# Generic Social Process and the Problem of Success-Claiming: Defining Success on the Margins of Canadian Federal Politics

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**Abstract:** Envisioning success and its pursuit as an enduring feature of human group life, this paper examines success as a humanly constructed and realized social process. As framed herein, success represents the attribution by some audience of qualities associated with achievement, attainment, and/or accomplishment to social act(s) and/or social objects. Consistent with symbolic interactionist approaches to the study of deviance, success is not a quality of the situation at hand, but rather is audience-dependent. Therefore, while the social construction of success may be evidence-based, what is defined as successful outcomes and what constitutes evidence of success is subculturally located. Drawing on extended ethnographic research, an application of alternate definitions of success is examined in the context of those participating in an electorally unsuccessful political party—the Christian Heritage Party of Canada. Specifically, this paper examines the definition of success in terms of political influence, providing political alternatives and demonstrations of religious faithfulness as strategies of success-claiming. Framing success in process terms, this paper examines the trans-contextual and trans-historical qualities of "doing success" as a feature of everyday life.

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## Towards a Sociology of Success

While sociology is shaped by many perspectives, variants, and proclivities that mark the discipline, there are some key aspects of the study of the social world where those from very different perspectives can, for the most part, find some common ground. History matters. People act based on meaning. What those who have gone before us have built (organizations, laws, languages, concepts of race and gender) place real, practical restrictions on the action. Human communities define some thoughts and actions as deviant or otherwise offensive. Deviance designa-

tions may alter life chances. The definition of social problems is the result of a complex series of social processes. And the great pragmatist lesson—human group life is, at least in part, problem-solving.[1]

In all of this, we have been somewhat remiss in attending explicitly to how shared understandings of what constitutes success in everyday life are highly consequential for understanding human group life. I would suggest that the problem of defining success, attending to barriers to success, and what constitutes accomplishment in various settings has been very much a part of the sociological enterprise. For example, Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992) may be framed as a detailed study of the problem of success.[2]

Weber's *Protestant Ethic* is, in many respects, an extended study of success-making and success-claiming—of addressing the problem of the assurance of salvation in the context of a doctrine of predestination. Weber examines the relationship between financial/entrepreneurial success and attributions of God's grace in the context of notions of predestination.[3] While Weber's work is foundational, we

also see an attentiveness to matters related to success-making and claiming in everyday life in the functionalist influence of work on deviance and deviant subcultures. Robert Merton's (1938) classic typology focuses on success indicators (cultural goals) and the strategies and tactics that people may utilize to achieve desired outcomes. While overly inattentive to human action and social processes, this model does address the cultural importance of socially constructed indicators of success. Relatedly, Albert Cohen's (1955) study of juvenile delinquency examines barriers to success that may contribute to status frustration and the responses of youths who may create subversive "games" and, through this joint action, alternate indicators of subcultural successes. These classic positions focus quite directly on definitions of success and people's abilities to adopt innovative strategies in their pursuit.

Symbolic interaction's long ethnographic tradition reinforces the associational, relational, intersubjective, and emergent qualities of people's efforts to define what constitutes success in any particular setting. It is rather central that those interested in examining success-making and success-claiming as a generic social process attend to these themes within the extended ethnographic tradition. Participants may not frame their activities explicitly in terms of success-related language—researchers, however, are encouraged to be mindful of success-related themes within the ethnographic tradition. For example, while the urban nomads whose lives and activities are examined by Spradley (2000) may not explicitly speak of their experiences as street-affected persons in success terms, there is an extended emphasis on "making it"—on developing a series of strategies to obtain the subculturally relevant resources to live life on the streets.

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[1] This listing is illustrative rather than exhaustive and in no way suggests that how various sociologists engage these themes will share much in common at all.

[2] It is necessary to attend to both the notes and the body of the work to fully appreciate Weber's interest in success. Much of Weber's discussion of the more applied aspects of success in the context of capitalism is found in the substantial notes that accompany each chapter.

[3] Importantly, Weber (1992:271 [emphasis added]) writes, "The idea that *success reveals the blessing of God* is of course not unknown to Judaism. But, the fundamental difference in religious and ethical significance which it took on for Judaism on account of the double ethic prevented the appearance of similar results at just the most important point. Acts toward a stranger were allowed which were forbidden toward a brother. For that reason alone it was impossible for success in this field of what was not commanded but only allowed to be a sign of religious worth and a motive to methodical conduct in the way in which it was for the Puritan."

