to facilitate mobilization: events that reveal inconsistencies between widely held cultural values and actual practices; unexpected events that generate grievances; incidents that dramatize the vulnerability of opponents; and the availability of a "master protest frame" (Snow and Benford 1988) that later challengers can appropriate.

In a heated critique of political process theory, Goodwin and Jasper (forthcoming) charge that the political opportunity model retains a structural bias and lacks applicability to movements that do not directly target the state (see also Abrahams 1992; Taylor 1999). While I concur that current conceptualizations are limited in this regard, I do not agree with Goodwin and Jasper's implicit call to abandon political opportunity theory. Rather, I modify the approach to extend its usefulness for analyzing activism in other institutional arenas, including the unobtrusive mobilization of institution-based organizations found in businesses, universities, religious congregations, and the military (Katzenstein 1990, 1998).

More specifically, I adapt political process theory and the nascent model of cultural opportunities to delineate four key dimensions of organizational-level opportunity that facilitate favorable policy outcomes or, if absent, constrain challengers' chance of success.
First is the presence of structural templates that allow access to key decision-makers and signal at least a minimal level of legitimacy for previously excluded groups. Second is organizational realignment that brings into the issue domain new elites or organizations that are supportive of or receptive to the goals of challengers. Third is the availability of allies, which can include influential individuals or groups from within or close to the elite as well as other organizational challengers who serve as coalition partners. Fourth is the existence of cultural supports such as a diversity-embracing corporate culture and, among elites, preexisting personal ties and "punctuating" experiences that serve to "humanize" challengers and evoke empathetic understanding.

**Mining New Institutional Theory: Conceptualizing Isomorphic Processes as Elements of Institutional Opportunity**

New institutional approaches to organizational analysis allow us to understand how variations in the organizational field and wider sociopolitical environment affect policy change. Institutionalists find that many organizational structures and policies reflect external expectations originating from and sometimes enforced by courts of law, legislatures, regulatory agencies, the professions, and public opinion (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The more recent focus on culture as constitutive of organizational repertoires is largely what distinguishes the "new" institutionalism from the "old" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a; Scott 1995). This cognitive approach highlights the more "subtle" influence of the environment, particularly how wider symbolic systems, cultural frames, discourses, and taken-for-granted cognitive scripts "penetrate the organization, creating the lenses through
which actors view the world" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a:13; see also Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott 1995a,b).

A central aim of new institutional theorists is to explain institutional isomorphism, or the processes by which organizations facing the same environmental pressures come to resemble one another in form and policy and hence achieve legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). Adapting DiMaggio and Powell's model, I identify three processes that operate at the sociopolitical and field levels to promote the diffusion of inclusive policies. I conceptualize these processes as macro-level institutional opportunities: coercive isomorphism, which entails political and legal pressure; mimetic isomorphism, which stems from benchmarking and other field-level influences such as consulting firms or intercorporate career mobility; and normative isomorphism, which originates from professionalization, or the legitimating standards, knowledge base, and intercorporate networks of various professionals.

Scholars in the field have theorized institutionalization not simply as an either-or outcome but rather as a process entailing variability in the degree to which particular structures and practices become diffused throughout organizational fields and hence taken for granted as proper and legitimate (Zucker 1977; DiMaggio 1988; Strang and Meyer 1993; Scott and Christensen 1995; Tolbert and Zucker 1996; Scully and Creed 1998). Thus researchers have attempted to specify the factors, both internal and external, that account for variation in the rate and extent to which organizations in a sector will become homogeneous and hence isomorphic with their environments (Tolbert and Zucker 1983;
Mediating factors include competing external pressures (Fligstein 1991; Mezias 1995) as well as internal characteristics that make some organizations more vulnerable to isomorphic influences (Scott 1995). For example, scholars have focused on the impact of size (Greening and Gray 1994; Mezias 1995), divisional structure (Thornton 1995), organizational age (Stinchcombe 1965), professional background of elites (Fligstein 1991), competitive position (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b), and relational connections such as interlocking board membership (Davis 1991). These internal characteristics do not have consistent effects, however, in part because of environmental complexity. Because any particular organization is embedded simultaneously in multiple and heterogeneous environments—a situation I refer to as institutional simultaneity—it often faces competing external pressures (Fligstein 1991; Mezias 1995).

Focusing on the interplay of internal and external characteristics, many institutional scholars have examined how organizational susceptibility to isomorphic pressures depends on proximity to the public sphere (Dobbin, Edelman, Meyer, Scott, and Swidler 1988; Edelman 1990, 1992; Sutton and Dobbin 1996; Dobbin and Sutton 1998). This group of scholars has found that organizations that are closer to the state sphere—such as public organizations, companies with federal contracts, or firms located in heavily regulated industries—are more vulnerable to governmental scrutiny and hence more likely to become "early adopters" of due process, equal employment opportunity, and affirmative action policies (see also Tolbert and Zucker 1983).
I find that the case of domestic partner benefits presents a challenge to this body of literature in that corporate adoption has proceeded in the absence of local, state, or federal legislation that would mandate equitable benefits (one of the only exceptions is discussed in Chapter 5). Indeed, private companies, often responding to internal mobilization, are leading the way when it comes to instituting gay rights. Nonetheless, institutional theory would predict that gay-inclusive anti-discrimination laws and city or state ordinances that provide domestic partner registries and/or benefits to government employees would have a positive effect on corporate adoption of benefits. This is because these pieces of legislation reflect a normative environment that draws at least symbolic attention to inequitable treatment (Edelman 1990). My findings support this prediction. However, I suggest that it is often more accurate to view variations in the legal environment as mediating the impact of internal activist challenges. My results thus challenge institutionalism's tendency to posit the impetus for and locus of organizational change as either exogenous shocks (Fligstein 1991; Powell 1991), such as changes in governmental policy, or as the strategic actions of dominant players in an organizational field (Fligstein 1991; for the opposite emphasis on peripheral members of a field, see Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, and King 1991; Powell 1991).

Critics from within the institutionalist perspective have called for a better understanding of the origin of change, or how new organizational structures and practices emerge (DiMaggio 1988; Brint and Karabel 1991; Fligstein 1991; Suchman 1995). As Hirsch and Lounsbury (1997:416) argue, "The genesis of an innovation must be explained just as much as its diffusion." The lack of focused theoretical attention to both the origin

As a corrective, a recent symposium of scholars has focused on "bringing actors back in" to institutional analysis (Fligstein 1997; see other symposium papers in same issue; see also Scott and Christensen 1995). These new institutionalists attend to "the problem of explaining change" at its source, rather than merely how innovations, once originated, diffuse across organizations (Leblebici et al. 1991:335). Long called for by DiMaggio (1988), this investigative turn shifts the spotlight to "the creation of institutions" and to the role of "institutional entrepreneurs" as agents of change. As DiMaggio (1988) argues, "New institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (institutionalized entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly. The creation of new legitimate organizational forms...requires an institutionalization project" (p. 14, italics in original).

Nevertheless, in examining the role of institutional entrepreneurs, the vast majority of scholars assume that change agents are either elites or professional occupational groups working within or across organizations, who are seen as motivated by self-interest to expand their positions as specialists (DiMaggio 1991; Dobbin and Sutton 1998). For example, concentrating on elites, Ingram (1998) focuses on the institutionalization project of hotel chain operators, Brint and Karabel (1991) on junior college administrators as "constrained entrepreneurs," and Galaskiewicz (1991) on the role of corporate elites in instituting philanthropic efforts. Other examinations of institutional entrepreneurs focus
on professional occupational groups, such as DiMaggio (1991) on the "professional projects" of art museum directors, and Dobbin and Sutton (1998) on the role of human resource managers in the creation and diffusion of EEO and AA offices.

As is obvious from this brief review, institutional scholars tend to ignore the fact that challenging groups can be important agents of institutional change. (For exceptions, see Chaves [1996, 1997]; Fligstein [1997]; and Lounsbury [1997].) In contrast, I emphasize the role that internal activists play in transforming complex organizations. While institutional models of isomorphic change prove useful in discerning the impact of institutional opportunities, movement approaches are necessary for understanding the crucial role that challengers themselves play in effecting organizational change. Thus I turn once again to the social movement literature, drawing on theoretical perspectives that highlight the significance of framing and collective identity.

Framing and Collective Identity Approaches in Social Movement Theory: Extending the Focus to Policy Outcomes

Challengers not only react to but also interactively shape the set of opportunities and constraints they face, creating new opportunities and winning new advantages through "power in movement" (Tarrow 1998; see also Gamson and Meyer 1996; Gomick and Meyer 1998). In other words, expanded institutional opportunities may create possibilities for change, but success depends as well on the resources, tactical repertoires, mobilizing structures, strategic framing, and solidarity of challengers (McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1983; Morris 1984; Gamson 1990; Rupp and Taylor 1990; Tarrow 1998). In recent years, social movement theorists have placed increasing
emphasis on ideas and beliefs, or the collectively shared grievances, identities, and unique frames of understanding that people use to make sense of their situation and to legitimate collective action (Morris and Mueller 1992; McAdam 1994; Taylor and Whittier 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Klandermans 1997). European new social movement theorists and other contemporary scholars primarily rely upon two concepts for understanding the cultural dimensions of social movements: collective action frames (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; Gamson 1992a) and collective identities (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Gamson 1992b; Taylor and Raeburn 1995).

Scholarly perspectives on framing reflect new interpretive approaches that conceptualize culture as a "tool kit" which people draw from in order to construct courses of action and solve various problems (Swidler 1986; Kunda 1992; Taylor and Whittier 1994). By punctuating an injustice and identifying its causes and likely solutions, collective action frames serve as interpretive schemata that activists use to legitimate their campaigns (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992). Research on frame alignment processes suggests that successful mobilization depends in part on the degree to which a proposed frame "resonates" with the experiences and interests of potential supporters (Snow et al. 1986; Gamson 1992a; Babb 1996).

Similar to Gamson’s (1988) work on ideological packages and Klandermans’ (1988) research on consensus mobilization, this literature tends to define the success of a framing effort in terms of its ability to recruit movement participants (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; see also Jasper and Poulsen 1995). In contrast, I aim to extend
f raming approaches by demonstrating their applicability not simply to mobilization but to the very policy outcomes toward which mobilization is directed (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995; Staggenborg 1995). In particular, I examine the impact of two different strategic frames that activists deploy in their efforts to win gay-inclusive policies: an ideology of ethics, which portrays the adoption of domestic partner benefits as "the right thing to do," and an ideology of profits, which frames the extension of benefits as "good for the bottom line."

I also analyze the strategic uses of collective identity, which refers to a challenging group's emergent understanding of itself and its shared situation (Taylor 1989; Gamson 1992b; Mueller 1994; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Whittier 1995). New social movement perspectives propose the concept of collective identity to highlight the fact that people frequently enact their social and political commitments not simply or even primarily as members of formal groups but rather more frequently as empowered individuals (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1985, 1989; Offe 1985; Touraine 1985; Habermas 1987; Klandermans and Tarrow 1988; Giddens 1991). A key process in the formation of an oppositional collective identity is the utilization of personalized political resistance (Taylor and Raeburn 1995). Aiming for institutional as well as cultural change, activists use this form of identity expression in their daily lives to challenge group invisibility and dominant representations of themselves, affirm new politicized identities, and contest traditional distinctions between the political and the personal (Gamson 1989; Melucci 1989; Epstein 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Lichterman 1996).
Challengers vary, though, in the means by which they practice personalized politics and in the extent to which they rely on this form of resistance (Lichterman 1996). Bernstein's (1997) work on "identity deployment," for example, reveals that activists make strategic decisions to either celebrate or suppress their differences from the majority. Likewise, I focus on the deployment of identity-oriented strategies that either promote or downplay gay visibility in the workplace. Extending Bernstein's approach, I examine the relative impact of these strategies on policy change.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to address the theoretical and empirical questions that drive this dissertation, namely those centered on the emergence and outcomes of the workplace movement, I relied on five main sources of data. First were telephone surveys of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employee networks in the Fortune 1000, along with the vice presidents or directors of human resources at companies with and without gay networks. Second, I conducted intensive interviews with a subsample of corporate elites, all of the gay employee groups for which I had contact information, and key informants from the workplace projects of the two largest gay rights organizations in the country. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The third source of data came from print and virtual media on gay-related workplace topics. Fourth were organizational documents from three case studies, described below. And finally, I gathered extensive field data from multiple workplace conferences, participation in the social activities of a regional umbrella organization, and attendance at the weekly meetings of one of the oldest and most well respected employee networks in the movement.
Prior to selecting my telephone sample, I attempted to compile a list of gay employee networks that was as complete as possible. I retrieved contact lists from the Workplace Projects of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay rights organizations. These lists were current as of April 1998. In order to seek additional contacts, I also conducted an exhaustive search of the Internet; read all of the books and articles I could locate on gay issues in the workplace (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5); contacted diversity consultants who were well-known for their knowledge of lesbian and gay issues; and attended movement conferences, both general and workplace-focused.

Combining all of these sources, there appeared to be 97 Fortune 1000 companies with gay employee groups. However, some of these sources were either inaccurate or could not be verified. As of April 1998, I was able to verify 85 networks that existed at one time or another, representing approximately 9 percent of the Fortune 1000. I attempted to contact all of them, but a couple had disbanded, and I was unable to locate any former members. In other cases, I lacked contact information and so sent my survey request in care of the vice president of human resources. In one such case, I was told that my request would not be forwarded to the gay network since the company does not allow employee groups to participate in external surveys. In other cases, I never heard back from executives even after repeated attempts on my part; I thus never knew whether or not my request had been forwarded to the gay network.

In all, 71 gay employee groups responded to my survey request, all of whom agreed to participate. Of the 83 documented networks still in existence, this represents a
response rate of 86 percent. Of those 71 activists networks, I was able to complete telephone surveys with 69 of them. The surveys were conducted mainly in a five-month period from mid May to the end of October 1998. While the surveys were semi-structured questionnaires intended to last approximately 20 minutes, all of the network informants agreed to in-depth interviews that ranged from 45 minutes to over three hours.

*Summary characteristics of gay employee networks.* Of the 69 networks for which I have complete data, the average size was 142 members, with totals ranging from a low of 10 to a high of 2000 members. In terms of gender composition, the workplace movement consists of more men than women. On average, women constitute only 38 percent of employee activists in the Fortune 1000. Gender representation is evenly balanced in only 26 percent of networks (17 out of 66), while in 61 percent of networks (40 out of 66) men outnumber women. The workplace movement is also disproportionately white. In only 9 percent of networks (5 out of 57) do people of color constitute 15 percent or more of members. An equal percentage of networks is entirely white. On average, people of color comprise only 7 percent of workplace activists in the Fortune 1000. While the movement is primarily fueled by lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees, heterosexuals comprise 8 percent of all workplace activists.

Nonmanagement employees make up a greater proportion of the movement than do management-level employees, with the former comprising 71 percent of network membership. The vast majority of gay employee groups have no union members. In many cases, this is because companies themselves lack unions, as was the case for 42 percent of all networks (29 out of 69). When unions do exist, gay employees often find it difficult to
win union participation because of three main obstacles that union members typically face: inflexibility of work schedules, which makes attendance at day-time meetings difficult; a hostile factory environment, which creates fear of harassment or violence; and lack of access to e-mail, which is the primary form of communication among network members. While some networks attempt to overcome these obstacles, they have largely met with limited success. Nonetheless, union members constitute, on average, 17 percent of the workplace movement's membership base.

Regardless of variation in the composition of the movement, gay employee groups typically share four main goals: to provide support, socializing, and networking opportunities for members; to gain official corporate recognition; to educate employees on sexual orientation issues; and to bring about gay-inclusive policies and practices, including nondiscrimination policies, diversity training, and domestic partner benefits. Some networks also encourage their employers to donate to lesbian and gay organizations or events in the wider community and/or to expand their marketing efforts to specifically target the gay community.

Selecting the wider sample. Using purposive sampling and drawing from the Fortune 1000 list published in Fortune magazine on April 29, 1996, I selected a total of 230 companies that reflected variation in industry type, degree of competition, location, size, and presence of a gay activist network. I also relied on numerous workplace-related Web sites, the WorkNet workplace project database of the Human Rights Campaign, and the ABI/Inform business news database to determine whether corporate headquarters
were located in areas that legally protect gays and lesbians and whether companies had been the target of lawsuits, boycotts, or shareholder activism.

Since the response rate for mail questionnaires is typically far below adequate (Neuman 1997), the letters I sent to executives and activists requested that individuals participate in a telephone survey. Of the 230 corporations I contacted, I was able to find willing participants in 94 companies (76 with a gay network and 18 without), for an overall response rate of 41 percent. I attempted to survey comparable numbers of executives from corporations with and without gay activist groups in order to gauge the relative importance of environmental and internal pressures. However, corporate elites proved largely unwilling to participate in the study. Of the 230 Fortune companies I contacted, only 51 human resource executives agreed to be surveyed, resulting in a subpar response rate of 22 percent. Not surprisingly, the response rate was higher among executives from companies that had a gay employee group. While 43 percent of these elites participated in the study (33 out of 76), only 12 percent of executives from companies without a gay network agreed to be surveyed (18 out of 154). Of those human resource professionals who responded to my request for participation, 10 agreed to intensive interviews, which ranged from one to two hours.

Of the industries represented in my sample, those most likely to have gay employee groups are entertainment (75 percent), high-tech as well as scientific and photographic (both 35 percent), and telecommunications (30 percent). Not surprisingly, these industries are also more likely to have adopted equitable benefits. The industries least likely to have gay networks are chemicals (2 percent), forest and paper products (3 percent), utilities (4
percent), electronics and electrical equipment (5 percent), and food (6 percent). (For a complete list of industries represented, see Tables A.1 and B.1 in the Appendix.)

*Note on confidentiality.* Given the fear that elites often expressed over the possibility of backlash, and in order to protect the identities of activists who often revealed highly sensitive information about particular executives, I promised all survey and interview respondents complete confidentiality. In many cases, I had to assure executives multiple times that I would not be identifying their companies and that I would disguise any revealing characteristics. I struggled with this, as did many of the activists themselves, since my personal commitment to workplace change meant that I would prefer the policies and practices of all employers to be brought out into the open. On scholarly grounds as well, I wish that this project could be a typical movement study, where the names of activist organizations are published and more detailed information could be provided. But given the choice between confidentiality (which hopefully elicited honest and forthcoming responses) and identification of participants in the name of movement goals (which would have drastically reduced my response rate), I chose the former. It is my hope that this study, regardless of its limitations, will contribute to the ongoing struggle for equality in the workplace.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

This research uses a comparative design that allowed me to explore different patterns of policy change across the cases in my sample (Ragin 1994). I used the survey data mainly as background information in discussing the significance of the social and political environment, industry and corporate characteristics, and internal social movement.
factors on the adoption of inclusive policies. For a rich understanding of the institutional and movement processes that underlie corporate policy decisions, I relied primarily on qualitative analysis. I selected three cases that illuminate the key theoretical processes posited by the study and drew from the interview data to construct intensive case studies that embody the differences among the cases.

The case studies represent a financial services company with a successful gay employee group, which I call "GLB"; a telecommunications corporation whose gay network, "GLUE" (Gay and Lesbian United Employees), had been unsuccessful until only recently; and a transportation company where equitable policies exist in the absence of a lesbian and gay employee group. A comparative design allowed me to gather in-depth information about a diversity of cases in order to understand the relative effects of institutional factors and activist challenges on policy change. Aside from the practical benefits that this study can provide for institutional activists, my goal is to advance theories of social change by highlighting the institutional and movement processes that underlie the transformation of complex organizations.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Having presented the substantive, theoretical, and methodological background for this study, I now turn in Chapter 2 to the emergence and diffusion of the corporate workplace movement. I analyze the patterned formations and spread of gay employee networks among the Fortune 1000 in relation to four main areas: the wider sociopolitical context, the larger gay and lesbian movement, the media, and institutional openings in the workplace. In Chapter 3, I account for the puzzling drop-off in corporate mobilization
beginning in 1995. I analyze this decline in new organizing in relation to the larger sociopolitical and institutional environments, emphasizing the interpretive processes that mediate the relationship between the environment and mobilization.

In Chapter 4, which focuses on the infrastructure of the movement, I trace the increasingly dense connections that developed among gay employee networks in the early to mid '90s. Examining the formation of virtual networking and local, regional, and national umbrella groups, I highlight the resources, structures, and strategies that arose from these same interorganizational linkages.

In Chapters 5 and 6, where I present a multilevel institutional opportunity framework, I delineate the key dimensions of the environment that facilitate favorable policy outcomes for challengers. I focus first on the macro-level opportunities that stem from isomorphic processes in the organizational field and wider sociopolitical environments. I then discuss the importance of organizational-level opportunities in the more immediate environment of activists (here, the corporation itself). Finally, in Chapter 7, I highlight the impact of movement processes, concentrating particularly on identity-oriented strategies that emphasize gay visibility, and collective action frames that rationalize inclusive policy change as serving the bottom-line interests of the corporation. I then conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of my research.
CHAPTER 2
THE EMERGENCE AND DIFFUSION OF
THE CORPORATE WORKPLACE MOVEMENT

Although the gay, lesbian, and bisexual movement is one of the most highly mobilized campaigns on the current political landscape (Adam 1995; J. Gamson 1995; Jenness 1995; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel 1999), scholars have yet to direct their attention to a significant development in the struggle for equal rights: the rise of a lesbian, gay, and bisexual workplace movement. With a fledgling start in the late 1970s and early '80s, when only two major corporations witnessed the birth of gay employee networks, by the late 1980s, small numbers of lesbians and gay men began to mobilize for inclusive policies and practices in their places of work. Still, by the end of that decade, only ten gay employee groups had sprung up among the Fortune 1000. By the late 1990s, however, the numbers had swelled to over 80 documented networks, which together constitute a pioneering force for social change. Serving as powerful reminders that the state is not the sole contested terrain, these "institutional activists" (Santoro and McGuire 1997) demonstrate that committed individuals "do" politics not simply on the streets or in voting booths but in the cubicles, offices, and board rooms of companies across the country.
Amidst the longstanding backlash against gay rights in the United States (Adam 1995; Vaid 1995; S. Epstein 1999), how did the workplace movement take off and gain enough visibility and partial success such that the New York Times referred to gay-inclusive corporate policies as "the workplace issue of the '90s" (Baker, Strub, and Henning 1995)? To answer this question, I first discuss the patterned emergence and diffusion of lesbian and gay employee networks among the Fortune 1000 in relation to four main areas: the wider sociopolitical context, the larger gay and lesbian movement, the media, and institutional openings in the workplace. I then briefly discuss the development of interorganizational linkages among gay employee networks beginning in the early nineties. In the next chapter, I address the surprisingly sluggish pace of new corporate organizing since 1995 and consider alternative explanations for the slowdown.

**THE RISE AND GROWTH OF THE CORPORATE WORKPLACE MOVEMENT**

Figure 2.1 below charts the number of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employee groups that have emerged each year among Fortune 1000 companies. The visual reference makes readily evident the distinctive patterning of network formations across time. Organizational births are clustered within three main periods such that the trajectory of corporate organizing can be described as follows: (1) a slow rise between 1978 and 1989; (2) rapid growth from 1990 to 1994; and (3) a decline in new organizing from 1995 to mid 1998 (when data collection ended).
Figure 2.1: The Emergence of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Employee Networks Among the Fortune 1000: Organizational Births by Year
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of Organizational Population (N=69)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1 Subtotal:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 1 Birthrate:</td>
<td>less than 1 (.83) new organization per year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2 Subtotal:</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2 Birthrate:</td>
<td>10 new organizations per year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thru mid-1998</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 3 Subtotal:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 3 Birthrate:</td>
<td>less than 3 (2.57) new organizations per year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Birthrate:</td>
<td>over 3 (3.37) new organizations per year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are from surveys and interviews with 69 gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee networks in the Fortune 1000, conducted primarily between May 1998 and October 1998.

Table 2.1: The Emergence and Diffusion of the Corporate Workplace Movement: The Clustering of Organizational Births Across Time

40
Table 2.1 above details the number and percent of gay employee networks that emerged each year and, in aggregate, the organizational birthrate for each of the three periods. (Table B.1 in the Appendix sketches the growth and diversification of the workplace movement by focusing on the periodized clustering of network formations by industry and region of the country. For a complete list of organizational births by year, industry, and geographic region, see Table A.1.)

As shown in Table 2.1, during the first period of the workplace movement, between 1978 and 1989, only 10 gay networks appeared among the Fortune 1000. The slow rate of mobilization over that 12-year stretch contrasts sharply with the next 5 years, which witnessed the birth of 50 new groups from 1990 through 1994. Put differently, while during the first wave of mobilization the organizational founding rate was less than one new group per year, that figure climbed to 10 per year between 1990 and 1994.

Examining the distribution trends from the perspective of the entire organizational sample (n = 69), only 14 percent of corporate networks were born during the first wave compared to 72 percent in the second.

The third period of the workplace movement is marked by a significant decline in the pace of new organizing. Only 9 employee groups emerged between 1995 and mid 1998, which represents only 13 percent of the total sample. At first glance the decrease may appear to be an artifact of unequal time comparisons (5 years in period 2 versus 3.5 years in period 3). But this does not explain the fact that the organizational birth rate dropped from 10 new networks per year in the second wave to less than 3 per year in the third.
All of these contrasting patterns will begin to make sense when viewed through the trifocal lens of the shifting political climate, the actions of the broader gay and lesbian movement, and the variable conditions present in other institutional spheres. For now, it bears mentioning that by the end of the third period, after over 20 years of workplace mobilization, gay and lesbian employee groups had emerged in 85 documented Fortune 1000 companies, 69 of which are included in my sample here (see methods section of Chapter 1 for explanation of discrepancy).

The Sociopolitical Context of Corporate Organizing

As political process theorists suggest, shifts in the wider political environment help to explain the rise and trajectory of social movements (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Tarrow 1989, 1998; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996a; Gamson and Meyer 1996). For example, Doug McAdam (1982) contends that the civil rights movement emerged in response to new political opportunities that were made possible by the collapse of the cotton-based economy in the South and the mass migration of African Americans to industrial regions of the North. Similarly, Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow (1977) argue that the success of the farm workers' movement in the late 1960s grew out of political realignments, policy reform, and broad economic trends that created a more supportive set of conditions for insurgent activity. The rise of the gay and lesbian workplace movement and the distinctive patterns of network formation over the past 20 years likewise reflect changes in the broader sociopolitical context.
The New Right and the first wave of employee activism. The tentative pace of early corporate organizing is hardly surprising given the rise of the New Right in the late 1970s and its consolidation of power in the 1980s. Mobilized around fiscally and socially conservative goals, including the defense of traditional gender and sexual norms, and drawing from a broad network of well organized single-issue groups, evangelical Christians, and various members of the corporate elite, the New Right took aim at the gains that had been made by the gay liberation movement in the 1970s (Adam 1995; S. Epstein 1999). Beginning with Anita Bryant's highly publicized "Save Our Children" campaign in 1977, which resulted in the repeal of a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida, a wave of similar repeals spread across the United States (Adam 1995). The day after the Dade County repeal, California state senator John Briggs introduced the infamous Briggs Initiative, which aimed to purge the school system of gay men and lesbians as well as anyone who presented homosexuality in a positive light (D'Emilio 1992).

In response to the growing anti-gay backlash, 300,000 people turned out for San Francisco's Gay Pride Day in 1978 (D'Emilio 1992:89), and over 30 organizations sprang up across the state to fight the initiative (S. Epstein 1999:47), a groundswell of mobilization that historian John D'Emilio (1992:89) described as "the most far-reaching and sustained gay organizing campaign" the movement had ever seen. Later that same year, Dan White, a disgruntled former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and former police officer, assassinated mayor George Moscone and city supervisor Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay office-holders in the country. When White received a
manslaughter rather than murder conviction, five to ten thousand people marched on City Hall (D'Emilio 1992:92), where some smashed windows and others torched police cars to express their rage at the injustice (Adam 1995).

It was during that turbulent year of 1978 that the earliest known gay employee group formed in corporate America. Not surprisingly, its location was California, as was the case for four of the ten employee networks that emerged during the first wave of the workplace movement. During the same year, the National Gay Task Force released the first movement study of anti-gay workplace discrimination in the private sector. Nonetheless, aside from the second corporate network that formed in 1980, the next five years of that decade produced no other gay employee groups. The increasingly hostile political climate had halted new organizing among lesbian and gay employees.

The stunted growth of the workplace movement may have stemmed from the recession of the early '80s as well since economic downturns make it more difficult for progressive social movements to advance their cause (Ryan 1992:68; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Adam 1995; Whittier 1995). Lesbians and gay men were already concerned for their economic livelihoods given their vulnerability to job loss and other forms of anti-gay employment discrimination (Weinberg and Williams 1974; Levine 1979, 1992; Lewis 1979; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Levine and Leonard 1984; Schneider 1984, 1986, 1988; Sherrill 1994; Badgett 1995; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Woods 1995). How much stronger the fear of coming out must have been when compounded by the rising rate of unemployment generally.
But an even more direct explanation for the five-year hiatus in corporate
organizing can be found in the New Right's consolidation of power in the early '80s. The
presidential election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the announcement of a renewed anti-
gay campaign by Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority served to entrench the New Right
(D'Emilio 1992), thereby forcing the gay and lesbian movement to focus on defensive
rather than proactive measures (Adam 1995). Struggling against the powerful
conservative momentum of the Reagan era and the rise of the AIDS epidemic, gay and
lesbian activists concentrated not on gaining recognition in the workplace but rather on
preventing further assaults on gay rights, battling the deadening silence of the media and
political establishment over AIDS from 1981 to 1983, and then defending against the
widespread panic and virulently anti-gay attacks that followed once word of the epidemic
hit the news (Adam 1995; S. Epstein 1999). Early news reports of the deadly virus, both
reflecting and reinforcing the dominant cultural imaginary, strengthened the supposed link
between gay men and pathology and fed the right-wing's continuing attempts to equate
homosexuality with inherent deviance and public threat (Schwartz 1995).

Thus the first two gay employee networks, both in the high-tech industry,
remained the solitary representatives of the corporate workplace movement from 1980
until well into the second term of Ronald Reagan, when they were finally joined by a slow
trickle of other gay networks beginning in 1986. By 1989, lesbian, gay, and bisexual
employees had mobilized in 10 Fortune companies. The workplace movement was thus
re-awakening from the doldrum years of the early to mid eighties, a period of "abeyance,"
to borrow Verta Taylor's (1989) term, during which activists had been forced into a
holding pattern amidst an unreceptive political climate (see also Rupp and Taylor [1987] 1990).

The revival of corporate activism by the end of the 1980s came on the heels of what Barry Adam (1995:130) called the "faltering" momentum of the New Right in the middle of the decade. These changes, compounded by sex scandals among the Christian fundamentalist leadership of the Right beginning in 1987 and Pat Robertson's failure to obtain the Republican presidential nomination in 1988, portended a shifting political environment. Lesbians and gay men then increasingly mobilized "in all spheres of civil society...at work, in communities, in churches, in health and social services, in sport, and in the media, education, and the arts" (Adam 1995:130).

Clinton's rise to office and the second wave of employee activism. The second wave of the workplace movement is marked by a significant jump in corporate organizing beginning in 1990, which ushered in a five-year period of rapid growth and diversification. While during the first wave of the movement it took 12 years to produce 10 gay networks, the year 1990 alone brought 10 more groups, starting a growth trend that would continue throughout the second wave of mobilization such that by the end of that period in 1994, 60 networks had formed among the Fortune 1000. The relative explosion of corporate organizing during the second wave corresponds to the changing political climate that eventually brought William Clinton to the presidency.

Beginning in the early nineties, the larger gay and lesbian movement encountered a more favorable set of environmental conditions, including the aggressive courting of the gay vote by Clinton (Vaid 1995). Openly gay people were prominent on Clinton's
campaign team and his list of presidential appointments (S. Epstein 1999). Discussing other significant openings in the structure of political opportunity for the gay rights movement, Sidney Tarrow (1994) notes the split among the political elite over the definition of "family values," the electoral realignment of 1992 that brought a Democrat into the White House after 12 years of Republican occupancy, Clinton's attempt to end the longstanding military ban on gay and lesbian service members (see also Korb 1996), and the increasing presence of gay-friendly allies among the women's movement, civil rights groups, and various members of Congress.

Just days after the election, President Clinton sent a letter to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in which he thanked members for their advocacy work and campaign support, asked for help in implementing positive change, and extended a warm welcome to those who were attending NGLTF's annual Creating Change conference. Describing both the immediate impact and wider significance of Clinton's gesture, one audience member later reflected, "When Urvashi Vaid [then NGLTF director] read Bill Clinton's letter...the crowd went wild. The President Elect's letter to us, lesbian, bisexual, and gay activists from all over the U.S., was at once a recognition of the role of our community in his victory and a positive sign for the future" (Bain 1992a:7; emphasis in the original).

Issues of fairness and equal treatment in the workplace also gained considerable attention as politicians began to furiously debate Clinton's 1991 campaign pledge to rescind the military's anti-gay policies (Vaid 1995). Fifty years earlier the military had taken a strikingly similar stance against racial integration of the armed forces. Faced with Clinton's promise, the military dusted off its racist arguments and sent them into battle
over gays in uniform, warning again of breakdown in unit cohesion and threats to combat readiness (Raeburn 1998; Herek, Jobe, and Carney 1996). The controversy culminated in 1993 with the so-called compromise policy known as "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue," which even conservatives describe as varying little from the former ban (Korb 1996:295). Nevertheless, the furor brought to the public eye not only the exclusionary policies of the armed forces but also the holes that could be shot through the military's defense of the ban. These weaknesses in military rhetoric revealed deeper questions about the rationale for—and rationality of—anti-gay attitudes in the workplace generally.

*New strategies of the Right.* In 1992 the workplace movement experienced a different kind of jolt following passage of Colorado's Amendment Two. A statewide ballot initiative that legally banned civil rights protection for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, the measure overturned gay rights laws that had been passed in Aspen, Boulder, and Denver (Adam 1995:133; Dugan 1999). While the lesbian and gay movement was accustomed to battling the repeal of gay rights ordinances, this measure and others like it in Oregon and later in Idaho and Cincinnati, Ohio, represented a new form of legislation "that sought to make it legally impossible for gay rights laws ever to be established" (S. Epstein 1999:68; see also Blain 1997 and Dugan 1999). Although in 1996 the United States Supreme Court ruled the Colorado amendment unconstitutional, its passage in 1992 by 53 percent of voters led outraged lesbian and gay activists to issue a national boycott against travel to the state (S. Epstein 1999:68).

Media attention to this new and more virulent strain of anti-gay legislation, a "suddenly imposed grievance" in movement terms (Walsh 1981), also precipitated an
increase in corporate mobilization. As shown earlier in Table 1, 9 new employee groups (13 percent of the current sample) emerged in 1992, making it the third most "fertile" year of the workplace movement's 20-year history. Commenting on the mobilizing impact of the legislation, one Colorado-based activist explained, "after voters in my district supported Amendment Two, I decided it was time for a gay employee resource group at my company." While none of the other employee networks that formed that year were located in Colorado, the New Right's success in passing a more insidious form of anti-gay legislation created a wave of gay and lesbian mobilization that reverberated across state lines and into corporations around the country. As Traci Sawyers and David Meyer (1999) argue, unfavorable legislation or hostile judicial rulings can be seen as opportunities since challengers can use them to generate publicity, raise consciousness and money, and gain new recruits or even increased leverage in other policy domains (see also Burstein 1991; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996).

The Impact of the Larger Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Movement

*Taking it to the streets...and into the workplace.* Situated within nested political environments, the workplace movement faces windows of opportunities and walls of constraint that stem not simply from actions of the state and of countermovements but also from the efforts of the wider lesbian, gay, and bisexual movement. Just as suddenly imposed grievances can incite activism, so too can movement protest itself lead to increased and more widespread mobilization (Sawyers and Meyer 1999). For example, the cluster of first-wave employee groups that sprang up during the late eighties followed the record-breaking turnout for the second National Gay and Lesbian March on

The radical presence at the march of newly formed ACT UP, a direct action, grassroots AIDS coalition, and the participation of 5000 activists at the national Civil Disobedience Action the following day at the Supreme Court (Vaid 1995:99), attracted considerable media attention. ACT UP expanded the strategic repertoire of the movement by reincorporating tactics that had been abandoned after the heyday of gay liberation (D'Emilio 1992; Berzon 1994; S. Epstein 1999). As ACT UP's "SILENCE = DEATH" slogan diffused rapidly to the public spaces of mainstream America, its message struck a responsive chord among many. While fear of discrimination and harassment had kept countless gay men and lesbians from coming out at work, the AIDS crisis and the life-saving necessity of speaking out pushed many out of the closet (Swan 1997). In the words of journalist Thomas Stewart (1991:44-45), who interviewed over 100 gay and lesbian people in corporate America, volunteering in AIDS organizations and mobilizing against the disease had "ended the isolation that confined many gay professionals."

Once connected through AIDS organizing, and once empowered to be visible, many gay men and lesbians decided to mobilize in their own places of work. The first gay network to emerge in a utility company, for example, grew out of the efforts of six employees who had persuaded their west coast employer to sponsor an internal AIDS
hotline. Although one of the founders was a gay rights activist who had previously worked for a civil rights organization, the gay employee network started out as a purely social group. Shortly thereafter, however, members took on explicitly political aims both within and outside of the company. Many other gay networks in the Fortune 1000 likewise began as informal "support groups," but members soon expanded their goals, renamed themselves "diversity networks" or "employee resource groups" (the terms commonly used by preexisting networks for women and people of color), and sought meetings with corporate decision-makers about the need for gay-inclusive policies (see also Swan 1997).

As alluded to above, however, the birth of several gay employee networks in the late '80s after a five-year hiatus came not simply from the mobilizing carry-overs of the AIDS epidemic. The 1987 March on Washington fanned the flames of that organizing impulse. As activist-writer Urvashi Vaid (1995:99) explained, the march and day-long demonstrations of civil disobedience "ignited gay and lesbian activism" in local communities across the country and in multiple institutional spheres, sparking a trend of movement growth and organizational diversification that continued well into the next decade. Movement scholar John D'Emilio (1992:267) commented eloquently on the impact of the 1987 march:

[T]he weekend in Washington proved uncontainable. The display of the Names Project quilt, the massive wedding ceremony at the National Cathedral, and the impressive parade of contingents from every state in the nation, struck a chord of self-respect so deep that it could not be ignored. People returned to their home communities transformed, ready to do what seemed unimaginable a few days before.
D'Emilio's words ring true in the founding account of the largest gay and lesbian employee group in the country, a telecommunications case study that I refer to as "GLUE" (Gay and Lesbian United Employees). Located in a company headquartered on the east coast and formed in 1987 by a small circle of friends who had attended the march, by 1996 the network had over 2000 members in 30 chapters across the U.S. Even though the group's membership was reduced after the corporation split into three separate companies, two of which entered the high-tech industry, GLUE is still the largest network in the movement with 1300 members and 28 chapters nationwide. The 1987 March on Washington made such an impression on the founders that even their informational brochure mentions its significance. As explained in the pages of the flyer, GLUE's first chapter formed after some friends in the company who had been meeting informally "returned home from the March on Washington inspired, energized, and convinced that they could change their part of the world...that they could make [their company] a place that welcomed ALL of its employees!" (emphasis in the original).

We're here, we're queer, we're fabulous, get used to us.... Although GLUE witnessed the emergence of gay employee groups in six other companies between 1987 and 1989, it was not until the 1990s that gay networks began to appear in far greater numbers, due in part to an attention-grabbing development in the wider gay and lesbian movement. In 1990, word spread like wildfire about a new social movement organization called Queer Nation. Formed in New York City, where it mobilized large and visible demonstrations against gay bashings, the group distributed 15,000 flyers at the New York Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade (S. Epstein 1999:60). News of Queer Nation's loud and
raucous entry at the pride march traveled fast, and "within days it seemed that groups calling themselves Queer Nation were springing up around the country" (Gross 1993:82, as cited in S. Epstein 1999:60).

Adopting a grassroots, direct action, "in-your-face" style of organizing and a binary smashing position that rejected the notion of fixed sexual identities, Queer Nation was a purposeful reaction against the mainstream tactics and essentialist stance of the larger gay and lesbian rights movement (J. Gamson 1995). As a means of challenging what queer theorists have called heteronormativity (Ingram 1994), Queer Nation claimed public—and implicitly heterosexualized—space by holding "kiss-ins" or "queer-ins" while leafleting at shopping malls and bars (S. Epstein 1999). Posting neon-colored stickers and wearing t-shirts with confrontational slogans such as "queers bash back," members popularized the "we're here, we're queer" chant that now echoes through the crowds of pride parades across the country (Faderman 1991; Podolsky 1994; Vaid 1995).

The corporate activism that took off in the early '90s and gathered momentum throughout the second wave was, to be sure, a far cry from the transgressive style of queer politics. Nevertheless, the rise of Queer Nation and its offshoots in 1990 and the heightened militancy of ACT UP injected a new energy into the lifeblood of the larger movement, garnering an increased visibility that facilitated multiple forms of organizing. As shown above in Table 1, 10 gay employee groups (15 percent of the current total) formed among the Fortune 1000 in 1990, making it the second most prolific year of the workplace movement. Of course, this eruption of corporate organizing was generated not simply by a spillover of activist energy from the streets to the workplace. The second
wave was fueled as well by the momentous turning of the media spotlight to lesbian and gay employment issues.

Although queer activists were not solely responsible for this pivotal shift in media attention, their success in generating mainstream visibility clearly benefited the campaign for equal rights in the workplace. At the start of the decade, queer activists succeeded in shifting the gaze of the media to gay and lesbian concerns (Rouilard 1994). Once journalists and news producers widened their focus of coverage to include queer politics, it was only a short matter of time before light was cast on the workplace movement itself. Since the media tends to give short shrift to social movement concerns generally (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996) and gay and lesbian issues in particular (Adam 1995), this remarkable interest in gay topics merits further analysis.

Mainstream media's "Year of the Queer." In a published chronicle of the lesbian and gay movement, 1990 earned the title "Year of the Queer" given the unprecedented media coverage of gay activism (Rouilard 1994). While media attention to movement concerns is often a crucial component of successful mobilization, such visibility can be exceedingly difficult to come by (McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam 1996). Due in part to what scholars have termed corporate hegemony, the news media are not apt to grant much access to movement actors whose demands are seen as threatening to the interests of media elites or their corporate sponsors (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996:297). Why then, in 1990, did the mainstream news establishment suddenly devote so much air time to queer politics?
Perhaps the answer lies at least in part with the propensity for much of queer activism to be directed not simply or even predominantly at specific institutions but rather at more diffuse targets (J. Gamson 1995, [1989] 1998a). Josh Gamson's work has revealed, for example, that many of ACT UP's efforts are aimed at what he calls an invisible enemy and what Michel Foucault (1979) has termed the normalization process: i.e., the cultural delineation and exclusion of the "abnormal" from the "normal" (J. Gamson [1989] 1998a:335). But as Gamson points out, queer activists do sometimes level their actions at specific institutional practices, such as when ACT UP challenges the budgetary priorities of the federal government or the testing protocols and pricing policies of pharmaceutical companies (see also S. Epstein 1996), or when groups such as the Lesbian Avengers protest exclusionary curricula by giving grade-schoolers lavender balloons, a color associated with gay pride, that read "Ask about lesbian lives" (Taylor and Rupp 1993; James 1995).

