"It's a sudden stop. It's just like somebody shut off the tap. It just ends. It's over. It's death."

DEATH AT THE POLLS
Experiencing and Coping with Political Defeat

WILLIAM SHAFFIR
STEVEN KLEINKNECHT

WILLIAM SHAFFIR is a professor of sociology at McMaster University. He is the author and coauthor of a number of scholarly books and articles in the areas of hassidic and haredi Jewry, occupational socialization, and field research methods. His Web site featuring a particular hassidic sect may be found at www.kiryastash.ca. His current projects include a study of diversity training and management in a Canadian metropolitan police force and a documentary on the Jewish community of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

STEVEN KLEINKNECHT is a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at McMaster University. His research interests lie in the study of qualitative methods, subcultures, deviant behavior, online interaction, and social problems. His recent research projects include ethnographic studies on the hacker subculture and social change within Old Order Mennonite communities. He has also worked as a research analyst at the Department of Justice Canada where he has written on issues pertaining to restorative justice, juvenile justice, and cybercrime.

This article examines means of coping adopted by defeated politicians to manage their unexpected loss. In particular, we consider how they deploy deflection rhetoric to claim that circumstances beyond their control resulted in the undesirable outcome. The data mainly derive from transcribed conversations with Canadian politicians at both provincial and federal levels of government. The analysis offers a case study of disengagement and how individuals, forced to assume a new status involuntarily, attend to the presented challenges. An understanding of social life is enhanced by investigating not only the dynamics of identity construction but also processes of "un-becoming."

Keywords: *role exit; politicians; rationalizations; social death; disengagement*

Your observation about defeated politicians is correct. Some can't talk about it, and others need to talk about it, and I would put myself in both categories. For a long time, I couldn't talk about it because of how devastating it was to me personally, my own ego and sense of identity, and its effect on the family, and my desire to get back in. Then I accepted reluctantly that it was not going to happen, but I constantly revisited what went wrong with what happened. And I would say that it's only been in the last three or four years . . . that I can talk about it a little more dispassionately and detached. (New Democratic Party)[1]

It's a sudden stop. It's just like somebody shut off the tap. It just ends. It's over. It's death. (Liberal Party)

In this study, we explore how ex-politicians[2] come to terms with electoral defeat. Losing an election has a powerful impact on the politician's ego and sense of self. How the individual comes to terms with defeat can be both traumatic and enduring.[3] As sixty- to eighty-hour workweeks are common, the individual's identity becomes linked to his or her work, and thus "politician" quickly becomes a master status. The abrupt, involuntary exit from their old role to a new amorphous status is often experienced as a social death. To cope with this transition,

ex-politicians invoke a denial of responsibility (Sykes and Matza 1957) tactic to account for the defeat. In doing so, they attempt to resituate defeat as outside of their control, thereby displacing blame and mitigating the stigma of defeat.

This article builds upon existing research and theory concerning role exit (Ebaugh 1988) and neutralization techniques (Sykes and Matza 1957). The two conceptual frames provide an appropriate context for understanding how defeated office holders employ selective rhetorical devices to retain a favorable self-image as their cherished social identity—members of the legislative assembly—is eliminated by the electorate that votes them out of office. In the process, we suggest insights into the little-studied process of involuntary role exit among politicians.

Role exit and disengagement have been the subjects of a significant amount of sociological research and theorizing (e.g., Anderson and Bondi 1988; Brown 1991a, 1991b; Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Ebaugh 1988; Hochschild 1975; Johnson and Barer 1992; Khullar and Reynolds 1990; Quinnan 1997; Sharp and Hope 2001; Sijuwade 1994; Wacquant 1990). Most studies concerning role exit have been concerned with *voluntary* departures where there is a great deal of contemplation (including self-doubt, exploration of alternatives, deciding to carry out the transition) on the part of individuals. There are some exceptions. In particular, research on former high-performance athletes (Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Rosenberg 1984; Sinclair 1990; Werthner-Bales 1985) has examined the experience of involuntary disinvolvement. The accounts of ex-politicians extend our understanding of how individuals experience a sudden severing of a former cherished identity.

Neutralization techniques (Sykes and Matza 1957) and related concepts (e.g., motive talk, accounts, disclaimers) have also drawn a significant amount of attention (Byers, Crider, and Biggers 1999; Copes 2003; Costello 2000; Eliason and Dodder 1999; Gauthier 2001; Hazani 1991; Heltsley and Calhoun 2003; Khoo and Oakes 2000; Levi 1981; Mitchell and Dodder 1983; Nelson and Lambert 2001; Orbuch 1997; Pershing 2003; Tomita 1990). Studies employing this set of concepts have mainly focused on how those classified as "deviant" attempt to maintain a nondeviant self-image. In this article, we argue for the extended use of these concepts—moving beyond the "deviant mystique"—to see

how they apply in another setting (see Prus 1996, 1997; Prus and Grills 2003).

DATA AND METHOD

This project came to life following a television program viewed by the lead researcher in 1999. Featured on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's series *Man Alive*, this particular segment, titled "The Hidden Tattoo," fascinated in its unusual claims about defeated politicians. Focusing on the stories of three defeated individuals, it featured how their election defeat not only traumatized them in the short run but impacted decisively on their life after politics. In order to understand the experiences of ex-politicians and, more specifically, offer an empirically grounded study of involuntary disengagement, an analysis of in-depth interviews with former Canadian office holders was conducted.[4]

Between 1999 and 2003, the lead researcher conducted approximately seventy informal interviews with former members of Canada's federal and provincial parliaments, parliamentary clerks, and administrative officials employed by the political parties. In the case of politicians, the conversations occurred within the first five years of their defeat. The material for this article is based on the transcription of forty-five conversations with respondents who represented the Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic parties. Keeping with the gender composition of the Canadian legislatures, the majority of respondents—sixty—were male, their legislative experience ranging from, roughly, three to thirty years. While the majority were backbenchers, the sample also included several cabinet ministers and a provincial premier. The interviews were tape-recorded and varied in length from one to three hours. Respondents chose the meeting places—in coffee shops, parks, restaurants, homes, offices, and hotel lobbies. Individuals were contacted in advance, knew the purpose of the research, and in the absence of a standard list of questions, were asked to share their thoughts on what life was like following their defeat.

The challenge of locating respondents was serendipitously overcome when the lead researcher chanced upon requesting help and guidance from clerks of the legislatures and various administrative officials of the political parties. Typically, they agreed to post a letter, drafted by the researcher, outlining the project on the parties' respective Web sites, inviting those interested to respond either by telephone or e-mail. A

major problem was to coordinate encounters with those interested in sharing their experiences.

Associations of former parliamentarians also proved valuable for meeting past members of the legislatures. Such organizations have recently formed on both provincial and national levels to provide services for retired and defeated members. The lead researcher was invited to attend the annual meeting of the national body in Ottawa in 2002. An invitation to speak about the research findings at the annual meeting of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians not only led to meeting additional respondents but also confirmed ever so clearly that the research struck a deep chord among the audience members.

Respondents expected to be tape-recorded and were unconcerned about assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Surprisingly, however, while adept at answering questions when confronted by and meeting with reporters, conversing about the impact of their loss on their career aspirations and the toll political life exacted on their families required a measure of candidness for which they were not initially prepared. However, reservations about sharing such details dissipated, in the main, as the lead researcher displayed a sympathetic familiarity with the challenges and problems that others had already discussed. The decision to leave the field (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 61-62; Taylor 1991, 241-44) was based on such matters as data saturation, the absence of any new discoveries or points that had previously been overlooked, fatigue, and the termination of the grant period.