Becker, Geer, and Hughes' (1968) study of student worlds, Becker and colleagues' (1961) examination of doctors' worlds, and Becker's (1982) detailed rendering of art worlds all contain elements of the study of what constitutes success in each setting. In *Making the Grade* (Becker et al. 1968), we find a study of learning and being compensated in the alternate currency of universities—grades. In *Boys in White* (Becker et al. 1961) and in Haas and Shaffir's (1987) *Becoming Doctors*, we see a related emphasis on medical students and the pursuit of the success of professional accreditation. Moreover, in *Art Worlds* (Becker 1982), we see an examination of the complex set of relations that influence the definition of work as desirable, collectible, and museum-worthy. In short, a detailed examination of "making it" in art. Put simply, interactionists have a long tradition of attending to the grand diversity to be found in everyday life and how people in various settings create, sustain, and modify what is understood as "doing well." It may, however, take some effort on our part as interpreters of this work to draw out these central themes. It is in this context that I turn my attention to two important themes related to the sociological examination of success within the extended interactionist tradition—attending to conditions for success and success in subcultural settings.

## Success and Social Processes: Conditions of Success

In addition to enriching our understanding of success in the context of the various relational and associational dynamics that mark our subcultural involvements, the extended interactionist tradition has also contributed to the sociology of success by articulating the necessary conditions for success that accompany various interactional sequences and outcomes. This tradition draws on phenomenologically informed approaches for examining the forms, types, and accompanying processes that help contextualize the human condition. Several classic works within the interactionist tradition may be profitably framed in terms of the examination of the successful realization of a particular interaction sequence or anticipated outcome.[4]

It was Garfinkel (1956) who engaged in the analysis of the successful conditions of degradation ceremonies. It is beyond the scope of this paper to recount the various conditions that Garfinkel elucidates. However, what is crucial for the purpose at hand is the emphasis in the analysis on the essential aspects of the process of degradation that, were they not to be met, would see the related encounters fail to achieve the intended outcome. Relatedly, Becker's (1973) examination of marijuana use is an examination of the essential processes that are requisites for successfully becoming a recreational marijuana user. Moreover, as Becker (1973:9) notes, "The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label." Goffman (1952) discusses effectively cooling out the mark, Prus and Grills (2003) examine the processes associated with successfully maintaining deviant subcultural involvements, and Blumer (1971) discusses the processes necessary to effectively cast some aspects of social life as social problems. As Blumer (1971:303) insightfully argues, the social conditions necessary to successfully label a social problem as "real" have more to do with the social process of legitimizing, authenticating, and creating a shared intersubjective reality than they do with the "intrinsic gravity of the social problem."

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[4] While attending to social processes that may accompany successfully becoming a marijuana user (Becker 1973) or entering the hotel community (Prus and Irini 1980), these models are in no way deterministic or prescriptive.

In this context, the theoretical emphasis is not so much on questions of "how-to" but on "how do"—how do actors successfully navigate the challenges of returning home after extended absences (Schütz 1945), manage the intrusion of chronic illness (Charmaz 1991), maintain faith in the context of failed prophecy (Lofland 1966; Shaffir 1995), or frame chess losses and draws to more established opponents as successes (Puddephatt 2003). Such work stands in stark contrast to more prescriptive (and often moralistic) approaches found in the advice/success-oriented literature.[5] That is not to suggest that a detailed examination of how people "do success" may not be quite helpful for those pursuing various projects or missions. Those attempting to have audiences attend to their claims that some aspect of the social world is highly problematic (e.g., homelessness, global warming, pandemic response) may find considerable advantage in understanding how the work of claims-making, evidence construction, and formulating plans of action occur within everyday life. However, unlike more advisory initiatives, an interactionist interest in "conditions of success" tends to be more fully attentive to the trans-contextual and trans-situational aspects of cases at hand.

## Subculturally Situated Success

As Prus (1997) has argued, everyday life is marked by a mosaic of subcultures. As human actors we may live our everyday lives out in a variety of sub-cultural settings. These relationally enabled settings mark our lives as we go about the activities associated with work and everyday life—doing policing in the context of social media (Schneider 2016), providing secondary aid (Loseke 1992), mountain climbing (Mitchell 1983), becoming a mushroom forager (Fine 1998), undertaking political action (Hall 1980), and marking status passages (Glaser and Strauss 2011). This array of subcultures represents the various settings within which everyday life is lived. While these associations will be of varying relevance during the life course, it is rather central to appreciate that people engage in activities in a range of subcultural settings—each marked by the nuances of the lifeworld within.