In fact, in 1990 queer activists targeted the media establishment directly, issuing charges of bias against the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other major news carriers (Rouilard 1994:358; Vaid 1995:201). Well aware of the fact that media discourse can be harmful if coverage presents a "biased and ridiculed picture of the movement" (Klandermans and Goslinga 1996:319; see also Gitlin 1980), gay and lesbian activists mobilized within and against the mainstream media. Queer Nation, ACT UP, NGLTF, OutWeek magazine, and organized groups of lesbian and gay journalists challenged the corporate media giants on inaccurate reporting, urged more extensive coverage of the gay community and movement, and pushed for nondiscrimination in employment (Rouilard
1994:358; Vaid 1995:201). News executives had also been facing pressure from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), which formed in 1985 to push for fairness and accuracy in the media. By 1992, the Los Angeles Times described GLAAD as "possibly the most successful organization lobbying the media for inclusion" (GLAAD 1999). It seems likely, therefore, that the increased and more accurate coverage of gay issues beginning in 1990 stemmed in part from the self-interest of major corporate players in the news industry, who were defending against public attacks that threatened their reputation as upholders of the highest journalistic standards.

But expanded media access also came in response to another important force, namely, innovations in the strategic repertoire of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement. Due to the increasingly creative symbolic politics of "self-proclaimed queers" who were "seasoned media-savvy activists" (Rouilard 1994:357), the movement finally met what Doug McAdam (1996:346) has called "the first requirement of media coverage": it had achieved the title "newsworthy" in the eyes of media gatekeepers. Faced with tight resources and restricted access to advertising, movements typically have to "induce the media to give free attention" (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1229), yet those in control of the media rarely find interesting a movement's "actual, thought-out reasons" for organizing (Molotch 1979:80). Given this indifference to the ideologies or collective action frames that justify mobilization (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Gamson 1992), not to mention the ratings-driven emphasis of news producers (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996), movements must often resort to "extraordinary techniques to gain
coverage" (Molotch 1979:91; see also W. Gamson 1995; J. Gamson 1998b). In other words, and rather ironically, outsiders have to disrupt the public order in order to gain mainstream visibility.

By moving beyond those forms of protest that have become institutionalized and hence ordinary, tactical innovations can invite repression (McCarthy and McPhail 1998; McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy 1998; Waddington 1998), but so too can they open up new possibilities for challengers (McAdam 1983; Gamson 1990; Tarrow 1996, 1998). Queer tactics, which harken back to the "zap actions" of the women's and gay liberation movements (Freeman 1975; Adam 1995), are a textbook example of what Sidney Tarrow (1998:102) has called "innovation at the margins." By "adding elements of play and carnival or ferocity and menace" to more conventional forms of collective action, tactical developments can expand a movement's opportunities (Tarrow 1998:102). This is because novel tactics can throw targets and countermovements off guard, attract new adherents and, equally important, catch the eye of the otherwise disinterested media.

As the flashy new tactics of queer activists grew ever more spectacular—figuratively and literally in the sense of a "media spectacle" (see McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996:309)—they brought much needed visibility not only to the street fighters themselves but to gay and lesbian issues in general. Given the dramatically disruptive nature of myriad queer actions in 1990, major television networks and newspapers suddenly began to focus on the concerns of lesbian and gay people, including their experiences with employment discrimination (Rouilard 1994). In the words of activist and writer Richard Rouilard (1994:357), "Week after week, we were six o'clock news." From
AIDS activists interrupting the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California; challenging President Bush during his first speech on AIDS; halting traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge during rush hour and deadlocking 14,000 cars; to street protestors issuing a national boycott of Miller beer and Marlboro cigarettes for manufacturer Philip Morris' corporate donations to anti-gay senator Jesse Helms, the movement in 1990 at last grabbed the serious attention of the media (Rouilard 1994:357-358; Thompson 1994:359-360).

Understanding all too well that an action without media publicity amounts to a "nonevent" (Gamson [[1995] 1997:235], Queer Nation and ACT UP planned numerous and dazzling demonstrations that made for good copy, thereby winning extraordinary coverage in mainstream news outlets (Rouilard 1994). Certainly the media framing was not always favorable, but as William Gamson ([1995] 1997:235) has so aptly put it, "No news is bad news." Whether positive or negative, media attention validates challengers as "important players" (p. 235). When in 1990 queer activism hit the news as never before, employee mobilization spiked as well. Thus the benefits of media validation are not necessarily limited to the media-featured activists themselves nor even to their particular wing of the movement. Once the media casts its glance on one type of challenger, the focus is more easily widened to include others within the broader movement. Indeed, the splash of queer actions that generated widespread press coverage in 1990 created a ripple effect as major business publications then turned their attention to sexual orientation issues in the workplace. In a later section of this chapter, I examine how the workplace movement itself played a part in and benefited from this new media focus, but first I delve more deeply into the relationship between queer politics and employee mobilization.
We're here, we're gay, and professional we'll stay.... Aside from winning expanded media access, queer activists provided additional aid to corporate challengers in the form of a radical flank effect (Haines 1988). Many employee activists reasoned that their "professional" requests for equality at work seemed far less threatening to corporate elites than did the militant stance of queer activists. Explicitly contrasting their tactics with those of ACT UP or Queer Nation, employee respondents repeatedly emphasized that network members always behaved "professionally" and never made "demands."

While respecting the boldness of these radical groups—at times even expressing a frustrated desire to adopt similar strategies—employee activists nonetheless defined their own collective identity through a distancing from queer politics.

Students of various social movements have documented a similar process of identity construction, whereby activists develop a collective self-definition through emphasizing boundaries not just between themselves and outsiders (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Raeburn 1995) but also between themselves and others within the larger movement (Mueller 1994; Whittier 1995; Einwohner 1999a,b; Rupp and Taylor 1999). In the case of the workplace movement, however, boundary demarcations between institutional activists and "queer nationalists" seem to stem less from ideological divisions than from strategic necessity. Situated within multiple institutional spheres, employee activists feel constrained to strike a more "restrained" course through the corporate terrain. Regardless of the apparent inappropriateness of queer strategies at work, the burst of corporate activism beginning in 1990 clearly corresponds to the heightened media.
visibility of queer organizing during that same year. Workplace activists were thus
drawing energy from, if at times envying, the activities of their queer peers on the streets.

In sum, queer radicals can simultaneously inspire workplace activism and temper
its apparent threat to corporate elites who, when faced with both kinds of challengers, see
moderation and professionalism in one and extremism and bad press in the other. Through
this process of indexicality, to borrow from phenomenological analysis (Pfohl 1994), the
meaning of workplace activism is constituted as "reasonable" vis-à-vis queer politics. The
"radical flank" thereby improves the bargaining position of institutionally-based activists
and their allies (Sawyers and Meyer 1999). "It is this unity of purpose, even in the face of
ideological and strategic differences," argue Sawyers and Meyer (1999:203), "that makes
social movements challenging and potentially powerful."

And the movement marches on.... Much like the shot in the arm that the birth of
Queer Nation delivered in 1990, the third national Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual March on
Washington in 1993 stimulated the largest growth spurt that the workplace movement has
ever experienced. Depending on the estimates used, the march drew to the Capitol
anywhere from 300,000 to 1,000,000 participants (S. Epstein 1999:68). The enthusiasm
generated by the march obviously carried over into the workplace wing of the movement.
While in 1990 10 new gay networks had formed among the Fortune 1000, followed by 6
more in 1991 and 9 others in 1992, the number of organizational births in 1993 shot up to
17. Looked at from the perspective of the current organizational sample (n=69), one-
quarter of all corporate networks were born in 1993 (see Table 1.1). With the help of the
March on Washington, then, the workplace movement had grown to include 52 Fortune companies by the end of 1993.

As their numbers reached a critical mass, employee activists' grievances, goals, and successes became the subject of media attention, which in turn furthered the growth of the movement. In the next section, I examine expanded media access as both a process and an element of institutional opportunity. I touch briefly on the role of queer activism in triggering this new "issue attention cycle" (Downs 1972, as cited in McCarthy and Zald 1979:1229; McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996). Drawing from gay publications, mainstream news outlets, and the business press, I then analyze media representations of employment discrimination and workplace activism in order to assess the mobilizing impact of visibility.

Expanded Media Access as an Element of Institutional Opportunity: The Benefits of Mainstream Visibility for Workplace Activists

Given the variable openness of the media system to movement concerns, political process theorists have recently begun to consider the mass media as an important component of political opportunity (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1996). However, since the term "political opportunity structure" has been used almost exclusively in reference to the state, a focus that has been criticized as overly narrow and structurally biased (McAdam 1994; Goodwin and Jasper forthcoming), it seems more appropriate to view media access as an element of institutional opportunity. Openings in institutional arenas such as the media and the corporate sector can facilitate collective action in much the same way as shifts in the traditional political domain. Activists, however, do not
simply wait for opportunities such as expanded media attention. As discussed above, challengers can create openings for themselves and others by drawing on the power of disruptive tactics or by planning other media-focused events (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1996, 1998; Koopmans [1993] 1997).

As queer activists in 1990 engaged in purposefully outrageous and imaginatively obtrusive acts of symbolic resistance, interrupting the flow of everyday life, the mass media finally took notice, sparking a novel period of mainstream visibility. Put differently, the "Year of the Queer" was the start of a new "issue attention cycle" (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996). The new queer presence extended to the institutions of popular culture as well. While the news media began to cover gay issues and made much ado about the newly coined "outing" phenomenon, wherein some queer activists dragged various gay politicians and corporate power-brokers like Malcolm Forbes out of the closet (Thompson 1994:365), the movie industry released three films in 1990 that gave additional voice and visibility to the diversity of the gay community. All three soon became queer classics: Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* on the lives of black gay men, Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* on drag balls in New York's black and Puerto Rican gay communities, and the even more widely seen *Longtime Companion* on the devastating impact of AIDS on a circle of affluent gay friends in New York, a film that won critical acclaim in the mainstream press (Thompson 1994:372).

Energized by the numerous queer images reflected on the big screen and in mainstream news venues, and cognizant of the opportunity afforded by this new visibility, lesbian and gay employees mobilized within their companies at a more rapid pace than
ever before. With the increased media attention to queer lives in 1990, 10 new networks emerged among the Fortune 1000, thus creating in only 12 months what had taken the earlier workplace movement 12 years to achieve. The doubling of the organizational population from 10 to 20 networks meant that lesbian and gay employee groups would become far more visible not just within but also outside of the corporate arena where they arose.

"Corporate bullies" and the gay press. The jump in workplace organizing in the early nineties, however, was not simply a response to the new mainstream visibility of gay issues. The lesbian and gay movement's own media also contributed to the upswing in corporate activism (see also Klandermans and Goslinga 1996 on the use of movement media). In 1990 the gay and lesbian movement's national news magazine, The Advocate, "changed dramatically" and adopted an "aggressive investigative reporting" style (Rouilard 1994:358), including a cover story entitled "Corporate Gay Bashing" (Hollingsworth 1990). The article attacked several major "corporate bullies" for anti-gay employment discrimination, especially their refusal to adopt domestic partner benefits.

The sudden focus of The Advocate on the lack of equitable benefits came on the heels of the decision by Ben and Jerry's, the popular ice cream makers that pride themselves on their socially responsible reputation, to adopt the benefits in late 1989. Besides the Village Voice newspaper, Ben and Jerry's, with 600 employees, was the only company to have opened its healthcare plan to domestic partners (Baker et al. 1995). The AIDS epidemic had also added tragic saliency to the issue of equitable benefits. Without bereavement leave, for example, many gay men who had just lost their partners to the
disease were forced to stay at work and "grieve in the bathroom" (Hollingsworth 1990:28). Reporting on a small number of lawsuits brought by individual employees seeking equitable benefits, the author of the cover story commented, "Many believe it is time to stop grieving in the bathroom and say it is time to receive equal pay for equal work, and that includes benefits" (p. 28).

Expanding on the equal rights angle, the author pointed out that "although employee benefits are, under law, considered to be part of wages," even companies with gay-inclusive nondiscrimination statements do not view the policies as applicable to benefit plans (p. 30). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, some lesbian and gay employee activists now frame their arguments for equitable benefits by highlighting this inconsistency, mainly by describing the lack of benefits as compensation discrimination. At the time this article was published, however, the push for domestic partner benefits by gay employee networks had barely begun. Noting the emergence of "gay and lesbian support groups" in the corporate workplace, the author lamented their reluctance to fight for equitable benefits: "Gays and lesbians who are currently fighting employment and compensation discrimination publicly...can be counted on fewer than two hands" (p. 30). This cover story by the movement's national news source thus sounded a call to arms.

While bemoaning the scarcity of gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, let alone equitable benefits, *The Advocate* writer nevertheless made clear that as of 1990 the struggle for gay rights in the workplace was being waged on multiple fronts: lawsuits in the court system by individuals and gay advocacy organizations, lobbying by activists for federal protection in the legislative arena, nascent attempts at shareholder activism, and
mobilization efforts within corporations by "a younger generation without fear" (p. 33). The list of workplace endeavors also included a survey designed to document the hiring policies of over 300 companies, an undertaking of the Gay and Lesbian Employment Rights Project at the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility in New York (p. 32). Discussing the preliminary results of the study, the author cited various corporations and whether they included sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination statements. He emphasized, however, that without municipal or state legislation to back them up, such policies are not typically treated as legally binding.

While lesbian and gay employees are painfully aware of their lack of legal rights, the wider public remains largely ignorant of the situation, perpetuated no doubt by the New Right's extensive campaigns against gay rights as "special rights" (Blain 1997; L. Duggan 1998; Dugan 1999). Nevertheless, press coverage of particularly blatant cases of discrimination can chip away at misinformation and jar people from a state of passivity. The audacity of some employers to publicly announce their anti-gay policies—and of some localities to preemptively ban any legal protections against such discrimination (S. Epstein 1999)—can actually be a boon to advocates of equal rights in the workplace.

_Cracker Barrel's crusade and the impact of "suddenly publicized grievances."_ In January 1991, Cracker Barrel corporation, a chain of restaurants located in 16 southern and midwestern states, issued a press release announcing an official policy against employment of "homosexuals." Signed by the vice president of human resources, the policy mandated the termination of individuals "whose sexual preferences fail to demonstrate normal heterosexual values, which have been the foundation of families in our
society" (as cited in Bain 1992b:1). The company then fired 11 gay and lesbian employees, all from jurisdictions that lacked gay rights ordinances. When word hit the national news networks, protestors quickly staged demonstrations and sit-ins at various restaurant locations, and activists from across the country issued calls for a boycott (Vaid 1995). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) launched a nationwide campaign against the company, and for the first time in the history of shareholder activism, a U.S. corporation was faced with a shareholder resolution that sought to institute explicit protections against anti-gay discrimination (Bain 1992b:1).

Much like the lunch counter sit-ins of the civil rights movement (McAdam 1983; Morris 1984), the Cracker Barrel sit-ins helped to elicit additional and "highly sympathetic" press coverage of gay employees' grievances (Bain 1992b:2). Stories appeared on programs such as Oprah Winfrey, Larry King Live, and ABC's 20/20 (Equality Project 1999). Even months later the company's policy was receiving national media attention. During a November 1991 segment of 20/20, which was said to have been rescheduled so that it would air prior to Cracker Barrel's annual shareholder meeting, Barbara Walters announced that she would not patronize the chain (Bain 1992b). Dan Quayle, on the other hand, showed public support for the corporation's intransigence by visiting one of the restaurants during his campaign for the presidency (Vaid 1995).

Nonetheless, the Cracker Barrel protestors had won support from several public officials and a broad range of organizations, including the NAACP, labor unions, pension funds that held stock in the company, and liberal religious institutions (Bain 1992b). The company's actions were later featured in a first-ever documentary on anti-gay workplace
discrimination entitled *Out at Work*. Premiering on PBS, the film subsequently aired on HBO in January 1999 as part of the cable channel's "America Undercover" documentary series (*Gay People's Chronicle* 1999). Long before then, however, in the words of corporate activist and writer C. Arthur Bain (1992b:8), Cracker Barrel's decision to trumpet its policy far and wide had "brought the issue of homophobic discrimination into sharp focus in boardrooms and living rooms across the country."

Scholars and activists alike have long recognized the galvanizing impact of media attention to movement concerns (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Molotch 1979; Gitlin 1980; Gamson 1988; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; McCarthy 1994; Tarrow 1994, 1998; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Klandermans and Goslinga 1996; Gamson [1995] 1997; J. Gamson 1998b; della Porta and Diani 1999). From the powerfully disturbing images of fire hoses, guns, and bombs aimed at African Americans in the South who were fighting for civil rights while practicing nonviolence; and reports of anti-war student protestors at Kent State University being gunned down by the National Guard, interspersed with shocking footage of the human carnage of the Vietnam war; to the depiction of the gruesome gay-bashing and crucifixion-style murder of Matthew Shepard, media coverage can strengthen the commitment of activists and invoke sympathy and support from non-activists. Visibility of grievances and of committed collectivities seeking redress can alert people to both the urgency and possibility of change, leading "bystander publics" (Turner 1970, cited in McCarthy and Zald 1977:1221) to question the inequity and inevitability of the status quo.
Realizing that the system can be transformed, or experiencing what Doug McAdam (1982) has called cognitive liberation, is a necessary precondition of collective action. Lesbians or gay men who have not yet ventured out of the closet can be moved to join the ranks of the out and proud through the potentially transformative images broadcast over the media. Activists thus seek media publicity not just to educate the public and influence elites but because images and soundbites, even if distorted through the filter of media producers' focus on ratings and profits (J. Gamson 1998b), can convert those who are "tuned in" from passive audience members to firm believers, or from vocal side-liners to active participants.

Put differently, to borrow the language of movement scholars, media attention can help activists turn uninformed or nonsupportive individuals into "adherents," who believe in movement goals, and adherents into "constituents," who offer resources in support of the cause (McCarthy and Zald 1977). As a recruiting mechanism, press coverage of movement concerns can also motivate "potential beneficiaries" to join the struggle. Thus mainstream media's Year of the Queer in 1990, followed by extensive coverage of the Cracker Barrel protests in 1991, sounded like beacons for the movement, calling "Come out, come out, wherever you are...."

In his delineation of key types of "expanding cultural opportunities" that can spur people to action, Doug McAdam (1994:40) highlights the impact of "suddenly imposed grievances" such as the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor disaster, which incited numerous anti-nuclear protests at both the local and national levels (Walsh 1981; Walsh and Warland 1983). The aftermath of the Cracker Barrel disclosure suggests that suddenly publicized
grievances can have the same mobilizing impact. While the firings were certainly nothing new to the gay community, the company's brazen announcement brought into the open what other equally discriminatory employers practice but rarely codify: i.e., a ban on the hiring or promotion of "known or suspected" gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. As Sawyers and Meyer (1999:202) have argued, "harsh rhetoric and unsympathetic policy...can strengthen a movement by creating a crisis which mobilizes its adherents." Thus, as the media publicized a particularly striking example of long-held grievances in the gay and lesbian community, 6 more employee networks formed among the Fortune 1000 in 1991, followed by 9 others the next year.

In 1990, the second wave of corporate activism had begun with the birth of 10 gay networks. Comparatively speaking, then, the workplace movement experienced a drop in new organizing after the Cracker Barrel story hit the news in 1991. Nonetheless, media coverage of the incident set in motion a new set of developments in corporate organizing that helped to mitigate the potentially chilling effect of the firings. Cracker Barrel's crusade against gays and lesbians persuaded many employee networks, which had been mobilizing separately, to join forces in order to share resources and hone strategies for making the workplace a safer space.

In the wake of the Cracker Barrel fury in 1991, activists from several different companies organized the first two conferences in the country to focus on lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in the workplace. As will be discussed in a later section, both of these 1991 events constituted a critical turning point for the workplace movement. The east coast conference, which focused on educating corporate elites, generated considerable
press coverage (Swan 1997). The west coast effort, called "Out and Equal in the Workplace," was organized primarily for gay and lesbian employees and was so successful that it became an annual event.

The business press takes note. Even staid, button-down business publications began to devote some of their pages to gay issues generally and the workplace movement in particular. A first in the world of business publishing, on December 16, 1991, Fortune magazine ran a cover story called "Gay in Corporate America," with the subheading, "What it's like, and how business attitudes are changing." Above the by-line on the first page of the featured article was the following statement, set off in bold print: "In the company closet is a big, talented, and scared group of men and women. They want out—and are making the workplace the next frontier for gay rights" (Stewart 1991:42).

Reporting that lesbians and gay men in major corporations were "rapidly forming employee groups," journalist Thomas Stewart described the agenda of this "new activism": gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, diversity training, and equitable benefits (p. 43). The article also mentioned one of the two conferences on gay and lesbian workplace issues that had taken place earlier that year, to which CEOs and human resource directors from companies across the country had been invited. Emphasizing the need for such events, Stewart cited one of the replies that organizers received in response to their invitation: "To all the fags, gays, homos, and lezzies. Do not mail me any of your fag shit lezzi homo paperwork to my business" (p. 56).

Citing a few of the companies that had begun to require attendance at homophobia workshops, the Fortune article indicated how far some segments of corporate America
had come in their treatment of gay and lesbian employees. But the author was careful not to overstate the extent of progress. Stewart relayed the painful experiences of several gay professionals who were struggling with what one respondent described as "rampant homophobia" (p. 43). Commenting on the results of a 1987 *Wall Street Journal* survey, in which 66 percent of the CEOs from major corporations stated that "they would be reluctant to put a homosexual on management committees," the *Fortune* author concluded, "[W]hile attitudes may have changed since, there's no evidence of a revolution" (p. 45).

Nonetheless, without realizing it, the writer was reporting on the very beginnings of a different kind of revolution in the workplace: the rise of domestic partner benefits. In an in-laid side feature entitled "A Cutting-Edge Issue: Benefits," Stewart discussed the "historic" move by high-tech Lotus corporation in September 1991 to extend to gay domestic partners all of the benefits already offered to the spouses of heterosexual employees (p. 50). Adopted in response to the organizing work of an informal group of lesbian and gay employees who had requested the benefits over two years earlier (Laabs 1991), the policy change made Lotus, with its workforce of 3100, the first major corporate adopter of equitable benefits (Stewart 1991:50). "Will Lotus set a trend? Probably not," concluded the author. Little did he know. As I will discuss in the next section, Lotus' move reflected a significant institutional opening for the corporate workplace movement. Inspired by the news and committed to winning equal rights in their own places of work, gay activist networks would eventually push many other companies to follow along in Lotus' footsteps.
In sum, this cover story appearing in the widely read pages of *Fortune* magazine brought much needed visibility to the workplace movement and to the "cutting-edge" issue of equitable benefits. The author's focus on gay employment topics and his mentioning of several specific employee networks served to further expand the ranks of the movement. That same year, articles on gay issues in the workplace, including domestic partner benefits, began to appear in personnel journals as well. To this day, employee activists celebrate such articles, especially those published in outlets like *Fortune* magazine that reach far wider audiences than specialty journals. At one of the many network meetings I attended, for example, members excitedly pored over the pages of a magazine article on gay workplace issues and then distributed copies to everyone on their mailing list, including those who worked for other companies. Thus, as greater numbers of gay employees heard about the struggles and successes of some of the early networks, many decided to mobilize in their own places of work, creating a new wave of activism that would eventually usher in a sea change in corporate America.

**Institutional Openings in the Workplace: Early Adopters of Equitable Benefits and "Walking the Talk" of Diversity**

*The rise of domestic partner benefits.* The dawning of domestic partner benefits on the corporate horizon spurred many gay and lesbian employees into action. Several founders of second-wave networks said that hearing the good news about early adopters prompted them to form employee organizations in their own companies. Other gay networks decided to add equitable benefits to their list of goals or, if already present, to give them higher priority. While the *Village Voice* newspaper in New York City was
actually the first employer in the country to adopt equitable benefits back in 1982 (Baker et al. 1995), word of the policy change did not spread far. The successful efforts of the union's gay and lesbian caucus thus went unnoticed in the wider business world. In contrast, after Lotus' decision in 1991, national newspapers started to cover stories about domestic partner benefits, which had already begun to arise in a small number of cities.

Municipal employees had first won equitable benefits in Berkeley in 1984, West Hollywood in 1985, Santa Cruz in 1986, and then Los Angeles and Takoma Park, Maryland, in 1988. (All dates are from a list provided by the Human Rights Campaign.) After Ben and Jerry's and Santa Cruz County adopted the benefits in 1989, Seattle and Laguna Beach followed suit in 1990. When Lotus announced their decision in 1991, the momentum spread from the arena of municipal government to the business sector. The scales then began to tip away from city politics such that for every year since 1993 the majority of adopters have been companies, both large and small, followed in number by universities. Lists of adoption dates gathered by the workplace project of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) document the shift.

From 1982 through 1990, there were just 20 employers that had adopted domestic partner benefits, and only 4 of these were companies. The bulk of adopters during this period were either cities or counties (9), national gay rights organizations (2), or other nonprofit organizations (5) such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Psychological Association, and Planned Parenthood. In 1991, however, with national newspaper coverage of benefits adoption by Lotus, and the similar move by Montefiore
Medical Center in the Bronx after threat of a lawsuit, other companies started to come on board. Of the 7 adopters that year, 4 were either small or large companies.

In 1992, there was an acceleration of benefits adoption: 21 employers extended their plans to cover domestic partners, including major corporations such as west coast-based Levi Strauss & Co., Silicon Valley's Borland International, MCA/Universal Studios, a few hospitals and legal firms, and five universities (Oberlin College in Ohio, University of Rochester, American University in Washington, D.C., Golden Gate University in San Francisco, and University of Iowa). Of the 21 adopters that year, only 3 were cities. The following year in 1993, 36 employers, 20 of which were companies, adopted equitable benefits. Corporate America had begun to outpace employers in other sectors and has been in the forefront of change ever since.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, the vast majority of early corporate adopters extended their policies only after being persuaded to do so by groups of lesbian and gay employees. Chapters 5 through 7 on institutional and movement processes explain how these groundbreaking changes came about. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, the relevance of early benefits adoption by major corporations lies in the energizing impact that it had on the workplace movement. As Lotus' policy change in the fall of 1991 jump-started the corporate campaign for equitable benefits, leading to a dramatic increase in adopters between 1992 and 1993, the pace of new organizing likewise quickened in response. While 6 networks formed among the Fortune 1000 in 1991, the next year brought 9 new groups, followed by 17 more in 1993.
"Walking the talk" of diversity. Given the buzz in the gay community about the rise of equitable benefits and the new queer visibility in mainstream media, as well as The Advocate's more aggressive coverage of employment issues and employee organizing, the workplace movement picked up considerable steam in the early years of the decade. But the second wave momentum that generated new gay employee networks across the country also drew fuel from another institutional opening in the corporate world. According to many network founders, the surge of corporate organizing in the early '90s stemmed in part from the glaring omission of gay men and lesbians from their companies' newfound interest in diversity issues.

While some executives began to see diversity training and the formation of diversity task forces, councils, and/or offices as examples of corporate "best practices," lesbian and gay employees largely found themselves excluded altogether from these initiatives. Nevertheless, some corporate elites began to view diversity as a business imperative, reflecting the diffusion of what institutional scholars Frank Dobbin and John Sutton (1998) describe as a new human resources paradigm. Lesbian and gay employees saw in this expanded corporate mindset an institutional opening that offered new hope for a place at the table.

In diversity-embracing companies, gay employees watched the doors begin to open wider for people of color and women in general. Responding to this "open moment" (Gourevitch 1986) that indicated "Big Opportunity" (Gamson and Meyer 1996:280), and taking a collective deep breath, lesbians and gay men attempted to walk through those doors as well. Although sometimes met by corporate bouncers on the other side, gay
employee activists remained steadfast in their determination to join the party. The swell of workplace organizing in the first half of the '90s hence grew not simply out of a more favorable political climate or out of the expanded opportunities afforded by media visibility and early benefits adoption. The rush of corporate activism during this period was also a response to a new institutional opening available to those whose employers had begun "talking the talk" of diversity. Responding to their changing corporate culture, gay and lesbian employees stepped in—or rather "out"—to be sure that their companies would, in the words of a popular catch phrase among workplace activists, "walk the walk" when it came to addressing gay concerns.

The emergence of the largest gay employee network in the country clearly demonstrates the importance of expanded institutional opportunities at the organizational or corporate level. As already discussed, GLUE was formed in a telecommunications company by a small group of friends who were inspired by the 1987 March on Washington. But even before the march, when meeting for lunch in restaurants or after work in their homes, the friends had talked about the need for an officially recognized lesbian and gay employee organization "like the other diversity groups" in their company for women and people of color. The majority of gay networks that eventually emerged in the Fortune 1000 likewise cited the existence of preexisting diversity groups in their companies as indirect but important motivators behind their decision to organize. These preexisting networks, which Sidney Tarrow (1998) would call "early risers," had already successfully mobilized for official recognition and resources, alerting gays and lesbians to the potential fruitfulness of claims-making on the corporate elite. As Tarrow (1998:87)
has put it, early risers "can pry open institutional barriers through which the demands of others can pour."

Thus, much like periods of change or instability in the political system that make the state "vulnerable to political challenges" (Gamson and Meyer 1996:280), the changing corporate culture in some companies signaled possible openings for gay and lesbian employees, who quickly mobilized in response. With an eye trained only on the formal political arena, as is the habit of political process theorists, one would miss the presence of opportunities that materialize in other institutional spheres. Obscured from one's gaze would be the transformations that were taking place in more and more companies whose executives saw dollar signs in the face(s) of diversity. By widening the theoretical focus to include other institutional arenas, this research extends the applicability of political process approaches to uncover the impact of opportunities that arise beyond the state.

Summary. The markedly greater fertility of the workplace movement during the second wave was thus the fruitful result of multiple factors. The more receptive political climate and unprecedented media coverage of queer activism and employment discrimination, in combination with early institutional shifts toward corporate diversity and domestic partner benefits, made for relatively inviting waters during the early '90s. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees hence took the plunge in greater numbers than ever before, creating visible workplace organizations aimed at effecting widespread institutional change. While most of the first-wave networks had labored in relative isolation, gay employee groups that mobilized during the second period could draw courage—and vastly improved networking opportunities—from the knowledge that they were not alone.

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THE RISE OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES AMONG LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL EMPLOYEE NETWORKS

During the second wave of the movement, between 1990 and 1994, institutional activists worked hard to create and foster interorganizational linkages among gay employee networks. These connections ranged from informal social gatherings and e-mail exchanges to more fully institutionalized networking mechanisms such as annual workplace conferences, hyper-linked web sites, and formal umbrella groups consisting of gay employee networks from a wide variety of institutional settings. In response to the burgeoning grass-roots movement for workplace equality, the two most prominent national gay rights organizations in the country, NGLTF and HRC, instituted Workplace Projects in order to provide resources and additional networking opportunities for employee activists from across the country.

As the linkages among employee activists grew increasingly dense and formalized during the second wave, the workplace movement experienced a certain coming of age. Much like other rites of passage, this period of development came with its own set of tensions and a heightened reflexivity as leaders struggled over the type and degree of formalization that would best suit networking at the regional and national levels. Some local umbrella groups folded while other regional organizations attempted to broaden their geographic reach. Efforts to form umbrella networks at the national level underwent a series of bumps and starts. In all, however, these growing pains resulted in a bigger, stronger, more densely connected movement.
By the mid 1990s, after a slow and tentative start back in 1978, the workplace wing of the gay and lesbian movement had finally come into its own. Numerous umbrella groups, two national workplace projects, and an abundance of conferences and web sites that focused on gay employment issues were all well established by the middle of the decade. Their continued presence signifies the successful institutionalization of the workplace movement. Given the beneficial mobilization and policy outcomes that were facilitated by these multi-network structures, I offer a more extended analysis of movement infrastructure in Chapter 4. There I trace the development and impact of interorganizational networks and consider the larger movement and institutional processes that facilitated their emergence. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, I focus only briefly on interorganizational linkages in order to further contextualize the third wave decline in new organizing.

In addition to sustaining the commitment of employee networks and increasing the visibility of the workplace campaign, these interorganizational structures have improved the movement's "bargaining" position in the institutional policy domain by educating corporate decision-makers as well as individual activists (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995). Indeed, the infrastructural efforts of activists during the second wave helped the workplace movement achieve relatively remarkable policy success. By the middle of the '90s, domestic partner benefits had practically become a household word given their adoption by numerous big-name companies across the country.

Despite the rapidly increasing number of policy victories, however, the third wave's organizational birth rate dropped significantly. Beginning in 1995, the momentum
of corporate organizing slowed to a snail's pace. As revealed in Table 2.1 above, while the second wave of the corporate workplace movement (1990-1994) averaged 10 new employee organizations per year, the third period (1995-mid 1998) produced less than 3 networks per year. What factors help to account for this paradoxical decline in corporate organizing? In the next chapter, I turn to the surprisingly sluggish pace of mobilization since 1995 and consider the likely causes of this apparent quiescence.
CHAPTER 3

THE EBBING THIRD WAVE: THE SLUGGISH PACE
OF NEW ORGANIZING IN THE FORTUNE 1000 SINCE 1995

Accounting for the puzzling drop-off in corporate mobilization requires the same wide-angle lens used to explain the slow rise and then rapid growth of the workplace movement across the first and second waves. In this chapter, I therefore discuss the third wave decline in new organizing in relation to the larger sociopolitical and institutional environments. I also address the role of movement-countermovement interactions (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996) and the impact of the media on the decisions of potential challengers. Drawing on social movement and new institutionalist perspectives, I treat political and institutional opportunities as socially constructed. I thus emphasize the interpretive processes that mediate the relationship between the environment and social actors, who must perceive both the possibility of change and the necessity of activism before they will engage in collective action (McAdam 1982; Gamson and Meyer 1996).

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF THIRD WAVE ORGANIZING

Advances of the New Right in the Mid Nineties

In many ways, the third wave decline in corporate mobilization is hardly surprising. In the November 1994 elections, conservatives secured a majority in both the U.S. Senate
and House of Representatives. The New Right’s increased strength was apparent not only in the unprecedented number of anti-gay measures considered by Congress but also in the actions taken by the Clinton administration. In an edited volume on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender public policy issues (Swan 1997), Kathleen DeBold describes the mid '90s as a particularly "troubling period" for gay rights advocates:

Whether it is a congressman "accidentally" calling an openly gay congressman "Barney Fag"; the decision of the U.S. Justice Department not to act as amicus curiae in the Supreme Court appeal of Colorado and Cincinnati anti-gay initiatives; the elimination of an outspoken surgeon general who supported gay rights; a proposal by Senator Jesse Helms to place unprecedented curbs upon federal gay/lesbian workplace groups; the introduction and passage of the virulently antigay (and cynically misnamed) Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)—to name just a few—there is a definite and deliberate trend toward reversing the gains only recently garnered by the gay and lesbian community. (P. xviii)

Reacting to the gains of the workplace movement, in 1995 Senator Helms introduced a bill that would have restricted the right of gay and lesbian federal employees "to meet and organize, use office e-mail, and exert other rights that are given to numerous employee groups" (HRC 1995a:7). In addition, the measure would have prohibited the federal government from instituting nondiscrimination protections for federal employees.

Anti-gay state legislation also increased dramatically in the middle of the decade. Between 1990 and 1994, no more than five states per year faced anti-gay measures at either the local or state level (NGLTF 1996a). In 1995, however, 29 states saw the introduction of 64 anti-gay measures (NGLTF 1996b, 1997). In 1996, 39 states faced a total of 99 anti-gay bills (NGLTF 1996c). The following year, those numbers increased to 44 and 120, respectively (NGLTF 1997). In 1998, elected officials considered 126
anti-gay measures, and as of June 1999, 217 more pieces of unfavorable legislation had been introduced in statehouses across the country (NGLTF 1999a, 1999b).

Beginning in the mid '90s, many lesbian and gay activists were forced to redirect their energy and resources toward staving off anti-gay marriage bills that arose in response to a landmark ruling by the Hawaii Supreme Court. In the 1993 case of *Baehr v. Lewin*, the state bench surprised observers on both ends of the political spectrum by ruling that if the government could not provide evidence of a "compelling state interest" for denying the right of marriage to gay and lesbian people, Hawaii must grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples (Swan 1997:118). The case was then sent back to trial court, where few expected that the state would be able to meet the strict scrutiny standard (Stacey 1996:121). Confirming those suspicions, a lower court ruled in favor of gay marriage in 1997, but the decision was appealed to the Hawaii Supreme Court (LLDEF 1999). In late 1999, the issue was ruled moot. Taking the matter out of the hands of the high court, voters had ratified an amendment to the state constitution which gave the legislature the power to restrict marriage to a man and a woman (LLDEF 2000).

Same-sex marriage has yet to be legalized in any state, but in response to the 1993 Hawaii decision, conservatives quickly developed legislation that would allow states to refuse recognition of gay marriages performed elsewhere in the country. Although some legal scholars have argued that these so-called "defense of marriage acts" violate the full faith and credit clause of the U.S. Constitution (Swan 1997:119), anti-gay marriage bills continue to appear in state legislatures across the country. By May 1995, 22 states had considered such measures, 8 of which became law (Stacey 1996:119). In 1996
conservative legislators proposed anti-gay marriage bills in 37 states, 16 of which adopted them as law (Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund 1999). In the fall of that same year, Congress passed the federal-level Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which reiterated the legal definition of marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution (Stacey 1996:120).

Bowing to conservatives in his bid for reelection, which was just 45 days away, and cognizant that his support of DOMA would be seen as a betrayal by the gay and lesbian community, Clinton signed the bill into law under cover of darkness, waiting until the middle of the night to affix his signature (Baker 1996). Although as federal law DOMA made state-level measures redundant, anti-gay marriage bills continued apace. Additional DOMAs were adopted by 10 out of the 33 states that considered them in 1997; 6 out of 16 states in 1998; and 1 out 18 states by the fall of 1999, with 5 others still pending (LLDEF 1999). As of fall 1999, 31 states had passed anti-gay marriage statutes (LLDEF 1999; NGLTF 1999c).

A Queer Fight Over the Right to Marry: The Tangled Relationship between Gay Marriage and Domestic Partnerships

Although many activists felt compelled to fight these preemptive attacks on same-sex marriage, the lesbian and gay community has long been divided over the issue of marriage given its historical grounding as a heterosexist and patriarchal institution (Ettelbrick [1989] 1993; Stoddard [1989] 1993; Stacey 1996; S. Epstein 1999). Commenting on the larger implications of the same-sex marriage debate, lesbian activist and legal scholar Nancy Polikoff draws on both lesbian feminist and socialist critiques of
marriage when she argues as follows: "Advocating lesbian and gay marriage will detract from, and even contradict, efforts to unhook economic benefits from marriage and make basic health care and other necessities available to all" (as cited in Stacey 1996:122).

Indeed, the fight for domestic partner benefits rests on the horns of a dilemma. Some advocates of equitable benefits see them as a temporary fix that, in the absence of the right to legally marry, provides symbolic recognition and material support for gay and lesbian relationships. Others view the movement for domestic partner benefits as settling for second-class citizenship since it leaves the institution of marriage as the sole preserve of heterosexuals, who remain firmly ensconced in what Gayle Rubin ([1984] 1998) has called the "charmed circle." Still others, mirroring Polikoff's arguments above, praise the domestic partner movement for its radical potential. In this view, the campaign for equitable benefits in the workplace challenges, or at least bypasses, the state's right to define family and to deny economic benefits to those who fall outside the bonds of marriage, whether by choice or by legal fiat (Ettelbrick [1989] 1993).

Regardless of internecine struggles over the meaning of gay marriage and domestic partner benefits, the New Right continues to wage fierce attacks against both. Whether pushing for legislation that would prevent same-sex marriage and/or the legal recognition of domestic partnerships, fighting court battles to overturn gay-inclusive legislation, or boycotting companies that offer equitable benefits, anti-gay conservatives are trying desperately to hold back the forces of change (Baker et al. 1995; Swan 1997; DataLounge 1999a, b).
Acknowledging the Complexity of the Sociopolitical Environment

Given the numerous advances of the New Right since 1995, the political climate may seem overwhelmingly unfavorable for lesbian and gay challengers. Looked at from this angle, the third wave decline in new corporate organizing comes as no surprise. Faced with an increasingly hostile environment, it would appear that gays and lesbians have either been afraid to organize in the workplace or they have been consumed by battles in the formal political arena. Yet an alternative explanation for the drop-off in new organizing seems equally plausible.

One could interpret the slowdown in employee mobilization as stemming not from the right-wing backlash itself but rather from the very prospect that same-sex marriage could be legalized. As the original and pending Hawaii decisions on gay marriage "thrust [the] issue into escalating levels of front-page and prime-time prominence" (Stacey 1996:119), it is possible that a growing number of gay men and lesbians began to view same-sex marriage as right around the corner. To all but the most progressive members of the gay rights movement, such institutionalization would render obsolete the fight for domestic partner benefits.

In her criticism of the New Right's war against gay marriage, Judith Stacey (1996:119) refers to the "rampant rumors" that began to circulate in the mid '90s claiming that "thousands of mainland gay and lesbian couples were stocking their hope chests with Hawaiian excursion fares, poised to fly to tropical altars the instant the first gay matrimonial bans falter." Although Stacey casts this vision as a figment of the New Right's reactionary imagination, it is nonetheless true that in the mid '90s gay and lesbian
travel agencies began to advertise Hawaiian marriage packages. Through the end of 1999, many firmly believed that the Hawaii Supreme Court would hand down a decision legalizing gay marriage (S. Epstein 1999). Then in a historic move on April 25, 2000, responding to a ruling by the Vermont Supreme Court, that state's legislature approved same-sex "civil unions," thereby extending to gay and lesbian couples all the rights, privileges, and benefits of marriage except the name itself (Lockhead 2000:A1). The impact of this groundbreaking legislation on the workplace movement remains to be seen.

Since the middle of the 1990s, then, the sociopolitical environment has sent out a complex array of mixed signals to lesbians and gay men. Although the New Right gained a stronghold in the 1994 elections and then proceeded to deliver a barrage of anti-gay measures, a 1994 Newsweek poll showed that 74 percent of Americans opposed workplace discrimination against gays and lesbians (HRC 1994). Indeed, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which proposed to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, was first introduced in Congress during the summer of 1994 with the backing of 185 religious, labor, and civil rights organizations. With high-profile support from Senator Edward Kennedy, a lead sponsor, and Coretta Scott King, 30 Senators and over 120 members of the House quickly signed on as cosponsors (HRC 1994). In 1995 Clinton endorsed ENDA, making him the first U.S. president to support gay rights legislation, and corporate and civil rights groups' endorsements of the bill more than doubled (HRC 1995b). By the spring of 1996, over 25 major corporations had expressed public support for ENDA, and in the summer of that same year several business leaders,
including the CEO of Eastman Kodak, delivered Congressional testimony in favor of the bill (HRC 1996a, b).