The analysis of the transcribed interview data led to the identification of conceptual and substantive categories that were judged relevant to the exiting process. As discussed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 170), these categories reflect salient aspects of the research problem. To add more depth and detail to the classification of the data, we distinguished between items that were volunteered by the respondent or were the result of specific questions that were directed by the researcher. This latter tabulation enhances the analysis' credibility (Becker et al. 1961, 43), providing the reader with grounds for concluding that the concerns we offer regarding the exiting process are shared by the defeated office holders and regarded by them as legitimate. Finally, we have borrowed from Coombs (1978, 12) by using the conventional words *few*, *some*, *many*, and *most*. They can be interpreted as follows: *few*—not more than 10 percent of the respondents; *some*—more than 10 percent but less than 25 percent; *many*—more than 25 percent but less than 50

percent; *most*—more than 50 percent, a majority (used interchangeably with *typically*).

CONNECTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

Sociology enjoys a rich tradition detailing how persons assume social identities (Becker et al. 1961; Kleinman 1984; Olesen and Whittaker 1968). The dynamics of disengagement or disinvolvement from previous identities—role transition and role loss—have received less attention (Prus 1997; Shaffir 1997).[5]

While role transition and role loss are commonly experienced in daily life, the career movements of professional athletes, particularly those forced to leave the game as active players, are dramatic instances of these phenomena. Drahota and Eitzen (1998) emphasize that such role transformations involve a loss that "has been the focus of their being for most of their lives, the primary source of their identities, . . . the adulation bordering on idol worship from others, the money and the perquisites of fame, the camaraderie with team-mates, and the intensive 'highs' of competition" (p. 263). Along this line, they cite Arthur Ashe, the former tennis professional, who writes, "Most athletes, no matter how intelligent they may be, are almost totally unprepared to retire, as they are forced to do, while they are in their physical prime. . . . I know that I was not adequately prepared to take the step. Remove the glitter and glamour of the tennis world, . . . the endless stroking of the ego, the copious episodes of pampering and privilege and where would I be?" (Ashe and Rampersad 1993, 41). For the most part, sociologists of sport interested in matters of transition from athlete to ex have attended to the dynamics of disengagement (Cumming and Henry 1961; Curtis and Ennis 1988; Lerch 1981; Rosenberg 1984; Swain 1991).

More generally, the sociological literature on role loss and exit connects to old age and widowhood (Zena Smith Blau 1973) or to the socialization from one role to another, changing role expectations, and status changes (Allen and van de Vliert 1984; Strasser 1984). The most promising approach depicts role exit as a process of disengagement, disidentification, and resocialization proposed by Ebaugh (1977, 1988). Drawing upon her personal experiences as a former nun, Ebaugh (1988) contends that three characteristics of role exiting differentiate this process from other transitions: (1) past affiliations with a role remains a part of the future identity, becoming incorporated into the

transformed ideas of self; (2) the previous status is not easily relinquished by others as people treat the individual on the basis of who he or she used to be; and (3) role exit impacts not only the individual but others connected with that person. The experiences of ex-politicians are roughly comparable to Ebaugh's conceptualization, but it must be stressed that her analysis attends primarily to *voluntary* role exit and is thus not entirely applicable to the study of unplanned or involuntary disengagement. For example, whereas Ebaugh's model begins with doubt about one's role followed by a decision to seek alternatives, ex-politicians experience no such doubt, believe they are worthy of continuing confidence from the electorate, and only reluctantly search for alternatives upon sustaining defeat.

As far as we know, this is the first study of how defeated office holders react and adjust to losing an election. This involuntary disengagement may be fruitfully conceptualized along the dimensions of status passage outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1971).[6] Perhaps the singular component of this passage requiring underscoring is its public nature: it occurs in full view of the electorate and even with the most sophisticated tactics at one's disposal, it cannot be disguised or concealed, thereby making it difficult to manage.

This article examines several means of coping adopted by defeated parliamentarians to manage their unexpected loss. We consider how they deflect responsibility for the defeat toward circumstances and events that were, they attest, beyond their control. However, the data also indicate that, overwhelmed by the enormity of the loss—their egos' having been publicly assaulted and bruised—not an inconsiderable number analogize the feelings experienced to death. We begin by examining this aspect of the defeat and then turn to some commonly employed neutralizing techniques.

THE TRAUMA OF DEFEAT,
THE IMAGERY OF DEATH

Newcomers to political life in the legislature must familiarize themselves not only with the culture of the institution but also with the political party's role within it including the various official responsibilities that they will be expected to assume. As well, members of the institution must find sufficient time for the innumerable meetings with

constituents and various interest groups who often demand and usually expect immediate attention.

Defeated politicians recall numerous instances where family-related activities were sacrificed to the demands of political office, for example, missed ballet recitals and hockey games or family trips and vacations that could not be planned in advance or were suddenly postponed or even cancelled. For some, political life contributes to the dissolution of their marriages. From their perspective, the adverse effect on family is connected to the enormously long hours required for their work, much of which removes them from the family setting for lengthy periods.

Political life, however, is also exhilarating. Immersed within its subculture, politicians readily believe that they are effecting positive change. As they are socialized into this social world, they also become convinced that they are becoming better at doing their work. As their initial feelings of uncertainty and confusion are replaced by those of confidence and determination, the label "politician" becomes a master status (Hughes 1945). Having committed themselves so completely to their political career, its termination—typically unexpected, sudden, and enacted publicly—is nothing less than shocking and, for many, utterly devastating. It is within this context that defeat at the polls is experienced as death.

Based on the data coded for this article, out of the forty-five interviews, reference to death was volunteered in fourteen or 35 percent of the cases. When reference to death was directed in the course of the conversation, twenty of the remaining thirty-one respondents, or 65 percent, considered the analogy reasonable in some fashion or other. Used as a metaphor for exclusion, disappointment, and failure (Kalish 1966; Kastenbaum 1981), their reference to death reminds us that defeated office holders are in fact leaving behind a life. Such an analogy is particularly germane to situations characterized by involuntary status loss (Charmaz 1980; Glaser and Strauss 1965).

Resonating with the vast majority of those interviewed, the metaphor of death best captures the profound disappointment they experience following defeat. "It's like the phases of death. You have loss, anger, sadness, and then you come to accept it," says a defeated Liberal. This individual offers a more graphic description: "It's as sudden as death. The only thing you don't go through is that you don't have to walk into a funeral home and peek into the box and say, 'Well, he was a nice guy' " (Liberal).[7]

The analogy to death is meant to focus on the enormous regret occasioned by the loss. Political resurrection is not entirely uncommon, but its immediacy precludes any realistic long-term perspective imagining an eventual return to the political arena. Instead, the loss is viewed as the snuffing out of a promising political career with its projected achievements and successes. Reflecting on her defeat, a former nurse compares the loss to a miscarriage:

> You find out you're pregnant and you plan the kid's whole life right from start to finish. You think about where they're going to go to university, and you think about who they're going to marry. It's unbelievable the extent to which you can go to visualizing and planning for this child. . . . So then you lose that person that you've really wanted and had made all sorts of plans for and had become part of your family, and nobody knows and nobody cares. And it's like that. And it's often because you cannot talk about it and you can't show it in a lot of ways because nobody really cares. It's true. In the day after the election, nobody dies. Everybody's still there intact. You feel like a piece of shit, and there's nothing to be done with it. You can't belabor this with your friends very much because they want you to get on with it, much as it is when a woman loses a baby, especially very early. And people say, "You can get pregnant again. You're young." Well, that's almost the same thing that happens. Well, people say, "You've got something that you'd really like to go back to." True. Very true. You know, maybe you'll even get to politics again. Who knows . . .? It's a different death. It's a death that no one grieves with you. (Liberal)

Quite often, the trauma of the experience is magnified owing to the all-possessing nature of political life: ". . . because you invest so much of your life into this. You become preoccupied. You live and breathe this thing. It's part of your being. So when it's taken away, and you feel prematurely, of course there's disappointment. Intellectually I understand I shouldn't take it personally. Intellectually I think I can be objective, but it's hard not to [take it personally]" (Progressive Conservative).