One of the vital contributions of the extended interactionist tradition has been the detailed, ethnographically informed analysis of a wide array of subcultural settings. These in-depth studies often provide exceptionally helpful windows into processes associated with what it takes to meet with success in any particular setting. For example, Gardner's (2011; 2020) study of bluegrass festivals examines, in part, how the "portable communities" that are established in festival settings offer a version of a successful community whose qualities of openness and equality reflect desirable aspects of the social world absent from the world of everyday life to which they return.

We find a similar attentiveness to success and success-making in ethnographies of occupations and organizations. Edgerton's (1967) concept of the *cloak of competence* attends to strategies utilized by those with mental illnesses to successfully pass as some version of "well." Prus' (1989) study of the marketplace attends to the strategies utilized by those purchasing products for resale to effectively pursue

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[5] I am referring here to works that are oriented towards or provide various forms of advice, counsel, or strategies for being successful. Some illustrative titles include, *How to Win Friends and Influence People: The Only Book You Need to Lead You to Success* (Carnegie 1937), *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (Covey 1989), or *The Law of Success* (Hill 2017). This literature stands in contrast to another large body of research that examines the variable-based analysis of predictors of and/or barriers to success (e.g., Litman 1983; Brunet Marks and Moss 2016).

customers. Relatedly, Besbris (2020) examines client/real estate agent relations and the emotive dynamics that may accompany successful home acquisition. Albas and Albas (1988) explore the impression management strategies used by highly successful university students (aces) in the context of their much less successful peers (bombers).

By attending to the rich and varied ethnographic tradition, we may profitably attend to success-claiming and success-making as a feature of everyday life. However, a key lesson to be garnered from this literature is that without a developed intimate familiarity with a setting, there cannot be a full and complex understanding of success-work.[6] For example, those internal and external to universities may employ various measures as indicators of institutional success—entering grade point average of students, external research dollars generated by faculty, student retention, time to graduation, or student/teacher ratios. These measures are utilized to generate what passes for subculturally relevant indicators of success.

However, as Becker (2017) notes, evidence-making is very much audience-dependent and relies, in part, on shared understandings of the worldviews of the group. Moreover, what constitutes evidence of success may be challenged, resisted, and problematized. By way of example, measures of external research funding are input measures. If, instead, output measures were utilized (e.g., articles per faculty member) and the related costs per article were defined as a relevant "factor" in assessing success,

then faculty members who are highly productive researchers yet require little in the way of external funding to support their accomplishments would be defined as relatively quite successful. Similarly, whereas universities may look to student retention as an indicator of success, learners may focus much more on persistence within post-secondary education. For learners, credential completion may be a much more salient indicator of success than whether they completed their studies at the institution where they began them.[7] If we are going to engage success as a sociological phenomenon, then we need to frame success as a subculturally situated and sustained aspect of everyday life.

As such, understandings of what constitutes the successful participation of subcultural members may be highly consequential for subcultural associations and those who make their lives within them. Office holders in management settings may find that a considerable amount of effort and time is consumed by matters associated with planning, assessment, evaluation, team construction, and other various aspects of accountability work—demonstrating success to internal and external audiences. Management work is, in various ways, attentive to indicators of success on the part of: 1) subcultural members (e.g., probation, promotion, discipline, dismissal); 2) subculturally-situated teams and the various missions they undertake (e.g., mission outcomes, team effectiveness); 3) more organization-wide concerns (e.g., issues of expansion/contraction, market share, disruptive competitors); and 4) national/international indicators of organizational success (e.g.,

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[6] It is Blumer (1969) who most clearly has articulated the necessity for the development of an intimate familiarity with settings at hand. In so arguing, he offers an important critique of those whose approach to social science privileges their moralistic or other agendas over a detailed, empirically-based attentiveness to the perspectives and processes central to everyday life.

[7] Sauder and Espeland (2009) offer a helpful contribution here. They encourage an examination of how the pursuit of increased university rankings in the public sphere may offer a particular "allure" for university administrators. As such, the pursuit of performance-based indicators of success may be salient to the everyday lives of organizational members.

competitive rankings, brand/name reputation, and identity).[8] While any detailed examination of success needs to attend to how it is lived out close to the ground—in the negotiations and interactions that accompany it—questions related to success-making and success-claiming can and should inform interactionist understandings of subcultural settings.