In the fall of 1996, ENDA came within one vote of passing the Senate (New York Times 1996). Perhaps many non-activist members of the gay and lesbian community interpreted both the introduction of ENDA and its near win in the Senate as evidence that mobilization in the workplace would soon be unnecessary, thereby justifying inaction on their part. Moreover, since press coverage of the bill rarely mentioned that it did not apply to benefits packages, many people may have incorrectly assumed that ENDA's passage would mandate equitable benefits.

Other elements of the political and cultural environment signaled a rosier future as well. At a November 1997 Human Rights Campaign fund-raising dinner, Clinton made history as the first president ever to speak at a gay and lesbian movement event (S. Epstein 1999:71). Earlier that same year, Ellen DeGeneres made history of her own when she and her sitcom character came out on prime-time television. Whether heterosexual audiences viewed the "coming out" episode of Ellen as overblown hype, mundane television, or glorification of deviance (J. Gamson 1998b), countless lesbians and gay men were glued to their television screens on the night of April 30, 1997. At Ellen parties across the country, friends gathered to watch the latest advance on the path toward major cultural transformation: i.e., the mainstreaming of homosexuality. Ironically, this enormous breakthrough in media visibility may have further reinforced the notion that lesbian and gay activism was no longer needed. Such is the danger of "virtual equality" (Vaid 1995).
Trying to mitigate against the perception that gays and lesbians have already obtained equal rights, HRC designed a commercial that was supposed to air on ABC during Ellen's coming out episode. Made possible by a generous donation and centered around the little-known fact that anti-gay job discrimination remained legal in 41 (now 39) states, the ad portrayed a lesbian leaving the office after having been fired, with her shocked colleagues looking on in disbelief as they wondered aloud how her termination could be legal. Originally set to broadcast nationally, the commercial was only seen in select cities since ABC refused to allow HRC to purchase nationwide air time (HRC 1997). Thus even as conservatives attacked Ellen and Ellen, interpreting her media visibility as the "promotion of homosexuality" (J. Gamson 1998b:262), the New Right's rhetoric against gay rights as "special rights" retained its secure position in the cultural imaginary.

THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLEXITY

Since its inception the workplace movement, like other movements, has faced a complex mix of environmental conditions that, in many ways, cannot be defined a priori as either favorable or unfavorable. Although the more stable components of political and institutional opportunity seem more readily susceptible to "objective" definition, some of the more volatile aspects are open to widely varying interpretations (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Hostile legislation, for example, can be seen as a setback for or barrier to a movement, but so too can it incite increased mobilization (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Sawyers and Meyer 1999).
Much like the poststructuralist argument that multiple discursive meanings make a unitary reading of text virtually impossible (Weedon 1987), social movement scholars have begun to render problematic simplistic treatments of political opportunity. It is not only discourses or frames that are subject to multiple meanings, a condition that poststructuralists refer to as polysemy or multivalence (Blain 1997). The environmental conditions that challengers face are also open to different, sometimes conflicting, interpretations. Recent advances in social movement theory help make sense of this complexity.

Attempting to correct for the structural biases of early resource mobilization and political process approaches, which took grievances as a given, many social movement theorists began to incorporate social psychological insights to better understand the role of interpretive processes in the emergence and development of collective action (Morris and Mueller 1992). Moving toward a synthesis of structural and cultural approaches, many scholars today attend not simply to the impact of political opportunities and mobilizing structures but also to mediating influence of "framing processes," a term which has come to refer broadly to the construction of meaning, grievances, collective identities, and interpretive schemata that identify systemic problems and solutions (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

Taking seriously the argument that opportunity, organization, and framing are interactive rather than independent components of collective action (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996:8), Gamson and Meyer (1996) highlight the "framing of political opportunity." They describe opportunity as relative in that social movement actors must
define a particular situation as favorable or unfavorable. Indeed, they argue that "the
definition of opportunity is often at the center of what is most contentious" (p. 283). In
other words, political opportunity, while predominantly viewed in structural terms, is also
socially constructed since the strategic actions of challengers depend on their perceptions
of particular circumstances as either hopeful or hopeless. As Gamson and Meyer
(1996:283) conclude, "An opportunity unrecognized is no opportunity at all."

Sawyers and Meyer (1999) likewise refer to "missed opportunities," focusing on
situations that appear unfavorable on the surface but which nevertheless contain seeds of
possibility. For example, movement leaders can create opportunities out of hostile
legislation or rancorous court rulings if they use them to increase publicity, raise
consciousness, and woo additional adherents and resources (Meyer and Staggenborg
1996; Sawyers and Meyer 1999). While I agree that activist interpretations of their
environment as overly unfavorable can result in "missed opportunities," this scholarly
focus leaves unexplored another possible scenario in the complex framing of political and
institutional opportunities. Namely, actors can define a situation as so hopeful or
favorable that additional collective action is seen as unnecessary. In the next section, I
consider this interpretation as another possible explanation for the third wave decline in
new corporate organizing.

THE PARADOX OF SUCCESS: THE IRONIC IMPACT OF THE
INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS AND THE MYTHICAL DOMINO
EFFECT

To fully understand the varying levels of corporate mobilization over time, the
focus must be widened to include not simply the political environment but also the other
institutional conditions that potential challengers face. In other words, when deciding whether to mobilize in their own places of work, lesbian and gay employees look not only at the sociopolitical climate but also at the state of affairs in corporate America generally. At the end of the first wave in 1989, after 12 years of workplace mobilization, less than 20 employers had adopted domestic partner benefits. In contrast, by the end of the second wave in 1994, the workplace movement was thriving and had won equitable benefits in a sizeable number of organizations. By the close of 1994, the number of adopters had risen to almost 150, most of which were companies, including 17 Fortune 1000 corporations or their subsidiaries (HRC list). Yet, beginning in 1995, the pace of new organizing among the Fortune 1000 slowed considerably.

Why, at a time when the workplace movement had much to celebrate and seemed on the brink of even greater success, did gay and lesbian employees not rush to the party in droves, hoping to win similar victories in their own places of work? Even as the pace of equitable benefits adoption accelerated throughout the third period, very few gay and lesbian employees decided to form networks of their own in the Fortune 1000. From 1995 to mid 1998, only 9 new corporate networks joined the movement. This apparent inactivity seems especially puzzling when one considers the fact that, by the end of 1998, domestic partner benefits had been instituted in 427 workplaces (HRC WorkNet database). Most of the adopters were corporations, 67 of them Fortune 1000. Why, in the face of greater publicity, resources, and favorable outcomes, did the number of gay network formations plummet rather than mushroom during the third wave?
Complacence: The Irony of Partial Success

Scholars have found that policy victories can energize a movement and inspire increased mobilization (McAdam 1982; Costain 1992; Sawyers and Meyer 1999). Less attention has been paid to the opposite possibility: namely, that success on the part of some challengers can lead to complacence among other potential beneficiaries. Scholars interested in the so-called "postfeminist" era have documented a similar process. Although the notion of postfeminism has been duly criticized by feminist scholars, the term nevertheless arose in response to the complacency of some young women who, while benefiting from the gains of feminism, no longer see a need for it (Stacey [1987] 1997; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Whittier 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1997).

Ironically, then, the institutionalization of certain movement goals, although favorable in terms of policy outcomes, can result in unfavorable mobilization outcomes (for the distinction between types of outcomes, see Staggenborg 1995). Although the pace of new organizing in the Fortune 1000 began to slow considerably in 1995, by then the workplace movement had achieved a staying power capable of sustaining it through relatively infertile times. Indeed, I propose that it is the visible success of the workplace movement that helps to explain the third wave decline in new corporate mobilization.

But it is not simply the quickened pace of equitable benefits adoption, or the media's increased attention to it, that accounts for inaction on the part of other gay and lesbian employees. The meaning of corporate policy change—i.e., how it will be interpreted by potential challengers as well as potential adopters—varies depending in part
on who is doing the adopting. I argue, in other words, that it is not simply the number of adopters that matters. The wider impact of a particular employer's policy change depends on the significance that is attributed to it by the actors in that organizational field. Future levels of mobilization by potential beneficiaries—and the policy decisions that will be made by institutional elites—will thus vary based on how individual and organizational actors interpret the adoption of innovation by particular players in the surrounding environment.

New institutional theorists, emphasizing a cognitive approach to organizational change, have made similar arguments about the social construction of organizational fields (Scott 1995; Scott and Christensen 1995). Empirical studies have found, for example, that the policy decisions of elites rest in part on whom they consider to be their competitors and whether the initial adopters are seen as high or low prestige organizations (Porac, Thomas, and Badden-Fuller 1989; Porac and Thomas 1990; Galaskiewicz and Burt 1991; Burns and Wholey 1993; Lant and Baum 1995). I extend the logic of this framework by arguing that potential beneficiaries undergo a similar interpretive process. The "need" for institutional activism, in other words, is socially constructed. In deciding whether or not to mobilize in their own places of work, lesbian and gay employees look not simply at the number of companies that have instituted equitable benefits but at the organizational identities of adopters, and what they "see" will be influenced by the reputation those companies have in the wider gay, lesbian, and bisexual community.

**Oversignification and the Meaning of Corporate Policy Change**

Although numerous employers had already adopted domestic partner benefits before 1995, that year two of the Fortune 1000 adopters were corporate giants whose
decisions came as a great shock to many: the Adolph Coors brewing company and the
Walt Disney corporation. While the former had been the target of a gay boycott for
almost 20 years, the latter lost its most favored status among conservatives, who quickly
called for a boycott of their own and charged the company with abandoning its "family
values" foundation. Both companies adopted equitable benefits in response to
mobilization by gay and lesbian employees.

The significance of their policy announcements rests not simply in their big-name
status but in their previous reputations in the larger gay and lesbian community. Coors,
founded and still partly owned by an arch-conservative family, had long raised the ire of
the gay community. After word got out in 1977 that the company was asking applicants
their sexual orientation and using lie detector tests to root out gay employees, lesbian and
gay activists issued calls for a boycott. Although Coors had been the top-selling label in
California gay bars, to this day, while the corporation captures 10 percent of the overall
beer-drinking market, among gays and lesbians the company's market share is only 1
percent. Indeed, Coors aggressively publicizes its equitable benefits plan to the lesbian
and gay community in an attempt to win back gay dollars.

Why in 1995, when two of the most unlikely organizational candidates embraced
gay-inclusive policy change, did the pace of new corporate organizing suddenly decline?
Perhaps when Coors' decision hit the news, gay and lesbian employees located in other
companies "oversignified" the importance of the policy change by assuming that, since this
notoriously anti-gay employer had adopted equitable benefits, others would surely follow
suit in quick order. Likewise, although Disney had no such anti-gay record, it seems
equally plausible that its reputation as the traditional "family values" company led to a similar process of oversignification in the gay and lesbian community. Disney's policy change, which also generated enormous amounts of media attention, may have convinced many that if the family values giant could expand its definition of family to embrace gay men and lesbians, then widespread policy change was sure to occur in the rest of corporate America.

The fact that press coverage rarely mentioned the presence of gay employee groups in these companies only reinforced this perception. Even though the vast majority of early adopters were persuaded by organized groups of lesbian and gay employees (see Chapter 1), media accounts rarely noted the existence, let alone the impact, of these institutional activists. David, in other words, is left out of the story of Goliath. Even today, the mainstream press may be quick to cover benefits adoption by the corporate giants, but the story they convey is often incomplete.

Media Representations of Corporate Policy Change

To explain institutional change, or how an innovation becomes widely adopted, new institutional theorists have emphasized isomorphic processes in the wider environment that lead to organizational homogeneity in both structure and policy (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). This focus on the diffusion of innovation, as critics within the field have pointed out, leaves unexplained the origin of change and downplays the role of conflict in generating institutional transformation (DiMaggio 1988; Brint and Karabel 1991; Suchman 1995; Chaves 1996, 1997; Hirsch 1997; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997; Rao
New institutional scholars have especially ignored the role of mobilized constituencies as agents of organizational change (Chaves 1996, 1997).

I argue that media accounts of gay-inclusive policy adoption suffer from the same weaknesses. Journalistic reports rarely if ever describe how equitable benefits came to be or who was behind their adoption. Thus the public is likely to see benefits adoption as an apparently seamless process that, once instituted by enough leading innovators, will eventually diffuse widely to the rest of the business world. Institutionalization of an innovation appears inevitable, guided by the invisible hand of the market as employers play follow the leader. Indeed, media references to the mythical "domino effect" abound. Reading about the rapidly growing pace of corporate change, many employees may simply assume that their company will eventually follow suit.

Not realizing the movement processes behind benefits adoption, potential beneficiaries in other companies may be lulled into complacency. As Gamson and Meyer (1996:285) argue, media access is not simply a key component of political opportunity; media attention also plays a role in defining political opportunity for movements. Likewise, media representations define the process of policy change in such a way that the general public, straight and gay alike, may come to see benefits adoption as fait accompli.

Inaction on the part of gay and lesbian employees therefore seems justified.

Of course the media is not solely to blame for this faulty perception. I suspect that even when gay and lesbian employees have pushed long and hard for equitable benefits, corporate spokespeople, whether responding to a reporter's questions or issuing a press release, will rarely identify the impact of gay employee groups on the decision-making
process. In many cases, for example, the vice presidents I interviewed downplayed the role of employee activists in effecting policy change even in the face of evidence that proved otherwise. But it is not just the media, corporate elites, or media relations professionals that present an incomplete or inaccurate picture of how policy change comes about in the corporate world.

Movement Discourse and the Mythical, Market-Driven Domino Effect

Leaders in the wider lesbian and gay movement—as opposed to the workplace wing itself—often adopt what I refer to as "domino discourse" when discussing the corporate adoption of equitable benefits. When issuing press releases or when asked by the media to comment on the most recent adoption, spokespeople from HRC, for example, often portray the policy change in market-based terms: once enough business leaders adopt the benefits, it is only a matter of time until others follow suit. Although movement spokespeople acknowledge, where applicable, the role of gay employee groups, they frequently refer either implicitly or explicitly to "the domino effect," popular terminology for what institutional theorists call mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). These explanations of policy change posit that once a few leaders adopt equitable benefits, others in the field will eventually do the same in order to remain competitive or to achieve legitimacy. In other words, once enough big players adopt an innovation, others feel pressure to adopt the newest "best practice."

A recent press release by HRC provides a clear illustration of this domino discourse. Kim Mills, who oversees HRC's workplace project called WorkNet, commented on the rapid succession of benefits adoption by three major carriers in the
airline industry. Until recently, no one in the industry had instituted equitable benefits. After United Airlines announced the extension of benefits to domestic partners on July 30, 1999, six days later American Airlines did the same. Responding to a similar policy change by US Airways, which came four days after the announcement by American Airlines, Mills commented, "This is another instance of how domestic partner benefits cascade through a market sector. It happened first in the information technology sector in the early 1990s and it's happening now in the oil industry, in the Big Five accounting firms, in banking and elsewhere" (HRC 1999a).

When movement leaders utilize domino discourse, it is of course a strategic decision. They are framing the situation as largely a "market process" so as to convince other employers to follow suit. This paints the adoption of domestic partner benefits as a "rational," profits-oriented move that will enhance an employer's position in a competitive labor market: "With unemployment running at a rock-bottom 4 percent," Mills explained, "employers have discovered these benefits are a tool for attracting and keeping the best employees." Although Mills went on to describe benefits adoption as "a step toward equal pay for equal work" and, at the tail end of the press release, mentioned the role of gay employee groups at both United and American Airlines, the dominant frame running throughout the piece was not one of justice or equal rights but of markets and profit.

In fact, the domino effect that Mills is describing was set in motion not only by the efforts of lesbian and gay employee groups and the larger gay right movement but by wider changes in the legal environment. In June of 1997, San Francisco adopted an Equal Benefits Ordinance, which requires any company with a city contract to offer domestic
partners the same benefits as those available to the spouses of heterosexual employees. In an attempt to overturn the ordinance, United joined in a lawsuit brought by the Air Transportation Association. Gay and lesbian activists quickly issued calls for a boycott, and "United against United" buttons and stickers appeared throughout San Francisco. On July 30, 1999, a federal judge ruled that the company must at least provide "soft" benefits such as bereavement leave. That same day, United announced that it would instead offer full domestic partner benefits, including health insurance (E. Epstein 1999).

Thus the "domino effect" that Mills portrayed as largely market-driven was in fact the initial result of movement processes that included both internal mobilization and external pressure by lesbian and gay activists. Policy changes stemming from both the United boycott and the Equal Benefits Ordinance serve as examples of what institutional scholars refer to as coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). Indeed, many companies now appear to be adopting equitable benefits not because of market pressures or mimetic isomorphism, or even employee mobilization, but rather because of external coercive forces. Statistics gathered by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, for example, show that over 2000 employers with city contracts instituted equitable benefits in order to comply with the Equal Benefits Ordinance (HRC 1999b).

Even when movement leaders acknowledge, where applicable, the impact of external coercive pressure and/or internal mobilization, they still tend to emphasize market forces when commenting on the spread of policy change. This intentional discursive strategy allows potential adopters, who often fear right-wing backlash, to publicly rationalize benefits adoption not so much as "the right thing to do" but as simply "good
business sense." Indeed, the latter phrase appears frequently in corporate issued press releases and in media accounts that quote organizational decision-makers. But when movement leaders rely too heavily on a discourse that emphasizes institutional or market processes, they may play an unwitting role in fostering complacency among potential beneficiaries. Domino discourse obscures the role of social movements and agency generally. Thus, while this frame may seem a reasonable tactic for influencing potential adopters, it can reinforce inaction on the part of potential beneficiaries. In other words, emphasizing the institutional processes of mimetic isomorphism (or even coercive isomorphism) can negatively impact future success since non-activist gays and lesbians may come to see employee mobilization as unnecessary for policy change.

Gamson and Meyer (1996:285-286) argue that, to counter the "rhetoric of reaction" that casts activism as either futile or too risky, movement leaders must adopt a "rhetoric of change" that "systematically overestimates the degree of political opportunity." My research shows that movement leaders can also adopt a rhetoric of change that overestimates the role of institutional processes, which unintentionally justifies inaction by gay and lesbian employees. This paradox stems not from carelessness on the part of leaders but from the conflicting requirements that challengers face. Activists must engage in strategic framing efforts that are directed not simply at winning adherents and constituents but also at influencing various policy targets (Einwohner 1999a, b). I argue that because activists must reach multiple audiences—both potential beneficiaries and potential adopters—and because those targets are differentially positioned in terms of power, resources, and interests, framing efforts that seem to resonate with one audience
(corporations) may have an unintended effect on other audiences (non-activists employees).

Summary. After taking into account the complexity of the sociopolitical and institutional environments, including the ironic effect of partial success and the way that media and movement accounts portray policy change, the third wave decline in new corporate organizing appears far less mysterious. The decisions of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are shaped by a complex array of factors. Whether seen as political opportunities or institutional opportunities, these factors defy strictly objectivist determination. Opportunities are not merely structural; they are processual in that environmental conditions are always mediated by the interpretations of potential challengers, current activists, and media professionals, to name but a few.

One other factor may help to account for the apparent decline in gay employee group formations. It is possible that the level of mobilization in the third wave is actually higher than current measures indicate. It is difficult to determine the true extent of workplace mobilization since I lacked the resources to survey all 1000 companies. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees may be mobilizing in the Fortune 1000 at a rate that matches or even exceeds that of the second wave. It could be that these younger gay employee networks, still trying to get on their feet, are less "hooked in" to the larger workplace movement. Not connected to networks in other companies, and uninvolved in workplace conferences, for example, these new groups would not appear on the contact lists that circulate via print and electronic media. They would thus remain invisible to outside observers.
Even if I were able to survey every corporation, without an activist contact, it is sometimes impossible to determine whether a company has a gay employee group. When I lacked an activist contact, I had to rely on corporate decision-makers to tell me whether a gay network existed. This approach proved problematic since, as discussed in Chapter 1, corporate elites are reluctant to participate in studies on this subject. Aside from the difficulties posed by a low response rate, relying on elites to document the existence of challengers is unreliable since some gay employee groups intentionally start out with a low profile. Given the methodological limitations of this study, therefore, it may be safer to issue a caveat: what appears to be a decline in third wave mobilization may only be, at least in part, apparent quiescence.

Whether the drop in new organizing is real or artificial, leaders in the workplace movement have helped to build a considerable infrastructure that provides information, resources, and motivation for the ongoing efforts of employee activists across the country. This infrastructure bodes well for the future of workplace organizing since new and veteran employee groups, linked together through the Internet, workplace conferences, and umbrella groups, can not only share strategies and tactics but also offer emotional support to each other as they take up the hard work that lies ahead. In this next chapter, I trace the development of these interorganizational linkages and discuss their importance in sustaining workplace activism through both the peaks and valleys of mobilization.
CHAPTER 4

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE WORKPLACE MOVEMENT

In this chapter I examine the connections, both formal and informal, that arose among gay employee networks in the early to mid '90s. The discussion has a dual focus: to explain the institutional and movement processes by which widely dispersed activists became linked to one another; and to highlight the resources, structures, and strategies that arose from these same interorganizational linkages. After tracing the more informal connections that developed among activists, I consider the formation of local, regional, and national umbrella organizations. Growing from favorable movement and institutional terrains, these coalitions unite gay employee networks across a wide variety of workplace settings.

In the second half of the chapter, I examine the important role that umbrella groups play in strengthening the movement and sustaining employee activism despite the recent decline in new organizing that was documented in Chapter 3. In a related vein, I discuss how umbrella groups function as abeyance structures (Taylor 1989), ensuring the survival of the workplace movement amidst harsh climate changes in the wider sociopolitical environment. On a more intermediate institutional level, umbrella groups also help employee networks weather any storms that appear on the corporate horizon.
Before the rise of interorganizational linkages, most gay and lesbian employee activists had little to no knowledge of the struggles being waged by their brothers and sisters in other corporations. Beginning in the early to mid '90s, however, numerous ties developed among workplace activists across the country. In a short period of time these connections grew more dense and overlapping, creating a strong movement infrastructure. At the informal level, these linkages constitute a diffuse but extensive social movement community (Buechler 1990). As ties among activists multiplied, some interorganizational linkages became more formalized, leading to the creation of local, regional, and national umbrella groups.

In this section, I examine the movement and institutional processes that fostered such extensive connections among individual activists and employee networks from across the country. In particular, I consider the facilitative role of three key factors: (1) newly available communication technologies, namely expanded access to e-mail and the Internet; (2) early workplace conferences focused on lesbian and gay issues; and (3) the involvement of national organizations in the wider gay rights movement.

Virtual Opportunities: The Impact of New Communication Technologies

Just as popular culture began to echo with lively exchanges about the mere "six degrees of separation" between any two individuals in the world, e-mail and the Internet helped to narrow that gap in "virtual" if not spatial terms. The expanded availability of electronic forms of communication helps to account for both the surge of new workplace
organizing in the early '90s and the rise of intercorporate networking during the same period. Referring to the "information society" or the "communication age," new social movement theorists also highlight the ways that new forms of communication facilitate collective action in the late modern era (Giddens 1991; Melucci 1996; Castells 1997). Citing various forms of electronic communication that allow groups with a common identity to mobilize across vast distances, Taylor (2000) mentions fax machines, copying equipment, e-mail, chat rooms, listserves, and other resources on the World Wide Web. In his analysis of the civil rights movement, Morris (1999) likewise comments on the favorable mobilization impact of new communication technologies. The spread of television in the 1950s and the launching of communications satellites in the early '60s brought galvanizing images of Black protest into the family rooms of millions of households.

Unlike television, where access depends on the ability of protestors to catch the eye of the broadcast media, the Internet and e-mail bring instant publicity and facilitate rapid diffusion of information that remains unmediated by the constraints and distortions of externally controlled media outlets (see also Shock 1999:370). Electronic mail and the Internet thus constitute a far more accessible and stable institutional opportunity in that challengers have direct access to free or relatively inexpensive communication venues. While the Internet was originally developed and used by the government in the late 1960s, at the start of the 1990s availability spread briskly through corporations and to individual computer owners, aided tremendously by the creation in 1991 of World Wide Web technology (Federer 1995; Guthrie 1999; IT Network 1999).
Electronic technologies as mobilizing structures. Serving as easily cooptable communication networks, which constitute a significant resource for movement recruitment and growth (Freeman 1975, 1979; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984), e-mail and the Internet helped the workplace movement mobilize far more rapidly than was otherwise possible. Lesbian and gay employee groups could use intercorporate communication channels to compare notes, share strategies, and spread news of gay-inclusive policy changes. After Lotus, the first major corporate adopter of equitable benefits, announced its policy change in late 1991, "[w]ithin minutes computer bulletin boards flashed the news to offices and companies across the country" (Stewart 1991:50). "I got it from ten different people," commented one gay employee group member (p. 50), reflecting the degree to which widely dispersed activists were becoming well connected through the diffuse webs of the Internet.

Gay and lesbian employee groups also coopt corporate e-mail for internal mobilization purposes. For instance, some networks use electronic communication to provide upper management with up-to-the-minute news of gay-inclusive policy change in the wider business world. When possible, networks use their companies' electronic bulletin boards, accessible to any interested employees, to post announcements of meetings or upcoming events (see also Hayden 1993:2). This latter strategy sometimes elicits a backlash from employees who object to receiving gay-related postings. On the other hand, a few networks have been successful in winning support from the editorial staff of their companies' electronic newsletters, which are sent to all employees. These
allies then publish articles on the gay network, for example, or celebrate gay pride month by sponsoring trivia contests about lesbian and gay figures in history or popular culture.

Whether internal or external, the expanded access of electronic information-sharing represented a pivotal institutional opportunity that was quickly seized upon by gay and lesbian activists in the workplace movement. Even the simple electronic circulation of contact lists helped word travel fast about gay employee groups that were forming in and outside of the corporate sector. Several respondents noted that they were motivated to organize in their own places of work after learning on-line about other networks. Activists also set up electronic discussion lists where they could share strategies or seek external encouragement in the face of hostile internal reactions.

Previously isolated lesbian and gay employees thus became linked to one another through the use of intra- and intercorporate e-mail, usenet newsgroups or discussion lists, and postings to gay-related listserves on the Internet. By early 1993, for example, the usenet newsgroup called Soc.motss ("Soc"ial group for people attracted to "Members Of The Same Sex") had grown to over 40,000 subscribers, and America On-Line had numerous lesbian, gay, and bisexual forums, including one focused on corporate issues (Hayden 1993:2). Those who were interested could even join a discussion list focused on domestic partner benefits.

Existing before the Internet became widely available in the early '90s, and awkwardly named to serve as code word for gay, the Soc.motss discussion list operated through Netnews, one of the earliest public bulletin boards. The obfuscation of the Soc.motss name was necessary at the time since many servers prohibited use of the words
gay or lesbian in the titles of newsgroups. Despite this obstacle, gay men and lesbians found each other on-line, and early workplace activists began using the discussion list in support of their mobilization efforts. To illustrate the mobilizing power of these electronic technologies, I briefly discuss how one of the earliest gay employee networks in the country used Soc.motss and intracorporate e-mail to reach out to other lesbian and gay employees.

Located in a major telecommunications company, in 1987 a founding member of "GLUE" (Gay and Lesbian United Employees) used Soc.motss to publicize her group's intention to meet with someone in upper management about the formation of the network. She expressed trepidation over outing herself to such a high-level executive whom she had never met. Seeking some advice and bravery-boosting solidarity, her posting to Soc.motss read, "I'd particularly like to know of other groups who have organized within their work locations or who are considering such action. And I'd really appreciate encouraging words with soothing overtones!"

With news of GLUE's formation spreading far and wide, soon other networks emerged. Indeed, e-mail helped word travel fast even within the corporation such that other GLUE chapters quickly sprang up in numerous company locations. At first a tiny group operating within a telecommunications giant, by the mid '90s the number of GLUE chapters had reached 30, with membership exceeding 2000. Often considered by others in the workplace movement to be the network that "started it all," GLUE is still the largest gay employee network in the country. In the absence of e-mail and the Internet, it is unlikely that the seeds planted by GLUE would have blown very far.
In movement terminology, discussion lists and electronic bulletin boards function as informal mobilizing structures (Tarrow 1994; McCarthy 1996). As the "collective building blocks of social movements," mobilizing structures serve as the "seedbeds in which framing processes and strategies germinate" (Gotham 1999:335-336). The virtual networks that arose from the Internet thus spurred the growth of workplace activism and diffused the strategic frames born of such struggles. With the spread of new communication technologies, individual activists and employee networks soon became linked to each other. Able to easily compare tactics, share information on victories and setbacks, and build solidarity, these virtual networks help connect, inspire, and inform activists in even the most remote locations.

The workplace movement resembles the loose structure of many of the other so-called new social movements (Tarrow 1998). Composed of "decentralized, segmented, and reticulated" social networks (Gerlach and Hine 1970), employee groups function autonomously but are connected through intersecting circles of friends, acquaintances, and discussion list members. These cyber-networks can be seen as "social movement communities" (Buechler 1990) or "submerged networks" of politicized actors who practice acts of resistance in their everyday lives, not simply through formal organizations (Melucci 1989:35). Regardless of their title, these "virtual" communities provide activists with essential resources, both tangible and intangible.

As access to the Internet spread, the number of electronic resources focused on gay and lesbian topics grew exponentially. Today several lesbian and gay Web sites, including the popular PlanetOut, draw over a half-million visitors each month (Bank
Topping the charts, Gay.com attracts more than 2.3 million users per month (GLOBES 2000). Adrift in a sea of information and looking for workplace-related sites, Internet users can conduct an on-line search of the 25,000 files contained in the Queer Resources Directory (Herscher 2000:D12). A longstanding Internet site, the Directory provides an indexed compilation of gay listserves and Web pages.

Those interested in more lively interaction can join real-time “chat rooms” dedicated to lesbian and gay employment issues. Some employee networks have set up their own electronic forums that members can participate in, but there are also external lists that serve to link activists across the country and the globe. One such discussion list, referred to as "glbt-workplace" (accessible via majordomo@queernet.org), includes threads on coming out at work, interacting with colleagues and managers, effecting change through activism in the workplace, and publicizing the activities of gay employee groups in the wider community.

Cyberspace as free space. Whether through electronic mail, listserves, or the World Wide Web, cyberspace offers to gay employees a virtual and literal "free space," to use the term coined by movement scholars Sara Evans and Harry Boyte (1986). Similar to the free spaces of women-only consciousness-raising groups that facilitated the spread of the women's liberation movement (Evans 1979; Freeman 1979; Buechler 1990), gay-oriented discussion lists and chat rooms allow activists to interact with each other apart from dominant groups and to gain valuable information and support for their mobilization efforts. The workplace literature likewise documents the importance of solidarity-building
activities that provide "an independent social space for workers' individual or collective identities" (Hodson 1996:723).

Employee group leaders frequently mentioned that even those who are closeted and too afraid to come to meetings can nevertheless maintain contact with the group by subscribing to a confidential e-mail list (see also Hayden 1993:2). In fact, in most cases joining the network is as simple as signing up to receive e-mail postings. Confidential electronic communication can thus provide closeted employees with a safe environment where they can interact with other gays and lesbians without fear of negative repercussions.

The contributions of virtual members. Reflecting on the significance of these free spaces, network leaders commonly reported two different numbers when asked about the size of their groups. One number consisted of those who would come to meetings and/or events, whether regularly or not, and the other included those who limited their participation to e-mail contact or electronic discussion lists. I use the term virtual members to refer to the latter group. Virtual members are sometimes a source of frustration for network leaders who wish for a more active and visible membership or, at the very least, a greater number of people to share the workload.

Looked at from this perspective, virtual members appear to resemble "free riders," who choose to reap the benefits of collective action without actually joining in the cause (Olson 1965; Fireman and Gamson 1979). But such a conclusion, grounded in rational choice assumptions, fails to capture the contradictory nature of gay and lesbian politics. In this particular form of identity politics, individuals cannot free ride on others' successes.
without first laying public claim to a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity (see also Raeburn and Taylor 1994).

Moreover, while closeted gays and lesbians could choose virtual membership and simply reap "solidary" benefits (Fireman and Gamson 1979) from participating in confidential e-mail or discussion lists, many virtual members, whether closeted or openly gay, do in fact contribute to the group through various forms of behind-the-scenes work. Some provide what Freeman (1979:173) has called "specialized" resources such as expertise, access to key decision makers, and connections to other networks. Others provide "insider knowledge," which organizational scholars have shown to be "a powerful tool for workers" in their struggle for change in the workplace (Hodson 1996:724).

Simply by virtue of their position in the company, other virtual members provide resources to the group in the form of status (Freeman 1979). With regard to status contributions, several network leaders emphasized the importance of having high-level managers, often heterosexual, join the gay employee group even if their participation was limited to virtual membership. These highly visible allies, merely by joining the network, offer symbolic support for the cause and hence signal to others that discrimination is unacceptable.

There is another significant way in which virtual membership differs from free riding. Even if they offer no specialized resources, virtual members do in fact join the movement, if only electronically. Resembling "paper members" who donate money but not time to social movement organizations (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977), virtual members make "numeric" contributions by adding to the size of the membership base. Just by signing up to receive network e-mail, even the most inactive virtual members can
bring tangible benefits to the larger group. For example, in some of the companies that provide resources to employee groups, management allocates budgets based on the number of members in each network. Even in corporations where this was not the case, activist leaders were quick to acknowledge the importance of virtual membership since they believed that larger networks carried more symbolic weight than smaller ones, an assumption put to empirical test in a later chapter.

Electronic resources: the Internet as informational clearinghouse. Resource mobilization theorists have clearly demonstrated the importance of resources such as publicity, money, space, time, commitment, organizing skills, and substantive expertise (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978; Freeman 1979; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1983; Morris 1984; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Rupp and Taylor 1987; Tarrow 1989; Gamson 1990). Today electronic forums such as e-mail and the Internet provide many of these resources with a touch of a keyboard or the click of a mouse, and with much speedier results and far less costly investments of money or time than that required by traditional communication channels. These new informational and communication technologies represent what Jo Freeman (1979:174) has called institutional resources. While existing independently of the movement, such resources can be coopted by challengers in their pursuit of social change.

Indeed, the Internet is now full of Web sites that focus specifically on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender workplace issues. In October of 1997, for instance, I easily located nearly 75 such sites, many of which are hyper-linked to each other. These links, along with the availability of powerful search engines, greatly facilitate both casual and
scholarly research. Internet users can quickly access lists of lesbian and gay employee
groups, some of which have Web pages of their own. The information contained on these
and other workplace-related sites ranges from general advice on starting an employee
network and building coalitions to more specific details such as the wording of affidavits
for domestic partner benefits. Internet users can also access lists of employers that have
already adopted equitable benefits. Most of these lists resulted from the early
"benchmarking" activities of lesbian and gay employee groups.

Many workplace activists began to document the rise of gay-inclusive
nondiscrimination policies and, later, equitable benefits, in large part to convince their own
employers to do the same. An enormously time-consuming task, these early
benchmarking endeavors were sometimes undertaken voluntarily by gay employee
networks. More often, however, activists went in search of such information at the
request of upper management. Many network leaders view this request as a diversionary
tactic used by the corporate elite, who sometimes ask for not only a list of adopters but
also the projected cost of adoption and "proof" of favorable financial impact in terms of
enhanced recruitment and retention. The latter piece of information, of course, is virtually
impossible for employee networks to obtain. Nonetheless, countless hours of research
eventually resulted in the compilation of lists containing the names of adopters and,
notably, empirical evidence documenting negligible costs of adoption.

Before the rise of the Internet and the interorganizational linkages it helped to
create, most gay employee groups were isolated from each other and would therefore
have to reinvent the wheel each time management requested such data. Benefitting from
early and ongoing benchmarking endeavors, today's employee activists can with the touch of their fingers have instant access to the fruits of their predecessors' labor. Individuals in the privacy of their own homes or offices can now find these ever expanding lists of gay-inclusive employers by visiting the Web sites of gay rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) or the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. These are supplemented by a small number of Web pages maintained by lesbian and gay consultants or by dedicated individuals who compile their own lists of gay-inclusive employers.

To sample the extensive organizing and policy information contained on the Internet, one need only access the on-line resources provided by HRC, the country's largest gay rights organization. HRC has a Web site exclusively devoted to its workplace project called "WorkNet: Resources for Workplace Equality Advocates." This site provides an excellent compilation of the types of informational resources scattered throughout the Web. Rather than having to browse numerous sites maintained by smaller organizations or by individual activists, WorkNet significantly reduces search time by assembling vast amounts of data in one convenient location.

WorkNet contains a plethora of useful material: a database containing those employers that have adopted domestic partner benefits and/or gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policies; a contact list of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered employee groups; "how to" guides for starting employee networks and winning equitable benefits or other inclusive policies; and monthly editions of the "Work Alert" newsletter, which covers changes in employer policies, employment legislation, or court rulings. As a
means of publicizing anti-gay bias and mobilizing support for federal passage of ENDA (the Employment Non-Discrimination Act), the WorkNet site also invites those who have experienced workplace bias to contact HRC's Documenting Discrimination Project.

In addition to providing updates on the status of ENDA, including new corporate supporters of the legislation, WorkNet lists jurisdictions that offer domestic partner registries and/or prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The site also publicizes the policies of U.S. Senators and Representatives regarding the employment of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals as members of their staff. Alternatively, one can access WorkNet to find details of boycotts that are being waged against particularly hostile employers. Users of WorkNet can also read about the annual "Out and Equal" workplace conferences on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues.

Other WorkNet resources include an index of books and magazine or journal articles on sexual orientation in the workplace, a listing of gay and lesbian legal services, and links to related Web sites. Reflecting recent attempts by the larger movement to include transgendered people and to seriously address discrimination on the basis of gender identity, the site also includes information on transgenderism and transitioning at work. The latter issue addresses how employers can accommodate those individuals who are undertaking a transition from male to female or vice versa.

Serving thus as an informational clearinghouse, the Internet offers crucial resources to employee activists on a 24-hour-a-day basis. Without ever leaving their homes or cubicles, activists can learn about the latest strategies, tactics, networking opportunities, and successes of the workplace movement. Before the rise of e-mail and the
World Wide Web, gay employees were far more likely to labor in relative isolation. They were therefore unable to capitalize on the lessons learned by activists who had mobilized in other companies or workplace settings. As electronic mail and Internet access spread, so too did the sharing of strategic information. A virtually inexhaustible resource, cyberspace thus facilitated the mobilization and continued success of the workplace movement.

**Summary.** As new communication technologies diffused rapidly through the corporate world and then to individual computer owners, lesbian and gay employees quickly took advantage of the institutional opportunities they afforded. The virtual networks they built brought together formerly isolated individuals within companies, connected separate employee organizations across corporations, and provided vast informational resources in a matter of seconds to anyone with a computer and modem.

While these communication innovations helped members of the workplace movement become more densely interconnected, activists did not depend on virtual networking alone. Staring at a computer screen is no substitute for the power of human contact. Anyone who has ever attended an activist-led event can testify to the profound impact of being with people who seem to live and breathe the tenets and promise of a movement.

**The Birth of the Workplace Conference: The Great Mobilizer**

Leaders of the workplace movement realized the importance of face-to-face interaction for stimulating interest, sharing strategies, celebrating successes, and maintaining commitment despite repeated setbacks. Thus was born the workplace
conference. As mentioned in Chapter 2, amidst widespread press coverage of the Cracker Barrel firings in 1991, activists organized the first two conferences in the country on gay, lesbian, and bisexual workplace issues. These conferences, one on each coast, were a powerful mobilizing force for the movement. They energized individuals who had been previously inactive, deepened the dedication of employee activists, and extended the reach of the movement by catching the eye of the mainstream business press. Both conferences, preceded by a suddenly publicized grievance, served to educate corporate decision-makers and activists as well as link previously secluded employee networks. Just as significant, the conferences whetted the appetite of individuals who had not yet mobilized in their places of work. Hungry for change, many returned to their companies and formed networks of their own.

The success of these early workplace conferences soon inspired employee activists to organize similar events at more local or regional levels. A few networks even began hosting what they call "professional development conferences" in their own companies, with workshops geared toward educating all employees about sexual orientation issues in the workplace. These events have been a highly effective means of winning allies throughout a company. Organizers focus particularly hard on convincing executives to attend, some of whom become such strong supporters that they are featured speakers at future professional development conferences. Most workplace conferences, though, are targeted to a much wider audience consisting of employee activists and organizational decision-makers from the corporate, non-profit, and government sectors. Though organized predominantly by employee activists from corporate settings, these conferences
both reflect and strengthen the interorganizational linkages that undergird the workplace movement.

The workplace conference as a key diffusion mechanism and local movement center. Borrowing from neoinstitutional theory, I view workplace conferences as key "diffusion mechanisms" or "central conduits" for the spread of organizational and tactical innovations (Strang and Meyer 1993:498). Through their attendance at workplace conferences, activists acquire specialized knowledge and crucial organizing skills, such as how to effectively construct and deploy collective action frames in a corporate environment (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992). In a later chapter, I discuss the central importance of framing strategies for movement success. For now, it simply bears mentioning that workplace conferences play a central role in dispatching frames that are then carried into multiple organizational fields.

As movement scholars have pointed out, "personal and organizational networks provide mechanisms for harmonizing frames across institutional spheres" (Haydu 1999:319). Thus, in bringing together individual activists and employee networks from various types of organizations, workplace conferences can be seen as "organizational transmission belts," with attendees serving as "carriers for isomorphic frames" (Haydu 1999:323). Bearing the seeds of change, conference participants return to worksites across the country and carefully cultivate policy innovations that, while often strategically portrayed as being rooted in corporate "best practices," nevertheless stem from movement ideology.
Drawing on Morris' (1984) research that documents the importance of indigenous resources for mobilization, I also view workplace conferences as "local movement centers" that bring activists and organizations together to articulate goals, develop tactical innovations, and provide training for both leaders and rank-and-file members (p. 284). Emphasizing the significance of movement centers, Morris argues that "[t]he pace, location, and volume of protest in various communities are directly dependent on the quality and distribution of local movement centers" (p. 284). Relatedly, I would posit that the effectiveness of challengers depends in part on whether they are connected to such movement centers. For example, I found that 58 percent of employee networks that attended workplace conferences were successful in their fight for equitable benefits versus only 39 percent of non-attending groups. Given the far-reaching political, cultural, and mobilization outcomes of these workplace conferences (Staggenborg 1995), I turn now to a more in-depth look at their origin, development, and content.