Although some defeated members claim to have anticipated their defeat, particularly during the campaign's latter stages, it nonetheless constitutes a severe blow to their ego both because it occurs in public and because they believe they deserved better. They are surprised and unprepared for its impact. Defeat represents rejection at its extreme: "You didn't get fired by one person; you got fired by 6,000," remarks a

defeated New Democratic Party member. Embarrassed and upset by the defeat, it is not unusual for them to withdraw, as revealed in the following:

> I can imagine that some people were devastated and didn't want to go out, didn't want to go to a funeral, didn't want to go to a wedding, didn't want to go to a baptism, didn't want to go to a confirmation, didn't want to go to church. Didn't want to do a lot of things. (Liberal)

> I thought I had come through it fairly well. When I woke up one day about a year and a half later, I realized that I had not responded to a single telephone call from Manitoba in those eighteen months. I couldn't do it. (New Democratic Party)

> People crawl into shells. They don't want to peak their head out because they think the public has turned them down. And that destroys their self-esteem. (New Democratic Party)

It is not surprising, therefore, that in reflecting upon the defeat, defeated parliamentarians refer to periods of grieving and mourning that, in some cases, endured for periods of several months and even longer. As the clerk of a provincial legislature remarks, "It's a loss, so there's a grieving process, and some people handle that better than others. . . . People grieve in various ways, and that's a reaction people have to being defeated." And a former provincial parliamentarian admits, "Ya, it's like a death. For some people, there's a long mourning period." Referring to a colleague's defeat one year earlier, he adds, "I don't think that he's over it."

The mourning is not confined to the defeated politician alone but may extend to family members and staff who also experience the accompanying disappointment and sadness:

> There was mourning, definitely. I mourned, my husband did. The next morning, he woke up early to go and pick up the signs, and he said that he was crying the whole time. He was very angry, angrier than I that the electorate wasn't loyal. It was very sad. (Liberal)

> I think that after a loss, what you're saying happens. It's like a death. I mean the person who worked for me for three years, I mean she said it: "This is like a death. Just like a death." I think it's just not the candidate and his family. I think it's also the key people. Many feel a sense of real disappointment, but Jenny said it very many times: "It's just like a

death." Jenny and I worked extremely well together, and that's why she
felt this sense of loss. (Liberal)

Staff and volunteers may also feel terribly saddened and deprived by
the office holder's defeat, and their loss is not easily ignored. The
defeated member may feel some measure of responsibility for their
newfound predicament. "There's a funny thing that happened the day
of the election. I felt really bad for my people, not for me," a defeated
Liberal member reminisces. Another defeated parliamentarian, a Pro-
gressive Conservative, observes, "I think of the concentrated time you
put in, and you also have a number of other people spending this kind of
time for you too. And you have to feel a little bit responsible for what
happened, not just for yourself but for the others who are involved."
Along this line, another reflects, "I felt I owed a lot to the people who
had volunteered to work for me as volunteers, and it's very difficult to
let down the side. Now realistically, in politics, there are always people
being let down, regularly. It's just that I hadn't had that experience. I
had won every time. . . . So, for me, it was a taste of failure that I hadn't
been used to. For a number of months, I felt really guilty about having
let people down" (Liberal).

The imagery of death rings true for yet another reason. The defeat
generates a series of sympathetic telephone calls and visits from family
members, friends, and constituents offering words of solace and com-
fort. The spouse of a defeated Progressive Conservative member
observes,

> After the election, there's a period where we're still around for a little bit.
> The phone would ring, people would be leaving messages: "Sorry about
> this." People would be leaving e-mail messages: "Sorry about this." I
> remember taking one phone call; it was our minister and he wanted to
> offer his condolences. Like people wouldn't know what to say to us, or
> me. You're on the street, and people wouldn't know what to say. I'd say,
> "It's OK, we're fine, we're OK with it." I had to reassure them that we
> were OK with it. If anything, it was the others that weren't.

Intending to comfort, they are, instead, reminders of the bitter loss:
"The last thing I wanted," recalls a defeated Liberal, "was for people to
drop by and tell me what kind of great guy I was and how they couldn't
believe it happened."

Hoping to be on the winning side of the electoral contest, defeat, then, is a blow to their self-esteem. Attempting not to personalize the loss, the task before them is more challenging than expected. Much like the stigmatized deviant who is suddenly shut out from social circles, the individual is no longer embraced and accorded special status but experiences rejection and isolation instead:

> And, you know, the community doesn't embrace them.[8] One of the things that struck me, but I expected it, I was half ready for this, is that you just stop getting phone calls. You stop getting invitations to go places, people stop wanting to meet with you. Organizations you really led, and suddenly you're past tense. You don't exist anymore. . . . But that could be devastating, it really could. It's almost as though you were a social reject. It's the story of winners and losers. If you win, you're fine; if you lose, you lose. And then I could see somebody say, "Well, why should I pay special attention to him? He's just another bloke like I am." (Liberal)

As incapacitating as the defeat may be, the defeated member must make sense of it.[9] Feelings of grief and rejection are not experienced to the exclusion of other emotions and thoughts helping to make the loss more understandable and palatable. In time, and with the assistance of others, a series of explanations for the loss—rationalizations—are embraced, serving to reduce the individual's culpability.

THE DISAVOWAL OF RESPONSIBILITY: DEFLECTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEFEAT ONTO EXTERNAL FACTORS

To cope with their loss, defeated politicians draw on a vocabulary of explanations, what Mills (1940) called motives. This vocabulary is composed of a series of rationalizations and accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968) used to explain their situation to themselves and others. Many such rationalizations used by former politicians involve a denial of responsibility for the defeat. This type of rationalization, according to Sykes and Matza (1957), is used to redirect responsibility for the outcome of an event, which may have been influenced by one's actions, onto some external force beyond his or her influence. Through this process, people provide themselves with a way of viewing their own

actions as "normal" and in line with what would be expected of them. Such tactics, then, not only explain an event but also act as a face-saving measure by deflecting feelings of guilt or shame that may accompany people's perspectives toward loss and defeat.

While the focus of this article revolves around rationalizations used to deflect blame and cope with defeat, what we refer to as *deflection rhetoric*, coping mechanisms may be categorized into two main forms. The first broad category involves developing ways to think and talk about the loss, for example, as we discuss, framing the loss in a particular light so that it would appear as if it were expected and thereby deflecting responsibility for the outcome. The second category is activity based and relates to new involvements or re-involvements that are undertaken, for example, finding new work or returning to one's previous employment.[10] However, neither line of coping mechanism fully shields the individual from the repercussions of defeat.[11]

We now turn to the types of accounts employed by the defeated politicians to come to terms with their new identities, manage the stigma of defeat, and cope with the repercussions of their loss. In short, they rely upon a variety of rationalizations which, whether recognized or not, serve to deflect responsibility for the outcome. Presented as justifications for the defeat, they situate the outcome of the election as being outside of their control.