## Considering Success: An Ethnographic Perspective

As Blumer (1969:133) argues, "The person who has a broad acquaintance with human beings…and who has an intimate familiarity with the area of experience that [they are] studying, should make a more able analysis than one who is less well equipped in these respects." Given the complexities of research sites, ethnographers may find it problematic to determine if this standard of a deep and complex understanding of the setting at hand has been met. While researchers have sought indicators of completeness such as saturation, linguistic fluency, awareness of unique perspectives, and relational affiliations within the setting, the pragmatic reality is that there is always more that could be done—another interview to undertake, another ritual to observe, another disruption in everyday life to attend to (Becker 2013).

I would suggest that one helpful marker of developing a sense of intimate familiarity in any setting is to be found as the researcher comes to understand what constitutes success within the research site. Such an appreciation of worldviews is marked by a long and patient presence in the field that affords researchers an understanding of the complexity of successes in the setting at hand (Grills 2020a). It is

vital that researchers do not substitute indicators of success that may be applied by others outside the subculture for the varied, complex, and fluid perspectives of members. For example, while external audiences may assert that the success of a prison system is to be found in its ability to effectively rehabilitate offenders and reduce recidivism, those within the setting may prioritize other outcomes. Processes such as negotiating order and maintaining dominative practices may be perceived as more highly consequential indicators of successfully navigating life in a total institution than indicators related to various versions of reform. In practice, recidivism is a source of return customers for prisons that represents a population that has, to some extent, learned the ropes. As such, those identified as repeat offenders may not be entirely unwelcome from a prison management perspective.

Researchers should also be mindful of the extent to which, in some settings, there may be considerable agreement and consensus related to indicators of success, yet in other local cultures, there may be considerable tension, conflict, and ongoing negotiation pertaining to missions at hand, accomplishment, and success. For example, publicly funded universities may be encouraged by funders (e.g., state/federal governments) to educate more students with fewer resources (e.g., funding, infrastructure, permanent faculty, and staff). As such, funders may employ results-based performance metrics that link resources to contestable versions of success. In this context, universities are rewarded for successes in increasing student/faculty ratios and increasing the proportion of contingent faculty.[9] However, for

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[8] See Grills and Prus (2019) for an extended discussion of management processes and enacting office.

[9] The term contingent faculty refers to those who teach in university settings on a sessional, term, or contractually limited basis. In some jurisdictions, the term *adjunct faculty* is used to denote this status.

learners, universities that adopt such a strategy may, in fact, be defined as less desirable as the university experience becomes more distanced and student/ teacher relationships more elusive.

Relatedly, matters of failure also inform understandings of success in a subcultural context. While my intent in this paper is to argue for the analytical relevance of attending to success in everyday life, related notions of failure and loss are highly consequential for a more fulsome understanding and appreciation of success claiming. For example, definitions of success may provide an interpretive context through which failures may be discounted if not more fully neutralized. Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter's (2009) examination of failed prophecy illustrates how the "faith" of cult members may resist empirical evidence of predicted outcomes. As well, outcomes defined as unwelcome, threatening, or challenging to the interests of a team may afford managers/office holders situationally located opportunities to remove or marginalize team members who are linked (however tenuously) to the loss. As such, failure may be cast as an opening to pursue success via means that would not otherwise be organizationally available save for in the face of considerable trouble. In this sense, those who are former members of settings may also offer a helpful vantage point for understanding the complexities of success. Our appreciation of the experiences of former nuns (Ebaugh 1988), politicians (Shaffir and Kleinknecht 2005), and persistent property offenders (Shover 1996), offers considerable insight into the challenges, doubts, and performance considerations that may contextualize assessments of success and failures. An appreciation of disinvolvement processes (Prus and Grills 2003) may contribute to our understanding of success and its absence.

In all of this, it is vital that researchers attend to the complexities of success-making and success-claiming. Rarely will official documents or mission statements give accurate depictions of the negotiated and emergent qualities of the social construction of success. It is in this context that I turn my attention to an ethnographically-grounded examination of success-claiming in the context of a specific research site and subcultural setting—the Christian Heritage Party of Canada.