*The emergence and development of the workplace conference.* In the midst of the Cracker Barrel fury in the fall of 1991, the Human Rights Campaign Fund (now HRC) and the New York City Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center co-sponsored a national conference with the theme "Invisible Diversity: A Lesbian and Gay Corporate Agenda" (Freiberg 1991:11). Organizers had sent invitations to the CEOs and human resource directors of 9400 companies but received a disappointing number of responses (Stewart 1991:56). Nonetheless, attendees included representatives from over 100 major corporations (Freiberg 1991:11). In his brief descriptive look at workplace organizing,
Wallace Swan (1997:27) noted how press coverage of the east coast event helped to fuel the growth and diversification of the movement:

The power of the mass media to cover the activities of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in workplace groups has been truly astonishing. The fact that the Human Rights Campaign Fund held a dinner where leading corporate representatives were invited to meet with hitherto closeted gays and lesbians from their workplaces resounded like a shot throughout the gay community nationwide, providing much of the impetus for workplace groups to begin throughout the country.

Also in the fall of 1991 but on the opposite coast, members of several gay employee networks in northern California organized the first annual "Out and Equal in the '90s" workplace conference. Brainchild of employee activists from major corporations in Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay area, this event likewise issued a resounding call for workplace activism. Held at San Francisco City College in October 1991, the first Out and Equal conference was a day-long affair that drew over 150 attendees from approximately 30 companies (Bain 1992c).

The event prompted several lesbian and gay employee activists in the San Francisco Bay area to organize an informal intercorporate network, which in 1992 became "formally constituted as an arm of NGLTF and the nucleus of the NGLTF Work Place Initiative" (Bain 1992c:4). In 1992 members of the Initiative organized two workplace sessions at NGLTF's annual Creating Change conference, where plans were made for an early 1993 meeting during which activists would consider the formation of a national organization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee networks that, if realized, would have fallen under the auspices of NGLTF (Bain 1992c:4).
Reflecting both the rapidly expanding ranks of the workplace movement and the networking success of the Bay area's intercorporate umbrella group, San Francisco's 1992 gay and lesbian Freedom Day Parade included a sizeable number of gay employee networks. The "corporate contingent" of the march was 250 people strong, representing approximately 60 companies both within and outside of the Fortune 1000 (Bain 1992d). This sudden and highly visible increase in the number of workplace activists reveals the profound impact that the 1991 Out and Equal conference had on the movement.

Indeed, that first Out and Equal conference was considered such a success that it soon garnered the financial support and organizational resources of the larger gay rights movement and powerful players in the university and corporate sectors. In both 1992 and 1993, NGLTF co-sponsored the conference with Stanford University (Bain 1992c). The 1992 conference, a two-day event held on Stanford's campus, was attended by 330 people from some 90 organizations, mostly corporations. At the 1993 conference, a highly successful fundraiser for the NGLTF Workplace Organizing Project was held on the grounds of Apple corporation.

In 1994, NGLTF moved the conference to Denver in an attempt to increase attendance and broaden geographic representation. San Francisco was home to the next Out and Equal event in 1996 and included a well-attended preconference "Human Resources Institute" for executives and personnel specialists. The following conference in 1998 took place in Rochester, New York. By then responsibility for the event had passed to COLLEAGUES, an umbrella organization made up of gay employee networks from across the country. COLLEAGUES itself had originated during an earlier movement...
conference. Reflecting the expanded interorganizational leadership of the workplace movement, the 1999 Out and Equal conference in Atlanta, Georgia, was a joint venture between COLLEAGUES and PROGRESS, another major umbrella organization focused on gay and lesbian workplace issues.

The workplace conference as movement training ground. The annual Out and Equal conference and other similar gatherings fostered dense linkages among previously isolated employees and activist networks. But these conferences serve not merely as structural conduits for the emergence of interpersonal and interorganizational networks. They also function as conveyors of substantive and tactical information that challengers and sympathetic elites take home with them and put into practice in their own places of work. With workshops ranging from starting a gay employee group and creating allies to building coalitions and convincing executives of the need for gay-inclusive policies, the nearly annual Out and Equal conferences provide information, training, and networking opportunities for individual activists, gay and lesbian employee groups, and human resources professionals from a wide variety of business, nonprofit, and governmental organizations.

A sampling of the sessions offered at the 1996 Out and Equal conference, which I attended in San Francisco, reveals the specialized knowledge that these movement centers provide for both gay employee activists and corporate decision-makers. At the preconference Human Resources Institute, executives and personnel professionals had a choice among morning sessions focused on domestic partner benefits, gay-inclusive diversity training, AIDS education, and another workshop called "Everything You've
Always Wanted to Know About Sexual Orientation as a Diversity Issue But..." At lunch, attendees were educated and entertained by "aha!," a group of professional actors who depicted heterosexist, sexist, and sexually harassing behaviors in the workplace. The afternoon line-up included sessions on working with a gay employee group; making lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues an integral part of all diversity programs; and "finding the words" to use in gay-inclusive diversity training (a train-the-trainer workshop).

Attendees also had the opportunity to view two videos useful for "teaching tolerance," one about parents of gays and lesbians and the other on the impact of homophobia on African American communities. Use of the latter video reflects the workplace movement's determination in recent years to acknowledge and challenge the interlocking nature of systems of oppression (Collins 1990, 2000). In response to the call of Black feminists especially (see, e.g., Dill 1983; King 1988; Collins 1998), the lesbian and gay movement has begun to pay far greater attention to the "simultaneity" of penalty and privilege based on race, class, gender, and sexuality. Striving to overcome the tendency of many social movements to prioritize oppressions (Barnett 1999), the expanded focus of the workplace movement represents a conscious attempt to avoid an "exclusionary solidarity" (Ferree and Roth 1998:629). This more integrative approach bodes well for those employee activists engaged in coalition building, which scholars have argued is an important contributor to movement success (Ferree and Roth 1998; Collins 2000).

In addition to numerous workshops, attendees at the Human Resources Institute gained valuable information from plenary sessions, which featured speakers from both
human rights and corporate organizations. Reflecting what neoinstitutionalists would call the normative role of the socio-legal environment, which constructs certain organizational policies and practices as ethical and legitimate (Edelman and Suchman 1997), a representative from the San Francisco Human Rights Commission spoke on "Preventing Sexual Orientation, AIDS/HIV, and Gender Identity Discrimination." Given the sometimes hostile reaction of corporate elites to the more coercive side of the legal system (Edelman and Suchman 1997), conference organizers made sure that the rest of the Human Resources Institute did not focus on legal arguments for gay-inclusive policies. Moreover, reliance on legal frames is an unreliable strategy given the gaps and shifts in the law and the fact that numerous corporations operate in localities not covered by nondiscrimination ordinances.

Realizing the effectiveness of having an elite "insider" or powerful ally deliver the message of the movement, organizers of the Human Resources Institute selected the Vice President of Human Resources at Xerox to give the keynote address. His presentation was preceded by a videotaped message from the CEO, whose words echoed the strategic framing of the company's own successful gay employee group: "Diversity is more than a moral imperative; it's a business necessity. It improves the bottom line." The Vice President's talk heavily emphasized the profit-oriented reasons to adopt gay-inclusive policies, as summarized by the title of his keynote address, "A Total Pay Strategy to Support Workforce Diversity."

The next two days of the general Out and Equal conference included workshops for both human resources professionals and gay employee activists, with some of the
sessions being repeat offerings from the preconference Institute. With sessions too numerous to list here, I select only a few to illustrate the diversity and complexity of the issues covered. The first day included workshops on creating and strengthening employee networks; using e-mail and the Internet for workplace activism; and gaining corporate support for ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Other workshops focused on how Disney's gay network won equitable benefits; how to build coalitions with unions and other workplace organizations; and how to mobilize organized labor to help fight the New Right. Another session concentrated on the workplace struggles faced by gays and lesbians of color, transgendered employees, and lesbians in male-dominated fields. Having begun with keynote speaker Dr. Frank Kameny, a pioneer of the gay rights movement and of workplace activism, the day ended with a closing plenary session on coalition building.

The final day of the conference opened with a plenary address on "Same-Gender Marriage and Domestic Partner Benefits" and continued with another wide array of sessions. Some of the topics included career management advice for gays and lesbians; mentoring and preparing future leaders in the workplace movement; dealing with closeted people in positions of power; and using the "Lavender Screen." Developed by an investment advisor, the Lavender Screen assesses the "gay friendliness" of companies in terms of their nondiscrimination policies, diversity training, benefits policies, and other related criteria.

Serving as a potentially powerful diffusion mechanism (Strang and Meyer 1993), benchmarking tools such as the Lavender Screen are likely to facilitate mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). Aware of the comparisons that investors and
consumers can now easily make by using these tools, corporate elites may feel increasing pressure to "follow the leader" in order to remain competitive. In the next chapter I discuss isomorphic processes in more detail, but what warrants emphasis here is the fact that workplace conferences serve not only as movement centers for the spread of tactical innovations (Morris 1984). They also play a role in larger institutional processes since attendees, whether activists or corporate decision-makers, acquire tools for tracking and interpreting changes in the wider organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). What participants do with that knowledge once they return to their own organizations—and the transformations in policy that may result—in turn change the very organizational fields in which they and others act.

Summary. With each passing year, the Out and Equal conference has won the support of additional corporate sponsors and has drawn greater numbers of organizational decision-makers as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered activists. Since its inception, this annual event has contributed greatly to the size, strength, and diversity of the workplace movement. In addition to the strategic training that attendees gain, these conferences give activists a chance to come together in a safe space where they can seek solace in the face of setbacks and draw motivation from the victories won by others.

Serving as "organizational midwives" (McAdam 1994:44), early workplace conferences also ushered in the birth of new employee groups and fostered the development of intercorporate networks at the local, regional, and national levels. The visible increase in employee mobilization, in turn, convinced leaders of the wider lesbian and gay movement to commit more resources to workplace activism. In the next section,
I consider the launching of workplace organizing projects by the two largest gay rights organizations in the country and examine their impact on the workplace movement.

The Expanded Focus of the Larger Gay and Lesbian Movement: Working It Out

The success of early conferences and the dedication of key leaders in the workplace movement led NGLTF and HRC to institute Workplace Organizing Projects in the early to mid '90s. These projects expanded the resource base of the workplace movement. They also brought greater publicity to the efforts of employee activists and to the willingness or resistance of employers to grant equality to their lesbian and gay workers. Given the well-recognized standing of NGLTF and HRC in the broader movement, these national projects were both indicators of and contributors to the institutionalization of the workplace movement.

NGLTF's Workplace Organizing Project. Initiated in the early '90s, NGLTF's workplace project was conceived by California activist George Kronenberger, who founded one of the earliest gay employee networks in the country and the first such group in the utilities industry back in 1986. With his finger on the pulse of the movement and his eye on the political landscape, this central activist figure correctly predicted that the next frontier for lesbian and gay rights would occur not in the legislature but in the workplace, with the pioneering efforts of gay employee groups leading the way (Vaid 1995:10). Although Kronenberger died of AIDS-related complications in late 1994, he left behind a strong foundation on which the workplace movement continues to build. To honor his legacy, NGLTF established the George Kronenberger Memorial Award, which is
bestowed on a gay and lesbian employee organization or workplace activist during the annual Out and Equal conference.

At the urging of Kronenberger and other core activists in the workplace movement, NGLTF initiated its Workplace Organizing Project to determine how "influence [could] be brought to bear on corporations so that they would see equal treatment for their gay employees as a matter of urgent concern" (Baker et al. 1995:x). As one of its earliest project-sponsored activities, NGLTF mailed a survey to Fortune 1000 companies in 1993 inquiring about the existence of gay employee networks and gay-inclusive policies and practices.

These efforts resulted in the publication of the book, *Cracking the Corporate Closet: The 200 Best (and Worst) Companies to Work For, Buy From, and Invest in if You're Gay or Lesbian—and Even if You Aren't* (see Baker et al. 1995). Because the book was published by Harper Business, a division of Harper Collins Publishers, it reached a much wider audience than would a movement-issued document. In the book's appendix, the authors included contact information for almost 40 gay and lesbian employee groups located in Fortune 1000 companies. The visibility that the book generated for the workplace movement furthered both the pace of new organizing and the density of connections among employee networks.

As part of the Workplace Project, NGLTF also began to sponsor the annual Out and Equal workplace conference. In addition, the organization instituted several sessions on the workplace at its annual Creating Change conference. While that conference covers a wide variety of gay rights issues not limited to employment, it is telling that in the mid
'90s organizers decided to offer separate workplace-related "tracks" for beginners and
advanced attendees. The message of the workplace movement thus spreads further as
attendance at Creating Change increases each year. The record-breaking turnout of 2500
at the 1999 conference portends an even wider audience in the years ahead (NGLTF

In addition to support for workplace conferences and for workplace sessions at
general conferences, NGLTF publishes various items that are of direct use to employee
activists. For example, in 1999 the NGLTF Policy Institute released a 140-page new
edition of *The Domestic Partnership Organizing Manual for Employee Benefits* (see
Kohn 1999). Other national lesbian and gay rights organizations, including the National
Center for Lesbian Rights and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (LLDEF),
have published similar manuals (see Roberts and Dettmer 1992 and LLDEF 1994).

*HRC's WorkNet.* Established in 1995 and often referred to as WorkNet, HRC's
Workplace Project was inaugurated by Elizabeth Birch as Executive Director of HRC, the
largest gay rights organization in the country. Birch earned some of her activist stripes in
the workplace movement. As corporate legal counsel for Apple in the early '90s, she
decided to join efforts with the gay and lesbian employee network, which had been trying
to persuade the company to offer domestic partner benefits. They succeeded in 1993,
making Apple one of the earliest corporate adopters of equitable benefits. Significantly,
that year marked a shift in the locus of policy change, as the majority of adopters ever
since have been companies rather than universities or municipalities. Having been part of
the upper ranks of corporate America, Birch is known for her ability to speak the language
of the business elite without pulling any punches. Her experience and skills inform the ongoing activities of WorkNet, which provides assistance to hundreds of individuals and corporations each year (HRC 1998:3).

Announcing the foundation of WorkNet, then called the Workplace Project, in the fall of 1995 an article in HRC Quarterly summarized its main objectives:

To enlist leading companies and employers to endorse ENDA, or adopt "sexual orientation" as a specific category under their written nondiscrimination guidelines. To recruit corporate executives, gay and nongay, to publicly endorse ENDA, and to cooperate with HRC in delivering congressional testimony and support. To document and reveal verifiable accounts of job discrimination. To significantly expand HRC's data and relationships concerning gay and lesbian employee groups, and enlist their aid as allies. To co-sponsor and facilitate workplace organizing conferences involving gay and lesbian support groups as a direct means of building grassroots support. (HRC 1995c:7)

Managed by HRC's Education Director Kim Mills and Research Coordinator Daryl Herrschaft, WorkNet offers valuable assistance to employee activists and to corporate management. For many of the individuals seeking HRC's help, the first point of contact is through WorkNet's Web site (HRC 1998). As discussed above, this site serves as an informational clearinghouse for workplace-related materials. Compared to other workplace sites, WorkNet is unparalleled in scope and accessibility. Even those without Internet access can benefit from at least some of the virtual resources provided by WorkNet. By signing up to receive e-mail from HRC, individuals receive a lengthy "WorkAlert" newsletter that provides monthly updates on gay-related workplace issues. Approximately seven to ten single-spaced pages, these electronic newsletters discuss setbacks and successes in the courts, in local, state and federal legislatures, and in the
public and private employment sectors. The final segment of each alert lists the employers that have recently adopted domestic partner benefits.

HRC also spreads the message of the movement by including workplace features in its membership publications. For example, in a recent *HRC Quarterly* article, two members of HRC's Business Council (Cromwell and Harris 1999) highlight the successful efforts of gay networks at Hewlett-Packard and BankBoston. In response to employee activism, both companies adopted gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policies and extended benefits to domestic partners. At the end of the article, the authors enumerate goals and strategies that can be adopted by gay employee networks. They also provide a list of policies and practices that employers can institute to ensure an inclusive, equitable, and profitable environment. Serving as a diffusion mechanism (Strang and Meyer 1993) for the spread of workplace activism, these types of articles alert thousands of HRC members to the possibilities and promise of employee mobilization.

Another contribution of WorkNet can be found in the publication of a 36-page booklet entitled "The State of the Workplace for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Americans" (see Mills and Herrschaft 1999). This well written, conveniently organized resource is replete with useful charts and tables. The text centers around seven major areas: civil rights laws, domestic partnership laws, nondiscrimination policies in the workplace, domestic partner benefits policies, shareholder resolutions, executive orders, and court cases on employment discrimination and domestic partner benefits.
While WorkNet clearly offers a plenitude of informational resources via its Web site, e-mail distribution service, and hard-copy publications, HRC's workplace project extends far beyond the virtual and textual realms. WorkNet staff provide individualized assistance to employee activists and to corporate executives who are considering inclusive policy changes. As Research Coordinator and WorkNet manager Daryl Herrschaft explains, "For many workplace advocates, being able to find out what other companies in their industry or state are doing is often critical to making a compelling case for change. We can help tailor information for individuals, gay and lesbian employee groups or human resources departments" (HRC 1998:3). WorkNet also provides sample proposals for domestic partner benefits, data on adoption costs, news articles on inclusive policy changes, and lists of insurance carriers that will write policies for employers wishing to cover domestic partners (p. 3). In some cases, requests for assistance are referred to the HRC Business Council, "whose members have expertise in this area and can advise employers and employees" (ibid).

The advocacy work of the HRC Business Council. HRC established the Business Council in an attempt to exert a more direct influence on corporations. The group meets twice a year and consists of employee activists and diversity professionals located in a wide variety of corporate settings. At a meeting in February of 1999, council members decided to "conduct direct advocacy in at least 10 companies in selected industries or market sectors" (HRC 1999c:3). The Business Council chose its targets on the basis of a system that members had created "to rate companies' readiness to adopt more inclusive policies toward gay and lesbian workers" (p. 3). After selecting the corporations,
members then volunteered to be the point person for key industries and to develop strategies for working within those industries" (ibid).

To better prepare volunteers for this advocacy work, the Business Council dedicated the first half of its two-day meeting to a training session conducted by Brian McNaught. Probably the most well-known and highly respected diversity consultant in the workplace movement, McNaught has worked with numerous corporations. He conducts employee workshops on homophobia in the workplace and meets directly with executives about the need for and profitability of gay-inclusive policies. As an openly gay man and independent diversity professional with ties to both corporate and activist networks, McNaught resembles what Belinda Robnett (1997) has called a "bridge leader." In her study of African American women in the civil rights movement, Robnett defines bridge leadership as "an intermediate layer of leadership, whose tasks include bridging potential constituents and adherents...to the movement" (p. 191).

Particularly adept at such bridging work, McNaught is highly acclaimed for his ability to win allies and create outspoken supporters out of even some of the most reluctant heterosexuals. Workplace activists praise his gift for convincing—indeed, inspiring—executives to institute gay-inclusive policies. It is thus no surprise that HRC invited McNaught to train members of the Business Council before they headed out to the corporations they had decided to target. HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birth, who attended both days of the Business Council meeting, commented on the purpose of McNaught's session: "His carefully crafted presentation helped to sharpen members' skills.

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and abilities so that when they have to meet with a CEO or a gay employee resource group, they will make the best case for fairness" (HRC 1999c:3).

Business Council members were thus well trained for the advocacy work that awaited them. One of the sectors in which members first put this new strategy into practice was the airline industry, where not one company had adopted equitable benefits. Hoping to change the industry's intransigence, Business Council members and WorkNet staff worked directly with United with Pride and GLEAM, the gay employee networks at United Airlines and American Airlines (HRC 2000a). These networks had been trying for years to convince their employers to extend benefits coverage to domestic partners. In the fall of 1999, both companies finally agreed to do so, joining the ranks of over 2800 other U.S. employers in the corporate, university, and public sectors (HRC 2000).

United Airlines was the first in the industry to adopt the benefits. Illustrating a pattern of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b), American Airlines quickly followed suit, with USAirways close behind. The companies' announcements came within days of each other and brought the total number of Fortune 500 adopters to 71. As discussed in a later chapter, United Airlines' decision was also influenced by a boycott in the gay community and a federal court ruling. Nonetheless, it seems likely that HRC, in partnership with employee activists, played an important role in effecting these groundbreaking changes in the industry.

Summary. In response to the call of employee activists, in the early to mid '90s national gay rights organizations began to focus more of their attention on workplace issues. Through their Workplace Organizing Projects, NGLTF and HRC contributed
time, commitment, money, space, organizational expertise, and publicity to the workplace movement. And by supporting early conferences, both organizations helped lesbian and gay employees meet face-to-face, where they formed lasting connections and solidified their commitment to equality at work. As organizational midwives (McAdam 1994), these workplace conferences inspired the uninitiated to form networks of their own and encouraged more seasoned employee activists to build umbrella groups at the local, regional, and national levels. Activists thus became more densely interconnected as they attended conferences and built coalitions of workplace groups that spanned the corporate, university, and government sectors.

While workplace conferences were the birthplace of many umbrella groups, additional coalitions were born from national movement events not related to the workplace. Conferences served as key mobilizers and provided important networking venues for activists, but they failed to reach individuals and employee networks that were not already hooked in to such movement centers. Wanting to bring more of these isolated groups into the fold, a few leading activists in the workplace movement developed a new strategy. They decided to take advantage of the enormous networking opportunity afforded by a national march and cultural events in the wider gay and lesbian community. I turn now to a consideration of this strategic innovation and examine its impact on the organizational density, size, and diversity of the workplace movement.

**Capitalizing on National Events in the Larger Gay and Lesbian Movement**

In 1994 a few friends who were active in the gay employee networks at their New York- and Connecticut-based companies began discussing the upcoming Gay Games and
Stonewall 25 March, both scheduled to coincide in Manhattan. The Gay Games serve as the Olympics of the gay community and are intended to showcase its world-class athletes. The Stonewall 25 March was organized to honor the 25th anniversary of the riots that erupted on the night of June 27, 1969, outside the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar that had been raided one too many times by police. Considered a watershed event, the rebellion gave rise to the modern gay liberation movement (Adam 1995).

Realizing the vast networking potential that Stonewall 25 and the Gay Games held for workplace activists, this small circle of friends began strategizing. "We said this is a great opportunity where there will be a million gay, lesbian, and bisexual people," explained one of the activists, "but we knew we needed a space where people could exchange business cards and talk about what their companies were doing regarding gay and lesbian issues." The friends decided to rent the gym of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center in Manhattan. They called The Advocate, a national news magazine for the lesbian and gay community, which agreed to provide refreshments. The activists sent about 100 promotional flyers to those companies that, they had heard, had either a gay employee group or a diversity office. They also contacted NGLTF and posted announcements to various organizations and listserves on the Internet.

Based on the response they received before the networking event, organizers expected about 40 people and so planned to charge ten dollars a person to cover the cost of the rental space. Much to their surprise and delight, over 400 people showed up from over 170 companies. Organizers had asked two people to give a five-minute introduction: Ed Mickens, author of The 100 Best Companies for Gay Men and Lesbians (1994) and
editor of the corporate newsletter *Working It Out*, and Karen Wickery, co-founder of Digital Queers, an organization that helps gay and lesbian groups get on-line and mobilize via the Internet. Some employee networks also tried to set up information booths in the gym, but the size of the crowd made it difficult. One of the organizers explained, "It was a madhouse. People were standing on chairs and tables, and others were lined up outside the door because there wasn't enough room. It was a beautiful thing!" Commenting on the geographic diversity of the attendees, she continued, "We met gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from companies across the country....It was incredibly empowering."

Staff members from NGLTF asked people to fill out cards listing their contact information so that they could build a database of employee activist networks. Unfortunately, the cards were lost, but the informal connections that activists made at the event ensured that the networking continued. As one of the coordinators put it:

We as individuals had exchanged business cards and made so many contacts that, through informal networks and e-mail, we could let people know about the next NGLTF workplace conference. As a result, the conference got bigger and more diverse, and companies that normally wouldn't be represented there started coming. And local and regional umbrella groups started forming after that in places that didn't have them before....Through these regional organizations, we [workplace activists] gained some power and authority. Plus [the umbrella groups] help with job contacts!

Thus from the vision of a few activist friends grew coalitions of employee groups that drew wider circles of activists into local movement centers (Morris 1984). Boosting attendance at workplace conferences and generating a greater number of umbrella groups, this Manhattan event increased the size, diversity, and organizational connectedness of the workplace movement.
Given the declining organizational birth rate among the Fortune 1000 in the late '90s (see Chapter 3), some might question the future stability of the workplace movement. But this stance ignores the movement's extensive infrastructure, which consists not only of numerous umbrella groups but also the workplace projects of the two largest gay rights organizations in the country. These support systems help buttress the workplace movement, thereby ensuring its staying power in the decades to come.

UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS: OPENING UP NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AND STRENGTHENING MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

By umbrella groups, I mean coalitions of gay employee networks from multiple institutional settings. Some of these interorganizational networks began as informal get-togethers and largely remain as such, while others are structured more formally. Whether local, regional, or national, these umbrella groups provide open channels for the exchange of information and the sharing of strategies and tactics. They also build solidarity among widely dispersed activists, offering a space where individuals can meet outside of their workplaces and develop a sense of connection to the larger workplace movement.

From Local to Regional to National: Expanding Umbrellas

As already discussed, workplace conferences played a big part in establishing connections among employee activists. But because they typically occur only once a year, conferences provide only a narrow window for networking. Useful as these temporal opportunities are, their time-bound nature revealed the need for more frequent and geographically rooted means of connection. In their search for more routinized opportunities for networking, activists began to form umbrella groups. These coalitions
brought gay employee networks together at the local, regional, and national levels. Local umbrella groups provide the most frequent avenues for face-to-face networking since they consist of networks located in the same city or surrounding municipalities. There are numerous local umbrella groups scattered across the country.

One of the most active and highly visible of these local coalitions is AGOG (A Group of Groups), which formed in the San Francisco Bay area in June of 1994. Leaders of AGOG were instrumental in establishing a wider alliance of workplace groups called the Pride Collaborative. Signaling the further institutionalization of the workplace movement, the Collaborative has won the financial support of the United Way. Members of AGOG also became active in PROGRESS, which began in California in 1995 as the first state-wide coalition of gay employee groups.

More than 70 workplace networks attended the first PROGRESS Leadership Summit, where activists decided that the organization would be "dedicated to making the American workplace safe and equitable for lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual people."

To allow for more frequent and personal interaction among members, PROGRESS established chapters, referred to as regionals, in places such as San Diego, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Francisco. Activists from several smaller cities joined forces to establish regionals in other areas such as Orange County, the Central Coast, and Lower Central Valley regions. Leaders describe regionals as "the backbone of the organization."

In the "PROGRESS Packs" that the organization distributes, a brochure lists some of the resources available to individuals, networks, and interested employers:
Documents on starting and running a network of les/bi/gay/trans coworkers in [the] workplace. Examples of corporate nondiscrimination policies and how they were achieved. Diversity Training Curricula. Manuals and examples of Domestic Partners Benefits organizing. A Quarterly Newsletter and pamphlets on timely issues. Website including domestic partner database and reference library. A library of information including: articles and books on les/bi/gay/trans workplace issues.

Other resources include a speakers' bureau and a mentoring program, which "links emerging Employee Resource Groups with well-established ones to assist in their development and growth." A referral service provides lists of diversity and benefits consultants, community and legal service organizations, and other regional and local employee networks.

Leaders of PROGRESS are particularly proud of the organization's annual Leadership Summit, which offers activists an opportunity to "network with representatives from other employee resource groups, learn management and leadership skills, and explore models of working together and building bridges." Attempting to expand the reach of PROGRESS and tap an "underorganized" region of the country, organizers chose Dallas, Texas, as the site for the third annual Leadership Summit in March of 1998. By then conference attendance had grown so large and organizationally diverse that leaders instituted two tracks to accommodate "both the novice and experienced leader."

As additional umbrella groups emerged at the local and regional levels, key activists in the workplace movement began to discuss the formation of a national umbrella organization. Seeking wider input, they decided to hold a day-long organizational and brainstorming meeting at the NGLTF Creating Change conference in the spring of 1996. While the conference itself was not focused on the workplace, the "workplace room" was
packed with over 50 people and eventually moved to a larger space as others dropped in throughout the day. At the meeting, representatives of gay employee networks from across the country debated the feasibility and purpose of a national federation. Those present eventually agreed that, aside from increasing the visibility of the workplace movement, a national organization would be taken more seriously by corporate and government elites. Reconvening after splitting into smaller brainstorming groups, activists then came to a consensus about mission, structure, and strategies.

Choosing the name COLLEAGUES, organizers quickly drew up a letter announcing the establishment of the organization. They distributed the letter to all conference participants and attached a survey to tap the interest of attendees and to gather recommendations for the resources that COLLEAGUES should provide. Noting that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered employee groups "are appearing everywhere....and making an impact far beyond the workplace," the letter explained the motivation behind COLLEAGUES: "We believe the time is right for one organization to service the needs of all LGBT employee efforts to end discrimination in the workplace."

Although a cause for much heated debate, organizers made a strategic decision to structure the organization on the basis of a corporate model. Describing the purpose and form that the national umbrella group would take, the letter read:

COLLEAGUES is more than another national organization. Our vision is to have this organization be a "For Profit" venture that incorporates and sells shares to LGBT groups and individuals. As the organization succeeds, so [do] its customers and shareholders. COLLEAGUES will offer many products and services, such as kits on "How to start a LGBT employee group, tips to writing your constitution and bylaws, and holding National Professional Development conferences." Our
desire is to fill a gap in the services and products needed to insure the success of achieving a fair and SAFE workplace for everyone!

In 1998, COLLEAGUES took over responsibility for the annual Out and Equal national workplace conference, which had previously been coordinated under the auspices of NGLTF. Deciding to combine the Out and Equal conference and the PROGRESS Leadership Summit, organizers held the first annual Out & Equal Leadership Summit in October of 1999. Held in Atlanta, the national conference theme was "Workplace Equality in the New Millennium." Attendees had a choice among tracks for individual activists, gay employee networks, and human resource professionals.

While many other local and regional umbrella groups have formed across the country, the cases I selected here document a typical developmental process. They also provide a good sample of the types of resources and services that workplace coalitions provide to individual activists, networks, and employers. Whether employee groups join local, regional, or national coalitions, survey data show that such participation significantly improves their chances of winning gay-inclusive policies. For example, 58 percent of the corporate networks that belong to one or more umbrella groups succeeded in obtaining equitable benefits compared to only 33 percent of the networks that were not coalition participants.

**Umbrella Groups as Social Movement Abeyance Structures: Weathering the Storms in the Political and Institutional Environments**

In addition to facilitating favorable policy outcomes (Staggenborg 1995), umbrella groups provide ongoing support to those networks that have been less successful in their fight for equality at work. As abeyance structures (Taylor 1989), umbrella groups help
employee activists persevere against the forces of corporate inertia and internal backlash. They also help challengers withstand hostile conditions in the wider institutional and sociopolitical environments. Thus as employee networks join forces across cities, states, and wider geographic regions, they strengthen the infrastructure and safeguard the survival of the workplace movement as a whole.

Taylor's (1989) conceptualization of abeyance structures has contributed greatly to the scholarly understanding of social movement continuity. Drawing on her and Leila Rupp's (1987) study of the American women's rights movement during the "doldrum" years, Taylor explains how abeyance structures help mass movements survive amidst "a nonreceptive political and social environment" ([1989] 1993:436). Although usually applied to movements that face tightened political opportunities at the macro-level, Taylor's framework can be fruitfully extended to meso-level restrictions that challengers face in their more immediate institutional surroundings. Taking both of these levels into account, I argue that umbrella groups function as abeyance structures in two spheres of contention. They shelter employee networks in the face of a hostile corporate or institutional climate; and they sustain the workplace movement as a whole during bouts of stormy weather in the wider sociopolitical environment.

Umbrella groups keep hope alive even among networks whose struggle for equitable policies has stretched over the course of a decade, with nary a victory in sight. As Taylor explains, abeyance structures help movements endure by "promoting the survival of activist networks, sustaining a repertoire of goals and tactics, and promoting a collective identity that offers participants a sense of mission and moral purpose" ([1989] 145
1993:436). Fulfilling all of these functions, umbrella groups assure that the workplace movement will carry on despite repeated disappointments and setbacks.

In addition to the specialized skills they offer activists, these multi-network organizations serve another important abeyance function. Through their participation in umbrella groups, activists build a social movement culture that provides meaning, ideological justification, and affective support for their social change efforts (Taylor 1989). Though largely intangible, these cultural resources are crucial for sustaining activist commitment (McAdam 1994). They help individuals continue with the hard and risky work of challenging the status quo, even when the established order seem impervious to change.

Participants in umbrella groups engage in a wide variety of culture-building activities. Depending on the geographic scope of the workplace coalition, members might meet for happy hour or hold "pride power breakfasts," host holiday parties with humorous skits and celebratory awards, or use workplace conferences as opportunities for renewing long-distance friendships or rekindling old flames. Although many individual networks also create strong activist subcultures (McAdam 1994) in their own companies, umbrella groups help to construct a diffuse yet cohesive movement culture that spans a wider social movement community (Buechler 1990). By strengthening the bonds among and between individual activists and employee networks, and by fulfilling important symbolic and expressive functions (Taylor 1989), this culture nourishes the lifeblood of the workplace movement. In so doing, it extends the movement's longevity and fortifies its power to effect change in workplaces across the country.
Summary. As the interorganizational linkages among employee activists multiplied and grew increasingly dense in the early to mid '90s, the workplace movement gained a stronger foothold on the institutional landscape. Drawing on the resources and tools provided by newly available communication technologies, early workplace conferences, and the workplace projects of national gay rights organizations, activists built a sturdy infrastructure consisting of expansive virtual networks as well as local, regional, and national umbrella groups. This infrastructure has helped to sustain the movement amidst hostile conditions in the corporate and sociopolitical climates. Of course, the environment does not simply pose obstacles for organizational challengers; it can also provide considerable aid.

I thus turn now to the contextual conditions that constitute favorable institutional opportunities for workplace activists. In Chapters 5 and 6, I present what I call a multilevel *institutional opportunity framework*. Focusing on the multiple and nested environments in which activist networks are embedded, I highlight the beneficial impact of various elements in the corporate, organizational field, and wider sociopolitical arenas. While I have concentrated thus far on the emergence and development of the workplace movement, the remainder of the dissertation focuses on the institutional and movement processes that facilitate policy success, particularly the adoption of equitable benefits.
CHAPTER 5
THE IMPACT OF MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON POLICY OUTCOMES: SOCIOPOLITICAL AND FIELD-LEVEL PROCESSES

In the next two chapters I delineate the elements of a multilevel institutional opportunity framework in order to highlight the contextual conditions that facilitate favorable policy outcomes for institutional activists. Borne from the fruitful synthesis of a neoinstitutional perspective on organizational change and a political opportunity approach to social movements, the theoretical model presented here offers a systematic framework for understanding how the multiple and heterogeneous environments of challengers can aid and/or constrain the fight for institutional transformation. Taking into account the "nested" environments of challengers (Meyer 19XX), or the multiple "institutional spheres" in which power relations get played out (Fligstein 1991), I examine the sociopolitical, field, and organizational settings of activist networks. For each of these institutional spheres, I lay out the key structural and processual elements that operate as institutional opportunities for challengers and thereby facilitate gay-inclusive policy change, particularly the adoption of domestic partner benefits.

In this chapter, which focuses on macro-level institutional opportunities, I identify three isomorphic processes that operate in the sociopolitical and organizational field
environments to promote the diffusion of gay-inclusive policy innovations. Adapting
DiMaggio and Powell's (1991b) model of isomorphic change mechanisms, I conceptualize
the following processes as institutional opportunities: coercive isomorphism, which stems
from legal and political pressures such as nondiscrimination statutes, lawsuits, or boycotts;
mimetic isomorphism, which originates from field-level influences such as benchmarking
and intercorporate employee transfers; and normative isomorphism, which results from
professionalization, or the establishment of legitimating standards, a cognitive knowledge
base, and intercorporate networks of professionals.

In the next chapter, I adapt Tarrow's (1996, 1998) state-centered political process
approach and the new literature on cultural opportunities (McAdam 1994; Johnston and
Klandermans 1995; Taylor 1996) to delineate the proximate or meso-level institutional
opportunities that exist within the immediate environment of institutional activists. More
specifically, I focus on the facilitative impact of four key elements in the target
organization itself (here, the corporation). These components constitute challengers'
organizational-level opportunities: structural templates that provide access to decision-
makers and to institutional resources; organizational realignments that bring more
receptive elites or organizations into the issue domain; allies who provide assistance as
individuals or as coalition partners; and cultural supports such as a diversity-embracing
corporate culture or, among elites, preexisting personal ties and "punctuating" experiences
that foster empathetic understanding of challengers.
SOCIOPOLITICAL AND FIELD-LEVEL OPPORTUNITIES: THE IMPACT OF ISOMORPHIC CHANGE MECHANISMS

A focal concern of new institutional theory centers on how organizations come to resemble each other in form and policy or, more specifically, "how groups of firms develop shared beliefs, structures, practices, strategies, and networks of relations" (Lant and Baum 1995:16). Institutional scholars attribute this "homogenization" outcome to isomorphism, which DiMaggio and Powell (1991b:66) define as "a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions." Drawing on the "institutionalization mechanisms" (Lant and Baum 1995) delineated by DiMaggio and Powell (1991b), I discuss the role that isomorphic processes play in the diffusion of gay-inclusive policies among Fortune 1000 companies. These isomorphic change mechanisms function as macro-level institutional opportunities in that challengers are more likely to succeed when their target organization also faces external pressures that encourage inclusive policies. I turn now to a consideration of the coercive, mimetic, and normative processes that constitute favorable institutional opportunities for gay employee networks.

COERCIVE ISOMORPHISM AS INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Coercive isomorphism refers to formal and informal pressures that are placed on organizations by the state and by expectations in the wider sociopolitical and cultural environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). With regard to the struggle for worker rights, the legal and political environment can exert direct or indirect influence on organizations. Subjected to such pressures, organizations may adopt new policies to
demonstrate compliance or good faith and thus obtain legitimacy in the eyes of the state, other organizations, and the public (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Dobbin et al. 1993; Chaves 1997). For example, scholars have found that organizations closer to the public sphere, such as companies with federal contracts or firms located in heavily regulated industries, are more vulnerable to governmental scrutiny and hence more likely to have been early adopters of due process, equal employment opportunity, and affirmative action policies (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Dobbin et al. 1988; Edelman 1990, 1992; Sutton and Dobbin 1996; Dobbin and Sutton 1998).

The adoption of domestic partner benefits, however, presents an interesting theoretical and empirical challenge to this literature in that companies have instituted these changes in the absence of any federal, state, or local legislation that would mandate equitable benefits. The first of only a handful of exceptions to this pattern is San Francisco's 1997 Equal Benefits Ordinance, which will be discussed below. Moreover, other forms of gay-inclusive policy change, such as protections against employment discrimination, are diffusing far more rapidly in the corporate world than in the state arena. Gay men and lesbians have no legal protections against private-sector job discrimination outside of 11 states (CA, CT, HI, MA, MN, NH, NJ, NV, RI, VT, and WI), 90 cities, and 15 counties (HRC 2000b). In contrast, over 50 percent of Fortune 500 companies include sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policies (HRC 2000c).

The results of this study therefore contradict institutionalist arguments that locate the source of organizational change in exogenous shocks, such as new government mandates or shifts in regulatory enforcement (Fligstein 1991; Powell 1991). In the early
to mid nineties, major corporations began extending benefits to domestic partners in the absence of any direct legal pressure whatsoever. Nonetheless, the first exception to this pattern clearly demonstrates the strong influence that coercive pressure can have on corporate policies.

**The Impact of the Country's First Equal Benefits Mandate**

In June of 1997, San Francisco's Equal Benefits Ordinance took effect. Breaking ground as the first such law in the country, the ordinance requires employers with city contracts to provide the same health-care benefits to domestic partners that are already offered to the spouses of married employees (Curiel 1997). As documented in HRC's recent report entitled *The State of the Workplace*, San Francisco's 1997 ordinance had a "profound impact on the spread of domestic partner benefits" (Mills and Herrschaft 1999:19). By the end of 1996 only 287 employers in the corporate, university, and government sectors had adopted equitable benefits (HRC 1999b). In 1997 that number shot up to over 1500, with the vast majority of new adopters being employers with city contracts (Mills and Herrschaft 1999).

As noted by the authors of the HRC report, San Francisco's law accounted for "1228 of the 1281 employers that added benefits in 1997, 882 of the 964 employers that added benefits in 1998 and 58 of the 98 employers adding benefits [as of early August] 1999" (p. 19). In proportional terms, legal mandate accounted for 96 percent of new adoptions in 1997, 91 percent in 1998, and 59 percent in the first seven months of 1999. Of the 3402 employers that currently offer equitable benefits (as of April 20, 2000), 2612, or 77 percent, did so in order to comply with the ordinance (HRC 2000c).
Although many of the complying employers are small firms located in California (Mills and Herrschaft 1999), the large corporations that extended their policies in response to the law are beginning to have a ripple effect in their industries (HRC 2000c). For example, in late July 1999, following a partial loss in its court battle over the ordinance, United Airlines became the first company in the industry to offer equitable benefits to the partners of gay and lesbian employees. Within ten days, although not subject to the ordinance, both American Airlines and US Airways adopted the benefits as well (HRC 1999a). A few months later, Continental extended its policy to the partners of flight attendants (HRC 2000d).

Thus even when coercive pressures are applied to only one company, that organization's response can soon have mimetic effects in the wider organizational field, as others adopt equitable benefits not by force of law but rather to remain competitive with the original adopter. As explained by HRC's Education Director, Kim Mills, "Even without the San Francisco law, we were seeing an average of two employers a week instituting domestic partner coverage, up from one a week in the first half of the 1990s....[But] the San Francisco law has led to a rapid acceleration of this trend, and a domino effect across market sectors and industries" (HRC 1999d:4).

Of course, firms do not simply respond passively to coercive pressures. Industry and trade associations, corporate lobbyists, and political action committees all represent collective efforts to effect legislation, regulatory policies, and mechanisms of enforcement (Wilson 1980; Miles 1982; Noll 1985; Kaplan and Harrison 1993; as cited in Scott 1995). Companies also use the courts to fight measures that corporate elites see as threatening to
their interests (Edelman and Suchman 1997). Thus it was that United Airlines, represented by the Air Transport Association, balked at San Francisco's Equal Benefits Ordinance and filed a lawsuit against the city (E. Epstein 1999). The largely unsuccessful legal challenge cleared the way for Seattle and Los Angeles to pass their own versions of the law in November 1999 (DataLounge 1999c). The first to follow San Francisco's lead, these two cities may soon be joined by Portland and Chicago.

The Softer Side of Coercive Isomorphism: Normative Impacts of the Legal Environment

The exponential increase in the number of benefits adopters clearly reveals the power of coercive isomorphism. But outside the reach of San Francisco's ordinance and recent moves by Seattle and Los Angeles, gay and lesbian employees struggle for equitable benefits without the aid of government mandate. Nonetheless, new institutionalists predict that other more diffuse changes in the legal environment can have a strong effect on organizational policies (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott 1995). As Edelman (1990:1403) explains, "The legal environment can engender significant change in the protection of employees' rights, even in the absence of any legal rules that directly mandate such change." This is because, as Edelman and Suchman (1997) argue, the legal environment consists not simply of court rulings or specific laws that regulate the policies and practices of organizations. It also encompasses broader and more symbolic shifts in the socio-legal arena.