ATTRIBUTING BLAME TO THE PARTY AND THE LEADER

Attempting to come to terms with their loss, some defeated politicians blame their political party. They may also blame their loss on their leader, the organization of the party, unpopular political decisions, or the calling of an election at an inopportune time. When the entire party is "swept" during an election, it supports the sentiment that the defeat was the result of the party platform or leadership issues rather than anything the politician could control or be responsible for. In the process, they distance themselves from responsibility for the loss and attempt to shield themselves from the negative repercussions accompanying the political defeat. For example,

> I think my government at the time caused its own defeat. So when we had the election and I lost, I was sort of a little more upset with my

government than I was with anybody else including myself. (New Democratic Party)

We all lost, all of our caucus lost. And it was really clear on the doorstep that people were saying, "I'm not voting against you, I want someone to defeat the government," and they were voting Liberal. And that's why I knew I wouldn't win, and that also took the personal sting out of it. (Progressive Conservative)

Door-to-door campaigning may alert politicians to the possibility of defeat. As some politicians indicate, these encounters enable them to gauge the support they might expect to receive on the day of the election. Some recall experiencing very direct indications that members of the public were dissatisfied with the party: "I remember knocking on doors, and you know, the guy would yell at you for fifteen minutes. He'd say, 'Jim, you're great, but I can't afford the NDP.' So Bill [party leader] asked me how's the canvassing going, and I said, 'Bill, I'm not canvassing, I'm doing psychotherapy on the doorsteps.' The fact is there's not a hope here. I can't win. The fact is that I just can't defeat the fact when they say, 'You're doing a great job; if you weren't running for the NDP, we'd vote for you.' We got creamed in the election" (New Democratic Party).

Experience of this kind provides evidence to support the rationalization that it's not the individual politician with whom the constituents are unhappy but the political party with which they are affiliated. Such encounters shape a vocabulary to explain the defeat both to oneself and to others. For example, "I was able to say to myself, and others said to me, and my friends said to me, 'You went down with the government. It didn't have anything to do with you.' And the feeling that I get from some colleagues is that they believe this too, that I went down with the government. So my social stature hasn't changed very much. People still see me as someone who is OK."

Encounters with the public are not the only way politicians are able to learn and develop acceptable rationalizations. Other politicians may help the defeated candidate fashion a way of thinking to explain the loss and retain a positive self-image. For instance,

I made the comment, in 1986, that the only reason that I was elected was because I wore the NDP cloth, that it had very little to do with the actual candidate. There was a policy, there was a platform, and not because I

was a nice guy and worked hard and everything else. When I lost in '88, I was feeling quite down and felt that had somebody else run, they might have won this seat, and my colleague . . . said, "Remember what you said in '86?" I didn't remember what I said in 1986. "Well, you said the only reason you won was because you were an NDP. Well, the only reason you lost, it's not you personally, you didn't drag the party down; the party was going down, and you got swept with that basic brush." It helped put things into perspective for me, personally, because "no, it's much bigger than me. It's not me who's a failure here. It's a broader failure. I wasn't personally responsible." (New Democratic Party)

Having already rationalized that the party was the most significant factor in winning the previous election, this same rationalization would be invoked to explain the loss, thereby deflecting blame from oneself.

In looking at party dynamics to explain their defeat, some politicians argue that the party did not have a sufficiently sound infrastructure in place to support its members. For instance, some maintain that proper educational mechanisms for maintaining constituency organizations were unavailable. In comparing their party to other parties during the election campaign, the competition, in their view, was better organized, thereby disadvantaging them in their quest for victory. For example,

Some of the blame goes to the Liberal party of Manitoba because during the two-year period, they did not educate us, as MLAs, as to how we can build a constituency organization that would sustain itself. We didn't do it. I had a president of my association that was running around signing petitions to ban French. You got a sitting MLA and you're out signing a petition to ban French. . . . Unfortunately, the Liberal Party of Manitoba did not provide the manpower for the intellectual ability [to help build the constituency]. Take a look at the Conservatives in our area. They have a constituency and one phone call and everybody's there. The NDP is the same. . . . How can you build a party if you don't have ground support? (Liberal)

It was an unusual situation. We were, in a way, handicapped going from one seat to twenty. We started from nothing. We had no money, there was no communications director, no research. . . . We had to build that up. . . . Had we had a majority government, we would have had four, close to five years to get our feet wet, to get organized . . . and so on. So as a result for having it for only two years, I wasn't known all around the riding. (Liberal)

A related claim contends that the defeat was partly attributable to the party's unsuccessful tactic of organizing itself too much around bridging the interests of various groups. For example, "I think when the NDP took such a severe hammering in the election, I think there's people in the NDP trying to look at who to blame for all of this, and they blamed people inside of the legislature. And I tried to say that the problem is in the NDP itself. . . . You can't build a successful party around bringing interest groups together. It just doesn't work. And no one is speaking for the public as a whole, and I think the public sensed that" (New Democratic Party).

Tied to the issue of party organization is a belief that the party leader can either make or break one's own political campaign. Therefore, in an attempt to distance oneself from the defeat, these politicians also look to place some of the blame on the leader of their party. Once again, cues from the public often supply the defeated member with the necessary ammunition to redirect the blame for the loss in this manner:

> To be honest with you, I blame the loss only on one person, and that was our leader. . . . Number one, people were telling me on the street that Shirley was no longer the leader they thought she was. Number two, she doesn't have the ability to lead. Number three, Phil, we like you, we admire you, you got a lot of chutzpah, but not your leader. Not your leader. (Liberal)

> So what was more disturbing is that when you got the negative stuff, none of it was directed at me. It was all because I was part of Taylor's team. So while that contributed immensely to me winning in 1995, it dragged me down in 1999. (Progressive Conservative)

> I was really sort of annoyed . . . at the premier of my party at the time because we could have avoided the election. . . . So when we had the election and I lost, I was sort of a little more upset with my government than I was with anybody else including myself. (New Democratic Party)

Additionally, having to compete against a party with a particularly charismatic leader can feed into a person's belief that it is a party's leader who should be held most accountable for the political defeat: "I pretty much knew I was going to lose. I had access to polls. In fact, I warned the caucus we were all likely to lose our seats. Bob Smith and I were the only ones that stood a chance of holding our seats until Klein became Tory leader. When he became the Tory leader, I knew that my

goose was cooked, because for some reason the man has some kind of magnetic appeal among the voters in my part of Calgary. I was probably more angry with my own party than I was with the electorate" (New Democratic Party).

Though believing ahead of time that a loss was imminent may bring some consolation by providing some time to plan and prepare for the defeat, accompanying feelings of frustration and disappointment are not entirely eliminated. However, if these emotions can be displaced onto something external to the politician, it helps to dampen the assault on one's ego.

PARTY POLICY AS AN ACCOUNT FOR DEFEAT

From the ex-politician's perspective, decisions that directly affect the public, such as taxation, public spending, and legislation, can have a tremendous influence on how the party is seen as a whole. If these decisions do not sit well with the public, the belief is that there is nothing any one politician can do to overcome these impediments to re-election. Remarks a defeated politician, "What happens here, it's the death of a thousand paper cuts; it's the toll highway, it's the nursing home, hospitals, it's the policing" (Liberal). As the following examples indicate, defeated members tend to identify unpopular decisions and policies as significant components contributing to their defeat.