## Success Claiming on the Margins of Canadian Federal Politics[10]

The Canadian federal political system is a multi-party system that elects representatives to the House of Commons based on a first-past-the-post electoral model. At the time of writing, parties represented within the House include the governing Liberal Party of Canada (154 seats), the Conservative Party of Canada (121 seats) in the role of the official opposition, two smaller parties with official party status—the Bloc Québécois (32 seats) and the New Democratic Party (24 seats), one party without official party status (the Green Party of Canada with 3 seats), and two members without party affiliation (Independents). In addition to these parties, there are an additional 16 registered political parties in Canada. In the 43rd General election of 2019, 2,145 individuals contested 338 riding/seats (an average of 6.3 candidates per riding). In this election, the Christian

[10] The ethnographic data presented here are based upon observation (e.g., attendance at party functions, recruitment events), participant observation (e.g., office support, editorial support), interviews (open-ended and unstructured), and a review of selected official documents with the Christian Heritage Party of Canada (e.g., constitution, statement of unalterable principles). The period represented in this research is from before the party's founding convention in the late 1980s to the present. See Grills (1998) for an extended discussion of research methods and the study of marginalized political voices.

Heritage Party ran 51 candidates, with at least one candidate in each of Canada's ten provinces.[11]

The political reality for most of Canada's more marginalized parties is that the election of their members to the House of Commons is an aspirational goal, as opposed to one that is likely to be realized. Quite apart from this electoral reality, the list of registered parties includes some that are, in a North American context, fairly long-lived. For example, of all currently registered parties in Canada, the second oldest is the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), which traces its roots to the early 1920s (Rodney 1968), while the oldest is the governing Liberal Party of Canada. The Christian Heritage Party (CHP) ran its first candidates in the federal general election of 1988. It has run candidates in every subsequent election. No member has been elected to the House of Commons, yet despite this lack of electoral success, the party persists and has done so for more than a generation.

It is a truism of the symbolic interactionist tradition that human action is best framed in terms of the meanings that inform it and that such meanings arise through interactions with others and are subject to ongoing interpretation, assessment, and modification.[12] Given the analytical importance of definitions of the situation, how do party members come to understand success in the absence of electoral success? How do subculturally located understandings of success contribute to continuing involvement of members, candidates, and other of-

fice holders within the party? It is to these questions that I turn my attention. This paper examines three central themes for contextualizing success within this setting: 1) Political Influence, 2) Offering Alternatives, and 3) Demonstrations of Faithfulness.

## Political Influence

While party policy articulates that the purpose of the CHP is to vie for and become the government of Canada, party members and adherents evaluate success in part on the extent to which party activities produce what might be broadly referred to as *political influence*. I wish to stress that what constitutes evidence of successful influence may encompass a wide range of indicators—many of which are subject to ongoing interpretation and adjustment. Nevertheless, participants may attend to a variety of outcomes and indications of what they define as meaningful political influence. As a party organizer states, "While it is true that our constitution refers specifically to the objectives of a witness and electoral accomplishments, as a member of the CHP, I see yet another objective: Influence" [fieldnotes].

Members may be particularly attentive to the extent to which the CHP is "on the radar" of other political actors. For example, members may focus on those ridings where the CHP was a factor in the outcome of the election. Particular attention has been directed to those ridings where the candidate running for the Conservative Party of Canada (or its earlier variants or fragments),[13] lost the election, and the votes

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[11] Extracted and compiled from Elections Canada resources (https://www.elections.ca/home.aspx [retrieved August 02, 2021]).

[12] See Blumer's (1969) classic depiction of the tradition in *Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method*. For a more contemporary discussion of Blumer's influence, see the special edition of the journal *Symbolic Interaction* entitled "Celebrating and Interrogating the Blumerian Legacy" (Low and Bowden 2020).

[13] Between the founding of the CHP in the late 1980s to the present, the mainstream conservative presence in Canadian federal politics has been represented by the Progressive Conservative Party that was marginalized after being reduced to two seats in 1993. In 2003, the Canadian Alliance Party (formerly the Reform Party) and the Progressive Conservative Party merged to form the Conservative Party of Canada, which serves as the official opposition in the 43rd Parliament of Canada.

garnered by the CHP could have propelled that candidate to victory in Canada's first-past-the-post system. As a CHP strategist noted, "We were a factor in unseating five sitting members of parliament" [interview].