Rather than focusing solely on coercive aspects of the law, neoinstitutionalist perspectives point to the wider normative impact of the legal environment. It is in this latter sense that "organizations look to the law for normative and cognitive guidance, as
they seek their place in a socially constructed cultural reality" (Edleman and Suchman 1997:482). This approach, known as the normative cultural alternative, highlights "organizations' subtle but profound responsiveness to legal ideals, norms, forms, and categories" (p. 493).

Drawing on this normative cultural approach, I draw out three elements in the legal environment that, while not requiring private employers to adopt equitable benefits, nonetheless provide normative and symbolic support for doing so. In particular, I focus on the impact of gay-inclusive anti-discrimination laws, city or state laws that provide domestic partner benefits to government employees, and city or state-wide domestic partner registries. Because they signal that gays and lesbians are deserving of equal rights and that their relationships are worthy of recognition, I conceptualize these measures as institutional opportunities for employee activists. I hypothesized that challengers would be more likely to succeed if their corporations were headquartered in geopolitical locales that had adopted any of these measures.

Findings show that city or state laws that prohibit anti-gay employment discrimination have a significant impact on corporations' willingness to adopt equitable benefits. While 66 percent of companies located in gay-inclusive jurisdictions adopted domestic partner benefits (43 out of 65), only 22 percent of corporations in non-inclusive jurisdictions did so (7 out of 32). This difference is especially striking given the fact that laws against anti-gay employment discrimination do not apply to benefits packages. These findings would seem perplexing from a rational materialist theoretical perspective, which views organizations as "rational wealth maximizers" that "instrumentally invoke or evade
the law, in a strategic effort to...bring the largest possible payoff at the least possible cost" (Edelman and Suchman 1997:481-482).

In contrast, new institutional theorists who adopt a normative cultural approach to the law would find nothing surprising about my findings. As Edelman and Suchman (1997:495) explain, "culturalist theories of the regulatory environment place less emphasis on the role of legal sanctions...and more emphasis on the role of legal symbols in evoking desirable normative commitments. Regulatory law, in this view, is less a threat than a sermon." In other words, from a culturalist approach, the law is seen "as a source of symbol and meaning, rather than as a source of coercive contraint" (p. 495). Thus gay-inclusive nondiscrimination laws, though lacking any legally mandated provision for benefits, nonetheless facilitate favorable policy outcomes. By signifying that lesbians and gay men are worthy of equal treatment, these laws provide normative challenges to dominant cultural codes and to the "other-creating" processes that construct gays and lesbians as pathological or threatening and thus outside the "universe of obligation" (W. Gamson 1995:17).

Another indicator of a favorable institutional environment for organizational challengers is the passage of local or state laws that grant domestic partner benefits to city or state employees. Culturalist approaches would expect these laws to have a positive effect on corporate benefits adoption for the same reason that nondiscrimination laws do. Results bear out this prediction. Of those companies headquartered in cities or states that provide domestic partner benefits to government employees, 66 percent (31 out of 47)
followed suit for their own employees. In contrast, among firms located in regions that lacked such laws, only 43 percent of firms (21 out of 49) adopted the benefits.

A final indicator of a supportive normative environment for gay employee activists is the existence of city or state-wide domestic partner registries, which allow gay men and lesbians to officially record their relationships as committed partners. Inclusion in registries can sometimes bring tangible benefits such as hospital visitation rights or access to family discounts in local establishments. However, registries function primarily as symbolic recognition since they do not grant gay couples access to the multitude of legal, financial, and tax benefits that accompany heterosexual marriage. Nonetheless, the presence of registries has a significant impact on corporations' willingness to adopt inclusive benefits policies. Companies located in cities or states with domestic partner registries were far more likely to extend their policies than were firms in other locales, with 76 percent of the former (32 out of 42) versus only 35 percent of the latter (19 out of 54) offering the benefits.

City or state-wide domestic partner registries clearly constitute a favorable institutional opportunity for gay employee activists. This makes sense once we examine the rationalistic decision-making process of companies that are considering equitable benefits. According to my interviews, a frequent concern of reluctant corporate elites is how to determine eligibility so as to avoid fraudulent abuse by employees who are not truly involved in committed relationships. Although companies rarely ask heterosexual employees for their marriage licenses, virtually all employers that offer equitable benefits require a signed and notarized affidavit verifying that an employee and his or her partner
are in a financially interdependent and committed relationship and that they share a residence (Winfield and Spielman 1995). Since domestic partner registries can help alleviate elite concerns about fraud by providing a legally centralized means of documentation, it is not surprising that companies located in registry jurisdictions are far more likely to adopt equitable benefits.

While this interpretation seems to favor a rational materialist stance rather than a normative cultural one, I argue that both accounts offer important insights. Domestic partner registries clearly provide companies with a rational mechanism for the determination of benefits eligibility. At a more diffuse and symbolic but equally important level, registries also represent a wider cultural renegotiation that has resulted in expanded definitions of family. Thus while many lesbian and gay activists have long argued that "love makes a family," they are far more successful in winning tangible benefits from employers when the law provides a formal means of recognition for gay and lesbian couples.

External Activists as Agents of Coercive Isomorphic Change

With regard to coercive isomorphism, institutionalists have traditionally focused on the influence of the state and regulatory agencies, but more recently scholars have pointed to the "political costs" that firms may suffer as a result of "the increasing organization of ordinary citizens and the creation of networks of collective interest" (Mezias 1995:176; see also DiMaggio 1988). Mezias (1995) mentions that firms face internal pressure from employees and unions as well as external pressure from consumers, politicians, and government bureaucrats. Companies are highly cognizant of the negative "political
visibility" that can be generated by lawsuits, boycotts, or vocal employee demands (Mezias 1995:174).

While it is an important step forward for neoinstitutional scholars to acknowledge the role of mobilized constituencies as both internal and external agents of change, they offer no theoretical framework for understanding organizational transformation when the locus of change is internal rather than external to the firm (for an exception, see Chaves 1996, 1997). In Chapter 6 I correct for this blindspot by focusing on internal organizational opportunities and the role that employee activists can play in creating such favorable conditions. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, I confine my focus to coercive pressure originating from activists outside the corporate walls.

A queer turn of events. As discussed in an earlier chapter, gay employee groups often distance themselves from their radical peers on the streets. In some cases, however, corporate networks benefit directly from the more aggressive tactics of queer activists. In one rather interesting turn of events, for example, a west coast utility company sought help from its gay employee network after hearing that ACT UP might target the corporation for alleged homophobia. Not long before, employee activists had requested that the company endorse a 1991 gay rights bill that was pending in the state legislature. The corporation refused, but officials did authorize the use of a company truck in the local gay pride parade. At the request of the employee network, the company's weekly newsletter covered the pride events. Small and hazy, but still visible in one of the photos, was a poster supporting the gay rights bill, which network members had placed on the hood of the company truck. After the newsletter went out to every employee in the
country, members of the gay network were barraged with hate mail on the company's electronic bulletin board.

Although the vice president of human resources promised to discipline the harassing employees, he nevertheless emphasized that the network was not to engage in "unauthorized political activities," such as displaying a poster endorsing gay rights legislation. But the actions of the network suddenly appeared rather benign once corporate officials caught wind of ACT UP's possible plans to target the company. In an ironic twist, management turned to the gay employee group for help in avoiding negative publicity. Afterward, according to one of the founders, the company was far more open to the concerns of the network. Shortly thereafter, for example, employee activists finally won gay-inclusive diversity training.

*The impact of boycotts on corporate policy.* Another source of coercive pressure that can facilitate favorable policy outcomes stems from boycotts of companies perceived to be anti-gay. After United Airlines filed a lawsuit against San Francisco's Equal Benefits Ordinance in 1997, lesbian and gay activists launched a major boycott. San Francisco-based Equal Benefits Advocates, which organized the campaign, created a Web site to spread the news. Buttons, stickers, and flyers emblazoned with the words "United Against United" appeared in numerous shops throughout the Castro, the city's famed gay and lesbian mecca. As part of the boycott, many burned their frequent flyer cards outside of the corporation's San Francisco offices (Raine 1999). In July of that year, demonstrators were arrested as they blocked the entrance to a downtown ticket office while dressed from head to toe in purple Tinky Winky costumes. The latter action was a flamboyant attempt
to both criticize United and poke fun at Jerry Falwell's claim that the popular character featured in the children's television program, "Teletubbies," was in fact gay because of his purple color, triangle-shaped antenna, and purse, which producers explained was a "magic bag."

After a two-year boycott, United announced in late July 1999 that it would offer the full range of domestic partner benefits. Some would argue that the decision came solely in response to a U.S. Court of Appeals ruling, which held that the company must offer soft benefits such as bereavement leave (E. Epstein 1999). Indeed, United announced its policy change on the same day that the decision was handed down. However, the ruling did not require the extension of health-care benefits, so it seems that activists can take at least partial credit for the company's decision to do so anyway. While a corporate spokesperson claimed that the San Francisco boycott "had no measurable impact on...tickets sold or number of flights," he acknowledged that the company "obviously...suffered in the community locally" (Raine 1999:B9).

Having pushed for the benefits from the inside for several years, United's gay employee network thus finally succeeded, but only after the company faced external pressure from both the courts and gay and lesbian consumers. Tellingly, the company now places full-page ads in national and local gay publications, where it proudly proclaims that it was the first airline to adopt a gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policy and the first to implement domestic partner benefits. Asked about the ads, a corporate spokesperson explained, "We recognize that the gay and lesbian community is a large market and there is a huge opportunity to market to them" (Raine 1999:B9).
Gay activist Jeff Sheehy, who helped draft the Equal Benefits Ordinance, was a co-organizer of the United boycott. Responding to questions about the boycott and the company's new advertising campaign, Sheehy commented, "Our goal was to demonstrate to the airline industry that we deserve to be treated equally. The fact that United is spending tens of thousands of dollars to trumpet the fact that they [now] treat their employees equally shows that there is some value in doing that" (Raine 1999:B9). Clearly, then, coercive pressure from the outside can provide tremendous aid to challengers on the inside. United's gay employee network can now celebrate its long fought, hard won battle and the impact that victory has had on others in the industry who quickly began to follow suit.

Did someone say boycott? Two can play that game. While activist successes create opportunities for later challengers, they can also spark mobilization of a countermovement (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Dugan 1999). From attempts to withdraw property-tax abatement to the threat or use of boycotts against inclusive companies, right-wing groups are seeking to undo the gains made by lesbian and gay employees. For example, through its publication of "The Homosexuality Report," the explicitly anti-gay American Family Association (AFA) helps its members keep close tabs on the adoption of gay-inclusive corporate policies. The organization calls for boycotts of gay-friendly employers and provides information on targeted companies. Using the Internet to publicize the campaigns to a wider audience, the AFA Web site contains a special section called the "Boycott Box" (La Salle 1997:11).
Key informants in the telecommunications case study believe that their company's longstanding refusal to adopt equitable benefits was due in large part to a right-wing boycott issued against the company for the gay-inclusive policies it already had. After the gay employee network convinced the company to sponsor the 1994 Gay Games, James Dobson, president of the right-wing organization Focus on the Family, urged members to call the CEO's response center to complain. Requesting a meeting with the CEO but instead winning an audience with the Vice President of Human Resources, Dobson attacked not only the company's sponsorship of the Gay Games, but also its support of GLUE, the gay employee network, and its gay-inclusive diversity training, which some business units made mandatory. Flexing his organizational muscle, Dobson cited Focus on the Family's membership figures and the large number of radio stations belonging to his avowedly anti-gay organization.

Later, the head of human resources flew to Colorado to meet with Dobson. Despite an "agreement" that he thought he had reached with Dobson, on a religious television network Dobson urged viewers not to use the company's long-distance services because of its gay-inclusive record. Donald Wildmon, president of the right-wing American Family Association, also called on his members to boycott the company. As explained by a former national co-chair of GLUE, it was "pretty scary there for several of the HR people" staffing the phones who had to listen to "radical right people calling in and sending in their torn up calling cards."

Tellingly, Wildmon issued the boycott in conjunction with the launching of the American Family Association's "Lifeline," which was marketed as a Christian long-
distance service. Advertisements for the service specifically criticized the company for calling itself "a company without closets" and for supporting the gay employee network. At that point in time, GLUE had been struggling for equitable benefits for approximately five years. After the boycott, it took another four years—and a new CEO—before gay and lesbian employees finally won their fight.

Of course, the impact of boycotts can be felt far beyond the walls of the targeted corporation. As is hoped for by those waging a boycott, news of such campaigns can also affect other companies by altering elites' perceptions of the apparent costs and benefits of inclusive policy change. Many of the executives I interviewed mentioned the highly publicized Southern Baptist boycott of Disney after it adopted equitable benefits in 1995. While several were quick to add that the boycott had no effect on Disney's profits, which in fact hit record-breaking levels, such boycotts can nevertheless plant fear in the hearts of corporate elites.

At one internationally known corporation, for example, the gay employee network had to fight hard to keep its officially recognized status. After hearing that the southern-based employer had granted corporate recognition to the network, several members of the company's Christian employee network complained, and the American Family Association threatened a boycott. In response, the company decided it should withdraw its recognition of the gay network. Members then requested help from Elizabeth Birch, Executive Director of HRC, the country's largest gay rights organization. A founder of the network explained Birch's successful plan to save the network and avoid a boycott:
Elizabeth Birch came in and spoke to senior management. She came up with an out for them: develop a Diversity Council that includes all the employee special interest groups, including us [the gay network], African Americans, other employees of color, and Christians. Because the Council became an umbrella group for all diversity groups, the company wasn't endorsing gays and lesbians.

Later, when the gay network presented their proposal for equitable benefits to senior management, members of the Christian network did not oppose it since the resolution was endorsed by the entire Diversity Council. The proposal nevertheless stalled when it reached the Board of Directors. Employee activists once again sought the aid of Elizabeth Birch. She offered to ask Coretta Scott King, a strong supporter of gay rights, to call a particular Board member whom they thought might be an ally. The plan was abandoned, however, after the gay employee group learned the reason for the holdup. As explained to the network by senior management, "The Southern Baptists told the company, 'We will boycott you if you do this.'"

Commenting on the gay network's previous emphasis on the profitability of inclusive policies, one of the founders lamented, "The business case gets complicated when you're talking about a boycott." As a result of the boycott threat, management told members of the gay network, "We'll not be the first [in the industry] to adopt the benefits, but we will be the second." The company remained true to its word, extending benefits to domestic partners less than a week after its first competitor did so. Aware of the fact that a boycott is more likely targeted against the first company in an industry to adopt equitable benefits, gay employee networks in the automotive industry are trying to persuade their "Big Three" employers to institute the benefits simultaneously. If the policy
changes were announced at the same time, the networks argue, the likelihood and
effectiveness of a boycott would be drastically reduced.

Lawsuits as Institutional Opportunity

As a coercive form of isomorphism, lawsuits brought against companies can also
affect elites' willingness to adopt gay-inclusive policies. The human resources director at a
consumer services corporation emphasized the fear of lawsuits as a driving force behind
her employer's decision to adopt equitable benefits. While acknowledging the work of the
gay employee network, she rated the threat of potential lawsuits as more important: "[The
company] is concerned with what employees are going to say. They could sue us, and
we're concerned with publicity. We don't want gays and lesbians to picket us at
headquarters." After being asked to rate a list of internal and external factors as to their
importance in influencing her company's decision to adopt gay-inclusive policies, she
commented as follows:

I realize now that it's not so internally driven. We're worried about what the
outside world will say and do to us. If one person says, "'You don't offer domestic
partner benefits, so I'll sue," the dollars can get big. We don't want the world to
say we did not do this for gay and lesbian employees. We realize that bad press
affects the bottom line.

Interestingly enough, however, her company did not adopt the benefits until
merging with another consumer services corporation that had already done so, at the
urging of its own gay employee network. Lesbian and gay employees at her company
were very aware of the fact that their merger partner had already instituted equitable
benefits, so the company's failure to do the same would have been fertile grounds for a
lawsuit. Another facilitating factor was the location of the merger partner's headquarters
in an east coast city with a very large lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. As explained by the director of human resources, "Like San Francisco, [their city] has a loud voice regarding gays and lesbians." Placing that statement in a larger context, she added, "We're big and visible, so we're sued at the drop of a hat."

Her company's high level of concern about the threat of litigation makes sense given its prior experiences with a highly publicized class action lawsuit. Over 20 years ago a group of women employees sued the company when it was still part of a much larger consumer services corporation. Commenting further on why her company decided to adopt gay-inclusive policies, she referred directly to this case: "There was a consent decree in the 1970s where [the company] paid millions and millions of dollars. We can be sued. And we don't want our shareholders to feel that that's a potential. Plus a lot of our shareholders are employees."

Shareholder Activism as the Newest Form of Coercive Pressure

While the above quote alludes to the indirect role that shareholders can play, sometimes their influence is far more direct. As a result of organizing work by lesbian and gay investors, shareholder activism has become an important source of coercive pressure that can facilitate favorable policy outcomes for internal challengers. While shareholder activism has been a strategy of socially concerned investors for over 30 years, it wasn't until the infamous Cracker Barrel incident that gays and lesbians adopted this tactic to fight for equality in corporate America (Alpern 1999). As discussed in Chapter 2, in 1991 Cracker Barrel announced its blatantly anti-gay employment policy. Around the same time, activist-minded investors formed the Wall Street Project in order to encourage gay-
affirmative shareholder activism among individual and institutional investors. Commenting on the impact of Cracker Barrel's widely publicized move, the director of the Wall Street Project explained, "We didn't set out to target [the company]. But just as we were forming the group, Cracker Barrel, as if on cue, gave us the perfect issue to mobilize support" (Bain 1992b:8).

Unlike the earlier divestiture model of the anti-apartheid movement, the Wall Street Project recommended that investors purchase Cracker Barrel stock in order to lend support to inclusive shareholder resolutions. Now called the Equality Project, the organization monitors corporate policies on sexual orientation, conducts workshops to persuade corporate adoption of gay-inclusive policies, disseminates information to the media, sponsors shareholder actions, and holds public demonstrations against particularly recalcitrant employers (Equality Project 1999). The Project aims for companies worldwide to sign on to seven "Equality Principles," which include the following "ethical guidelines": written nondiscrimination policies that explicitly include sexual orientation; the distribution of said policies to all employees and the monitoring of company-wide compliance by a senior corporate official; equal recognition of all employee groups; diversity training that covers sexual orientation issues; equitable benefits for domestic partners; marketing policies that include advertising in gay publications and that prohibit negative stereotypes; and policies against discrimination in the sale of goods and services (Equality Project 1999).

While shareholder actions are rarely successful in terms of actual adoption, activists consider the mere placement of their issue on the proxy ballot as a positive
outcome given the visibility and awareness that it generates (Proffitt and Sacks 1999). And at times, such actions bring tangible policy changes. In response to a shareholder resolution coordinated in part by the Equality Project, General Electric announced in March 2000 that it would add sexual orientation to both its nondiscrimination policy and diversity training program (HRC 2000e).

The Equality Project is targeting five other corporations this year, including ExxonMobil. In December 1999 the newly merged company nullified Mobil's gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policy and rescinded its domestic partner benefits. This reversal has earned ExxonMobil the ignominious distinction as the first and only Fortune 500 company to have reversed its equitable benefits policy. While the Equality Project lost its fight against Exxon in 1999, shareholder activists were successful that year in convincing McDonald's Corporation to amend its nondiscrimination policy to include sexual orientation (HRC 2000e). The fast-food empire's gay employee network had been fighting for such inclusion since 1995. McDonald's agreed to the policy change in order to avoid a shareholder proxy initiative by the Seattle-based Pride Foundation, which had targeted General Electric as well.

Summary. As demonstrated above, coercive isomorphic pressures serve as important institutional opportunities for internal challengers. Employee activists have a far greater chance of winning equitable policies when their companies are subject to gay-inclusive statutes, boycotts, or lawsuits. Nonetheless, it was a rarity for the executives I interviewed to acknowledge the impact of coercive pressures such as legislation. It was far more likely that they would rationalize the adoption of gay-inclusive policies as "good

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for the bottom line." Even when companies clearly change their policies in response to legislation, their stated rationale typically draws on efficiency arguments. For example, when a west-coast bank adopted equitable benefits only after it was mandated to so by the San Francisco Equal Benefits Ordinance of 1997, a corporate spokesperson claimed, "We feel the San Francisco ordinance was a factor in our decision-making process, but only one factor." Instead, he emphasized that "the benefits package is also expected to boost worker morale and productivity."

This supports the findings of institutionalists Dobbin and Sutton (1998), who report that human resource professionals began to justify the creation of corporate departments for AA, EEO, safety, and benefits not as measures of compliance to civil rights laws. Instead, they rationalized these structures as economically beneficial given their potential for increasing employee productivity and loyalty. Dobbin and Sutton describe this shift in rationale as the "drift toward efficiency" (p. 443). What institutionalists have failed to investigate, however, is the role that activists themselves play in convincing corporate elites that inclusive policies are rationally beneficial. In the case of gay-inclusive policy adoption, the "drift toward efficiency" in elite justifications is often a reflection of activists' own strategic framing, a point that will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

MIMETIC ISOMORPHISM AS INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Mimetic isomorphism refers to a process of imitation or modeling whereby organizations mimic the policies, practices, and structures of other organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). This source of change stems from the "tendency of
administrators to emulate apparently successful forms" (Brint and Karabel 1991:343).

Fligstein (1991) argues, for example, that firms engage in extensive monitoring of each other "by reading the business press, which is usually quick to note major organizational changes, attending trade meetings, and using other sources of information" (pp. 316-317).

Haveman (1993) found that large firms look especially to other large firms but that all organizations, regardless of size or profitability, rely on highly profitable organizations as role models. The adoption of a particular practice by certain firms can therefore have "spearheading effects" on others (Thornton 1995:210), who may then follow suit either to remain competitive or to be seen as legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b; Fligstein 1991; Borum and Westenholz 1995). In playing "follow the leader" (Haveman 1993), waves of later adapters both reveal and contribute to a "bandwagon effect" (Thornton 1995:210). Fligstein (1991) captures the duality of this process when he states, "What is an effect at one time point can be a cause at another" (p. 317; see also Powell 1991).

In considering the sources of mimetic isomorphic change, institutionalists attend to benchmarking and other field-level influences such as industry associations, consulting firms, and intercorporate career mobility (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). These factors encourage organizations to model their structures and policies after leaders in the field.

Emphasizing the importance of benchmarking, a diversity consultant and manager of employee networks at an east coast financial services provider commented on the factors that led to her company's adoption of equitable benefits. In addition to internal pressure from the gay employee network, she explained that her company "conducts a lot of
Clear evidence of mimetic effects can be found in multiple industries. For example, once United Airlines extended benefits to domestic partners in July of 1999, in less than a week American Airlines did the same, followed four days later by US Airways (HRC 1999a). Soon thereafter, Continental came on board. Likewise, after Wells Fargo and Bank of America adopted equitable benefits in 1998 to comply with San Francisco's Equal Benefits Ordinance, soon Bankers Trust, BankBoston, and Chase Manhattan extended their policies as well, although they were not obligated to do so by law (Mills and Herrschaft 1999). This same pattern held in the oil industry, with Chevron extending benefits in compliance with the city's ordinance, followed by Shell, Mobil, and BP Amoco, which were not legally required to do so (ibid). As mentioned above, Mobil's policy was later rescinded after the company merged with Exxon in November 1999 (Wright 2000). Nonetheless, these examples show that the response of particular companies to coercive pressures can soon have ripple effects throughout an industry.

These mimetic effects are readily apparent in Figure 5.1 below. From 1991 to 1996, the Fortune 1000 averaged only 4.5 new adopters per year. In 1997, the year that San Francisco's ordinance took effect, the number of new adopters rose to 11. That number shot up to 29 new adopters the following year, as competitors of the complying companies began to jump on board even in the absence of legal mandate. While many of these same employers had also faced pressure from gay employee networks, it is telling that some apparently changed their policies without any internal prodding.
Figure 5.1: The Adoption of Domestic Partner Benefits Among the Fortune 1000 by Year
The Power of Benchmarking in the Absence of a Gay Employee Network

Some decision-makers also keep a close eye on the policies and practices of their corporate customers (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). The transportation case study provides a good example. When asked why her conservative, southern-based company adopted gay-inclusive diversity training in the absence of any gay employee network, the director of corporate diversity explained:

It was a sign of the times...other companies were doing it. There was just conversation about it going on....Our focus has always been more around what are other companies doing....When you look at some of our [corporate] customers...you [need to] know where they stand on issues like this [because] you don't want to be totally off-center, so to speak.

The corporate customers she referred to were a high-tech firm and an imaging company, both of which have outstanding records with regard to gay-inclusive policies.

The campaign for equitable benefits at this transportation company provides a powerful example of the importance of benchmarking. In the absence of a gay employee network, the director of corporate diversity dedicated herself to the issue of equitable benefits. She was joined by a gay manager who, without knowing of her commitment, had "decided to take a stand to see if he could get the company to adopt the benefits." The manager contacted NGLTF and HRC for information on the number of companies with equitable benefits and prepared a spreadsheet detailing the expected costs. With data in hand, the two of them approached the vice president of benefits. He was very supportive given the low projected cost and agreed to help them develop a presentation for the executive vice president of human resources.
In preparation, they each took responsibility for benchmarking a certain number of companies. The manager used the data he obtained from NGLTF and HRC, while the diversity director consulted the Corporate Advisory Council, an organization that provides research and benchmarking services. The three of them paid close attention to companies that were "sort of conservative like [their company], especially oil companies and financial institutions." Although they did end up including some entertainment and high-tech companies, they tried to avoid them "because they've already been sort of ahead of the curve on these issues."

Choosing to gather in-depth information on 14 corporations, the team found that ten of the corporations had equitable benefits while four did not. Using the benchmarking data they had gathered, they were able to allay concerns over cost by showing that enrollment is "typically less than one percent of the employee population." Their research also made clear that, except for Disney, no one experienced an organized backlash following the announcement of equitable benefits.

Interlocking directorates also factored highly in their choice of benchmarking targets. They were particularly interested in companies represented on the Board of Directors and those corporations for which the CEO was a Board member. "I've learned here...that benchmarking is very important," explained the corporate diversity director. "Our CEO loves benchmarking," especially with those firms that are linked to the company via interlocking directorates. These intercorporate ties, which she described as "off the charts" in their level of importance, ended up playing a critical role in the process.
In the spring of 1998, the diversity director presented to the Board's three-member Committee on Directors in Corporate Responsibility, which consisted of a man who is a close advisor to President Clinton, the CEO of a publishing company that had already adopted equitable benefits, and a woman from a high-powered law firm in Washington, D.C. When the diversity director told them that the company was "moving aggressively toward domestic partner benefits," the reaction from the two men on the committee was, "I can't believe you guys haven't already done that." In retrospect, the director commented, "That I think was what really helped me." Shortly thereafter, during the last stage of the process, the CEO raised this same point in discussions with his "cabinet." He explained to the members of the executive management committee that the Board's committee on corporate responsibility was "more than supportive" of equitable benefits.

That summer, the corporation decided to extend its policy to domestic partners, the first in the industry to do so. Placing the policy change in a larger context, the corporate diversity director explained, "The transportation industry is very conservative and very male-dominated, so this is a big deal." Indeed, she pointed to the "macho" environment of the company itself as the reason that the two high-level gay employees she knew remained closeted at work. To further underline the significance of her company's decision, she cited the reaction of the noon-time prayer group she belongs to at work, whose disapproval of equitable benefits mirrored that of the general employee population. An earlier survey of employees showed "overwhelming opposition" to benefits for both gay and unmarried heterosexual couples. "They'll get over it," she quipped. "This is just such a macho organization, and I know it's going to take us a long time to get there, but I
feel that we just have to start making steps toward making this a more inclusive environment."

The Mimetic Impact of Intercorporate Career Mobility

Aside from benchmarking, another source of mimetic isomorphism stems from personnel flows or intercorporate career mobility (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). Mezias (1995), for example, found that personnel turnover is a significant source of diffusion for organizational innovations. My findings also suggest that in highly competitive environments and in industries in which career tracks entail movement from one firm to another, once an industry leader grants domestic partner benefits, many others follow suit in order to compete for the best talent in the field. This was the case in the entertainment and high-tech industries. As the earliest adopters of equitable benefits, they still remain the most thoroughly gay-inclusive industries in the corporate world. It is important to remember, however, that this swift adoption wave—or rapid mimetic isomorphism—was initiated by lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees who either mobilized within their companies (in the high-tech case) or across the industry (in entertainment). In the latter case, leading gay figures in the entertainment industry formed an organization called Hollywood Supports.

In the early 1990s, Hollywood Supports began working tirelessly to disseminate information on why equitable benefits should be adopted and how to do so. Although primarily focused on the entertainment industry in its early years, Hollywood Supports now provides resources to companies across corporate America. The organization has a task force that concentrates on educating corporate decision-makers. As explained in
informational literature, members of the task force set up meetings with executives "to explain and discuss the issues involved in implementing [domestic partner] coverage."

Reflecting the widespread support for gay rights in the entertainment industry, the organization's Board of Trustees numbers approximately 150. The names of Board members, which appear on all organizational letterhead, include such well known figures as David Geffen, Whoopi Goldberg, Goldie Hawn, Spike Lee, Bette Midler, Jack Nicholson, and Steven Spielberg.

Supplementing the internal activism of several gay employee networks, Hollywood Supports was highly successful in the entertainment industry, winning equitable benefits among virtually all of the major players. The fact that the organization has been less persuasive in generating a wave of adoptions in other industries may be due in part to the factors discussed above. If these other fields are less competitive or intercorporate mobility is less common, then mimetic isomorphic change would proceed more slowly. Though beyond the scope of this study, future investigations should put this institutionalist argument to empirical test.

**The Structuration of Organizational Fields**

Attending to variability in the extent and pace of institutionalization, new institutional scholars argue that innovations will diffuse most rapidly among those organizational fields that are more highly "structurated." Driven by competition, state processes, and professionalization, structuration of an organizational field entails the establishment of frequent interaction among organizations and a widely recognized status hierarchy among leading firms and peripheral ones (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b:65).
Thornton (1995) found, for example, that new policies and practices will spread more quickly in those fields where "status competition" is more evident. Trade newsletters and other industry publications heighten awareness of such status hierarchies by focusing on "competitive discourse among dominant players in the field" (Thornton 1995:221). These publications fuel mimetic isomorphism because they facilitate and encourage benchmarking, where organizations keep tabs on the policies and practices of their competitors and others in the wider business world.

While new institutionalists have not yet explored the impact of the Internet on the structuration of organizational fields, I argue that this new communication technology greatly facilitates benchmarking and thus should contribute to mimetic change. This is because the Internet can contribute to the structuration of a field and to the diffusion of innovations across fields by facilitating "mutual awareness" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b) among organizations as to the policies and practices that each is adopting. I turn now to a consideration of a new financially-oriented web site focused on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues, and I discuss its potential impact on the importance that corporate elites place on benchmarking.

The Internet's Impact on the Salience of Benchmarking

I have previously focused on HRC's WorkNet site since it provides an exemplary overview and convenient compilation of the types of workplace information available on the Internet. Even more relevant to the issue of mimetic isomorphism is the recent emergence of another Web site called "gfn.com." Created in April 1998 by the Gay Financial Network, the site provides a wide variety of tools, including on-line trading and
banking, financial information, and investment services (Chalfant 1998). It also contains a section called "gfn.com 500" that focuses on companies listed in the Standard and Poor 500. Complete with search capabilities, the site allows users to compare and contrast corporations on the basis of their gay-related policy records, including areas such as nondiscrimination policies, diversity training, domestic partner benefits, and marketing to the gay and lesbian community. It also includes the name of the company's gay and lesbian employee organization, if applicable.

This at-your-fingertips benchmarking engine, catered to socially concerned and financially savvy users, not only provides an invaluable (and free) resource but also lends "empirical credibility" (Snow and Benford 1988, 1992) to the profits-oriented framing strategies of workplace activists. The mere existence of the site makes clear that many individuals do indeed consider a company's record on gay and lesbian issues when choosing where to spend and invest their money, time, and talent. In addition to providing detailed financial information on each company, the site publicizes major corporations' commitment (or lack thereof) to gay-inclusive policies in order to inform the decisions of investors and consumers, not to mention prospective job-seekers and employee activists. The site also allows corporate executives to keep close tabs on the personnel, training, benefits, and marketing policies of the nation's top companies generally and their competitors in particular.

Given the free and easily accessible benchmarking services provided by gfn.com, this financially-oriented Web site has the potential to increase the importance that elites place on other companies' policies. Survey and interview data reveal that corporate elites
vary in terms of how much weight they place on the policy stance of other employers when making decisions about their own policies. This weighting in turn affects the willingness of firms to adopt equitable benefits. For example, those firms that rate the policies of their competitors as very important in their decision-making process are far more likely to institute equitable benefits than those companies that rank the policies of their competitors as only somewhat or not at all important. The proportion of adopters in the first category is 86 percent, compared to only 44 percent in the latter. Similarly, those companies that rate the policies of other Fortune 1000 companies as very important are more likely to extend benefits than those firms that rank the policies of the Fortune 1000 as only somewhat or not at all important. The proportion of adopters across these categories is 75 percent and 58 percent, respectively.

In light of the ease with which gfn.com users can compare policies across companies, this tool should increase the saliency of benchmarking among corporate decision-makers. This is because the site makes highly visible to both elites and outsiders a company's place along the "adoption curve"—i.e., how far ahead or behind a corporation is compared to competitors and others in the wider business world. The gfn.com site should thus augment the importance of benchmarking because now investors, consumers, and job seekers can easily benchmark, too. Targeted to the financially sophisticated, this site is a tangible manifestation of the ideology of profits. As such, it should add to the "resonance" of the activist-generated profits frame and increase its "potency" in the eyes of the corporate elite (Snow and Benford 1992).
National publicity about the site will most likely increase its impact. Featured in a July 1999 issue of the industry newspaper called *American Banker*, gfn.com's founder Walter B. Schubert "became the first openly gay man to grace its cover" (Wockner 1999:1). With the recent advent of a six million-dollar advertising campaign, gfn.com is even more likely to enhance the saliency of benchmarking among corporate decision-makers. On February 18, 2000, gfn.com made history as the first "gay-specific" company to be advertised in the *Wall Street Journal* (p. B2; photo available at http://www.businesswire.com). The eye-catching, half-page ad uses humor to comment on "the often uncomfortable way the financial world has reacted to members of the gay and lesbian community" (gfn.com e-mail, Feb. 18, 2000). Most of the ad space is filled by a large photo of a balding, cigar-chomping businessman clutching at his lapels as though they were suspenders, saying: "You're GAY!!!...Well, I'm feeling quite happy myself." Beneath the photo reads, "Log on for a more welcoming financial world," followed by a list of the financial services and information available at gfn.com.

The ad also debuted in *Entertainment Weekly* and will soon appear in *Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, Fortune, Business Week, Money*, and a variety of other business publications. In addition to placement in national gay and lesbian magazines such as *The Advocate, Out*, and *Hero*, an on-line advertising campaign will target both financial and gay-related Web sites. As word spreads about gfn.com and its benchmarking search engine, it seems likely that corporate elites will pay even closer attention to the policies and practices of other employers, knowing that gay investors, consumers, and job-seekers are doing the same. Such Web sites should thus facilitate
mimetic isomorphism, as companies mimic the policies and "best practices" of others in the field in order to remain competitive.

**Mimetic Isomorphism and the Need for Legitimacy**

While I have focused on competitive pressures, it is important to keep in mind that mimetic isomorphism also derives from the need for organizations to obtain legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1991b; Christensen and Molin 1995). Once a particular practice starts to become established among certain organizations, pressures toward conformity increase. Thus organizations will "model their own structures on patterns thought to be, variously, more modern, appropriate, or professional" (Scott 1987:504, as cited in Mezias 1995:177). As DiMaggio and Powell (1991b:65) explain:

As an innovation spreads, a threshold is reached beyond which adoption provides legitimacy rather than improves performance (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Strategies that are rational for individual organizations may not be rational if adopted by large numbers. Yet the very fact that they are normatively sanctioned increases the likelihood of their adoption.

In other words, while early adopters may institute an innovation in order to obtain a competitive advantage, once the practice becomes more widespread, that advantage dissipates. Later adopters may simply be following suit in order to be seen as legitimate. Illustrating this process, several respondents explained that, while their individual companies did not want to be among the first adopters in their field, they would eventually offer equitable benefits to avoid being seen as "behind the curve."
Normative Isomorphism as Institutional Opportunity

New institutional theorists focus on professionalization as a key mechanism that promotes the diffusion of policy innovations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b; Scott 1995). This source of normative isomorphic change derives from the legitimating standards, knowledge base, and intercorporate networks of various professionals who seek "to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b:70). University training programs, professional networks, interindustry councils, and formal associations of human resource managers and diversity specialists serve as channels for the diffusion of organizational innovations and for the legitimating rationales that define them as "best practices." Thus DiMaggio and Powell (1991b:76) hypothesize that the more involved that organizational managers are in trade and professional associations, the more likely it is that an organization will come to resemble others in its field. Additional mechanisms of diffusion include organizational consultants, professional conferences or seminars, professional newsletters or magazines, and journals for human resource professionals, diversity specialists, and other management personnel (Edelman et al. forthcoming).

Institutionalists would predict human resource professionals and diversity specialists to be particularly relevant channels for the diffusion of gay-inclusive policies in the corporate world. This is because, according to institutionalists such as Dobbin and Sutton (1998), human resource professionals were responsible for developing and diffusing the idea that diversity is a "business imperative." In analyzing the rise and spread of departments focused on equal employment opportunity and affirmative action, for
example, Dobbin and Sutton (1998) found that human resource professionals were responsible for "retheorizing" these offices. Rather than seeing the new departments simply as compliance measures that emerged in response to federal policy, namely the Civil Rights Act of 1964, human resource professionals argued that they should be seen as economically rational means of increasing employee productivity and loyalty. Dobbin and Sutton refer to the rise of this framework, which views diversity as a business imperative, as a "new human resources management paradigm."

While companies originally instituted EEO and AA offices to signal compliance with the law, beginning in the 1980s middle managers in human resources began to frame these departments in ways that decoupled them from their original source of inspiration. Rather than acknowledging the influence of the "rights revolution" in the employment sector, human resource professionals began to justify new EEO and AA offices "in purely economic terms" (Dobbin and Sutton 1998:441). The authors argue that this "drift toward efficiency" occurred because state intervention in the private sector is seen as illegitimate, and because this rhetoric served the professional interests of human resource personnel by expanding their role as specialists.

Likewise, through content analysis of personnel journals, Edelman, Uggen, and Erlanger (forthcoming) reveal the role of personnel professionals in framing equal employment opportunity grievance procedures as rational practices. Employing "ideologies of rationality," these professionals argued that grievance procedures increase employee morale and reduce the risk of lawsuits, union mobilization, and liability. Thus
personnel experts played a key part in the diffusion of grievance procedures in workplaces across the country.

The Locus of Theorization

The framing work described above exemplifies a cognitive process that neoinstitutionalists call "theorization," where actors self-consciously construct accounts that legitimate particular innovations "in terms of standardized notions of efficiency or justice or progress" (Strang and Meyer 1993:497; see also Suchman 1995) While attention to theorization acknowledges the role of agents in effecting organizational change, institutional scholars nevertheless tend to emphasize "culturally legitimated theorists" such as academics, policy analysts, and other professionals (Strang and Meyer 1993:494). This approach pushes activists to the sidelines, portraying them as mere supporters in the diffusion of already theorized accounts rather than as active players in the theorization process itself. Note, for example, how the following neoinstitutionalist account gives short shrift to the role of activists in the diffusion process:

[D]iffusion obviously requires support from...state authorities, large corporate actors, [and] grassroots activists. In some way, models [or frames] must make the transition from theoretical formulation to social movement to institutional imperative. (Strang and Meyer 1993:495, emphasis added)

In contrast, my theoretical synthesis broadens the reach of the spotlight to illuminate the active role that challengers play in the theorization process. Workplace activists are not simply supportive cast; indeed, they frequently write the script that human resource professionals and other corporate elites then use to legitimize new policies to others within and outside of their companies. Contrary to the arguments of new
institutionalists (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Dobbin and Sutton 1998; Edelman et al. forthcoming), my results indicate that the primary agents of rationalization are not always located in the professions.

While the new human resources paradigm that emerged in the 1980s rationalized diversity by framing it as a business imperative (Dobbin and Sutton 1998), it was gay workplace activists who pushed for an expanded definition of diversity that would include gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. In the case of domestic partner benefits for example, the original promulgators of the "efficiency argument," which I refer to as an ideology of profits, were gay employee activists themselves, accompanied by others in the larger workplace movement. The profits frame was then further diffused via the workplace projects of NGLTF and HRC, gay and lesbian diversity consultants, and a small number of heterosexual diversity professionals who were allies of the movement.

I therefore argue that those (heterosexual) human resource professionals and diversity consultants who now include lesbians and gay men in their definitions of diversity—and who paint this expanded definition as profitable—are best seen as the trailing rather than leading edge of such reframing. In other words, the motivation for this "frame extension" (Snow et al. 1986) stems not from the professional interests of human resource managers who, in the case of AA and EEO, were seen as desiring to expand their domain as specialists (DiMaggio 1991; Dobbin and Sutton 1998). Instead, the impetus behind the frame expansion derives from the collectively constructed interests of lesbian and gay employees who wish to secure equitable treatment. Co-opting corporate discourse, these
workplace activists utilize a profits frame in order to gain access to a set of institutionalized employee rights which they are denied.

Once developed and honed by early employee activists, the profits frame began to spread rapidly through the infrastructure of the workplace movement (see Chapter 4), eventually diffusing to the pages of the business press. How did this transfer take place? How did the framing strategies proffered by locally embedded gay networks become established elements of the larger institutional environment? The answer to these questions lies largely in the fact that the workplace movement consists not simply of gay and lesbian employee networks. It also includes a cadre of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and gay-allied consultants, speakers, researchers, and writers. This cadre, which I refer to as discursive activists (Katzenstein 1998), helps to publicize and package the framing efforts of gay employee groups. These discursive activists create opportunities for employee activists as the former's publications, workshops, and seminars diffuse through the business world. Once the work of discursive activists began to be featured in the business press, employee networks could draw on these publications to help legitimate their claims.

Before discussing the impact of such publicity on equitable benefits adoption, it is first necessary to provide a brief sketch of the framing processes themselves.