I knew we were going down. I mean the timing was bad. We put in a really nasty budget, you know, raising taxes and all that. Normally in a four-year mandate, you do your bad stuff in the early part. So we had done the bad stuff and we're running on the bad stuff, right. Aside from that, we had raised rates in the auto insurance and people were just going nuts about that. (New Democratic Party)

Going into it, I didn't think we're going to lose because I had won the previous election by the second highest majority. We had gone through a difficult time where we had spent in largesse from the standpoint of the schools, hospitals, and for the first time we were in debt, had to deal with it, and we didn't know how long we'd be in debt. . . . And, of course, when we moved to '89, the price of oil and gas had gone up. . . . Whereas you had a lot of support earlier on in the re-election process, you started getting the finger as you were standing and freezing on the overpass waving to people. . . . So you got the impression that things weren't going as well as they should. (Liberal)

The province had been suffering attitudinally, psychologically, economically. And in ten years, we completely turned the province around. It took some hard medicine, and it required a whole lot of little no's to everybody, which eventually added up. That's why we lost in June. (Liberal)

BLAME THE TIMING OF THE ELECTION

In the eyes of politicians, the timing of an election is a crucial factor affecting their chances for re-election. In order to understand their defeat, some ex-politicians rationalize that the government chose a poor time to call an election, for example, that the economic climate was not conducive to winning the election or that key elements of the electorate, for one reason or another, were simply unavailable to support the candidate.

In the Canadian parliamentary system, the federal government and most provincial governments are not held to fixed terms before an election is called, as is the case, for example, in the United States. Rather, elections may occur somewhat unexpectedly when there is a minority government or be more strategically planned when there is a majority government. As such, the unexpectedness of an election figures into explanations offered to account for one's defeat (Franks 1987).

A majority government enjoys considerable discretion as to when the next election will be called. Polls can be used as indicators of public support, and certain strategies can be implemented to prepare a positive political climate in which to hold the election. While this may hold in theory, even this sort of preparation does not always provide the advantage it is expected to. On the other hand, serving in a minority government may place certain restrictions on the party members—for example, minority governments typically become bound to a shorter time period during which they will call an election. As a result, the governing party may not have adequate time to become well organized and implement policies that are conducive to re-election. Time limitations placed upon the party and candidate provide the opportunity to explain the defeat by attributing responsibility for the loss to the timing of the election: "Ideally, had we had a majority government, we would have had four, close to five years to get your feet wet to get organized . . . and so on. We got elected in '88, and Taylor called it in September of '90. So as a result of having it for only two years, I wasn't known all around the riding" (Liberal).

Additionally, politicians rationalize that there are situational factors such as recessions and public service crises that create a political atmosphere that is not conducive to re-election. In the following example, a defeated member situates these unanticipated developments in the "bad luck" category: "We had some very bad luck. I lost by 100 votes, which is 50 votes really. Here's what happened the week before the election. Ten thousand people without a doctor in St. John. Major crisis. . . . X-ray technicians are on strike. 'Tom, if you can't do something about this, I'm not going to vote for you.' This is two or three days ahead [of the election]. Then a strike on the day of the election" (Liberal). The next example illustrates how the timing for the election can hamper a member's chances to win. The individual in question develops a detailed rationalization, which outlines how his regular supporters were not around when the election was called: "You have to remember that a lot of our people in our area are seniors. They go to the beaches. They don't stay around. Only the younger people stay. And those are the younger people who voted, and they voted . . . for the Conservatives. So I got my butt kicked. Had my senior population stayed, I probably would have given a good run for the money, or I might have even won. But that wasn't to be" (Liberal).

By developing a rationalization that situates blame on a variety of seemingly external factors, the defeated politician is offered a more convincing justification as to why he or she was unsuccessful. At the same time, it allows for face-saving to deal with negative feelings experienced as the result of the defeat.

By viewing oneself as being at the whim of one's party, defeated politicians are able to feel some consolation when their party is "swept" and a large proportion of members of the same party lose in their bid for re-election. With a substantial proportion of one's colleagues in a similar situation, it provides for the opportunity to commiserate with others about the defeat and its accompanying repercussions. Moreover, when a recently defeated politician sees that a significant proportion of his or her fellow party members also lost their seats, it allows for the rationalization that his or her individual defeat was influenced by some factor related to the party as a whole rather than anything he or she did or did not do as a member of that party. While this may produce feelings of anger toward the party, it simultaneously deflects the responsibility onto something beyond his or her control. For example, "When the election came, I was defeated by a 2-1 count, which was a shock;

however, the shock was diminished by the fact that by the time the election returns started coming in, until I got word that I had lost, the whole province had gone down" (Liberal). Having people encourage the belief that the loss had to do with the government as a whole and not the individual allows for the acceptance of this rationalization. In the next example, we see that having friends indicate that the defeat was the result of her party affiliation rather than anything that she could have controlled helps the individual attend to the defeat: "I guess, for me, I was able to say to myself, and others said to me, and my friends said to me, 'You went down with the government. It didn't have anything to do with you.' And the feeling that I get since then, by their reaction, . . . is that they believe that too. They believe I went down with the government. So my social stature has not changed very much" (Liberal).

The following example further illustrates the point that the defeat may be depersonalized by attributing responsibility to something beyond one's control: "I think what was different, here, is that we all lost, all of our caucus lost. And it was really clear on the doorstep that people were saying, I'm not voting against you, I want someone to defeat the Tories and they were voting Liberal. And that's why I knew I wouldn't win, and that also took that personal sting out of it. That was a kind of unique set of circumstances" (Liberal). However, as the wife of a defeated member observes, this rationalization may offer only minor comfort: "it was a landslide for the PC's. And there is some comfort in that, but just some comfort. And so there are a whole lot of you. Big deal, you still lost" (New Democratic Party).

TARGETING MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AS AN EXPLANATION FOR DEFEAT

There is a strong consensus among defeated politicians that negative publicity, especially of the kind disseminated via the media, can hurt one's chances for re-election. Note the following observations:

> So no matter how good you are, it doesn't matter. It matters what they're saying on the front page and the editorial page, and they haven't changed their tune one iota over the last three years. So you have to look at those things. Now all that can change in twenty-four hours. (Liberal)

> I think the media really turned negatively towards us as we started going for that re-election. They didn't want to hear what we had to say, distorted my words, and took them out of context. It was as if they created the stories in advance and were waiting for you to say something to reinforce their story that was already there. (New Democratic Party)

Whether the coverage is directed toward the party as a whole or focused on a particular politician, the outcome in terms of one's chances for re-election is significantly impaired. More often than not, the ex-politician believes that the media provide inaccurate or biased coverage of issues that frame the politician or the party in a negative light. For example, ex-politicians may reason that a particular newspaper publisher had a vendetta against the party or that the paper was simply trying to bolster sales by writing a provocative smear campaign involving the politician or the party. Based on this type of reasoning, they are able to formulate a further rationalization that situates blame for political defeat on the media.