For participants, these indicators of influence may be taken as evidence that their actions are politically consequential. For some, success is running "spoiler campaigns"—ones that unseat incumbents or thwart challenges by strategically splitting voter support. For some members, this understanding of success via influencing outcomes is particularly enhanced where Conservative candidates who were defined as inadequately supportive of key policy issues for the CHP were unsuccessful in their campaigns. By being further to the right on issues such as marriage equality, abortion access, and capital punishment,[14] CHP members perceived that they had a vital role to play in preserving "family values" and applying political pressure on the Conservative Party to remain right of center. Success, in this case, includes successfully competing for votes on the right of the political spectrum and of denying electoral success to those who are "right" but not "right enough." As a former candidate notes,

> Now, the Conservatives have a party on the other [right] side, another party drawing away their votes. So, what they're going to have to do is to win back these votes to appease these people—present policies which are in accordance to their wishes and which I believe hopefully would be healthier for their country. To win would be nice, but basically, we are giving people an opportunity to see an alternative, and the

PCs [Progressive Conservatives] are going to have to keep us in mind. [CHP candidate]

The party's activities within the courts to advance its agendas may also be seen as indicators of success. Participants may view being charged with offenses as an indicator that the related protests were effective enough to warrant constraint by those with the power or authority to do so. Relatedly, funding and mounting legal challenges and associated legal victories or precedents may be framed as political successes. To be the target of the dominative practices of various office holders, may be interpreted by members as an indicator of success—for ineffective political actors do not warrant the attention of control agents and the moral entrepreneurial fellow travelers. We see an example of such renderings of successful political action in the party's account of legal action:

> the Christian Heritage Party…won a strong decision in its dispute with the City of Hamilton over the removal of political advertising from bus shelters in the city. A Judicial Review panel ruled overwhelmingly in favor of the party whose paid advertising was removed by city staff…The bus shelter ads which the party had contracted to run for one month simply asked the question: "Competing human rights: where is the justice?" and were posted as a challenge to the city's pending policy which would allow biological males to access female washrooms, change rooms, and showers. The Judicial Review examined the timing of events and the lack of consideration by city staff for the freedom of expression traditionally allowed political parties… This decision is a victory not only for CHP Canada but for all political parties. By this ruling, the panel has showed their support for the "competing human right" of freedom of speech in Canada. The Christian Heritage Party would like to express our thankfulness…for

[14] Capital punishment was removed from the Canadian Criminal Code in 1976. A motion to reinstate it brought forward by Conservative politicians was considered by the House of Commons in 1987 and defeated.

a just decision which has bolstered our confidence in the judicial process. [CHP, 2018[15]]

Party members may also see the attention afforded by those holding some form of attributed expertise as an indicator of influence and political relevance. Notable here is attention to coverage offered by various media enterprises (local, regional, national) and by academics (e.g., Grills 1997; McKeen 2015; Malloy 2017). There are notable parallels here with Blumer's (1971) discussion of the social construction of social problems. Therein Blumer (1971:303) argues that for social problems to be legitimated, they must develop "the credential of respectability"— to enter into public discourse via the press, expert discourse, and/or social media. The comments of a political scientist included in a party press release serve as illustrative of this theme:

> According to my research where the Christian Heritage Party is running, I see 10 ridings where CHP candidates could steal enough votes to prevent the PC incumbents from winning…The CHP has built a solid organization in many of the ridings. I expect the CHP to get from 5-15% of the vote in these ridings. In ridings like [Southbend] and [Eastbend], [they] will likely do much better. [CHP press release draft, field notes, riding names are pseudonyms]

Party members may view the attention afforded by such audiences as having a legitimating quality for a party that may be viewed by others in quite negative terms. As such, discussions of party policy and political influence in the public square may be seen as important indicators of success—whether entirely supportive of party activities or not.

## Offering Alternatives

In addition to attending to evidence of influence as an indicator of success, participants may also view the party's ability to offer voters a Christian alternative to more mainstream, non-theologically based parties as something of a success in and of itself. A press release issued to coincide with the founding convention champions this message,

> This convention marks the beginning of a new era in federal politics. When we in the CHP talk about a "real alternative" in Canadian politics, we do not only refer to a real choice at election time. We will present a real alternative in the way we conduct federal politics from the grassroots up. [Press release, field notes, 1987]

In this sense, the subculturally-situated work of building and sustaining a political organization is made meaningful, in part, through the options it provides the electorate. Success is located in the opportunity afforded others to participate in, as well as vote for a party that represents an explicitly Christian political witness. As a party organizer comments, "despite our shortcomings, we have sought to provide a real alternative based on biblical principle. We have been unapologetic for this and have not hesitated to appeal to scriptural principle as a final authority."[16]

What is unstated above, however, is that while participants may view the biblical text as the "inerrant word of God," all text requires interpretation and

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[15]  See: https://chp.ca/images/uploads/PressRelease-October_5,_2018.pdf (retrieved August 21, 2021).