**Doing the Right Thing and Increasing the Bottom Line: Ideologies of Ethics and Profits**

As part of their strategic repertoire, workplace activists tend to utilize two different "collective action frames" (Snow et al. 1986): an ideology of profits, which is part of corporations' claimed domain, and an ideology of ethics, which is generally drawn from wider notions of justice promulgated by progressive social movements. The profits
frame rationalizes—literally, in terms of cost-benefit analysis—the adoption of equitable benefits by framing them as "good for the bottom line." The ethics frame, on the other hand, justifies—in the literal sense—the extension of benefits by describing it as "the right thing to do" or as a matter of equal rights. The profits frame coopts corporate values by arguing that inclusive policies heighten productivity, improve employee recruitment and retention, and expand customer markets. The ethics frame, in contrast, draws on what social movements scholars refer to as a civil rights master frame (Snow and Benford 1992; McAdam 1994).

These two frames constitute the ideological repertoire of gay employee activists. Most networks use the two in tandem, but challengers rely far more heavily on an ideology of profits to legitimate their call for policy change. Employee groups discovered early on that exclusive reliance on an ethics frame meets with very little success. This is not surprising since the profits frame "resonates" (Snow et al. 1986) more deeply with the capitalist values of the corporate world. Some activists even downplay or avoid altogether an ideology of ethics. This is because arguments such as these incite internal and external backlash by fundamentalist Christian groups. Given activists' reliance on the profits frame, it is important to examine how larger institutional processes help to diffuse this frame throughout the wider business world, thereby increasing the legitimacy of challengers' claims.

The Diffusion of the Profits Frame via the Business Press

Since normative isomorphism refers mainly to the influence of professionalization, it seems more appropriate to view the diffusion of the profits frame as an instance of
"cognitive isomorphism." New institutionalists posit this term to refer to the influence of wider belief systems, cultural frames, discourses, and cognitive scripts that lead to the adoption of similar policies and practices across organizations (Scott 1995). I see the following cognitive and normative processes as constituting favorable institutional opportunities for employee activists: the increasing coverage of lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in the business press; and the additional diffusion of the profits frame via business networks, conferences, and professional associations such as the Society for Human Resources Management.

*Breaking the silence of the business press.* As discussed in Chapter 2, a 1991 cover story in *Fortune* magazine broke the longstanding silence of the business press regarding gay and lesbian issues. On Dec. 16, 1991, Thomas Stewart's article, "Gay in Corporate America," was featured on the cover of this widely read business magazine. Scattered generously throughout the article were references to the healthy returns that companies can reap from gay-inclusive policies. This emphasis reflects the diffusion of movement discourse onto the pages of mainstream business publications. Mirroring an ideology of profits, the article presented the bottom-line rationale for creating a gay-affirming workplace. Pointing to the high price that companies pay for non-inclusive or hostile environments, Stewart cited a study by academic James Woods (later published; see Woods 1993), who documented a phenomenon that he called "entrepreneurial flight." Fearful of a glass ceiling, tired of an unwelcoming environment, or frustrated by unfair treatment, many talented gay professionals end up leaving companies to start their own businesses (p. 46).
Stewart also raised the issue of productivity, quoting corporate consultant Brian McNaught, who conducts workshops on gay issues in the workplace: "My basic premise is that homophobia takes a toll on the ability of 10% of the workforce to produce" (p. 44). This statistic, an implicit reference to the well-known Kinsey study that found 10 percent of respondents clustered toward the "exclusively homosexual" end of the sexual continuum (Kinsey et al. 1948 in Rubenstein 1993:10), is commonly used by gay employee activists to emphasize the institutional costs of hostile environments and heterosexist policies.

The author's decision to interview Brian McNaught is notable given the key contributions he has made to the workplace movement. Although the article does not make explicit his activist connections, McNaught holds an esteemed place within the movement. My interviews with employee activists reflect a deep respect and admiration for the man, who is openly gay and considered by many to be the "godfather" of gay diversity training. Over a decade ago he developed corporate workshops on homophobia in the workplace. Having been fired from his job back in 1975 after his employer learned of his sexual orientation, McNaught speaks from experience. He has been an honored keynote speaker at several workplace conferences organized by gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee networks, and his workshops are still widely sought and imitated by employee activists.

Moving up in the hierarchy of prestige. While movement discourse began to appear in the business press and in personnel journals in 1991, it took a couple additional years to hit the more prestigious business journals. Due in part to the work of discursive
activists, who had succeeded in publishing a flurry of articles and books that appeared in 1993, coverage of gay issues in the workplace finally appeared in academically-affiliated business journals. In the summer of 1993, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article entitled "Is This the Right Time to Come Out?" Written by Alistair D. Williamson, an editor at the Harvard Business School Press, the article was organized around a case study based on a compilation of real-life experiences, although corporate names and individual identities were changed. Following presentation of the case study, meant to provoke discussion of the perils and promise of coming out at work, seven experts responded.

Helping to establish the "respectability" of the issue, the article included photographs of the seven experts along with brief biographies listing their related publications and affiliations. The variety of institutional spheres represented is telling since it conveys that gay-inclusive thinking is advocated not only by gay activists but also by high-level professionals in the world of business and law and by academics and consultants who have studied the issue. The panelists included a former Fortune 500 executive who had become president and CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management (to which, according to my survey results, many human resource vice presidents belong); three professors from departments of law, cultural anthropology, and communications, the latter of whom wrote *The Corporate Closet: The Professional Lives of Gay Men in America* (Woods 1993); a management consultant and an attorney, who came out as a couple in their response and had recently co-authored an article on sexual orientation in the workplace for the journal *Compensation and Benefits Management* (Colbert and
Engagingly well written, the case study resembles a popular role-playing or discussion-based strategy used by gay employee groups and/or outside consultants during diversity workshops. The article presents the case of a "star employee" who is gay and who tells his manager, an assistant vice president of a financial advisory firm, that he intends to bring his partner of five years to the company's silver anniversary dinner. The employee will be featured as a guest of honor at the dinner for his recent success in closing a highly lucrative deal. Also in attendance will be top clients of the firm, including some conservative military contractors, and several influential business and political leaders.

Although many colleagues of the employee know that he is gay and have met his partner, who is a corporate attorney, his manager expresses shock that he is gay, asks questions that appear ignorant but not necessarily homophobic ("Why do you want to mix your personal and professional lives?"), and in response receives calm and well-reasoned responses ("For the same reason that you bring your wife to company social events"). After trying to discourage the associate from bringing his partner to the event, the executive says that he needs time to think about what he has been told.

At this point the story ended and the seven experts offered commentary on the gay man's actions and on how his manager should respond next. While acknowledging both the risks and benefits of coming out, all of the commentators made a strong case for the bottom-line advantages of gay-affirming environments. Reflecting what institutional scholars refer to as coercive sources of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b), two
of the experts emphasized the legal rationale for adopting inclusive policies, citing the number of states and municipalities that outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. One panelist also raised the issue of domestic partner benefits, framing them as a matter of compensation equity. Others framed gay-inclusive policies as both ethically desirable and financially profitable. As two of the experts concluded, "[T]he long run, the moral choice will be the lucrative one as well. When major changes in cultural values take place, it pays to be leading the trend rather than running behind making excuses" (p. 24).

Reflecting ideologies of both profits and ethics, this dualistic rhetorical strategy illustrates what I call frame blending, a discursive tactic used by many employee activists who found that ethical arguments alone had little to no impact on corporate elites. For the purposes of the present discussion, what seems most relevant is that activist discourse had finally diffused to the pages of a widely read, highly prestigious business journal aimed at corporate decision-makers. Even more important, the burst of gay-related publications in 1993 appears to be related to a jump in the number of equitable benefits adopters. Until 1993, only two Fortune 1000 companies had instituted domestic partner benefits, but by the end of that year the total had increased to eleven (see Figure 5.1 above).

The explosion of gay workplace titles. The groundbreaking coverage of gay workplace issues in Fortune magazine and the Harvard Business Review was soon followed by an explosion of books published between 1993 and 1996. The titles alone reveal common themes in the new literature, whose intended audience includes not simply lesbian and gay employees but corporate decision-makers as well: Gay Issues in the

The contents of the books clearly reflect movement discourse, providing strong arguments for the ethical but especially the profit-oriented reasons for adopting equitable policies. All of the books include a discussion of gay and lesbian employee networks, with some providing specific information such as how to form a new network or how particular groups have won gay-inclusive policies. A few include partial lists of gay employee
networks along with contact information (Mickens 1994; Baker et al. 1995; Friskopp and Silverstein 1995; Powers and Ellis 1995). Most of the authors also list other resources such as gay-related organizations, consultants, books, articles, newsletters, and videos.

The efforts of discursive activists, whose publications and presentations disseminate ideologies of profits and ethics, resemble what Abrahamson and Fombrum (1992:176) call the "mass media production of macro-culture" (as cited in Thornton 1995:221). New institutional scholars have highlighted the role of human resource professionals and academics in producing macro-culture, and they have focused on professional journals, trade newsletters, and other business publications in fueling the spread of organizational innovations (Thornton 1995). My research demonstrates that discursive activists can also be important producers of macro-culture and thus a key source of isomorphic change. As the publications of discursive activists were reviewed in the business press, the profits frame undoubtedly reached the desks of more and more corporate elite. The work of gay employee networks was thus made a bit easier as the message of the movement, reflected now in the pages of respected business journals, gained a degree of external legitimacy.

Summary. This chapter has highlighted the ways that isomorphic pressures in the sociopolitical and organizational field environments can promote the diffusion of gay-inclusive policies. Conceptualizing these isomorphic change mechanisms as macro-level institutional opportunities, I documented the favorable policy impacts of three institutional processes. Focusing first on coercive isomorphism, I discussed the positive effects of San Francisco's Equal Benefits Ordinance, one of the only such mandates in the country. I also
investigated the "softer" side of coercive isomorphism, uncovering the normative impact of the legal environment. Though not mandating equitable coverage, each of the following local and/or state-level measures facilitated favorable policy outcomes: nondiscrimination statutes that prohibit anti-gay bias in private employment, ordinances that grant equitable benefits to government employees, and domestic partner registries that provide mostly symbolic recognition of lesbian and gay relationships. I also revealed the coercive effects of boycotts, lawsuits, and shareholder activism.

Turning next to mimetic isomorphism, I discussed the importance of field-level influences such as benchmarking and intercorporate career mobility. Even in the absence of gay employee networks, mimetic forces can exert powerful pressures on companies. Once a few leaders adopt equitable benefits, others may follow suit in order to remain competitive. And once enough companies jump on the bandwagon by mimicking the "best practices" of these leading organizations, pressures toward conformity increase all the more as slower-moving companies, seeking legitimacy, eventually join in to avoid being seen as "behind the curve."

Finally, I revealed the positive effects of normative and cognitive isomorphism, including the emergence of the "new human resources paradigm" that framed or "theorized" diversity as a business imperative. Correcting for new institutionalists' tendency to posit the locus of theorization in the professions, I emphasized the role that discursive activists play in expanding this diversity frame to include gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. As discursive activists succeeded in getting their work published and reviewed in the business press and in the more prestigious academic journals, corporate
elites were increasingly exposed to the profits frame that employee activists themselves had originated. Reflected on the pages of the business press, their message gained legitimacy and thereby facilitated the adoption of gay-inclusive policies.

As important as these macro-level institutional opportunities are for challengers, they are not the only contextual factors that account for inclusive policy change. It is also necessary to examine the crucial role of opportunities and constraints in the more immediate environment of activists, namely the corporation itself. I thus turn in the next chapter to a consideration of organizational opportunity, delineating its key dimensions and documenting the impact of each dimension on the adoption of equitable benefits.
As shown in the previous chapter, neoinstitutionalism provides a useful theoretical model for understanding isomorphic change processes in the wider sociopolitical and organizational field environments. Coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphic pressures can facilitate favorable policy outcomes for employee activists. Accordingly, I conceptualized these institutionalization mechanisms as macro-level institutional opportunities. But what about the more immediate environment of workplace activists, namely the targeted corporation? And what about the role of organizational challengers themselves?

If the power of institutional analysis lies in the significance granted to large-scale contextual factors, both normative and structural, in explaining the diffusion of organizational innovations, its blind spot has been the failure to identify the agents of change within organizations, whether elites or mobilized constituencies (Chaves 1996; DiMaggio 1988). Even with more recent attempts to address agency and power, scholars in the field acknowledge that neoinstitutionalists lack a clear understanding of "the conditions under which actors in a given organization who do not have power, come to
gain power, and bring about shifts in strategy" (Fligstein 1991:335). In other words, new institutionalism leaves us empty-handed when trying to understand both the meso-level conditions that challengers face within their own companies and the movement strategies that activists use to alter those very conditions.

Social movement approaches clearly provide a much needed complement to institutional perspectives on organizational transformation. Social movement theory directs our attention to the role of activist networks in social change and to the mobilization processes and political opportunities that contribute to movement success (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Students of social movements view activist outcomes as resulting from the interplay between structural constraints and opportunities in the larger political environment and internal organizational, strategic, and cultural factors (Morris 1984; Gamson 1990; McAdam 1994; Staggenborg 1995; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

Researchers in the resource mobilization and political process traditions treat political opportunity primarily in reference to state structures and political alignments (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Staggenborg 1991; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; Tarrow 1998). Pulling from this body of literature, Tarrow (1998) defines the structure of political opportunity as "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure" (pp. 76-77). In addition to focusing on variation in state repression, Tarrow highlights
While political process theory provides a powerful explanatory model for understanding the emergence and outcomes of state-centered challenges, it needs some fine-tuning in order to fit the needs of scholars interested in institutional activism. When we shift the focus from the state to the workplace, for example, it becomes necessary to examine the elements of opportunity and constraint that exist inside particular corporations. In this chapter I offer such a framework. Adapting Tarrow's (1998) political process model and the new literature on cultural opportunities (McAdam 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Taylor 1996), I delineate the meso-level institutional opportunities that exist within the immediate environment of institutional challengers. In particular, I examine the impact of four key elements in the target organization itself (i.e., the corporation). These dimensions of organizational opportunity facilitate favorable policy outcomes or, if absent, constrain activists' chance of success.

I first focus on the impact of structural templates that provide access to decision-makers and to institutional resources. Second, I discuss the significance of organizational realignments that bring more receptive elites or organizations into the issue domain, thereby altering the balance of power in the corporation. Third, I consider the importance of allies who provide assistance as individuals or as coalition partners. Finally, I focus on the impact of cultural supports such as a diversity-embracing corporate culture or, among elites, preexisting personal ties and "punctuating" experiences that serve to "humanize" challengers and foster empathy with their struggle.
OPPORTUNITIES AS A DYNAMIC PROCESS OF CONTESTATION

In her utopian essay on progressive politics in the twenty-first century, Taylor (2000) emphasizes that movements depend on the ability of challengers "to identify and translate conditions, circumstances, and events in the wider society into protest opportunities" (p. 221). She points out that sometimes opportunities appear "ripe for the plucking," but at other times challengers must work hard to cultivate their own opportunities (pp. 221-222). For example, many gay employee groups push to be included in corporate nondiscrimination clauses and then, once successful, use those very policies to argue for inclusive diversity training and equitable benefits. Likewise, when elites prove hesitant or unwilling to effect change, activists focus on winning allies who, in turn, help create a more favorable corporate climate.

Given this degree of play and malleability in the opportunities of challenging groups, Taylor (2000) argues that opportunities "should be considered not a fixed commodity but a dynamic process of contestation" (p. 222). Similarly, in a section called "making opportunities," Tarrow (1996:58) explains that an activist network "can experience changes in its opportunity structure as a function of its own actions." By expanding their tactical repertoires, for example, challengers can open up new possibilities (Tilly 1993; McAdam 1982, 1983; Gamson 1990). Likewise, Jenkins and Klandermans (1995) argue that social movements can "[set] in motion changes that often create new opportunities for further action. Hence, opportunities both exist and are made" (p. 7, emphasis in original). In other words, aggrieved groups do not simply wait for more favorable conditions; they help create them. Through mobilizing structures, framing
processes, and strategic deployment of collective identities, challenging groups take aim not only at their immediate target but also at the set of conditions that constrain them (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

Comparative approaches reveal that dimensions of political opportunity vary across political systems, issue domains, groups, and time (Dalton 1995; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1996). Scholars have also focused on the relative malleability of opportunity structures, with some dimensions being more stable and others more volatile (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Pointing to the more volatile end of the continuum, Tarrow (1996) refers to "dynamic" opportunities. Likewise, my comparative approach reveals that institutional opportunities and constraints vary not only within but across companies, with some dimensions being more open to change and others appearing relatively impervious.

ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: CREATING AND CAPITALIZING ON FAVORABLE CORPORATE CONDITIONS

Taking seriously the argument that opportunity is a dynamic process rather than a fixed structure, this chapter has a dual focus: to examine the impact of meso-level institutional opportunities present in the target organization itself (i.e., the corporation); and, where appropriate, to highlight the role of activists in creating these favorable conditions if they do not already exist. I turn now to the immediate site of contention for workplace activists. With the corporation as the focal terrain of struggle, I draw out the dynamic interplay between structures of constraint and opportunity on the one hand and movement processes on the other. I delineate and discuss variations in each of the four
key dimensions of organizational opportunity: structural templates, organizational realignments, allies, and cultural supports.

STRUCTURAL TEMPLATES AS ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

The first dimension of organizational opportunity refers to the presence of structural templates that signal at least a minimal level of legitimacy for previously excluded groups and that allow access to key decision-makers and to institutional resources. Indicators of such templates include the following: other employee resource groups such as those for women and people of color; mechanisms for official corporate recognition of networks; access to a budget; the presence of a diversity office; and a diversity task force that includes representatives from the various employee networks.

Early Risers as Structural Templates

As Tarrow's (1998) comparative research has shown, "early risers" can provide effective models of collective action for new challengers. Likewise, in many cases nascent gay and lesbian employee groups were able to draw from and expand on the mobilizing structures and collective action frames of their officially recognized sister networks. These diversity groups for women and people of color had already convinced at least some executives that diversity-embracing policies were profitable. While the mere existence of other employee groups can signify an important opening for new challengers, preexisting networks can also express vocal support for newcomers, turning symbolic institutional opportunities into more tangible ones as early risers become allies of those who follow.
Such was the case with the 1987 emergence of GLUE, still the country's largest gay employee network. As mentioned in a previous chapter, a small group of friends who worked at a telecommunications company began talking about the need for a lesbian and gay employee organization like the diversity networks that already existed. Their employer had adopted a gay-inclusive nondiscrimination policy over a decade earlier in response to external pressure by gay rights activists. Nevertheless, the friends felt that the company did not enforce the policy. Fearful of coming out to top management, they decided to ask someone in the Diversity Office to serve as a go-between. After the liaison "tested the water," the group decided, with much trepidation, to request a meeting with upper management. As one member of the steering committee put it, "I [was] really leery of talking about this to someone who doesn't know me and who is four levels above me in the hierarchy."

At the same time and halfway across the country, two gay friends who worked in the company's research and development site on the east coast noticed bathroom graffiti targeted against "faggots." One of the two served on the company's Diversity Council, and although "gay issues weren't on the list then," this man explained that he saw the company putting "a big emphasis on equal opportunity and diversity." Testing the depth and breadth of their company's commitment, they decided to complain to management and the Affirmative Action Council, which included representatives from the women's employee group and the African American network.

Functioning as structural templates and potential allies, or at the very least as symbolic markers of normative support for diversity and inclusion, the preexisting
employee networks as well as the Diversity Office and Affirmative Action Council constituted important organizational opportunities for these gay employees. After hearing the employees' concerns, members of the Affirmative Action Council expressed their support, invited the gay employees to form a network of their own, and thus the second chapter of GLUE was born.

It was this east coast chapter of GLUE, located close to headquarters, that established a working relationship with corporate management and won official recognition for the network in 1988. The head of the facility where the group formed, however, encouraged the group to remain low profile since "he knew [their] existence would be controversial," explained GLUE's informal historian. Nonetheless, due to increased access to the company's e-mail system, a "cooptable communications network" in the most literal sense of the word (Freeman 1979:170), news spread quickly about GLUE, and soon other chapters sprang up across the country.

GLUE's leaders also helped gay employee groups that began to materialize in other companies, a responsibility they still take seriously. Acknowledging GLUE's advisory role and its status as one of the earliest gay networks in the country, many organizations in the workplace movement consider GLUE to be the "grandmother" of all gay employee groups. Members are rightfully proud of their organization's reputation. At a National Gay and Lesbian Task Force conference on workplace issues, GLUE members wore buttons that included the group's name and emblem with pink and lavender overlapping triangles, symbols of gay pride, which read, "It started with us! 1987-1997...Workplace Pride."

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**Official Corporate Recognition**

As an institutionalized form of acceptance, official corporate recognition is a successful outcome in and of itself. "Acceptance," in Gamson's ([1975] 1990) classic movement outcomes study, entails formal recognition by the challenging group's target that the group is a valid representative for a legitimate set of interests. Burstein et al. (1995) call this form of success "access." The other type of success Gamson called "new advantages," or benefits granted by the target that meet at least some of the challengers' demands. Indeed, corporate recognition represents an early goal of most gay activist networks.

Nonetheless, the mechanisms of recognition (i.e., the process by which networks achieve official status) can be seen as a form of institutional opportunity. This is because, in most instances, previous employee networks for women and people of color had already won this institutionalized form of access, which in turn made it easier for the gay employee groups who followed. In other words, the success of early risers in establishing procedures for official corporate recognition, which represents a favorable "policy" outcome (Staggenborg 1995), also functions as an important "mobilization" outcome in that these institutionalized mechanisms facilitate the formation and success of later challengers. As Staggenborg (1995) puts it, "One type of success may have a bearing on another type, and outcomes occurring at one point in time affect future outcomes" (pp. 341-342).
Access to Institutional Resources

As a structural template, official corporate recognition of employee networks can also provide access to institutional resources such as a budget. Friedland and Alford (1991:254) speak to the importance of institutionalized access to resources for those seeking organizational transformation:

The success of an attempt at institutional change depends not simply on the resources controlled by its proponents, but on the nature of power and the institutionally specified rules by which resources are produced, allocated, and controlled. The institutional nature of power provides specific opportunities for not only reproduction, but transformation as well.

Although official corporate recognition did not always come with a budget, 57 percent of gay employee networks (40 out of 70) received some sort of monetary support from their corporations. For most groups the funding came from centralized sources such as a diversity office or human resources department. For others, money came in the form of "elite patronage" (Jenkins and Eckert 1986) from influential allies, who allocated part of their departmental budget to the gay network. Overall, funding ranged anywhere from a few hundred dollars to over $100,000 a year.

Regardless of the dollar amount, those groups that had access to a budget were more successful in winning domestic partner benefits than those networks that lacked such monetary support. Sixty percent of groups with a budget (24 out of 40), compared to 43 percent of those without (13 out of 30), won extended policies. This is not surprising since the granting of a budget allows networks to hold educational events, bring in outside speakers, organize professional development conferences, or produce awareness-raising materials such as flyers, buttons, and magnets. But this positive relationship between
budget access and policy success can also be explained in larger cultural terms. The willingness of companies to spend money on diversity networks reflects a corporate culture that already views diversity as a business imperative (Dobbin and Sutton 1998)—that is, as an investment that brings both symbolic and monetary returns to the corporation. This component of institutional opportunity, which I refer to as cultural support, will be discussed in more detail later on.

In any case, my results mirror those of McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977), who found that "institutional funding" facilitated favorable outcomes for challengers. Likewise, following Gamson (1990), I found that "sponsorship" of challengers by elite patrons increased the likelihood of success. While Gamson found that these positive effects were limited to groups with small numbers, my findings show that funding is beneficial for groups regardless of the size of their membership.

The higher success rates of budgeted groups also seems to indicate that "institutional funding" (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977) and "elite patronage" (Jenkins and Eckert 1986) do not lead to cooptation (Gamson 1990). Nor does such funding typically serve as a means of social control (McAdam 1982), whereby challengers abandon their goals or strategies in order to maintain elite support. On the other hand, I did find evidence of channeling (Jenkins and Eckert 1986; Jenkins 1998) in that some networks felt pressure to avoid making public endorsements of gay rights legislation.

**Representation on a Diversity Task Force**

Another structural template, representation on a company's diversity task force, also makes a significant difference for organizational challengers. Eighty-six percent of
gay networks (60 out of 70) reported that their companies had a diversity task force or diversity council. While 57 percent of gay networks (24 out of 42) who sat on these task forces succeeded in their fight for benefits, only 33 percent of those lacking such representation were able to effect policy change (6 out of 18). These task forces aid challengers not only because they provide regular channels of communication with decision-makers, who expect representatives to voice their concerns and ideas. They also offer a formal means of interacting with other diversity groups, who may eventually become allies of the gay network. A good example of this can be found in Chapter 5, where I discussed the gay employee group that was able to overcome opposition by the Christian network after all employee resource groups were brought into an overarching diversity council.

On the other hand, at least one gay network saw their company's lack of a diversity task force as helpful in the long run. A leader of the network at a well-known scientific and photographic company explained why her corporation did not have a task force and the ironically beneficial effect it had: "We had an inept diversity officer for quite some time, so we'd go directly to senior management, which was a good thing probably."

Indeed, the network won equitable policies across the board and is seen as a role model in the larger workplace movement.

While this particular network benefitted from the lack of a diversity task force, this finding does not challenge the importance of structural templates. In fact, it underlines the significance of access to key elites. This employee network obviously had direct access to senior management, which meant that their arguments for equitable benefits did not have
to be filtered through multiple levels of management or through a diversity council. In the vast majority of cases, however, findings clearly show that structural templates facilitate favorable policy outcomes. Whether these templates come in the form of institutionalized mechanisms for official recognition, institutional resources such as a budget, or diversity task forces that provide access to decision-makers, these organizational opportunities increase the likelihood that challengers will win equal rights in the workplace.

ORGANIZATIONAL REALIGNMENTS AS ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Various scholars have documented the importance of electoral realignments in encouraging collective action and facilitating legislative victories (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Piven and Cloward 1979; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Costain 1982; Tarrow 1996, 1998). When the focus of contention is the corporation rather than the state, the appropriate counterpart to electoral shifts would be organizational realignments. Focusing on the organizational opportunities and constraints that stem from these realignments, I pay particular attention to the impact of the following factors: elite turnover that results in a new CEO; changes in the composition of the Board of Directors or in the policy status of the organizations represented on the Board; and acquisitions of or mergers with other companies. Each of these organizational realignments can bring more receptive elites or organizations into the issue domain and hence shift the balance of power in ways that benefit activist networks.

The Impact of Elite Turnover

Organizational scholars have found that very low turnover of administrators can lead to rigidity of company values and behavior; hence, new corporate policies and
strategies often depend on a "change of personnel at the top" (Pfeffer 1983:325). In his institutional analysis of organizational transformation, Mezias (1995) found that high turnover among top managers is a significant source of diffusion for organizational innovations. While Mezias' findings demonstrate that high-level personnel change can fuel isomorphism at the macro level (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b), here I focus on elite turnover not as a mimetic diffusion mechanism but rather as a meso-level opportunity that offers hope for challengers inside particular corporations. A change in CEO, for example, can bring new ideas and attitudes that effect changes in corporate culture. Organizational realignments can also exert a more direct influence on corporate strategy. For instance, a new CEO can decide to adopt policies that his or her predecessor opposed.

The importance of a change in CEO is powerfully illustrated in the telecommunications case study. The gay network there struggled for nine years before winning their fight for domestic partner benefits. In looking back at GLUE's struggle, every network leader who was interviewed concluded that the main reason for the company's refusal to adopt equitable benefits was the CEO's personal objection. In a meeting with the network back in 1993, the CEO, whom I will call "Michael Smith," brought up his religious beliefs. In the words of GLUE's national co-chair, "We knew we were in trouble [then]."

It is telling that although Smith attended professional development conferences organized by other employee networks in the company, he refused every invitation to GLUE's annual conferences. This angered GLUE leaders so much that they decided not to invite him to their 1997 conference even though it was held at corporate headquarters.
They instead invited Smith's "heir apparent," who attended the conference and received a standing ovation for making it clear that, as one national co-chair put it, "he got the issues and understood us." Although this man did not end up taking over as CEO, his willingness to express support for GLUE stood in marked contrast to Smith's refusal to even attend GLUE conferences.

As GLUE's national co-president, "Jane" repeatedly requested meetings with Smith, only to be turned down. "Finally after all [those] years," Jane commented, "right before he retired, he agreed to meet with me." Although Jane had to cancel the meeting, in a letter to Smith, gay network members pleaded with him: "Grant domestic partner benefits before you leave, or get us access to the decision-makers." Smith retired in 1997 without granting the benefits. He had been CEO for nearly 10 years, almost as long as GLUE had been in existence. Commenting on the timing of Smith's retirement and the adoption of benefits shortly thereafter in 1998, the other national co-president of the gay network stated, "It was absolutely critical that [Smith] was out of the picture. I'm convinced in my soul that he was the reason [the benefits didn't come sooner] because everyone, including people reporting directly to him, came out and supported domestic partner benefits." Indeed, the CEO's resistance was especially glaring given the vocal support for equitable benefits expressed by the company's Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, and the Executive Vice President of Consumers, among others.

In preparation for the changing of the guard, GLUE leaders did their homework on the new CEO, "Jay Thomspon," in the hopes that he would be supportive of benefits adoption. Although Thompson came from a company that was a major defense
contractor, one of GLUE's national co-presidents heard from sources who knew Thompson that he had organized a "Republicans for Feinstein" event. This signaled a potentially receptive attitude since California Senator Dianne Feinstein has a consistently pro-gay voting record. Network members also drew hope from a photo that was sent to all company employees in which Thompson sat smiling while astride his Harley Davidson motorcycle. From outside sources, GLUE's co-president learned that Thompson had dropped out of college for a year to ride his Harley across the country. The co-president laughingly commented, "So I knew he had to have met some lesbians along the way."

Thompson did in fact express a receptive attitude toward lesbian and gay concerns during a "get-to-know-you" session with employees. One of the people in attendance asked the new CEO what he thought of domestic partner benefits. Thompson responded, "To be honest, I don't know that much about it, but I'm willing to learn." In early 1998, shortly after Thompson came on board, all the employee networks met and had lunch with him. Three months later, the company adopted the benefits as part of its negotiations with the unions. As it turned out, by the time the company came to the negotiating table, top management had already decided to grant the benefits. The network co-president explained, "I was very close to the company's chief negotiator. We had lunch right before she went into the negotiating meeting, and she told me that [the benefits] were coming."

It seems clear, then, that elite turnover is an important dimension of organizational opportunity. My interview with the company's Director of Corporate Diversity lends further credence to this interpretation. Using a 4-point scale ranging from "very important" to "not at all important," I asked him to rate 30 different factors, both internal
and external, as to the role each played in the company's decision regarding equitable benefits. The only factor that he rated as very important was the opinion of the CEO.

**Shifts in the Composition or Policy Balance of the Board**

Another key organizational opportunity exists in the form of organizational realignments that shift the composition of the Board of Directors in ways that favor gay-inclusive policy change. This shift can stem from the addition of a new member whose own company has equitable policies; or, alternatively, the timely adoption of benefits by an organization already represented on the Board. My earlier discussion of the transportation case study (see Chapter 5) revealed the crucial role that supportive interlocking directorates can play in the adoption of equitable benefits. On the other hand, sometimes Board members pose nearly insurmountable obstacles for challengers.

Although some vice presidents of human resources said that if the CEO supports partner benefits, approval from the Board of Directors is usually "pro forma," in some cases the Board prevents inclusive policy change. At an east coast insurance company, for example, after persistent pressure from the gay employee network, Board members finally agreed to at least consider the issue of equitable benefits. But this consideration came only after the endorsement of a year-long official research team that consisted of representatives from the gay network, Human Resources, the Benefits Department, the Legal Department, and the Tax Department. Despite strong support from every member of the research team, the Senior Vice President of Human Resources, everyone in the Benefits Department, and the CEO, the Board of Directors chose not to adopt equitable
benefits. It took two additional years of mobilizing before the Board finally issued its approval.

While shifts in the composition of the Board can open up opportunities for challengers, they can also create formidable constraints. For example, in one of the major airlines that faced internal pressure to adopt equitable benefits, the gay employee network had succeeded in winning support throughout the corporate hierarchy. After informal talks with individuals in Human Resources, including the Vice President, the network prepared a formal proposal and presented it to the Senior Vice President of Human Resources and then to the Executive Management Committee, including the CEO. All signaled their support for the proposal, which was then sent to the Board for final approval. There it stayed.

Members of the gay network waited interminably for an answer but never received any official response at all. They eventually learned from insiders that the prospect of domestic partner benefits made two of the Board members "very unhappy." A founder of the network explained, "For one of them it was a 'moral decline thing' as a Christian. And the other one [who opposed the benefits] had been appointed to the Board of the National Boy Scouts of America, so he was concerned that [equitable benefits adoption] would besmirch him." Tellingly, this national organization is currently arguing in front of the U.S. Supreme Court for the right to exclude gays as scouts and as troop leaders.

**Mergers and Acquisitions**

Acquisitions or mergers, another type of organizational realignment, can also have a significant impact on policy change. The year before the aforementioned
telecommunications company adopted equitable benefits, one of its industry peers had
done so after merging with a leading phone company that already had the benefits.
Likewise, a late adopting high-tech firm on the east coast finally extended benefits to
domestic partners after acquiring another high-tech company that had done so a half
decade earlier in response to employee mobilization. Prior to the acquisition, the gay
employee network at the east coast firm had struggled for the benefits for approximately
four years.

Additional evidence revealing the importance of organizational realignments can be
found in HRC's *State of the Workplace* report (Mills and Herrschaft 1999). For example,
Bank of America, which adopted equitable benefits in compliance with San Francisco law,
later merged with Nations Bank, which did not have the benefits. Although the newly
formed BankAmerica is now headquartered in North Carolina, where only one other
company has adopted equitable benefits, the corporation decided to extend domestic
partner benefits to all of its employees. Likewise, in the spring of 1999 BankBoston,
which had already adopted equitable benefits, announced its upcoming merger with Fleet
Financial Group, which had not extended its policy to domestic partners. That fall the
combined FleetBoston Financial corporation offered equitable benefits to all employees
(HRC 2000d). Typically, then, mergers with and acquisitions of gay-inclusive companies
can be crucial organizational opportunities for challengers.

In the age of conglomerate corporations, acquired subsidiaries are often compelled
to adopt the same policies and procedures as the parent company (DiMaggio and Powell
1991b). In the case of mergers, though, the situation can get complicated. For example,
the vice president of human resources at a pharmaceutical, agricultural, and food sciences corporation explained that her employer had originally adopted equitable benefits in response to numerous individual requests that she had received from gay and lesbian employees and friends. However, a company that they are merging with is balking at the benefits. In the meantime, her employer is still the only major corporation in their midwestern state to have adopted the benefits. Testifying to how "against the mainstream" this move was, the vice president said two people resigned in protest, and many other employees contacted her to say that the company was "breaking down nuclear families and breaking sodomy laws." While the corporation faced no external backlash, she received so many e-mails from outraged employees that, in her words, "I thought my computer screen would melt with animosity."

Nonetheless, she explained, when the corporation acquired four other companies, it was simply "assumed that they'd adopt our benefits," which they did. But the company is now merging with another pharmaceutical company that is "adamant about not doing domestic partner benefits." Commenting on the impact that the merger will have, she added, "They're two times our size, though it will be an equal merger. I'm not sure how it will work. [Our company] will no longer exist; it will be a whole new company starting from scratch [with] 60,000 employees."

As far as I could determine from my surveys and data acquired from HRC WorkNet, there has only been one case in which a merger resulted in the reversal of equitable benefits. Indeed, only two companies have ever rescinded their benefits policies. Mobil did so after being purchased in November 1999 by Texas-based Exxon, which is the

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far larger of the two firms that now make up ExxonMobil. The other case, though not the result of a merger, clearly reveals the impact of another kind of organizational realignment already discussed, namely a change in leadership.

In April 1998, high-tech Perot Systems Corporation went down in history as the first major company in the U.S. to rescind its equitable benefits policy (Mills and Herrschaft 1999). The company had adopted the benefits while Ross Perot was away from the helm during his campaign for the U.S. presidency. Upon his return in late 1997, he announced in Business Week that he might reverse the policy even though very few companies in the high-tech industry lack equitable benefits. HRC's Executive Director Elizabeth Birch then wrote to Perot, asking him to reconsider. Although he told her that he would think carefully before making a decision, gay employees later notified HRC that the benefits were "surreptitiously terminated" (Mills and Herrschaft 1999:21). Tellingly, the other company Perot created, Electronic Data Systems, adopted equitable benefits in early 1998 after Perot sold off his controlling shares in the firm.

**Summary.** As demonstrated in the above examples, organizational realignments can serve as powerful institutional opportunities for workplace challengers. Whether through elite turnover, shifts in the composition and policy balance of the Board, or mergers and acquisitions, gay employee networks can find their fortunes suddenly turning in response to such realignments. While employee activists obviously have no control over organizational realignments, other institutional opportunities are far more malleable and may be opened up in response to the actions of networks themselves. In the following sections, then, I discuss both the impact of these malleable opportunities and the strategies...
that activists use to create them if not already present. I begin with a focus on allies and then end the chapter by discussing broader cultural supports in the corporation itself.

ALLIES AS ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

A third key dimension of organizational opportunity entails the availability of allies, which can be influential individuals, groups from within or close to the elite, as well as other organizational challengers who serve as coalition partners. The latter include other diversity networks in the company and, if applicable, unions. Some companies also provide—although more typically employee networks actively seek out—“executive sponsors” or “management champions.” These individuals advise the group and have the ear of key decision-makers. If their company does not already fund employee networks, some sponsors use part of their own discretionary budget to support the group. This form of elite patronage (Jenkins and Eckert 1986) can make a key difference in the network’s chance of success, as discussed above. Regardless of funding, the mere presence of a management champion has a significant impact on policy outcomes.

Management Champions

I focus here on those companies that, according to gay network leaders, have some form of executive sponsorship, whether informally sought by diversity networks or formally instituted by the company, usually through human resources or a corporate diversity office. Gay networks are often joined by their sister diversity groups in pushing for the institutionalization of executive sponsorship since formal mechanisms obviously make it far easier to win influential allies. Of the 70 gay employee groups for whom I
have complete survey data, 53 (or 76 percent) worked in companies that had some form of executive sponsorship, whether formal or not.

The presence of a management champion can make a significant difference for gay employee groups. While 60 percent of networks with an executive sponsor (18 out of 30) succeeded in their push for equitable benefits, only 43 percent of those without a sponsor (10 out of 23) were able to effect a change in policy. The case study of an east coast financial services company provides a clear illustration of the importance of management champions. At this company, sponsors are senior-level executives who support diversity networks in various ways, including the securing of a budget.

In 1995, after discussing the need for a well-recognized and well-respected sponsor for their newly formed organization, which I refer to as GLB, members of the gay network at corporate headquarters came up with names of executives they had either worked with or felt comfortable approaching. From the list, they chose the President of a very visible corporate division who had also been on the Diversity Council. According to one of the founders of GLB, this President had been very active in diversity initiatives and had established "a track record of being somewhat enlightened and supportive." A network member who had previously worked with the executive asked him to be the group's sponsor; he quickly accepted.

For his first action as executive sponsor, he wrote a memo, sent to every employee in the U.S., in which he announced GLB's formation, communicated its importance to the company, and identified himself as the network's executive sponsor. In his memo he included an 800 number for anyone interested in joining GLB, and he encouraged support
for the organization. In a separate communication, the executive sponsor urged senior managers to utilize the gay employee group as a resource for reaching out to the lesbian and gay market. Three months later, the CEO also sent a memo about GLB’s formation, where he discussed the importance of all employee networks. As a result of the corporate-wide communication, GLB grew quickly. All of the people who called the 800 number were sorted by location and then introduced to each other. Today the gay employee network has over 700 members, with 15 chapters across the country. Each chapter of the gay network has an executive sponsor, as does the national coordinating body that links the local chapters.

Roadblocks to winning benefits. After the memo was sent by their executive sponsor, GLB members rolled up their sleeves and got right to work on the issue that had motivated them to form the network in the first place: domestic partner benefits. Their strategy was carefully thought out, and their proposal was well researched. Members knew they had to find a way around a roadblock that had surfaced before the network even formed. In 1994, the year before GLB was established, three gay employees who belonged to a "satellite" of the Diversity Council wrote to the CEO and asked the company to adopt equitable benefits. In response, Human Resources contacted a consulting form for additional information. Shortly thereafter, the company denied the request and prepared a memo citing several concerns. I briefly cover them here since, according to my interviews with Fortune 1000 executives, they provide a good feel for the mindset of corporate elites who are faced with a request for equitable benefits.
From a competitive standpoint, one of the issues raised was that the benefits were not "mainstream" since, at that time (1994), fewer than 50 companies had adopted them. More importantly, "none of the 14 companies [that the corporation] uses for compensation/benefits benchmarking" had adopted equitable benefits. The memo also cited "legal/policy" issues, saying the benefits might "conflict with certain state laws" and that the company would have to decide who qualifies as a domestic partner, how to document the relationship, and which policies to extend. Under "tax issues," the company cited the fact that employees will be taxed on the value of their partner's benefits, which is not the case for married heterosexuals. Under "cost" concerns, the company raised the issue of "additional risk exposure," reflecting the false assumption that costs would increase significantly if gay men signed up partners with AIDS. The memo also mentioned a "timing" concern, fearing "employee relations issues" that might arise over extending benefits at a time when the company was restructuring and employee contributions for medical coverage had increased.

Removing the roadblocks. Realizing the need to address each of these issues, GLB members gathered lists of employers that had already granted equitable benefits and interviewed over 20 human resource directors and benefits coordinators in order to obtain more detailed information on enrollment figures and costs (both low to nil), internal and external reaction, concerns of the CEO and other senior management, and so on. They also sought advice from gay employee networks at other companies, a task made relatively easy given GLB's membership in an informal umbrella group that met regularly at a local restaurant.
In preparation for their first formal presentation to key decision-makers, GLB members met with the company's General Counsel, Public Affairs, as well as the head of Human Resources and Compensation and Benefits, who helped them prepare "an extremely thorough cost analysis." In their preparatory meetings, GLB asked each of these parties to look at their benefits proposal and "surface all the issues that may come out" if they won an audience with senior management. As "Barb," one of the founders explained, since their ultimate goal was to present to the Office of the Chief Executive, members "wanted to make sure that by the time [GLB] got to them, every single question, concern, obstacle was removed."

Partly because of the access provided by their executive sponsor at corporate headquarters, who sat on the Diversity Council, GLB was able to make a formal presentation to members of the Council, all of whom were supportive. In fact, according to Barb, because of the previous "awareness work" of GLB, the Diversity Council turned out to be another "executive sponsor" of sorts. Network members then prepared a series of presentations, all in "[company]-speak," as Barb described it, which they tailored to different senior management audiences, eventually hitting all of the CEO's direct reports. The presenters were fairly senior-level gay employees who were well respected by executives on the Diversity Council, to whom they had first presented their proposal.