In the following example, a former East Coast MPP argues that his chances for re-election were hindered by erroneous media coverage of a particular project the party had completed: "But I felt the year leading into the election, the media had turned on us. The Moncton paper was vicious, and unjustifiably vicious. One of them was the park we built . . . wonderful deal, worked out well, [but] the paper crucified us there" (Liberal). Similarly, the following excerpt illustrates the belief that the media tend to inaccurately reflect how politicians handle a particular issue:

> You know, politicians compromise. We take a thousand different points of view and try to come to a consensus. And the most amazing thing is you sit there and you listen and you listen and you listen. . . . And what you're trying to do is bring consensus to a thousand competing and conflicting points of view. So you get a consensus, say, for 20 percent of them, and that's all you're ever going to get on a consensus, across the spectrum of 100 percent, so the other 80 percent, "You didn't listen." After twelve years in New Brunswick, this is what the people in this province thought. Why? Because the media would report the comment "You didn't listen" when, in fact, you did. It became incessant to the point where the reason we lost is because we never listened. (Liberal)

The media are seen to provide a significant source through which politicians have an opportunity to express their particular platform to the public. However, as the next example demonstrates, there is a great deal of competition that is fostered through the media not only between parties but also between certain interest groups. In the following example, a defeated member points out that it does not matter how truthful the claims being made are; even more important is that well-presented, even if inaccurate, claims made through the media can have a powerful impact on public sentiment:

> In this election, rightly or wrongly, we built this toll highway, and I'll be honest with you, I never agreed with it to start with and the way it was done. But the toll busters ran a very effective campaign against the government. They ran ads that were as effective as the conservative campaign against the government. . . . So there was no truth, and ads were flashed on TV. They bought the time and put it right on during the Stanley Cup finals. We couldn't spend the money even if we had it to counter that sort of thing and you couldn't counter it anyway. (New Democratic Party)

As some politicians indicate, they can use the harshness and extent of negative media attention to judge how they might fare in an upcoming election. By being able to judge their chances for re-election through the media, they are provided with the opportunity to brace themselves for possible defeat. "I knew in my town I'd have a difficult time, because the local media, two years prior to the election, was extremely rough with us and hasn't stopped being rough with the Liberal party. I mean forty-five-day front-page campaigns on the toll highway, twenty-one-day front page on the project, which I was defending, a seven-day campaign on another major, so it was just incessant" (Liberal).

INVOKING A MEDICAL DISCLAIMER: PERSONAL HEALTH ISSUES AS A RATIONALIZATION FOR DEFEAT

Up to this point, discussion has centered on rationalizations that focus blame on factors external to the individual—"I'm not to blame." In discussing one's personal health and the impact it had on attempts to secure re-election, rationalizations take on a somewhat different focus. Rather than placing blame on a factor far beyond the individual, some

defeated members rationalize the defeat in terms of a very personal factor—their own well-being. Here the strategy is to accept personal responsibility for the defeat, but with a caveat—"I'm to blame, but. . . ." While placing the responsibility for defeat more directly on oneself by attributing the loss to issues relating to personal health, the ex-politician is able to displace blame onto an illness, something that he or she, given the nature of the illness or his or her job, could not control. For example,

> For a number of months, I felt really guilty about having let people down. If only I hadn't been sick. I don't think there's any doubt that had I not been ill, I would have been able to get out. What are we talking about? A couple of hundred votes. It doesn't take much effort to swing a couple of hundred votes if you can get out there. (Progressive Conservative)

> So I was ill from before the election. I had a kind of very serious laryngitis. There were times when I couldn't talk, which means I had to write notes. I tried to go out twice during the election, campaign door to door, that's the way it's done here. I couldn't. I got ill both times. I'd be out an hour, and I wouldn't be able to talk. So I did a lot of it by telephone. So I lost by a few votes. (Progressive Conservative)

By not completely internalizing blame for the defeat, ex-politicians are able to maintain a less self-damaging perspective on their identity. At the same time, they offer up reasoning that encourages others to sympathize with their position.

By rationalizing defeat as the result of personal health, defeated politicians are able to also frame their defeat in a positive light. As the following examples illustrate, political defeat is sometimes viewed as the best medicine for the stress-induced illnesses that become associated with a career in politics. Very powerful personal examples are also offered as possible benefits of having lost an election due to health concerns:

> By the time the election had come, I still hadn't fully got on my feet. Sleepin' on the chesterfield in the office, gettin' up and going again for ten or twelve hours, diabetes out of control, kind of, you just don't get a break. It's constant, constant, constant. I flew over this house here so many times I don't even remember. (Liberal)

> Another term like that in government would have killed me. It truly would have. I worked that hard and I was just wasted, so the defeat, when

it came about, was a good thing because I was able to become my wife's number one caregiver. She passed away on December 24 of the same year, having been diagnosed with lung cancer. She wasn't well in September, and then October came the diagnosis and December came the death. (Progressive Conservative)

The following example further illustrates how the ex-politician rationalizes a defeat in terms of personal health. For this individual, personal health may not have been the most significant factor contributing to his defeat, but he believes it was quite influential when combined with a second justification:

I also spend fourteen days in bed in the middle of the campaign with bronchial pneumonia out of the thirty-five–day campaign. So my health may have contributed to it. I was the lightning rod for all the antagonism and rage over the language issue from 1983-4. It's now '86. It should have been forgotten, but people needed to express it. They expressed it in Springfield. I lost by fifty-five. Well, the doctor was going to put me in the hospital if I wasn't going to promise to stay home in bed, so I did. If I couldn't have swung twenty-eight votes in two weeks, then I shouldn't have been in politics. So you can blame it on bronchial pneumonia, but the bottom line was it was the French language issue. (New Democratic Party)

This form of rationalization acts as medical disclaimer (Hewitt and Stokes 1978), wherein the defeated politician presents a blameless, beyond-my-control medical interpretation, which also distances him or her from the defeat while apparently personalizing it. The same rationalization doubles as a claim of benefit in managing the stigma associated with being labeled as "defeated." In this way, the grieving process moves forward by framing the experience as a positive outcome and encouraging others to define the loss not as a dishonorable or an unfavorable event but as a blessing in disguise.

CONCLUSION

While becoming involved in politics can take many years, the departure from political life, following electoral defeat, is often swift and without remorse. The suddenness of defeat and loss of public attention

has an abrupt and direct impact on the politician's identity. Political ideals of caring and making a difference are inexorably sidelined, and the now ex-politician is forced to deal with his or her new reality and compulsory identity change. In the process, the individual develops coping strategies to come to terms with the loss and the stigma of political defeat. In examining involuntary disengagement from political office, we have described the extent of the trauma and how it is defined and experienced, as well as the coping tactics that cushion the failure by deflecting responsibility for the ex-politician's defeat. The rhetoric employed pins ultimate responsibility for the loss on matters beyond the ex-politician's personal control. Paradoxically, while the rhetoric absolves the individual of responsibility, it fails to totally alleviate the sense of failure and disappointment associated with the loss. Face-saving efforts allow for the preservation of a credible self-image. Despite the rhetoric, the loss is deeply felt, and an imagery of death is used to describe its impact. Data from the larger project indicate that the defeat, experienced as a stigma, impedes the ex-politician's efforts to secure gainful employment.

Generally, while highlighting a particular exit, sociologists should also attend to general features common to the exiting process (Prus 1994). Research on the retirement process of high-performance and elite-level athletes (Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Rosenberg 1984; Sinclair 1990; Werthner-Bales 1985) provides good examples of the issues that individuals encounter during the exiting process. Having been the nation's "media darlings" during times of great achievement, the "choice" to retire is one that becomes particularly difficult as the athletes discontinue the activities that once defined their public identities. The process becomes all the more problematic when they feel powerless in the decision to sustain their athletic careers. Anger, diminished self-esteem, and depression are not unique to defeated politicians. Whenever people's primary identity is severed, they experience a transition wrought with attributions of blame and feelings of self-deprecation. The experience is more traumatizing for those who relinquish their former identity involuntarily: students who fail out of school, workers fired from the job, professional athletes cut from the team, a bride- or groom-to-be left at the marriage altar. Indeed, the relevant situations are limited only by the significant roles with which we identify. The experiences of defeated politicians attend, even more generally, to reactions of rejection, a feature not uncommon to a myriad of facets of

social life. Academics, for example, may serve as an interesting illustration: they encounter rejection from book and journal editors who reject their manuscripts and from academic bodies denying their requests for tenure and promotion.