[16] These themes are also central to the recruitment practices of the CHP—the emphasis on the biblical grounding of the party has also been a rather central feature of strategies utilized to recruit members, candidates, and party organizers. See Grills (1994; 1997) for a discussion of matters related to recruitment and party promotion.

sense-making on the part of those who engage it. As such, while there may be agreement that party policy be biblically based, the interpretive work that people undertake may lead members to divergent conclusions on specific matters at hand. For example, the original party membership application of 1987 states, "We believe that the major functions of government are to uphold law and order, to maintain justice in the land and to ensure for each individual…the sanctity of life from conception to natural death (capital punishment notwithstanding)."

However, some Christian communities or denominations are decidedly opposed to capital punishment. In 1965, the General Conference of the Mennonite Church adopted a position opposing capital punishment as unjust, and Pope Francis affirmed in 2018 that capital punishment is an attack on human dignity and is immoral in all cases. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to undertake a review of policy and policy-related disputes. However, it is vital to attend to the everyday experiences of party members in these wider contexts. For if one measure of success is to offer some form of alternative political expression, then the work of making distinctions, drawing out uniquenesses, and articulating points of tension is crucial to the enterprise. As a party office holder expressed,

> We have to impress upon the electorate that we are a party of compassion—and that makes Christian politics different from all of the [other] forms of politics. At the candidate training sessions—that is one of the things that struck me, that we have a lot of conservative candidates and not enough Christian ones. [interview]

Participants' definitions of success considering political influence and offering political alternatives locate success in terms of the world of party politics. As such, indicators of accomplishment attend to themes such as the creation of party policy, indicators of political consequence, and perceived relevance within the context of federal politics. However, other definitions of success may eschew defining success in political terms and instead emphasize the theme of *faithfulness*. It is to this theme that I turn my attention.

## Demonstrations of Faithfulness

Party members may view party participation and involvement as politicized extensions of carrying one's faith into the political fray. Weber's (1992) discussion of the relationship between the protestant ethic and capitalism illustrates the importance of understanding religious worldviews in the context of everyday activities.

A word of caution here. Given that the CHP is a diverse political movement that includes members from a range of Christian communities (e.g., Evangelical, multiple Reform traditions, and Roman Catholic), there are multiple theological traditions present within the setting. Whereas Weber's rendering of Protestantism focused on the influence of concepts such as "calling" and "predestination" to frame members' understandings of work and labor, there is no such shared theological perspective within the CHP subculture. Nevertheless, members' interpretation of success is to be found in their larger framings of faith, duty, and living a scripturally-informed or obedient life. For these members, the idea of separating church and state is something of a heresy.

In this sense, faithfulness requires action—evidenced in worship, family life, education, and com-

munity. Political action, therefore, may be perceived to be an extension of a faithful life. And a faithful life is one marked by conflict—conflict between all that challenges faithfulness as various socially constructed manifestations of evil. If we are to fully appreciate the framing of success within this subculture, it is essential to grasp the importance of enduring conflict and the need for religiously-based resistance. This theme is somewhat thinly referenced in a promotional video, "In spite of all of these obstacles and roadblocks which faced the CHP at every turn, we went on believing that our efforts, although imperfect, were nevertheless the best we could do to be faithful to our principles and to our God" [fieldnotes].

In this context, party creation, maintenance, and its ongoing participation in the political process is an indication of obedience to the faith and, therefore, is an indication of subcultural success—for the organization and for the individuals whose sense of self is, in part, shaped by party involvements and related self-other identities as engaged actors in a Christian mission.

> There's more to it than [political success]. Like, to me, a Christian's life is never supposed to become a utopia. It means sacrifice, not for a year or six months, but always. I mean, we are supposed to be fighting a battle here. You know, whatever happened to the weary soldier? That is what we are doing here—we are in a fight. [party organizer]

In Weber's (1992) analysis, the accumulation of wealth is not the purpose of the Protestant faith, but prosperity may be defined as an indication of living a faithful life. Likewise, for some subcultural members, electoral success is not the goal of party participation. Living a life faithful to their under-

standings of the obligations of adherents is. Party involvement may, therefore, be understood as pursuing a particular version of a good life.