The presentation or "deck," as members called it, was accompanied by several pieces of supporting materials (a 19-page hard copy of the presentation, a 10-page list of equitable benefits adopters, and 33 pages of interview responses from the companies they benchmarked). The top of the first page served as a good summary of the profits frame
emphasized throughout: "Why offer domestic partner benefits? Apart from fundamental considerations of equity, such a program recommends itself because it is in the Company's best interest...." The rest of the deck focused on the advantages of equitable benefits for shareholders, customers, and employees; corporations that had already adopted the benefits; and key considerations. Drawing on the benchmarking interviews GLB had conducted with over 20 other adopters, presenters carefully addressed all of the points that had been considered concerns the year before, including expected financial impact, legal and policy issues such as eligibility, and internal and external reactions.

*Opening the doors to the executive suite.* Because of the support they had won from the Diversity Council and from a high-level executive for whom one of the network leaders worked, GLB was able to gain access to each one of the company's senior executives, namely the Presidents of the 15 corporate divisions. Various GLB members who worked for these senior managers then "satellited off and went through the presentation" with each one of them. They had received "fairly unanimous support" from the senior managers by the time they presented to the Office of the Chief Executive, which consisted of the CEO and three vice chairmen. Prior to the meeting, all four had been briefed about the issue.

Barb thought that the presentation and discussion afterward went "exceptionally well." She noted, "[The CEO] was very engaged; he asked the right questions. I think we had the right answers." She described the meeting as "extremely open, very productive, and enjoyable" as well as "intellectually stimulating and emotionally fulfilling...a genuine dialogue." One of the things the CEO asked was for presenters to take him through the
company's current benefits program and explain exactly how his wife and children benefitted from it. This was juxtaposed with what gay and lesbian employees and their families were denied under current benefits policy. As Barb later explained, the inequity is not obvious to most people, so seeing it on paper and then hearing it described in personal terms proved to be quite powerful. Approximately two months after the meeting, the company announced its decision. After only a year or so of formal organizing, GLB had won its fight for equitable benefits. Following the announcement, key decision-makers received between 150 and 200 thank-you letters from GLB members.

Coalition Partners

Sister networks. While influential individuals from within or close to upper management can serve as key allies, so too can other employee networks. The presence of these coalition partners has a significant impact on the likelihood of gay-inclusive policy change. Focusing on equitable benefits, the difference in success rates between gay networks with and without coalition support is striking: 64 percent (30 out of 47) versus 33 percent (7 out of 21), respectively. The telecommunications case study illustrates the important role that these organizational allies can play.

Leaders of GLUE firmly believed in the fruitfulness of coalition building. Many members made a concerted effort to establish connections with the other employee resource groups in the company, being sure to attend their events and invite them to attend GLUE’s in return. Through their structural embeddedness in multiple systems of oppression (Collins 2000), some members of the gay network were dedicated members of other diversity groups in the company. Leaders described this as "seeding," where
activists, through overlapping memberships, would actively contribute to other causes and in turn educate other networks on the issues of concern to gay employees. With "spillover" working in both directions (Meyer and Whittier 1994), feminists in the women's employee group who joined the gay network had a significant influence on some of the gay male members, who began to claim a pro-feminist identity (Raeburn 1995).

After establishing strong connections with their sister networks in the company, GLUE members asked the leaders of these groups to support their fight for equitable benefits. After a brief period of deliberation, all of the other networks signed off on GLUE's proposal, which requested benefits for the partners of both heterosexual and gay employees. Thereafter, in quarterly meetings with management (including business unit presidents, the head of human resources, and the diversity office), leaders from each of the employee networks expressed support for the benefits.

When GLUE wrote a letter to the top decision-makers urging them to adopt equitable benefits, leaders of all the employee networks signed it. Representing their respective constituencies, these signatures "sent a message to the company that 25,000 employees support domestic partner benefits." While it took at least two more years, GLUE finally won their fight for equitable benefits. As previously discussed, elite turnover played a crucial role in this policy change, but it seems unlikely that the new CEO would have agreed to the benefits so quickly if it weren't for the vocal support GLUE had already won from all of the company's diversity networks as well as from the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, and the Executive Vice President of Consumers, among others.
Union as coalition partners. While relatively infrequent, unions can also serve as coalition partners, as when collective bargaining units negotiate for gay-inclusive policies such as nondiscrimination policies or domestic partner benefits. Of those companies that had both gay employee networks and unions, collective bargaining units got involved in the fight for benefits in approximately one-third of the cases. Gay activist networks were slightly more successful in winning benefits when unions were involved than when they were not: 40 percent (4 out of 6) versus 32 percent (6 out of 19), respectively. I suspect that the reason union involvement appears to make less of a difference than the presence of other allies is that oftentimes union support is rather tenuous. Plus in many cases, the percentage of employees covered by collective bargaining agreements was rather low.

The telecommunications case study illustrates the sometimes tenuous nature of union support for equitable benefits. It also appears to represent the most organized effort on the part of gay activist networks to win union support. GLUE's national leaders worked long and hard to establish a working relationship with the leadership of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the Internal Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). GLUE met with the leaders of both unions and asked them to bring up domestic partner benefits in contract negotiations, which they did in 1992 and again in 1995, with contract periods lasting three years. Both times, however, the unions "easily dumped" the benefits early in the negotiating process since the membership was not fully committed to the issue.

GLUE's national leaders then met to devise a more effective union strategy. They established a union liaison committee and a Vice Presidential title specifically for a union
representative. Since half of the gay network’s membership belonged to the unions, the union liaison was able to “work it from the bottom up at the locals wherever [GLUE] had members” and from the top down at the national office by arguing “this is what our members want.” Some gay network members also joined the equity committees of the CWA and IBEW and met with the rank and file to build support for the benefits from the ground up. One of the national co-presidents commented that it "took a lot of courage for GLUE union members" to stand up and talk to their fellow union members about partner benefits because most of the union’s membership was "rabidly homophobic." Some individual union stewards were supportive though because, as another national leader explained, "they have had some personal relationship [with gay people]...either in the workplace or outside of it, so they kind of get it."

As a result of GLUE’s concerted efforts, the CWA ended up extending benefits to the domestic partners of its own working staff around 1995. The union locals also established Diversity Councils that included lesbian and gay representatives. GLUE’s focus on the unions eventually paid off in 1998, when the union membership passed a resolution saying they would seriously push for equitable benefits in their upcoming contract negotiations. As discussed previously, however, by the time the company came to the negotiating table, top management (including the new CEO) had already decided to grant the benefits. A national co-president of the gay network, who was "very close to the company’s chief negotiator," learned that the company was simply waiting for the union to ask for the benefits. He commented on the irony of the situation. Three years earlier, while talking with the Benefits director in Human Resources, the same gay activist
suggested a way for the company to adopt the benefits while avoiding potential backlash: corporate officials could simply attribute the decision to the insistence of the unions. As the gay network leader put it, "Why don't you just do it and say that the unions negotiated for it?" At the time, the Benefits director said, "I can't," but three years later, that's exactly what the company did.

CULTURAL SUPPORTS AS ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

As the final dimension of organizational opportunity, cultural supports refer to ideational elements and interpretive frameworks (Taylor and Whittier 1995) in the target organization itself that facilitate gay-inclusive policy change; and experiential components of opportunity that derive from the personal backgrounds of elites. I focus in particular on the impact of a diversity-embracing corporate culture and, among elites, preexisting personal ties and "punctuating" experiences that evoke empathy with challengers.

A Diversity-Embracing Corporate Culture

In his discussion of institutionalization, Scott (1995) emphasizes the importance of "cultural carriers," which refer to "patterns of meanings" that operate on multiple planes, from the world system and societal levels to more specific levels such as the field environment, the organization itself, or its various subunits. Corporate culture exemplifies the more particularistic level of meaning (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, and Martin 1991; Scott 1995). In interviews, several human resource executives commented at length on the importance of building a corporate culture that treats diversity as a business imperative. When asked why her telecommunications company added sexual orientation to its nondiscrimination policy and to diversity training before the gay employee network
even emerged, the director of human resources acknowledged the role of the company's diversity manager, who "presented the rationale and business case for diversity, which was one of seven components of culture change" that she was promoting.

In terms of gay-inclusive policy adoption, I hypothesized that employee networks would be more likely to succeed if their corporate culture embraced diversity as a business imperative. This is because companies that adopt this new human resources paradigm (Dobbin and Sutton 1998) already view at least some inclusive policies as a means of attracting and retaining employees and securing the loyalty of equity-minded customers. Indeed, if the company does not already view diversity as profitable, gay employee networks often find that their requests fall on deaf ears. As one frustrated activist put it, reflecting on her employer's unwillingness to adopt equitable benefits despite the network's emphasis on their profit potential, "They just don't buy it."

A company that buys it. The financial services case study provides strong evidence in support of the claim that culture matters (Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). As discussed above, despite some initial roadblocks, GLB succeeded in winning equitable benefits after only a year or so of organizing. But their journey was made much easier because they were navigating in a corporate culture that already viewed diversity as profitable. Two years before GLB mobilized, for example, the company had produced a 43-page document called *Diversity: 1993 Report to Benchmark Partners*. The report was a "major diversity benchmarking effort" that was described as "breaking new ground in this area." After discussing the process by which benchmarking partners were chosen, the document focused on "best practices" and

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interview results. The emphasis throughout was on the competitive advantages that come from embracing diversity. Importantly, their definition of diversity included sexual orientation.

When I interviewed the Director of the Diversity Resource Center and asked her about the factors involved in her company's decision to grant domestic partner benefits, she credited the work of GLB, but she also emphasized a strong diversity-affirming corporate culture:

The company's culture consists of a strong set of values. If people can't live, feel, and breathe those values, they don't stay around long....It's part of who we are as a culture. We have a corporate culture that [encourages] being open, embracing, and inclusive no matter who the individual is. To be successful here, that's just the way things are.

A company that buys it but doesn't think anyone wants it: a case of missed opportunity. Similarly, a human resources director at a midwestern insurance carrier comments on his company's diversity-as-profitable stance:

[While] a lot of companies aren't paying attention to leveraging differences, we've had affirmative action since the 1960s even before we had federal contracts, and we'll keep them no matter what happens elsewhere....Our diversity concept is not just gender and race but also being sensitive to, recognizing, and leveraging people's differences...historical differences, physical differences, and so on. [It's about] creating an environment where everyone feels good and included and which lets everyone add in their special parts. And it's about having our employees mirror our market. This is good leveraging.

While this company seems to "talk a good talk," it nevertheless lacks domestic partner benefits. The director's explanation for this inconsistency reveals the importance of movement processes in bringing about equitable benefits policies. This company has no lesbian, gay, or bisexual employee network: "According to our benefits department, there
are very little requests for [the benefits] from the field. The company is not actively opposed; it's more about 'Do we have enough interest?"

Summary. In Chapter 5 I discussed the new human resources paradigm (Dobbin and Sutton 1998) as a component of normative isomorphism and conceptualized the "diversity as business imperative" script as an important macro-level opportunity. Shifting down a level to meso-opportunities, this section has provided examples of how diversity discourse, as reflected in particular corporate cultures, becomes embedded in concrete practices and structures. As Josh Gamson (1998b) has argued, discourses are not simply free-floating ideas; they are attached to particular institutional logics and organizational practices. I have thus highlighted whether and how companies embrace the idea that diversity is good for the bottom line. I argue that the further along the curve a company is in accepting this discourse, the more likely it is that gay employee activists will win equitable policies.

As shown in previous chapters, employee activists themselves, joined by a cadre of discursive activists, can help to create such opportunities if they are not already present. Nonetheless, that takes considerably more time, energy, resources, and patience. When companies "just don't buy it," gay employees activists have to set down their briefcases, roll out their charts and graphs, and push hard to sell it. And it can be a hard sell indeed. The negotiations are much easier, at least, when elites have had personal experiences that "punctuate" the need for equality. In other words, while recalcitrant companies may look at gay employees and think they're being sold a bill of goods, fair-minded elites may be more apt to see a bill of rights.

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Punctuating Experiences

While institutional scholars have found that the professional background of the CEO influences corporate strategies (Fligstein 1991; Thornton 1995), they have not focused on the impact of elites' personal background. I argue that it is not just professional training but interpersonal experiences that influence the decisions of elites, especially with regard to issues of justice and equality in the workplace. While themes of fairness and equal treatment are now widely accepted cultural frames, individuals clearly disagree over which groups are entitled to such rights. In his work on the politics of exclusion, Gamson (1995:1) describes this division as "an ongoing contest over who is the 'we,' to whom specific moral obligations apply, and who is the 'they,' to whom they do not." With this in mind, I argue for the importance of examining how wider cultural scripts regarding equal rights become embedded in the heads and hearts of elites and, consequently, in the structures and practices of the organizations they run.

While not focusing on justice frames, neoinstitutional scholar W. Richard Scott (1995:53) emphasizes that cultural beliefs, whether widespread or organizationally specific, "are carried in the minds of individuals." Attempting to capture the impact of such internalization on organizational actors, Scott draws on the notion of *habitus*, which Bordieu (1977) defines as a "system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions" that structure the behavior of individuals (as cited in Scott 1995:53). My interviews likewise reveal the importance of past experiences in shaping the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of organizational elites.
In attempting to convince a particular elite of the need for gay-inclusive policies, some employee networks find that empathy and understanding either already exist or can be generated with relative ease. This receptiveness often derives from what I call punctuating experiences that serve to humanize challengers and generate empathy with their concerns. The notion of punctuating experiences is similar to Jasper and Poulsen's (1995) term "moral shocks," which refer to events that outrage people and hence encourage them to join a social movement even in the absence of any preexisting ties with activists. I see punctuating experiences as similar to a moral shock in that they can generate sympathy from elites even before (or without) direct interaction with gay employee activists. Sympathy may derive, for example, from preexisting ties with gay or lesbian family members, friends, or colleagues. Alternatively heterosexual elites may be supportive of gay causes because they themselves have suffered from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and so on.

Personal ties and elite experiences of discrimination. Sometimes personalizing connections come from elite relationships with gay family members. According to one of the network founders at a scientific and photographic company, family ties can greatly facilitate policy change. When asked why she thinks her company adopted equitable benefits and several other gay-inclusive practices, she responded that, in part, "it's because people in upper management have this diversity in their families, and they've told us that. That has really helped us be so successful."

In the same industry, another leading company had adopted equitable domestic partner benefits at the urging of its gay employee network. Members attributed the
decision to a variety of factors, including the fact that the CEO's secretary has a son who is gay. Perhaps most important, the CEO had become friends with a man who happened to be the leader of the gay network. As "a big Democratic supporter," the CEO was also asked by HRC to testify before Congress in support of ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which he did. This elite's own family background helped him make personal connections with the concerns of lesbian and gay people, as he himself explained to members of the network. He shared with them the story of his Huguenot ancestors who, as French Protestants, "were hunted down and killed, fled here, but also didn't fit in" in this country either.

The gay network's executive sponsor, who approached the group and offered to be their champion, didn't necessarily have personal ties with gay and lesbian people, but he did share a similar story about his family background: "I'm Hispanic and Jewish, and my family wasn't accepted in the Hispanic community because we weren't Catholic, and we weren't accepted in the Jewish community because we're Hispanic. So I have a deep commitment to treating people fairly. Plus we want good quality people."

Personal experiences with discrimination can be a deep source of empathy with other outsiders. For example, an African American man who is a division President at a high-tech corporation agreed to speak at a Professional Development Conference that had been organized by two gay employee networks, one from his company and the other from a sister spin-off in the same industry. During his plenary address, with over 300 employees present, he drew powerful connections between racism and homophobia: "There was blood spilled in Selma, Alabama. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr....They
are part of my heritage. I know I didn't get here by myself. I relate to the Stonewall Riots as a watershed event. We all benefit from those actions." He then shared personal stories of racism that he had experienced in and outside of the workplace.

Commenting on the fact that his employer had not yet adopted equitable benefits, he explained why gay-inclusive policies should be adopted: because they are good for business and "because it's right." Afterwards he took questions from the audience. In one of his responses, he encouraged heterosexuals to "not just say you support diversity" but to actually "do it." As part of his closing comments, he challenged heterosexuals with a simple but telling question, "Can you say 'gay and lesbian' without looking down and staring at every whole in your wingtip shoes?" He was met with thunderous applause.

Another plenary speaker, an African American woman who is the corporate head of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity at the same high-tech company, said that she can relate in some ways to being closeted. "I can't be all of who I am at work," she explained. Discussing a diversity article she had written on the topic, she said, "I turn off my blues and my Marvin Gaye right before going into work and going 'on stage.'" She continued, "And the clone suit—blue and taupe for women—isn't me....I knew I couldn't thrive with sexism and racism, so I decided I was going to be who I am and be comfortable." After discussing the relationship between homophobia and racism, she proudly exclaimed, "[W]hen I was able to hug my very out lesbian friend in the cafeteria at work, I knew I had arrived."

She closed with the story of a little boy who was seen throwing stranded starfish back into the ocean. When someone asked, "What are you doing? There are too many.
You can't help; you won't make a difference," the little boy tossed back another starfish and said, "It sure made a difference for that one." The keynote speaker then added, "That's what I do....I have a passion for equality." During the question and answer period, she said that she receives phone calls from "pretty senior people who are afraid of coming out," and she tries to encourage them to take the risk. She said that if anyone in the audience was trying to decide whether or not to come out at work, they should consider a phrase repeated often in the African American community after Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot and killed: "Either you can keep living on your knees or [risk] dying on your feet."

She then turned and, continuing a ritual that had been woven throughout the other plenary sessions, opened a closet door. Behind it was a huge pink triangle. The national leadership of the two gay employee networks then joined her on stage and turned all of the doors around to reveal the colors of the rainbow flag, a symbol of gay pride and the diversity of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered community. Written across the closet doors was the conference theme "A Company without Closets," along with the words "Safe Space" and the logos of both gay networks. The room echoed with cheers and applause.

By inviting heterosexuals to speak at the conference and challenge the cultural code of the closet, which signifies secrecy and shame, these employee activists purposefully sought to win allies and draw elites into the "emotion culture" of the movement (Taylor and Whittier 1995). Taylor and Whittier's definition of ritual describes perfectly well the symbolic import of breaking down closet doors. Rituals, they argue,
"are the cultural mechanisms through which collective actors express the emotions—that is, the enthusiasm, pride, anger, hatred, fear, and sorrow—that mobilize and sustain conflict" (p. 176). Because of their own experiences as "outsiders within" (Collins 1990, 2000), these elites "got" the political connections between homophobia and other forms of institutionalized discrimination. By telling personal stories of their own in plenary speeches and by participating in the rituals and emotion culture of the workplace movement, these allies helped other elites in the audience see those connections as well.

Summary. Just as isomorphic processes in the wider sociopolitical and field environments facilitate favorable policy outcomes for challengers, so too do organizational-level opportunities inside the corporation. As this chapter has made clear, employee activists are more likely to succeed when their immediate organizational environment contains certain structural and processual elements that favor inclusive policy change. In particular, I have documented the significance of four key dimensions of organizational opportunity.

First is the presence of structural templates that signal at least a minimal level of legitimacy for previously excluded groups and which provide access to decision-makers and to institutional resources. Second is organizational realignment that brings into the issue domain new elites or organizations that are supportive of inclusive policy change. Third is the availability of allies, whether influential individuals or other organizational challengers who serve as coalition partners. Fourth is the existence of cultural supports such as a diversity-embracing corporate culture or, among elites, preexisting personal ties and punctuating experiences that foster empathy with challengers.
Organizational realignments, such as elite turnover and shifts in the composition of the Board of Directors, seem relatively beyond the control of activists, but other dimensions of opportunity appear more open to change. I have thus treated institutional opportunities as a "dynamic process of contestation" (Taylor 2000) in that challengers can, through their own actions, create more favorable conditions when none currently exist. In the next and final chapter, I highlight the role that activists themselves play in creating inclusive corporate climates. I focus especially on the importance of two movement processes: namely, the strategic deployment of identity and the mobilization of a profits-oriented collective action frame.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: CHANGING THE CORPORATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT:
THE IMPACT OF MOVEMENT STRATEGIES ON POLICY OUTCOMES

The previous two chapters have illuminated how institutional opportunities at the
sociopolitical, field, and organizational levels facilitate favorable policy outcomes. In this
concluding chapter, attending to what Tarrow (1998) has called "power in movement," I
highlight the role that activists themselves play in bringing about gay-inclusive policy
change. I focus in particular on the impact of two movement processes: the use of
identity-oriented strategies that emphasize gay visibility in the workplace; and the
mobilization of collective action frames that rationalize the call for inclusive policies.
Throughout the dissertation I have woven examples of the way movements matter. In this
chapter, I provide a more thorough discussion of the collective identity and framing
strategies that activists deploy in their efforts to create organizational opportunities and to
convince corporate elites to grant them equal rights.

Dividing the chapter into three sections, I first examine the impact of identity-
oriented strategies that celebrate rather than downplay gay visibility, focusing especially on
the use of personal narratives. Next, I discuss what I have called an ideology of profits
and delineate the various components that constitute that frame. Finally, I draw out the
larger implications of my findings for the study of institutional activism generally, emphasizing the usefulness of a theoretical framework that attends to both movement and institutional processes.

THE IMPACT OF IDENTITY-ORIENTED STRATEGIES

Scholars use the term *collective identity* to refer to how challenging groups come to define themselves and their shared situation, or how they "make sense of the question of who we are" and how they "draw the circles that separate 'us' from 'them'" (Taylor 1999:23; see also Taylor 1989; Gamson 1992b; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Mueller 1994; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Whittier 1995). New social movement perspectives use the concept of collective identity to highlight the fact that people frequently enact their social and political commitments not simply or even primarily as members of formal groups but rather as empowered individuals (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1985, 1989; Offe 1985; Touraine 1985; Habermas 1987; Klandermans and Tarrow 1988; Giddens 1991; Castells 1997).

The construction of collective identity consists of three key processes: the creation of submerged networks; the development of new collective self-understandings; and the deployment of personalized political resistance, or the politicization of everyday life (Taylor and Raeburn 1995; see also Taylor and Whittier 1992). In this section I focus on the latter component to demonstrate the impact that personalized political strategies can have on others who fall outside the circle of the "we." Through "coming out" stories and other personal narratives, gay and lesbian employees strategically deploy collective identity in order to effect both structural and cultural change in the corporation. Activists use this form of identity expression in their everyday work lives to challenge group invisibility and
dominant representations of themselves, affirm new politicized identities, and help others see the connection between the personal and the political (Gamson 1989; Melucci 1989; Epstein 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Lichterman 1996).

While identity expression has been a central dimension of most movements (Morris 1984; Fantasia 1988), new social movement scholars argue that part of what is "new" about new social movements is the adamant insistence that the formation and expression of collective identity is indeed politics (Breines 1982; Melucci 1988; Kauffinan 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992:117-118). As Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue, drawing on Pizzorno (1978), "[T]he purposeful and expressive disclosure to others of one's subjective feelings, desires, experiences—or social identity—for the purpose of gaining recognition and influence is collective action" (p. 110, emphasis added).

Identity Deployment in the Workplace

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists use various forms of identity expression such as coming out stories and personal narratives to help potential allies and elites relate to their concerns. Nonetheless, I found that gay employee networks vary in the extent to which they rely on this form of personalized political resistance (Lichterman 1996). Similarly, Bernstein's (1997) work on "identity deployment" reveals that activists make strategic decisions to either celebrate or suppress their differences from dominant groups. Adapting her framework, I focus on the deployment of identity-oriented strategies that either promote or downplay gay visibility in the workplace and examine the relative impact of these strategies on policy outcomes.
Collective identity strategies that emphasize visibility can be highly effective means of winning inclusive policy change. With regard to domestic partner benefits, I found a striking difference in success rates between networks that highlight versus downplay gay identity. Survey data reveal that 67 percent of groups (16 out of 24) where most members are out at work succeeded in winning equitable benefits compared to only 11 percent of groups in which very few members had come out (2 out of 18). As further evidence of the positive impact of lesbian and gay visibility, I found that 62 percent of networks (34 out of 55) that celebrated Gay Pride Month in the workplace won benefits compared to only 27 percent of groups that did not organize such events (4 out of 15).

Similarly, while the success rate was 72 percent (26 out of 36) for networks who participated in National Coming Out Day, which is held in October to commemorate the 1987 Gay and Lesbian March on Washington, the success rate for groups that did not participate in such events was only 35 percent (12 out of 34). Another indicator of gay visibility is the number of network chapters that exist within a corporation. While particular chapters clearly vary in the extent to which they emphasize gay visibility in the workplace, the sheer number of chapters raises awareness of lesbian and gay issues. It also sends a strong signal to corporate headquarters that the concerns of gay employees are not simply local or limited to a single group of particularly "disgruntled" employees. As expected, those networks that had more than one chapter were more likely to win benefits than those that did not: 62 percent (21 out of 34) versus 44 percent (16 out of 36), respectively.
Doing it up big: celebrating National Coming Out Day. Employee activist networks that choose to emphasize gay visibility in the workplace do so in a wide variety of ways. At a global corporation headquartered in the south, for example, the gay employee group organized particularly elaborate celebrations of National Coming Out Day. As discussed in a previous chapter, this company had already faced a right-wing backlash in response to its support of the gay network, and it was currently under threat of a boycott for its consideration of equitable benefits. Nonetheless, members of the gay network continued to push hard for the benefits. Understating the degree of pressure, but acknowledging the face-to-face work of the network, the vice president of human resources explained in our interview: "Fifteen or so fairly high-level openly gay employees met with the CEO [recently] at one of their homes, and domestic partner benefits were mentioned."

The network also used National Coming Out Day to generate support for gay-inclusive policy change among employees throughout the company. During our interview, a network leader spoke excitedly about the group's most recent celebration of the day. Members had organized a two-hour lunch time event that included outside speakers from the local gay and lesbian community center, the lesbian and gay credit union, and the Metropolitan Community Church, a large multidenominational congregation of gay, lesbian, and gay-supportive people of faith. In honor of the event, the company agreed to replace all of the international flags flown at headquarters with rainbow flags, a popular symbol of gay pride.
There was also an exhibit organized by NGLTF called "Love Makes a Family," which included photographs showing the diversity of lesbian, gay, and bisexual families. Infusing some humor into the day's events, the network displayed cartoons such as the smartly funny "Dykes to Watch Out For" series by Allison Bechdel, interspersed with "Did you know...?" snippets to educate employees on various gay and lesbian workplace issues, such as "Did you know that you can be fired in [this state] for being gay?" Indicating commitment, strength, and power in numbers, members from all eight chapters of the network flew into town to attend the event.

The network also set up information tables and passed out "safe place" magnets as part of a new awareness program. As visible indicators of support for gay and lesbian people, allies display the magnets in their workspaces to designate the area as free of homophobia. I will discuss "safe place" or "safe space" strategies in more detail below. What warrants emphasis here is the fact that the network had convinced the President of the company to unveil the safe place program at the National Coming Out Day event.

Perhaps this is not surprising since the network had already persuaded the company to add sexual orientation to its nondiscrimination policy and diversity training and to begin marketing and donating to the wider lesbian and gay community. Nonetheless, the airline had yet to adopt equitable benefits. Despite strong support for the network among top management, the company feared the wrath of the Right. At the time of my interviews, when asked whether the benefits were currently being considered, the vice president of human resources responded:
They're always under consideration. We've done research, we know what we would offer and how we would do it. We could do it very quickly. Will it happen? I think it will happen eventually. No one in our industry does it, but enough other big companies will. Then there will be a peer pressure effect. They will become so commonplace that reactions of employees, customers, and shareholders will eventually be consensus instead of backlash.

As revealed in a previous chapter, the company did indeed adopt equitable benefits. Their announcement came less than a week after the first company in the industry took the plunge and extended its benefit plan. Tellingly, that first adopter had faced years of both internal and external pressure to adopt the benefits.

The Power of Personal Narratives: Winning Allies and Convincing Elites

Another important way that activists deploy identity-oriented strategies is to use personal narratives or stories that help heterosexuals understand what it is like to be gay or lesbian in the workplace (see also Taylor and Raeburn 1995). Lofland (1995) discusses "everyday stories told and retold with strong positive or negative emotional expression" as an important component of movement culture (p. 192, emphasis in the original). Taylor's (1996, 1999) work on the postpartum depression self-help movement likewise reveals the mobilizing impact of personal stories, whether shared through face-to-face interaction, letters, publications, telephone conversations, or daytime talk shows. Reflecting the insistence of new social movements that "collective self-expression is politics," and highlighting the transformative impact of "emotion culture," Taylor (1999:20) argues that "activists use the expression of emotions as a deliberate tool for change" (see also Taylor 1995b). Similarly, Sherkat (1999) emphasizes that "narrative identity constructions and
other ideological machinations may be used strategically by social movement organizations to appeal to emotive responses from constituents or targets" (p. 17).

Realizing the power of emotional connection, lesbian and gay networks that choose to emphasize gay visibility will often use coming out stories or other personal narratives. Such revelations are in many ways no different from what heterosexuals do on an everyday basis without even thinking—discussing a weekend spent with a spouse, relaying a funny family incident, sharing a painful personal story. But in the context of a heterosexist environment, such acts of sharing by gays and lesbians take on an additional political and emotional significance. Gay employee activists thus utilize personal narratives not simply because that is what (heterosexual) friends and colleagues do freely in their everyday lives. They also do so because that very act of sharing, when done by members of a stigmatized or invisible group, can have ramifications that echo long after the stories themselves have been told.

Sometimes network members utilize personal narratives on an individual basis with colleagues or supervisors, while other times they organize formal educational events for management that include moving testimony that serves to generate empathy with their concerns. These events are typically small-scale occasions held at particular company locations, but some gay employee groups organize large-scale "professional development conferences" and send out company-wide invitations.

Making it personal. Strategies that promote gay visibility by establishing personal connections can be highly effective in convincing elites to support policy change. One gay employee group in the high-tech industry used this strategy in its presentation on domestic
partner benefits to upper management. In preparation for the meeting, network members
had put together a video featuring interviews with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual
employees in both line and management positions. Each interviewee explained why they
personally support equitable benefits. Though not the first in its industry, their company's
extension of the benefits made it one of the earliest adopters in the corporate world.

The telecommunications case study offers an example of a particularly innovative
identity strategy that demonstrates the power of personal narrative. Leaders of GLUE
repeatedly emphasized the importance of establishing a personal connection with
heterosexuals so that gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns are "brought home" rather than
seen as abstract issues. One way that members put this philosophy into practice was by
compiling a "GLUE Family Album" that contained, in the words of the national co-

president, "stories of our gay and lesbian lives." Beginning in 1991, network leaders
began to compile "a collection of short autobiographical sketches of members, primarily
those in long-term committed relationships, to help overcome society's stereotypes."

Over the years, leaders had asked 50 members to contribute to the album by
writing personal stories about their lives, their partners, and their work. The album
included full-color photographs of the contributors and reproductions of their stories,
many of which were hand-written on notebook paper and so included ragged edges and
all, to make it look "even more human," said the national co-president who coordinated
the effort. This woman distributed the album to senior management around 1995. In her
words, "I gave the book to every executive I could find." She believes that this strategy,
by putting "a human face on the issue," was perhaps the most important factor in obtaining domestic partner benefits, which came in 1998 after a nine-year struggle.

Her national co-president ranks other factors as more significant, yet he agrees that the album helped GLUE gain additional allies and was hence "a building block along the way." Indeed, while the former CEO was opposed to domestic partner benefits, GLUE had succeeded in winning vocal support for the benefits from the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, and the Executive Vice President of Consumers, among others. Thus, by the time the new CEO took office, the skids had already been greased. Shortly after his arrival, the company announced the extension of equitable benefits.

"Professional development conferences as wide-scale arenas for the deployment of personal narratives." Some lesbian and gay workplace activists also organize company-wide "professional development conferences" in order to educate executives and win allies throughout the corporation. Employing discursive strategies aimed to legitimize their call for a gay-inclusive environment, activists use these conferences to diffuse ideologies of ethics and profits, which I discuss in a later section. Equally important, activists utilize these events as wide-scale arenas for the deployment of personal narratives.

In 1996, I attended a professional development conference that was jointly organized by gay employee networks from two high-tech companies that had recently spun off from a telecommunications corporation. This conference had two tracks, one general and one for management. Although one of the high-tech companies had recently adopted domestic partner benefits, the other had not. Shortly after the conference,
however, the second company followed suit. Below I describe some of the ways in which gay activists used personal narratives to establish a connection with potential supporters.

In one of the management sessions, entitled "Living the Issues: Our Employees' Experiences," a long-time heterosexual ally organized and facilitated a panel of lesbian, gay, and bisexual managers, who shared some of their workplace experiences. Some talked about what it was like being closeted while others talked about the risks and rewards of being out. One of the panelists, "Sandy," explained how she was "way closeted when [she] taught in public schools." Finding the secrecy too difficult and draining, she changed careers. Looking for a company with a nondiscrimination policy, she found one in her current employer, but she was still afraid to come out. Sandy would talk about her life partner, Jackie, but would not identify her as such. One day, Sandy's heterosexual manager approached her and said, "It must be hard for you and Jackie." As Sandy explained to the workshop audience, that supportive acknowledgment "opened up the world to me." Indeed, having found an ally who gave her the courage to come out, Sandy decided to join the gay employee network and eventually became its national co-chair. Still actively involved in the network, she also serves on the board of a national gay rights organization.

In another management session called "Workplace Realities: Fact and Fiction," several gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees shared experiences with harassment, exclusion, and other forms of discrimination. In one case a story was shared about a gay man who decided to come out at work the day after his company location had an all-employee meeting on harassment. A member of both the union and the gay employee
network, he soon began to receive lewd pictures. In addition to a defaced copy of the gay network's informational pamphlet, he also received a cut up "safe space" magnet.

After some co-workers began making homophobic remarks and he was excluded from his work group, the man finally decided to go to the Equal Opportunity Office. Although in tears when he arrived, he explained that he was "so relieved to see a safe space magnet on the door of the EO office before walking in." When the office tried to investigate, the union refused to cooperate. Others present at the management session where this story was told said that situations like these, though very upsetting, "are not the worst" examples of homophobic treatment in the workplace. Whether through threatening e-mails, vulgar photos, hurtful jokes, or smashed car windows, lesbian and gay employees receive countless messages that encourage them to remain closeted. Some network members who work in the factory side of the business literally fear for their lives.

The managers present at the panel discussion seemed truly shocked to hear these stories. The session closed with the facilitator dividing the managers into small groups, where they brainstormed ways not simply to prevent harassment but also to create a truly supportive, gay-affirming environment. In other words, said the heterosexual ally and facilitator, "What does social justice and equality really look like?" The managers in attendance, moved by the personal stories they had just heard, generated ideas that filled numerous easel-size pages, which they then posted around the room. Domestic partner benefits figured prominently among them. As mentioned above, shortly after this conference, the high-tech company that had been holding out finally adopted equitable benefits.
Bringing in Outside Activists: The Role of Institutional Bridge Leaders in Revealing the Personal as Political

Sometimes gay employee networks call on individuals from outside the company whom they feel will do an exceptional job helping heterosexuals relate to the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees. At the aforementioned professional development conference, for example, organizers invited a professor of communications from the University of Colorado to lead a plenary session on the various "passing strategies" that gays and lesbians often feel forced to adopt. During her session, entitled "The Price of Passing," she shared moving stories about her experiences as a child from a very religious family and as a college student at a conservative university in the 1950s.

After spending what was seen as "too much time with a woman friend" in college, she was called into the office of the Dean, who "accused [her] of being homosexual" and told her to "repent." She looked up the word homosexuality in the encyclopedia and learned that it was considered, at that time, a mental illness. "I also learned," she added, "that I would have to hide." Combining humor with pain, she quickly summarized the next chain of events: she got married, divorced, and then "went to a bigger library" to find more information about homosexuality. "But the messages," she explained, still said "you better hide." And so she did, for over three decades.

Commenting on her role as plenary speaker, she told the audience, "As a child of the fifties, I never dreamed of a conference like this. This is a great time to be alive." She continued, "After hearing my story, heterosexuals often respond that they had no idea what I had been going through by passing, but it takes two to tango." She then discussed
the various ways that heterosexuals consciously or unconsciously encourage gays and lesbians to be closeted. She closed by sharing some of the things that prompted her to come out in 1992. Her reasons underline the importance of the wider sociopolitical context and the presence of movement support. Nineteen ninety-two was the year that her state, Colorado, passed the anti-gay Amendment 2. Angered but still afraid to come out, she came across an old flyer she had gotten years ago about a Lavender Caucus at her university. Encouraged by the mere presence of this organization, she also found support by joining an evangelical group of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Christians.

Offering a tragic illustration of the personal as political, she then shared the most powerful reason behind her decision to come out to both her family and her colleagues. That year a young lesbian relative of hers shot herself to death. She was found with a bible in her lap, wearing a sweatshirt from the corporation that had just fired her for being gay. Emphasizing the crucial struggle that employee activists and their allies are engaged in, the speaker ended by saying, "You in corporations are changing the workplace from 'Don't ask, don't tell' to 'Be all you can be.'" She then turned to the stage behind her and, continuing a previously explained conference ritual, opened a closet door.

Blending humor and pain: the transformative power of emotions. Another person who does an exceptional job winning heterosexual allies and who is widely admired in the workplace movement is Brian McNaught, a diversity consultant who is known as the "godfather" of gay-inclusive sensitivity training. I focus below on a few of his management workshops, which provide additional illustrations of how emotion and personal narratives can be mobilized to create committed allies. McNaught has spoken at
numerous companies across the country, sometimes with senior management and other times with employees at large. I was fortunate to see him in action in 1996 at the aforementioned professional development conference. He led several of the management sessions, all of which I attended.

McNaught was truly captivating. Weaving in some of his own painful memories (e.g., being fired from his job for being gay) as well as joyful ones (such as his parents coming to stay with him and his partner of 20 years), he was able to draw people in and create allies in the short space of a one-hour session. His messages were then reinforced in other management sessions throughout the day. Comfortably quoting Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz ("Somewhere Over the Rainbow") alongside Edmund Burke—"All that must happen for evil to triumph is for good people to sit by and do nothing"—McNaught easily combined emotionally moving stories with humor. As an example of the latter, during a management session called "A Quick Walk in Ruby Slippers or Comfortable Shoes," McNaught questioned the rationality of homophobia by saying, "Some men say, 'I'll kill a gay man if he comes on to me.' Why kill him? Start with 'No thank you.' If every heterosexual woman killed the men who came on to them, there'd be so few men left!"

Switching later to a serious tone when discussing what it's like to be gay in the workplace and in society at large, McNaught asked those in attendance to think about examples of internalized racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on. Citing a psychologist, he used the words "psychologically homeless" to describe how outsiders feel. This seemed to really "click" with many heterosexual managers, as I heard several repeat the phrase throughout the conference. He continued, "We need to hear people's journeys to be
reminded of people's pain. People won't have the incentive to speak out against bias
unless we hear those journeys and name the pain." Then he asked people to come up to
an easel and write words and phrases that they had heard used against lesbian, gay, and
bisexual people. Pages were filled, which he placed all around the room. Afterward, he
discussed suicide as the leading cause of death among gay and lesbian youth and showed a
video about a mother who had lost her gay son to suicide. He followed this with a video
segment of Marlon Riggs' "Tongues Untied," which drew connections between racism and
homophobia.

Later, when he discussed the difference that heterosexual allies can make, he asked
for a volunteer to remove the homophobic words that had been written earlier. Someone
quickly jumped up and tore down all of the hate-filled pages. McNaught then approached
the easel and, writing his first name on a blank page, said simply, "Now I can say, 'I am
Brian." He then invited the lesbian, gay, and bisexual managers in attendance to come up
and write their names. It was a very powerful moment. Afterward, he said, "Now I have
and know my community." He then encouraged the heterosexual managers in the session
to show their support in the workplace, to not be afraid to speak out against homophobia,
and to work for gay-inclusive policies—in short, to be committed allies. Suddenly, straight
participants rushed forward and wrote their names on the easel alongside those of their
gay colleagues, with one man saying as he walked toward the easel, "I guess it's time to
swim upstream."

Afterward, McNaught asked how it felt to declare oneself an ally. "It felt good,"
said one man, "but I wonder if I'll be strong enough to do it in a different group."
McNaught responded, "We all have journeys to make." He then closed with a short but moving children's story he had written called "A Frog is a Frog," which captured the pain and joy of being different and the importance of allies along the way. Afterward several people approached him and encouraged him to publish the story. Many enthusiastically thanked him for the sessions he had led throughout the day.

**Information intermediaries and institutional bridge leaders.** McNaught's ability to win allies is legendary in the workplace movement. While I have focused on some of the concrete strategies he uses, I turn now to a more theoretical consideration of his role in the movement. Institutional scholars would see McNaught and other independent diversity consultants as "information intermediaries" (Suchman 1995), or "actors whose structural position allows them to observe multiple examples of organizations facing similar sets of problems and attempting varying solutions" (Scott and Christensen 1995:306). In this sense, diversity consultants and other information intermediaries serve as channels for the mimetic and normative diffusion of gay-inclusive policies. In this light, McNaught can be seen as an isomorphic change agent.

Adapting Robnett's (1997) work on women in the civil rights movement, I also see McNaught as an *institutional bridge leader*. Robnett argues that because Black women were excluded from authority positions in the church and in activist organizations, they served primarily as "bridge leaders" who connected "potential constituents and adherents...to the movement" (p. 191). Similarly, as an independent diversity consultant, McNaught provides sensitivity training and meets with individual executives in order to convince them of the need for and profitability of equitable policies. As such, he helps
bridge gay employee activists with potential adherents in the corporation, aiding networks in their struggle to win allies and create converts out of reluctant elites.

Reflecting on Robnett's work, Morris (1999:14) emphasized how the structural location of bridge leadership, operating as it did outside the constraints of formal organizations, granted these activists wider latitude than that available to formal leaders. Thus bridge leaders were able to "act in more radical ways than men, given [the women's] allegiances to the grassroots" (Morris 1999:14). As a form of charismatic leadership (Morris 1984), the responsibilities of bridge leaders often included "emotional work, which increased [the movement's] mobilization capacity and generated greater strategic effectiveness" (Morris 1999:14).

Likewise, given his unique structural location as neither an employee activist nor an in-house member of corporate diversity staff, McNaught is freed from the constraints of these positions. Gay employee activists, as well as the internal allies they may have won, often feel pressure to couch their message in profit-oriented language and to conduct "professional" presentations that emphasize the rational, cost-effective basis for gay-inclusive policies. While McNaught incorporates this approach in his seminars, he also relies heavily on personal and emotional narrative. Drawing on feminist models of activism that emphasize the connections between the personal and the political (Whittier 1995; Taylor 1996), McNaught is particularly adept at relating his own experiences with homophobia to larger structures of exclusion in the workplace and wider society.

Indeed, McNaught engages in a great deal of emotion work (Hochschild 1983, 1990; Taylor 1995b, 1996) as he attempts to bridge the worlds of gay employees and
corporate decision-makers. He has brought workshop participants to tears with his moving stories. He exudes charisma, far more than would be considered acceptable if engaged in by employees of the corporation. The behavioral standards of professionalism in the gendered business world reflect the inexpressiveness and cool emotional detachment of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Acker 1990; Taylor 1996, 1999). Since McNaught is an independent consultant, he is freed from the fear of being discounted by his colleagues or, worse yet, fired from his job.