Ebaugh's (1988) notion of role exit is primarily concerned with voluntary departures from a previous role. As we point out, this characterization does not take into account the extreme difficulty encountered when a master status is severed suddenly and involuntarily. When the degradation occurs publicly, the threat to one's sense of self is greater. Sudden, involuntary role exit lacks many of the initial preparatory reflective elements characterized by voluntary disinvolvement.

In dealing with the loss of their highly valued status, ex-politicians, faced with managing the stigma of defeat, feel that they have to engage in some form of face-saving. In dealing with this stage of the transition, this article has mainly examined the vocabulary-based strategies, as opposed to the activity-based ones, to shield and protect their sense of self. In this case, we have focused on neutralization techniques, which we have referred to as deflection rhetoric. Deflection rhetoric is employed to depersonalize and distance oneself from the defeat and encourage others to relate to their rationalization and, in turn, help the individual to feel less shameful about the loss. While previous studies have predominantly applied this concept to deviance research, we maintain that the use of deflection rhetoric is a strategy people invoke on an everyday basis and is common in disparate contexts. Based on our analysis, it is reasonable for researchers to focus on the generic qualities of these rhetorical strategies that are used to negotiate and influence perspectives and ultimately a view of self.

NOTES

1. The majority of respondents who are quoted are defeated members of provincial legislatures in Canada. In this article, we do not distinguish between provincial and federal levels of government. Although there are likely differences in the respective experiences of those serving at these levels, notably in terms of separation from family and travel time to and from the legislature, these are overshadowed by commonalities in the exiting experiences.

2. The appellation "ex-politician" is appropriate even though defeated office holders may remain involved in various facets of political life. Not only do the media often use this designation; so do former office holders. However, the latter also use the term "defeated members," signifying that the individual does not currently serve in the

legislature. The reader should note that "ex-politician" and "defeated office holder" are used interchangeably in this article.

3. Although there are substantial sacrifices made during the political career, the vast majority of ex-politicians interviewed indicated that, if given the opportunity, they would return to political life. David Docherty's (2001) data substantiate this observation. His survey on former Members of Parliament contains some excellent data on the challenges facing the latter when they try re-entering the nonpolitical world. See his article "To Run or Not To Run: A Survey of Former Parliamentarians" (Docherty 2001). Steve Paikin's (2001) *The Life* offers some excellent insights into the seductive qualities of political life. His focus, however, is not centered on how politicians respond to electoral defeat.

4. This was anything but the popular view of politicians, defeated or otherwise, portrayed by the media. The documentary humanized the politicians, casting their travails in a very different light. This segment offered more that ran so contrary to public perception: was it really conceivable, as claimed by the narrator and as interviews revealed, that identification as a defeated member of a government, regardless of party affiliation, was stigmatic, jeopardizing future employment possibilities? Why no mention of the economic cachet that followed life in the legislature, enabling defeated members to secure lucrative employment? And how to understand the claim that branded as former members of the legislature, their social and economic horizons narrowed rather than broadened? Such claims were surely worthy of sociological investigation.

5. There are notable exceptions (Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Johnson and Barer 1992; Vaughan 1986). More specifically, in the area of deviance, studies have attended to processes whereby individuals substitute their deviant behaviors, ideologies, and identities for more conventional lifestyles (Adler and Adler 1983; Biernacki 1988; Brown 1991a, 1991b; Erikson 1966; Faupel 1991; Herman 1993; Lesieur 1977; Lofland 1969; Luckenbill and Best 1981; Meisenhelder 1977; Peyrot 1985; Prus and Irini 1980; Ray 1961; Sharp and Hope 2001; Waldorf, Reinarman, and Murphy 1991). Attention to disengagement has also been a focus in studies of religion detailing how individuals' commitments to a religious group or community both dissolve and disintegrate, resulting in gradual departure and final exit (Bar-Lev and Shaffir 1997; Beckford 1978; Brinkerhoff and Burke 1980; Bromley 1988; Ebaugh 1977, 1988; Peter et al. 1982; San Giovanni 1978; Wright 1987).

6. Properties of the passage that appear relevant to the experiences of ex-politicians include (1) its desirability and reversibility, (2) whether it is experienced alone or collectively, (3) whether it is undertaken voluntarily, (4) the individual's control over its trajectory, and (5) its centrality to the person. We do not intend to deal with status passage systematically in this article.

7. Again the work of sports sociologists bears relevance, as they link social death to the forced retirement of athletes (Ball 1976). For example, in a most telling excerpt, Rashad (1982), a football veteran and star, describes this aspect: "Most times, no matter who's cut, it's like a guy died. No, it's worse than dying because when you die people sit around and . . . eulogize you. When you're cut from a football team, it's more like you never existed at all" (p. 85). Jim Bouton (cited in Ball 1976, 731) highlights the degradation reaction in baseball in the following: "As I started throwing stuff in my bag, I

could feel the wall, invisible but real, forming around me. I was suddenly an outsider, a different person, someone to be shunned, a leper."

8. More than a few respondents claimed that American politicians did not encounter the negative postdefeat experiences that are common among Canadian ex-politicians. Their mantle of respectability, influence, and prestige remained intact, they claimed, even following defeat in the political arena in contrast to Canadian politicians who, once out of elected office, were largely ignored and even shunned.

9. Theoretically, it is possible to hypothesize a range of situations that could cushion the defeat and mitigate the sense of rejection and even despair. A reader of an earlier draft of this article suggested that we examine more closely the situation of the election outcome. For instance, at one end of the continuum is a situation where the entire party is swept from office, while losing one's seat while the party retains power, or adds to its numbers in the legislature, would constitute the opposite end. Thus, it may be possible to more carefully detail the circumstances that evoke usage of the death metaphor: it would least likely be triggered in situations where the entire party went down to defeat. Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, the coded data do not bear out this theoretical conjecture. As noted earlier, feelings of anger and rejection were highly common. Not a single defeated member was relieved by the loss. While the shock and disappointment occasioned by the defeat were typical responses, their intensity and duration varied accordingly to several circumstances that we identify but do not address in this article, for example, length of time in office, the centrality of the position to one's sense of self, whether the loss is experienced alone or collectively, and alternative career/employment options.

10. This article does not directly attend to the activities that are pursued to neutralize the effects of electoral defeat. Instead, we focus on the rhetoric employed by the defeated office holders. Based on the data coded to date, for those returning to the workplace, securing gainful employment is identified as a critical hurdle by a majority of the respondents (68 percent). Expecting that the experience gained in the legislature will serve to their advantage, many register surprise, and even disbelief, upon discovering the disadvantages of being identified with a political party. More generally, where losing the election is defined as shameful and embarrassing, several defeated office holders resist resurfacing socially to reconnect with friends and acquaintances. Difficulties in re-entering the workforce and resuming an active social life will constitute the focus of a separate article.

11. Our ordering of disavowal claims is not meant to be inclusive but reflects our analysis of the data to date. We suspect, however, that any additional rationalizations will closely connect to ones already identified.

REFERENCES

Adler, Patricia, and Peter Adler. 1983. Shifts and oscillations in deviant careers: The case of upper-level dealers and smugglers. *Social Problems* 31:195-207.

Allen, V. L., and E. van de Vliert. 1984. *Role transitions: Explorations and explanations*. New York: Plenum Press.

Anderson, Tammy L., and Lynn Bondi. 1988. Exiting the drug-addict role: Variations by race and gender. *Symbolic Interaction* 21 (2): 155-74.