> Ultimately, it is for each person to ask him/herself what the Lord requires of them in political activity. The Lord does not require success of His people, but rather obedience, and He chooses often to bless obedience with success. And so, the challenge of the CHP continues seeking to be faithful to our God and in faith, waiting for Him to bless our efforts. [party candidate]

This perspective invites evidence of success to be based on indicators of faithfulness and obedience as evidentiary of God's blessing. Therefore, a lack of traditional electoral success is no meaningful challenge to the ongoing participation of members who hold related worldviews. As long as party involvement is understood as an extension of living an obedient life of faithfulness, the successes that encourage ongoing involvement are not to be found in the ballot box.

## In Sum

Ongoing involvements in particular subcultures may, in some ways, be contingent on realizing and enacting success and success practices. Much as those participating in deviant subcultures come to acquire the perspectives of the subculture and overcome or manage resistances to participation (Prus and Grills 2003), so too do they engage in the intersubjective processes that accompany learning and embracing various definitions of success.

In this paper, I have attempted to make a case for those working within the extended symbolic interactionist position to profitably examine the social

processes of success-making and success-claiming as central features of human group life. We have a strong and diverse body of literature on which to draw—research that has attended to the social construction of success in a variety of subcultural settings, as well as research that has attended to the various conditions of success for various aspects of human group life. Both of these traditions of inquiry have contributed to our ability as researchers to examine the trans-historical and trans-situational qualities of success-making.

I have undertaken an application of this interest in a sociology of success to a specific subcultural setting—the Christian Heritage Party of Canada. While Blumer (1969) demands of interactionists that we achieve a deep and intimate understanding of peoples' activities and worldviews if we are to avoid creating "attentional ghettos" (Zerubavel 2015), we must move beyond cases at hand towards the generic social processes revealed within. By attending to definitions of success within the CHP, we gain a fuller appreciation of the processes of success making and claiming more generally. This work demonstrates how a deep and detailed understanding of peoples' socially constructed notions of success are integral to contextualizing subcultural continuance, self-other identities, notions of completion and conflict, and more personal assessments of success relative to offices held and roles undertaken. As Grills (2020b:631) writes, "Understanding the practical accomplishment of human group life is strengthened by our ability to move beyond the particular to the processes of everyday life through which the social world is accomplished and by so doing speak to the generic aspects of the human condition."

While the themes of influence, faithful obedience, and offering alternatives as pathways to success are

research site-specific, the fundamental sociological problem at hand is not. Questions related to how people define processes and outcomes of human action as indicators of success and what evidence may serve as indicators of success are important for understanding the various life worlds we inhabit. A central aspect of learning the ropes for those initially involved in subcultural settings includes coming to appreciate and (potentially) adopt the framings of success located therein. For example, doctoral students may learn the importance of conferencing, the pressure to publish (in the "right" journals and with the "right" presses), the importance of adopting "marketable" theoretical and substantive positions in their work, and pathways to promotion and tenure—all socially constructed versions of the successful academic career. Importantly, subcultural participants can and do resist various organizationally situated definitions of success. But, such resistance may hold meaningful, at times quite unwelcome, implications for their advocates.

While emphasizing the centrality of social processes and the everyday world of people doing things together, it is also crucial to appreciate the extent to which joint acts occur within the context of organizations, rule sets, and established expectations of behavior. People can and do create the requirements for success in some settings via policies, procedures, legislation, and collective agreements. While consequential and determinative in a variety of ways, such organizational qualities are best framed as the products of human action. As Dingwall and Strong (1985:218) suggest, "there is an enormous difference between saying that [organizations] are, in principle, indefinitely negotiable and recognizing that they are, in practice, determinate. Our argument is for the study of the ways in which that actual determinateness is accomplished."

While the activities of the CHP occur within the organizational and structural realities of a set of codified rules about political parties, campaign financing, election practices, and a first-past-the-post parliamentary electoral system, analysts need to move beyond these themes to appreciate success more fully as it is realized in everyday life. As Blumer (as cited in Lofland 1980:261) suggests, more structuralist accounts produce "a complete inversion of what is involved…[Instead,] there are people who are engaged in living, in having to cope with situations that arise in their experience, organizing their behavior and their conduct in the light of those situations they encounter, coming to develop all kinds of arrangements which are ongoing affairs."

One such set of arrangements that people make is related to the processes of managing success. As people go about the everyday work of doing politics and religion and education and family life, they may also be actively engaged in ongoing assessments of these activities. I would encourage researchers to attend to the related processes of success-claiming, success-making, and evidence construction. An appreciation of these themes is crucial for developing an intimate familiarity with a wide range of subcultural settings and more fully articulating and understanding the human condition.

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