Capitalizing on the wider latitude this independence affords him, McNaught uses emotion as a social movement strategy (Taylor 1995a,b; Taylor 1996; Taylor and Whittier 1995). He strategically employs his own subordinated masculinity as a gay man (Connell 1987) to challenge both gendered and heterosexist norms in the workplace. A similar emotional/political dynamic has occurred in the larger gay and lesbian community as gay men, coping with the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic, came to "[break] through the strong cultural taboos that suppress intimate caring relationships between men" (Taylor 1996:176; see also Adam 1995). Learning to value such emotions for their personal healing effects and their larger political impact, many gay men have joined lesbian feminists in their revaluation of a traditionally feminine "ethic of care" as politically transformative (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Taylor 1995b, 1996).

*The importance of charisma.* In many ways, McNaught can be seen as a charismatic leader, a role that has been shown to contribute greatly to movement success (Morris 1984). Lamenting the fact that significant media attention to the 1993 Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual March on Washington has had "little lasting impact on movement
mobilization," Steven Epstein (1999:69) blames this failure on the lack of any "widely recognized, charismatic leaders." Reflecting on gay rights activism in the 1990s, Epstein (p. 69) argues:

[G]ay and lesbian movements seemed to have difficulty generating or sustaining leaders with the imagination and personal qualities needed to mobilize or redirect collective sentiments in powerful ways, to generate solidarity across divisions within the movements, or to construct coalitions with movements of other kinds.

Whether or not Epstein's arguments are an accurate reflection of the larger movement, and I would suggest they are not, I do agree with the importance he places on charismatic leadership. In fact, I would argue that the mounting success of the workplace movement can be attributed in part to leaders like McNaught, who inspire countless individuals, gay and straight, to work for change both in and outside of corporate America.

In their unpublished study of gay-inclusive policy change, Scully and Creed (1998) likewise mention the importance of charismatic leaders, although they limit their discussion to high-level management champions. They cite one particular company in which a heterosexual ally of the gay employee group delivered a moving speech at an executive forum organized by the network. Commenting on the mobilizing impact of the speech, the authors explain, "The story of the forum is often retold and is itself institutionalized as an important piece of lore or an inspirational opener for subsequent meetings" (p. 22). I found that a similar process has taken place on a much larger scale in the workplace movement, as activists develop institutionalized mechanisms for the public recognition of charismatic leaders.
As mentioned in a previous chapter, at the annual workplace conferences on gay and lesbian issues, activists recognize an individual or group with the George Kronenberger Memorial Award. This symbol of achievement is named after the inspirational figure who founded one of the earliest gay networks in the country. Activists from across the country speak very fondly of Kronenberger, crediting him with helping to secure the movement's future by organizing workplace conferences and winning the support of national gay rights organizations. Likewise, gay employee activists from coast to coast heap high praises on Brian McNaught. They speak reverently, even lovingly, of his role in effecting change in their own lives and of his gift in creating allies and winning converts among the corporate elite.

**When Insiders Come Out**

Sometimes lesbian and gay employee networks are delightfully surprised with the fruits of their labor, as their efforts to win heterosexual allies unexpectedly draw out influential insiders. When activists attempt to convince elites that the corporation should eliminate its closet, every once in a while one of those elites steps out of that closet as well. At one company in the scientific and photographic industry, for example, the assistant to the CEO approached the leaders of the gay employee network three years after its formation and said she wanted to join. At the time, they did not know she was a lesbian. However, at the network's first "Educational Event with Management," as the CEO and his wife sat in rapt attention, the assistant to the CEO decided right then to break her longstanding silence. She came out to the entire audience. She talked about
how for years no one knew she was a lesbian and how difficult and painful that was for
her.

Many of the senior managers present were moved to tears. Afterward, she became
the management sponsor for the gay employee group. Commenting on the importance of
the network's educational event in spurring this personal revelation, the founder of the
network explained, "[O]nce she saw the management event, and she saw the commitment
to what we were doing, she realized that she had an opportunity to [be] a role model."
Shortly after this educational and emotional event, "some of the people who [were] in
charge of policy got together and decided that it was time to take a serious look at the
system." The following year, the company adopted soft benefits such as family and
bereavement leave, and the year after that they extended medical coverage to domestic
partners of employees. Tellingly, the company adopted the new policy despite the right-
wing boycott it had recently faced for sponsoring the Gay Games. Indeed, it was the
assistant to the CEO, as the gay network's new management champion, who had
convinced the company to sponsor the Games, where she herself won a medal.

When Outsiders Come In

While the coming out testimony of the assistant to the CEO served as a powerful
"punctuating" experience for the senior management team, it is also important to note the
role of external movement players at this educational event. The keynote speaker was
Elizabeth Birch, head of the nation's largest gay rights organization. Birch had been
invited to share some of her previous experiences as senior counsel for Apple, where she
had been involved in the successful campaign for equitable benefits. In the words of the

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gay network's national president, who summarized Birch's keynote address, "She talked about a number of issues, and domestic partner benefits was one of them. So she gave the managers an education." One of the founders added, "I think she has a great style about her, and she's a wonderful presenter. She tells you things in a nonthreatening way so that you want to do things. Almost like she calls you to action: 'Here's some information, and now that you have this, what are you going to do with it?"

Another founder, also present at the management event, had a slightly different recollection of Birch's style:

We wanted domestic partner benefits, but we wanted to come off gently...Elizabeth Birch...nailed [the CEO] and said, 'You're not the first, you won't be the last. It's the right thing to do.' He sat there shaking his head yes. We couldn't have gotten away with that. This was the first management event we had, and we were like, 'Come on, Elizabeth, don't kill us before we start.'

In their post-event survey, senior managers rated Birch "very highly," but at the time, members of the network were scared that she was pushing too hard. As one of the founders put it, "We were dying!"

Although they acknowledged the role of the larger gay rights movement and national leaders such as Elizabeth Birch, members of the network nevertheless emphasized the crucial impact of internal supporters. Each year at their educational event for management, employee activists presented key allies with what they call "Visible and OUTspoken Awards," which upper management regards very highly. Recently the awards have gone to the CEO, the management sponsor, and a divisional vice president. The latter woman was spurred to action after a childhood friend of hers came out as a lesbian. Over time, she rebuilt the relationship from years past, but her friend died of breast cancer.
After seeing the support that other lesbians had given her dying friend, this vice president decided to offer her own support to the lesbian and gay employee network, illustrating again the power of punctuating experiences that serve to personalize gay and lesbian concerns.

Making Allies Visible: Pink Triangles, Safe Spaces, and Symbolic Politics

As is illustrated by the "Visible and OUTspoken Awards" mentioned above, activists do not simply engage in identity-oriented strategies to increase their own visibility. Through rituals of public recognition, they also seek to increase the visibility of their allies. Every year, for example, GLUE members choose an influential ally at their telecommunications company and honor them with a ceremony and a nicely designed glass plaque. In addition to the written engraving, two overlapping pink and lavender triangles, symbols of gay pride, figure prominently on the award. While these awards are usually given to individuals, GLUE has also recognized an entire business unit for its support of the network. National co-chairs also thank allies informally by sending flowers or chocolates. GLUE recognizes allies at the local level as well during gay pride events organized by chapters across the country.

While these awards are genuine gestures of gratitude, they also function to legitimate gay-affirmative support and encourage others to become allies. Moreover, the awards increase the likelihood that individual supporters will publicly adopt and proclaim their identities as allies to the movement. Thus identity-oriented strategies work both ways: gay and lesbian employees come out to win allies, and those outspoken and publicly recognized allies, in turn, construct a new collective identity that encourages them
(and others) to practice personalized political strategies of their own. For example, some heterosexual allies wear buttons that read "straight but not narrow."

I expect that as more corporations adopt equitable benefits, and as more influential allies are publicly rewarded for helping to effect such change, other companies will be motivated to follow suit. In other words, to use institutionalist terms, public recognition of allies—and of gay-inclusive companies as a whole—should facilitate mimetic isomorphism as other employers seek the legitimacy and visibility that early adopters have already obtained (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b). Although not focused on challenging groups, Galaskiewicz (1991:300) has likewise examined the impact that awards can have on corporate policy, especially when those mechanisms for public recognition become institutionalized. In his study of corporate philanthropy, Galaskiewicz commented on the favorable effects of an annual awards luncheon sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, which publicly recognized particularly generous corporations. With members of the press and high-level political officials in attendance, the ceremonies helped companies gain stature in the public eye and encouraged other corporations to join the "philanthropic elite" (p. 301).

Encouraging allies to "come out": the institutionalization of safe space programs. First appearing at the 1987 March on Washington, ACT UP's powerful slogan, "SILENCE = DEATH," was soon plastered on the posters, stickers, buttons, and t-shirts of queer activists across the country. The bold block letters were paired with an inverted pink triangle to symbolize the Nazi extermination of known and suspected homosexuals, who were forced to wear the triangle as visible stigmata. ACT UP's inversion of the
triangle, according to one of the developers of the visual campaign, was meant to denote a "disavowal of the victim role" (as cited in Soehnlein 1994:371). The slogan's call to action had a mobilizing impact on countless individuals who were moved by the imagery and urgency of the message. The transformative effects of these symbols serve as a vivid reminder of the power of "discursive politics," a concept that Katzenstein (1998:17) uses to refer to challenges that rely primarily on language and which revolve around struggles over meaning.

ACT UP's motto and symbol became widely recognized and were adopted by many advocates of gay rights, including those who otherwise eschewed the group's direct action strategies. In 1989, workplace activists borrowed from the imagery of ACT UP to develop the "safe space" or "safe place" program. Originated by GLUE members in the telecommunications case study, employee activists distribute educational flyers and magnets bearing the inverted pink triangle, surrounded by a green circle to symbolize universal acceptance. Allies display the magnets to show support for gay rights and to designate their workspaces as free from homophobia. GLUE members now distribute the magnets and flyers at internal and external speaking engagements across the country, encouraging allies to "come out" in support of gay and lesbian employees.

Although GLUE formed in 1987, it wasn't until 1989, after the network launched its safe space program, that the CEO began to include sexual orientation in his talks on diversity. He even began mentioning the magnets by name. The program is so successful that GLUE now sells the magnets to other gay employee groups and interested corporations. Allies at the telecommunications company where the program was born can
also obtain the magnets at the "GLUE Store," which sells various items bearing the network's name and logo. Whether t-shirts, hats, mugs, or key chains, these products serve to increase the visibility of gay employees and their allies.

Thus, in addition to winning allies, the safe space program was an attempt to make those allies more visible. Providing a symbolic means of demonstrating support, the magnets began to appear in greater numbers as networks distributed them during internal diversity training sessions, professional development conferences, and external workplace conferences. Many gay employee networks now participate in safe space programs or derivations thereof, such as the "Open Mind, Open Door" program launched by gay activists at another telecommunications company. As visible indicators of support for gay-inclusive policies, the use of safe space magnets significantly increases the chance of success. While 67 percent of networks that instituted safe space programs won equitable benefits (14 out of 21), only 42 percent of those lacking the programs achieved policy equity (13 out of 31).

Summary. As the above examples clearly demonstrate, identity-oriented strategies that emphasize the visibility of gay employees—and their allies—contribute greatly to movement success. Through coming out stories and personal narratives, lesbian and gay activists provide moving testimony that gives a "human" face to the issues, thereby increasing the likelihood that others will empathize with gay and lesbian concerns. Emotion work thus proves to be an effective part of the workplace movement's "cultural repertoire." Similar to the notion of strategic repertoire (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1998),
Williams (1995) uses the concept of cultural repertoire to emphasize the "strategic dimensions of culture."

**CONSTRUCTING AND DEPLOYING A PROFITS FRAME**

As important as personal narratives and safe space programs can be in effecting change, they comprise only part of the movement's cultural repertoire. Virtually all workplace activists find that identity-oriented strategies must be supplemented by collective action frames that rationalize gay-inclusive policies as not simply "the right thing to do" but also as the most "profitable" course of action. Similarly, in his discussion of cultural repertoires, Williams (1995) emphasizes the importance of social movement ideologies, conceiving of rhetorical frames as key cultural resources. He discusses the wider political culture of the U.S. as providing "abundant resources" for activists. Williams' (1995:140) arguments reveal the significance of the context in which challengers mobilize:

> Actors pull elements from a cultural repertoire and adapt them to their movement's purposes; the relationship between movement cultural resources and the wider cultural repertoire is therefore crucial. Ideologically-driven challenger movements...are particularly in need of legitimacy. Drawing on ideological resources firmly established within the cultural repertoire is one way of acquiring legitimacy.

These arguments apply equally well to the workplace movement. As activists who mobilize inside corporations, gay and lesbian employees operate in a domain that emphasizes profits rather than ethics, rationality rather than emotion. Given the need to legitimize their call for equality, gay employee networks must draw on the ideological
resources that carry the most "cultural currency." In the context of the corporate world, that means relying on a profits frame.

**Collective Action Frames and the Interpretation of "Murky" Environments**

Attempting to correct for the lack of attention paid to social psychological processes by resource mobilization theorists (Morris and Mueller 1992; Mueller 1992), more recent social movement approaches have emphasized the importance of framing and other cultural processes (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Tarrow 1998). Collective action frames are cognitive scripts or interpretive schemata that challengers use to legitimate their campaigns (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992). The emergent frames or subjective meanings that actors attach to their circumstances serve as the mediating link between opportunity structure and organizational action (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996b). Thus Gamson and Meyer (1996) coin the phrase "framing political opportunity" to highlight the ways in which activists influence others' perceptions of opportunity. Organizers "frame" the political context in favorable terms in order to convince others that action is needed and that success is possible.

Attempting to "bring the actor back in" to institutional perspectives on organizational change, Fligstein (1991, 1997) likewise emphasizes the cognitive and political role that actors play in interpreting "murky" environments. These sense-making accounts, along with the relative power of particular actors, shape the possibilities for institutional transformation. As my interviews with executives made clear, elites pay close attention to the wider environment when making policy decisions. But the meaning and
significance of those external conditions vary, especially since corporations are embedded in multiple environments that often exert contradictory pressures. Thus gay employee activists attempt to influence the subjective judgments of elites by helping them interpret their "murky" environments in ways that favor change. What this usually boils down to is an emphasis on the competitive advantages that equitable policies can bring vis-à-vis other players in the industry and wider business world.

Ultimately, in institutional spheres beyond the state, it is elite decision-makers who determine whether activists' opportunities, resources, and strategies "matter." For unlike political systems, the leaders cannot be voted out of office by citizens or overthrown by the masses. Nevertheless, much like the "bargaining" that occurs between challengers and elites in the formal political arena (Burstein et al. 1995), corporate executives weigh employee requests in light of the conditions present in the wider institutional environments. As neoinstitutionalists have shown, these conditions, including the very definition of one's competitive reference group, are up for subjective interpretation (Porac, Thomas, and Badden-Fuller 1989; Porac and Thomas 1990). Thus gay employee activists, though in no way unionized, can gain "bargaining" points by framing their requests—and the competitive environment—in ways that reveal how elites themselves can benefit from inclusive policy change.

**Coopting Corporate Discourse**

In his ethnographic study of corporate culture in a large high-tech firm, Kunda (1992) discusses organizational ideology and the way in which managers, as "engineers of culture," create and selectively apply particular definitions of reality. Adopting a critical
stance, Kunda comments that "the concept of culture is expropriated and drawn into the political fray by cultural engineers and their various helpers in the service of corporate goals." Although a useful starting point, this approach ignores the fact that employee groups can and do coopt corporate discourse in the service of their own goals. The profits frame is a case in point.

As mentioned earlier, in drawing on their strategic repertoire, workplace activists utilize both an ideology of profits, which is part of the corporation's claimed domain, as well as an ideology of ethics, which generally derives from larger movement frames. While gay employee networks rely on the former far more often than the latter, their use of an ethics frame illustrates an important cultural opportunity (McAdam 1994): namely, the availability of a preexisting "master protest frame" that later challengers can appropriate (Snow and Benford 1988). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual employee activists draw on the "civil rights master frame" (McAdam 1994) as well as later feminist frames when they argue that domestic partner benefits are a matter of equal pay for equal work. More typically, however, the ethics frame takes a more diffuse form, emphasizing that the adoption of equitable policies is simply "the right thing to do."

The Bottom-Line Benefits of Equality

Since employee activists typically find that, when used alone, arguments about "doing the right thing" carry little weight in the profit-driven corporate world, they end up emphasizing the "bottom-line" benefits of equitable policies. More often than not, networks engage in what I call frame blending. Combining an ideology of ethics with an ideology of profits, they argue that doing the right thing is good for the bottom line.
Similarly, though not focused on activist groups, neoinstitutionalist Joseph Galaskiewicz (1991:309) discusses how corporations in the Twin Cities were persuaded to make substantial contributions to charities. As the "new philanthropic corporate elite" began to hold executive seminars and awards banquets, originally reluctant business executives came to see corporate commitment to philanthropy as "enlightened self-interest," which McGuire (1963) defines as "a crude blend of long-run profit and altruism" (as cited in Galaskiewicz 1991:302).

Thus, Galaskiewicz (1991) argues, analysts should take heed of the fact that "cultural elements that may even run contrary to the dominant ideology of the firm can be consciously introduced into the organization by change agents" (p. 309). His conclusions mirror my own regarding the impact of employee activists: "[T]his study shows that conscious efforts to institutionalize meanings, values, and norms both within the organization and at the interorganizational field level are effective in changing organizational behavior" (pp. 309-310). I now turn to the ways that activists use a profits frame in order to convince elites that equitable policies are in the corporation's own best interests.

The key dimensions of the profits frame. Highlighting the competitive advantage that gay-inclusive policies can provide corporations, activists' deployment of a profits frame generally takes three main forms, often used in combination: an emphasis on increased productivity, enhanced recruitment and retention, and expanded markets. The telecommunications case study provides a particularly strong exemplar of how gay employee activists utilize an ideology of profits. In all of their presentations with
executives, GLUE stressed that gay-affirmative policies and practices increase employee productivity by freeing up the time and energy that gay employees and their supporters would otherwise expend worrying about and/or combating harassment and discrimination.

The network also attempted to spread this message through internal company publications. For example, in the corporate "yearbook" on affirmative action and equal employment opportunity, which GLUE members fought hard to be included in, one of the sections on the gay network included a photograph and description of a workshop on homophobia in the workplace. The text, written by a GLUE member, noted that the facilitator "effectively presented the cost of homophobia to organizations like [GLUE's employer]." Besides its negative effects on gay employee themselves, "relatives and friends of gays and lesbians are less productive when their loved ones become the target of homophobia."

The second type of profits frame argues that adoption of inclusive policies will provide a competitive advantage by attracting and retaining outstanding employees who are gay or gay-supportive. For instance, in an interview that appeared in the aforementioned AA/EEO yearbook, a gay employee, who remained anonymous for fear of coworkers' reactions, painted the lack of domestic partner benefits as not only discriminatory but also economically irrational. In his words:

We will not be able to attract and retain the best people unless this changes. Young people are especially sensitive to these issues and will not tolerate this kind of treatment, especially since they now have so many other alternatives, companies such as Lotus, Microsoft, and Levi Strauss, that do offer equal benefits to gay employees.
Indeed, some gay activist networks attempt to show empirical evidence of the economic disadvantages that companies suffer when they retain exclusionary practices and policies. Frustrated after a four-year struggle for partner benefits, one of the leaders of the gay network at a leading company in the imaging industry wrote an internal report on what she called "brain drain." In the report she documented how many employees had recently left the company for positions with other employers who already offered the benefits. Shortly thereafter, her company adopted equitable benefits. She attributes the decision not only to the brain drain report, but to two situations that served as potent illustrations of the report itself.

Two high-level lesbian and gay employees, one of whom co-chairs the gay network, had been offered promotions that would entail relocation. Both refused, saying that the company's lack of domestic partner benefits made it too difficult for them to move. They explained that their partners, who were both over 50 and well established in their careers, were fearful of their job market chances in a new city. Without secure positions of their own, their partners would have no health insurance. The man who was offered the promotion emphasized that relocation assistance, which was only available to heterosexual spouses, would have helped alleviate but not eliminate this concern. He also mentioned that he was being actively courted by another company that already offered the benefits.

In response to her promotion offer, the other high-level employee explained that her partner had a chronic health condition that did not affect her ability to work but which nevertheless made it too risky for her to leave behind a job that guaranteed medical
coverage. When this news reached the head of human resources, who was also the executive sponsor of the gay network, he was able to use these concrete examples to convince the company to change its policy. With the promise that the benefits would be adopted in the immediate future, both employees accepted their promotion offers.

The third version of the profits frame emphasizes the expanded marketing base that inclusive policies would provide. For instance, GLUE fought hard to convince upper management that actively targeting the lesbian and gay market would be profitable for the company. As explained by a network member in the previously mentioned company publication:

There are also [telecommunications] companies that are competing with us and are marketing to the gay community. In my opinion, as long as [our company] retains this discriminatory policy [noncoverage of domestic partners], it will be difficult to represent our company to these customers in a positive light. We will lose their money.

In an attempt to provide concrete evidence, GLUE developed a marketing survey that they distributed at the 1993 Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual March on Washington. One of the questions asked how respondents would feel about "a long distance carrier whose marketing efforts specifically recognize lesbian/gay/bisexual people." Another asked about their willingness to participate in a market research study. The response was so high and the results so convincing that the company began marketing and donating to the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. One of its first such moves was sponsorship of the 1994 Gay Games, which immediately drew the wrath of right-wing forces who issued calls for a boycott.

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Empirical Credibility and Discursive Strategies

In her social constructionist analysis of the adoption of hate crime legislation, Jenness (1999) focuses on the claimsmaking and discursive strategies of social movement organizations and how they "rendered particular types of violence empirically credible and worthy of federal attention" (p. 548; see also Jenness and Broad 1997). By documenting, drawing media attention to, and providing legislators with examples of bias-motivated acts of violence, gay and lesbian civil rights groups were able to win gay-inclusive hate crime statutes in many states.

Likewise, lesbian and gay workplace activists attempt to establish the "empirical credibility" of the profits frame. Snow and Benford (1992) define empirical credibility as "the apparent evidential basis for a master frame's diagnostic claims" (p. 140; see also Snow and Benford 1988). By distributing marketing surveys at gay pride events in the wider community and gathering data on "brain drain," for example, activists provide empirical support for their claims that gay-inclusive policies are profitable and their absence costly.

While I lack data on the number of employee groups that supplement their discursive strategies with "hard" evidence, I expect that those networks that do attempt to provide empirical support for the profits frame would be more likely to win policy victories than those that rely on discourse alone. I did find indirect support for this hypothesis. As discussed in Chapter 4, the infrastructure of the workplace movement facilitates communication among employee networks across the country. After activists in particular companies gathered empirical evidence to back up their bottom-line arguments,
many shared the results with other networks via conferences, umbrella groups, e-mail, and the Web. It therefore comes as no surprise that activist groups that were hooked in to these communication structures were far more likely to win equitable benefits than those groups that were relatively isolated. (As reported in Chapter 4, the success rates for members versus nonmembers of umbrella groups were 58 percent and 36 percent, respectively; and for participants versus nonparticipants of workplace conferences, 58 percent and 39 percent, respectively.)

Summary. As activists in the workplace movement attempted to convince elites to extend equal rights to gay and lesbian employees, they found that arguments emphasizing equitable policies as "the right thing to do" carried little weight in the bottom-line world of corporate America. Gay employee networks thus coopted corporate discourse and constructed accounts that literally rationalized inclusive policies. Equitable benefits were framed less as matters of social justice and more as "best practices" that would serve the interests of the corporation.

Deploying identity-oriented strategies that emphasize gay visibility with collective actions frames that highlight the profitability of equitable policies, workplace activists have developed a potentially potent combination. Nonetheless, as demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6, institutional opportunities play a crucial part in facilitating policy success. In the absence of favorable conditions in the sociopolitical, field, and corporate environments, some gay and lesbian networks find that their employers seem impervious to change regardless of the strategies and tactics that activists deploy. On the other hand, evidence clearly reveals that most workplace challengers can mobilize resources, identities, and
strategic frames to create at least some opportunities where none currently exist. Thus my study points to the usefulness of a theoretical framework that integrates both movement and institutional processes.

CONTEXTUALIZING EMPLOYEE ACTIVISM: THE FRUITFULNESS OF AN INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITY FRAMEWORK

A small but growing number of scholars have begun to apply social movement and neoinstitutional approaches in tandem (Ramirez 1987; Amenta and Zylan 1991; Minkoff 1994; Chaves 1996, 1997; Fligstein 1996, 1997; Jenness and Broad 1997; Katzenstein 1998; Lounsbury 1998; Strang and Soule 1998). This move makes particular sense given that "well-established lines of thought in both of these literatures attempt to 'bring culture back in' by highlighting the role of normative and cultural expectations in shaping organizational forms, strategies, goals, and discourse" (Jenness and Broad 1997:10). Thus far, however, no one has attempted a systematic theoretical synthesis aimed at understanding the impact of institutional and movement processes on the emergence and diffusion of new organizational policies.

Taking a first step toward filling that gap, I offer a multilevel institutional opportunity framework that highlights the impact of the multiple institutional environments in which challengers are embedded and the significance of mobilization itself. I have analyzed the effects of nested environments through attention to isomorphic change mechanisms, and I have examined the impact of movement processes via a focus on identity-oriented strategies and collective action frames. My findings show that policy outcomes are not simply determined by environmental conditions. Instead, it is more
accurate to view various sociopolitical, field, and corporate-level variables as mediating the impact of activist strategies. I thus argue that institutional scholars should recognize social movements as important agents of organizational change.

Expanding the Purview of Social Movement Theory

Aside from the explanatory power of an institutional opportunity approach for understanding gay-inclusive policy change, the framework I develop here expands the usefulness of political process theory, which is arguably the dominant perspective on social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). By shifting the focus from the formal political arena to other terrains of struggle, I provide an analytical tool for understanding the role of changing opportunities in institutional arenas other than the state, such as the workplace, education, medicine, and religion. My study also corrects for the tendency of American political process theorists to concentrate on the emergence of movements rather than their outcomes (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996b:3). My approach more closely resembles European scholars whose comparative focus attempts to explain cross-national variation in the structure and outcomes of the same movements based on different national political contexts (ibid). Shifting the focus from the state to the workplace, I compare the policy outcomes of workplace activists across various corporate, field, and sociopolitical contexts.

My conceptualization of institutional opportunities reflects not simply a shift in terminology but, more importantly, an expansion in theoretical and empirical focus. An institutional opportunity framework directs attention to the opportunities and constraints that challengers face both in and beyond the state. Activists are simultaneously situated in
multiple, nested environments that—separately and in combination—exhibit variable and at
times contradictory conditions. Movement scholars have noted that activists sometimes
face a conflicting set of political opportunities (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Tarrow 1998).
All the more so for institutional activists, who are embedded in multiple institutional
spheres that include not only the sociopolitical arena but also the more immediate site of
contention (here, the corporation) and the organizational field in which that target
organization is located.

Institutional scholars have drawn attention to the complexity and heterogeneity of
the multiple environments or institutional spheres in which organizations are located
(Fligstein 1991; Powell 1991; Scott 1991; Mezias 1995). The embeddedness of
challengers in multiple environments—a situation I refer to as institutional simultaneity—
means that activists often face a contradictory set of conditions, both within one
institutional sphere and across multiple spheres. Some elements of challengers'
environments facilitate success while other elements limit the possibility. This
environmental inconsistency, as I call it, is an inevitable consequence of institutional
simultaneity.

In other words, activists rarely face a congruent or consistent set of institutional
conditions. Challengers do not encounter either a favorable set of opportunities or an
unfavorable array of constraints. In most cases, institutional activists face both sets of
circumstances. Thus, in comparing the likelihood of policy success among employee
networks, it is imperative to examine the "specific context of embeddedness" (Karnøe
1995:247) for each group. Identical tactics, for example, can produce quite different
results. To understand why, scholars must take into account the widely varying sets of institutional opportunities that exist both within and across networks. Different employee groups must traverse quite different institutional terrains. The soil may be relatively rich for some but rocky for others, so the tools and strategies that work in one context may prove futile in another. Likewise, as the political, industry, and corporate conditions change over time for a particular network, previously unsuccessful tactics may finally bear fruit.

Hence, I argue that it would be useful to conceptualize institutional opportunities as falling along a continuum, with conditions ranging from highly favorable to highly unfavorable. At either end of the continuum, challengers operate under conditions of environmental consistency. Falling between the two poles would be opportunities that present a mixed bag for challengers, who in those situations face what I call environmental inconsistency. I propose that the emergence, strategies, resources, and outcomes of challengers are all shaped by the intersecting and complex set of environmental conditions (some favorable, some not) within each institutional sphere. Future investigations of institutional activism should therefore attend to the interplay between movement processes and the often complicated array of institutional opportunities that challengers face, noting especially the impact of environmental inconsistency on the likelihood of policy success.

Like the traditional political domain, institutional arenas such as the workplace and the media (see Chapter 2) present openings as well as obstacles, some of which seem more stable while others vary considerably over time and place. These sometimes mercurial climates affect both the emergence and outcomes of mobilization. Activists, however, do
not simply react to changes in their environment. Through their own actions, they can create opportunities for themselves and others (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Tarrow 1996, 1998; Sawyers and Meyer 1999). In other words, while movements are susceptible to stormy conditions, so too are they partially responsible for improved climates.

**Correcting for New Institutionalism's Blind Spot**

Critics from within the institutionalist perspective have faulted its practitioners for focusing almost exclusively on the isomorphic processes that account for the spread of new organizational practices rather than on the genesis of those very innovations (DiMaggio and Powell 1988; Brint and Karabel 1991; Fligstein 1991; Suchman 1995; Chaves 1996; Lounsbury 1997). In other words, while neoinstitutional theory offers a useful model for understanding how particular policies and practices become institutionalized, it offers little in the way of explaining how those practices arise in the first place. By synthesizing social movement and new institutional approaches, I provide a systematic framework for understanding the origin—and not simply the diffusion—of organizational innovations. Moreover, by highlighting the role of mobilized constituencies as agents of institutional change, I correct for the gaping hole that exists in the vision of neoinstitutionalists, who focus so intently on the external environment that they often miss the action going on inside organizations.

As previously discussed, institutional scholars tend to posit "exogenous shocks," such as changes in the law, as the original source of organizational change (Fligstein 1991; Powell 1991). Dobbin and Sutton (1998), for example, discuss how the Civil Rights Act
spurred the creation of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity offices, which human resource managers then began to frame as a business imperative rather than as symbolic markers of compliance. This "drift toward efficiency" was seen to have served the professional interests of human resource specialists.

My study, however, tells another story and points to a different impetus for gay rights policies as well as a different motivation for the adoption of efficiency arguments. In the case of domestic partner benefits, which can be seen as the new "gay rights revolution" and which represent the latest expansion in the definition of worker rights generally, the state's role seems far more ambiguous. No federal or state laws require equitable benefits for gays and lesbians in private-sector employment. And except for very recent moves by Seattle and Los Angeles who mirrored San Francisco's 1997 Equal Benefits Ordinance, which is still being fought in court, no cities mandate that private employers offer domestic partner benefits. Indeed, given the anti-gay backlash that has occurred at the city, state, and federal levels throughout the 1980s and '90s, it seems prudent to acknowledge that the state can be a potential inhibitor of—rather than impetus for—equal benefits adoption in the corporate world.

Practical Implications for the Workplace Movement

Contrary to the predictions of institutional theorists, the original catalyst for the rise of lesbian and gay rights in the corporate workplace was not employment legislation but rather employee mobilization. Early adopters of domestic partner benefits instituted these equitable policies only after they had been urged to do so by gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee groups (see Chapter 1). Thus, while institutional processes clearly play
a role in the diffusion of inclusive policies, it was the groundbreaking efforts of workplace activists that explain the first wave of corporate adoptions. As word got out about these mavericks in the business world, others slowly began to follow suit, eventually triggering more rapid isomorphic change as mimetic and normative pressures kicked in.

Once these institutional processes were set in motion, extensive internal campaigns for equitable benefits became somewhat less necessary. To put it differently, whereas in the early years of Fortune 1000 adoption, gay employee networks appeared to be "necessary" though rarely "sufficient"—in that various institutional opportunities also needed to be present—now it appears that institutional processes alone can sometimes persuade a company to institute equitable policies. As shown in Table 1.1 of Chapter 1, while the earliest adopters of domestic partner benefits had all faced internal pressure from gay employee networks, the presence of such networks became less necessary in later adoptions waves.

Even with the decline in new corporate organizing since 1995 (see Chapter 3), more and more companies are adopting equitable benefits. On the other hand, it is possible that many of the corporations that appear to be adopting equitable benefits in the absence of a gay employee network could in fact be instituting these changes at the request of individual employees or informal groups that remain invisible to outside observers. In any case, even if the rate of new network formations remains low among the Fortune 1000, institutional processes have clearly begun to figure more prominently such that internal mobilization is not as necessary as it was in previous waves of adoption.
In a similar vein, Tolbert and Zucker (1983) found that although city characteristics—including the presence of a political reform movement—were strong predictors of municipal civil service reform in the first adoption wave, those characteristics played less of a role in subsequent waves, eventually having no bearing whatsoever. Likewise, the presence of a gay employee network should eventually be unrelated to the adoption of equitable benefits.

Clearly, however, we are still a long way from that point. Indeed, I argue that gay and lesbian employees should not assume that their employers will jump on board the benefits wagon in the absence of internal pressure. Lesbian and gay employees who are standing idly by, waiting for their own companies to adopt equitable policies, should be careful of resting on others' laurels. Isomorphic pressures are not so strong that most corporations are instituting inclusive policies in the absence of internal mobilization. Thus the slowdown in new corporate organizing is risky for the workplace movement since it can result in what Sawyers and Meyer (1999) have called "missed opportunities." As I discussed in Chapter 3, the risks of complacency are too high.

Concluding Thoughts...or Utopian Dreams?: Shifts in the "Cultural Meaning" of Equitable Benefits Adoption

Neoinstitutional scholar Patricia Thornton (1995:214-215) emphasizes that the "cultural meaning" of particular organizational innovations can vary over time due to both the "evolution of management ideologies" and the level of structuration in an organizational field. As the ideologies that justify new practices diffuse within and across highly structurated organizational fields, later adopters can rationalize their incorporation.
of the innovation by using already elaborated discourses and/or by invoking economic motives about remaining competitive. Applying her arguments to movement rather than management ideologies, it seems clear that once enough companies begin to adopt equitable benefits, employee activists can more effectively mobilize a profits frame, emphasizing the need for employers to remain competitive.

Early in the game, however, employee activists were constrained in their ability to argue convincingly that equitable benefits would give employers a competitive advantage. Since very few companies were offering the benefits, the empirical credibility of the profits frame was hard to establish. The same goes even today for activist networks located in industries that have yet to witness a first adopter. As pointed out in HRC's *State of the Workplace Report*, "Domestic partner benefits have not yet broken into every industry sector. None of the major automakers or aerospace companies offer the benefits....Likewise, many large corporations in the consumer products, food services and retailing have yet to take this step" (Mills and Herrschaft 199:21). Tellingly, except for the auto industry, these laggards appear to be sectors or companies with few if any visible gay employee networks. This demonstrates that movements still matter. In other words, to reemphasize the point, gays and lesbians should not count on isomorphic pressures in the wider environment to effect change in their particular companies in the absence of internal mobilization.

Nonetheless, neoinstitutional analysis would help to explain why the presence of an activist network has become less necessary for policy change, as compared to the first adoption wave which was composed almost entirely of companies facing pressure from
gay employee groups (see Table 1.1 in Chapter 1). Once a "critical mass" of major companies instituted equitable benefits in response to internal pressure, and once enough people began asking for the benefits at college recruitment fairs and in job interviews, other corporate elites were more likely to follow suit since they could see the competitive advantage of doing so. Hence, even in the absence of a gay network pushing from within, later adopters "got" the profits frame because they saw it being played out before their very eyes.

Looking ahead, I expect that equitable benefits adoption will proceed at an increasingly faster pace as companies, faced with a rapidly mounting list of adopters, begin to feel greater pressure to follow suit. This prediction is in keeping with the work of institutionalists who have studied the spread of organizational innovations across time. Attending to "waves" of adoption on the road to institutionalization, several scholars have found that the diffusion of innovations proceeds more rapidly in later adoption waves (Knoke 1982; Edelman 1990; Chaves 1996; Dobbin and Sutton 1998). Studying the expansion of due process protections in the workplace, for instance, Edelman (1990) found that "the rate at which organizations adopt nonunion grievance procedures increases over time as a function of the prevalence of such procedures in the population" (p. 1424).

Casting additional light on this process, Tolbert and Zucker (1983) emphasize the changing motivations behind the adoption of innovations across time. Early adopters of municipal civil service reform, for example, instituted the reforms out of "rational self-interest," while later cities came on board "to be in conformity to prevailing beliefs" (Scott 1995:87). Tolbert and Zucker (1983:35) conclude:
As an increasing number of organizations adopt a program or policy, it becomes progressively institutionalized, or widely understood to be a necessary component of rationalized organizational structure. The legitimacy of the procedures themselves serves as the impetus for the later adopters.

Although domestic partner benefits are far from becoming fully institutionalized and hence taken for granted, I expect that the "cultural meaning" (Thornton 1995) of equitable benefits will eventually shift such that the rationale for adoption will no longer be a primarily economic one. Instead, future adopters will implement domestic partner benefits because they are seen as proper and legitimate. At that point, equitable benefits will have reached the stage of complete institutionalization, where non-adoption is seen not only as out of step with "modern" corporate practices but also as blatantly discriminatory. For why else would a company refuse to grant equitable benefits when that refusal would discredit the firm in the eyes of the public and hence threaten its own bottom line?

From the perspective of today's lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees who are still fighting tooth and nail for equal rights, this may seem a hopelessly utopian vision. From the standpoint of the New Right, however, full equality for gays and lesbians looms large, a specter right around the corner. Thus as right-wing forces fill their coffers by painting the "homosexual agenda" as a threat to the sanctity of the home and the security of the nation (Adam [1994] 1998, 1995; Blain 1997; Dugan 1999; S. Epstein 1999), gay and lesbian activists struggle on. Aided in their fight by the rapidly growing number of
corporations that are instituting equitable policies in the name of profit, lesbian and gay
people should take heart. Who would have thought that the engines of capitalism would
provide fuel for social justice?
APPENDIX A

Table A.1: The Formation and Spread of the Corporate Workplace Movement: Organizational Births by Year, Industry, and Geographic Region

**Period 1 (1978-1989)—Slow rise:**

*Number of groups formed in Period 1 = 10*

*Percent of total organizational population (N=69) born in this period = 14%*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of groups formed (% of organizational population born then)</th>
<th># in Industry and Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
<td>1 high-tech (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
<td>1 high-tech (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1985</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
<td>1 high-tech (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>3 (4.3%)</td>
<td>2 telecommunications (east and west coasts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 utility (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
<td>1 aerospace (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pharmaceutical (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
<td>1 financial (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 high-tech (west coast)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Period 1 Subtotal (n=10) by Region:*

- 6 (60%) west coast
- 3 (30%) east coast
- 1 (10%) midwest

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Period 2 (1990-1994)—Rapid growth and diversification:

Number of groups formed in Period 2 = 50
Percent of total organizational population (N=69) born in this period = 72%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of groups formed (% of organizational population born then)</th>
<th># in Industry and Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>10 (14.5%)</td>
<td>1 apparel (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 automotive (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 financial (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 high-tech (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 insurance (both east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 paper products (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 scientific/photographic (midwest and east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 telecommunications (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>6 (8.7%)</td>
<td>1 aerospace (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 communications (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 entertainment (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 petroleum (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 scientific/photographic (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 utility (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9 (13.0%)</td>
<td>1 airline (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 chemical (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 electronics (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 financial (both east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 retail (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 scientific/photographic (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 telecommunications (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 utility (midwest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Period 2 (1990-1994) [continued]—Rapid growth and diversification:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of groups formed (% of organizational population born then)</th>
<th># in Industry and Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>17 (24.6%)</td>
<td>2 banking (both midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 beverage (mountain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 consumer products (both midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 electronics (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 entertainment (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 financial (west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 high-tech (2 east coast, 1 west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 insurance (east coast, midwest, west coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 office equipment (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 telecommunications (east coast, south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>8 (11.6%)</td>
<td>1 airline (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 automotive (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 banking (midwest, south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 financial (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 high-tech (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 petroleum (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 scientific/photographic (midwest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Period 2 Subtotal (n=50) by Region:**

- 18 (36%) east coast
- 16 (32%) midwest
- 8 (16%) west coast
- 7 (14%) south
- 1 (2%) mountain
Period 3 (1995-mid 1998)—Decline in new organizing:

Number of groups formed in Period 3 = 9
Percent of total organizational population (N=69) born in this period = 13%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of groups formed (% of organizational population born then)</th>
<th># in Industry and Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3 (4.3%)</td>
<td>1 food service (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 insurance (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 retail (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3 (4.3%)</td>
<td>1 automotive (midwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 insurance (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 scientific (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
<td>1 petroleum (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pharmaceutical (east coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through mid 1998</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
<td>1 pharmaceutical (east coast)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Period 3 Subtotal (n=9) by Region:
4 (44%) east coast
3 (33%) midwest
2 (22%) south

Data are from surveys and interviews with 69 gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee networks in Fortune 1000 companies, conducted primarily between May 1998 and October 1998.
### APPENDIX B

**Table B.1: The Growth and Diversification of the Corporate Workplace Movement: The Periodized Clustering of Network Formations by Industry and Geographic Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period/Years</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>% of Organizational Population ($N = 69$)</th>
<th>Clusters by Industry</th>
<th>Clusters by Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (1978-1989)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4 (40%) high-tech</td>
<td>6 (60%) west coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (20%) telecommunications</td>
<td>3 (30%) east coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (40%) diverse mix</td>
<td>1 (10%) midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (1990-1994)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>5 (10%) high-tech</td>
<td>18 (36%) east coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (10%) financial</td>
<td>16 (32%) midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (10%) insurance</td>
<td>8 (16%) west coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (10%) scientific/photographic</td>
<td>7 (14%) south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (8%) telecommunications</td>
<td>1 (2%) mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (8%) banking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22 (44%) diverse mix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (1995-mid-1998)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2 (22%) insurance</td>
<td>4 (44%) east coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (22%) pharmaceutical</td>
<td>3 (33%) midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (56%) diverse mix</td>
<td>2 (22%) south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate: (1978-mid-1998)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>9 (13%) high-tech</td>
<td>25 (36%) east coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 (10%) insurance</td>
<td>20 (29%) midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (9%) telecommunications</td>
<td>14 (20%) west coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (9%) financial</td>
<td>9 (13%) south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (7%) scientific/photographic</td>
<td>1 (1%) mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36 (52%) diverse mix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are from surveys and interviews with 69 gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee networks in Fortune 1000 companies, conducted primarily between May 1998 and October 1998.
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