Ashe, A., and R. Rampersad. 1993. *Days of grace*. New York: Knopf.

Ball, Donald. 1976. Failure in sport. *American Sociological Review* 41 (August): 726-39.

Bar-Lev, Mordechai, and William Shaffir. 1997. *Leaving religion and religious life*. Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Becker, Howard S., Blanche Geer, Everett C. Hughes, and Anselm L. Strauss. 1961. *Boys in white: Student culture in medical school*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beckford, James A. 1978. Through the looking-glass and out the other side: With-drawal from Reverend Moon's Unification Church. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 45 (1): 95-116.

Biernacki, P. 1988. *Pathways from heroin addiction: Recovery without treatment*. Phil-adelphia: Temple University Press.

Blau, Z. S. 1973. *Old age in a changing society*. New York: New Viewpoints.

Brinkerhoff, M. B., and K. L. Burke. 1980. Disaffiliation: Some notes on falling from the faith. *Sociological Analysis* 41 (1): 41-54.

Bromley, David, ed. 1988. *Falling from the faith: Causes and consequences of religious apostasy*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Brown, J. David. 1991a. The professional ex-: An alternative for exiting the deviant career. *Sociological Quarterly* 32 (2): 219-30.

———. 1991b. Professional socialization and identity transformation: The case of the professional ex-. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 20 (2): 157-78.

Byers, Bryan, Benjamin W. Crider, and Gregory K. Biggers. 1999. Bias crime motiva-tion: A study of hate crime and offender neutralization techniques used against the Amish. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 15 (1): 78-96.

Charmaz, Kathy. 1980. *The social reality of death*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Coombs, Robert H. 1978. *Mastering medicine: Professional socialization in medical school*. New York: Free Press.

Copes, Heith. 2003. Societal attachments, offending frequency, and techniques of neu-tralization. *Deviant Behavior* 24 (2): 101-27.

Costello, Barbara J. 2000. Techniques of neutralization and self-esteem: A critical test of social control and neutralization theory. *Deviant Behavior* 21 (4): 307-29.

Cumming, E., and W. E. Henry. 1961. *Growing old*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Curtis, J., and R. Ennis. 1988. Negative consequences of leaving competitive sport? Comparative findings for former elite-level hockey players. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5:87-106.

Docherty, David. 2001. To run or not to run: A survey of former parliamentarians. *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 24 (1): 16-23.

Drahota, Jo Anne Tremaine, and D. Stanley Eitzen. 1998. The role exit of professional athletes. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 15 (3): 263-78.

Ebaugh, Helen R. F. 1977. *Out of the cloister*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

———. 1988. *Becoming an ex: The process of role exit*. Chicago: University of Chi-cago Press.

Eliason, Stephen L., and Richard A. Dodder. 1999. Techniques of neutralization used by deer poachers in the western United States: A research note. *Deviant Behavior* 20 (3): 233-52.

Erikson, Kai T. 1966. *Wayward puritans*. New York: John Wiley.

Faupel, Charles E. 1991. *Shooting dope: Career patterns of hard-core heroin users*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Franks, C. E. S. 1987. *The parliament of Canada*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Gauthier, DeAnn K. 2001. Professional lapses: Occupational deviance and neutralization techniques in veterinary medical practice. *Deviant Behavior* 22 (6): 467-90.

Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. 1965. *Awareness of dying*. New York: Aldine.

———. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine de Gruyter.

———. 1971. *Status passage*. Chicago: Aldine Atherton.

Hazani, Moshe. 1991. Aligning vocabulary, symbols banks, and sociocultural structure. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 20 (2): 179-202.

Heltsley, Martha, and Thomas C. Calhoun. 2003. The good mother: Neutralization techniques used by pageant mothers. *Deviant Behavior* 24 (2): 81-100.

Herman, Nancy J. 1993. Return to sender: Re-integrative stigma management strategies of ex-psychiatric patients. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (3): 295-330.

Hewitt, John, and Randall Stokes. 1978. Disclaimers. *American Sociological Review* 40:1-11.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1975. Disengagement theory: A critique and proposal. *American Sociological Review* 40 (5): 553-69.

Hughes, Everett. 1945. Dilemmas and contradictions of status. *American Journal of Sociology* 50:353-59.

Johnson, Colleen L., and Barbara M. Barer. 1992. Patterns of engagement and disengagement among the oldest old. *Journal of Aging Studies* 6 (4): 351-64.

Kalish, R. 1966. A continuum of subjectively perceived death. *The Gerontologist* 6 (2): 73-76.

Kastenbaum, R. 1981. *Death, society, and human experience*. 2nd ed. St. Louis, MO: Mosby.

Khoo, Angeline C. E., and Penelope J. Oakes. 2000. The variability of the delinquent self: Antiauthority attitudes and endorsement of neutralization techniques among incarcerated delinquents in Singapore. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3 (2): 125-32.

Khullar, Gurdeep S., and Beverley C. Reynolds. 1990. Quality of life and activity: A test of the activity versus disengagement theories. *International Review of Modern Sociology* 20 (1): 33-68.

Kleinman, Sherryl. 1984. *Equals before God: Seminarians as humanistic professionals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lerch, S. 1981. The adjustment to retirement of professional baseball players. In *Sociology of sport: Diverse perspectives*, edited by S. Greendorfer and A. Yiannakis, 38-48. New York: Leisure Books.

Lesieur, H. 1977. *The chase*. New York: Anchor.

Levi, Ken. 1981. Becoming a hit man: Neutralization in a very deviant career. *Urban Life* 10 (1): 47-63.

Lofland, John. 1969. *Deviance and identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Luckenbill, David F., and Joel Best. 1981. Careers in deviance and respectability: The analogy's limitations. *Social Problems* 29:197-206.

Meisenhelder, Thomas. 1977. An exploratory study of exiting from criminal careers. *Criminology* 15:319-34.

Mills, C. W. 1940. Situated actions and vocabularies of motives. *American Sociological Review* 5:904-13.

Mitchell, Jim, and Richard A. Dodder. 1983. Types of neutralization and types of delinquency. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 12 (4): 307-18.

Nelson, E. D., and R. D. Lambert. 2001. Sticks, stones and semantics: The ivory tower bully's vocabulary of motives. *Qualitative Sociology* 24 (1): 83-106.

Olesen, Virginia L., and Elvi W. Whittaker. 1968. *The silent dialogue: A study in the social psychology of professional socialization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Orbuch, Terri L. 1997. People's accounts count: The sociology of accounts. *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:455-78.

Paikin, Steve. 2001. *The life: The seductive call of politics*. Toronto, Canada: Penguin.

Pershing, Jana L. 2003. To snitch or not to snitch? Applying the concept of neutralization techniques to the enforcement of occupational misconduct. *Sociological Perspectives* 46 (2): 149-78.

Peter, Karl, E. D. Boldt, I. Whitaker, and L. W. Roberts. 1982. The dynamics of religious defection among Hutterites. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (4): 327-37.

Peyrot, M. 1985. Coerced voluntarism: The micropolitics of drug treatment. *Urban Life* 13 (4): 343-65.

Prus, Robert. 1994. Generic social processes: Intersubjectivity and transcontextuality in the social sciences. In *Doing everyday life: Ethnography as human lived experience*, edited by M. L. Dietz, R. Prus, and W. Shaffir, 393-412. Toronto, Canada: Copp Clark Longman.

———. 1996. *Symbolic interaction and ethnographic research: Intersubjectivity and the study of human lived experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 1997. *Subcultural mosaics and intersubjective realities: An ethnographic research agenda for pragmatizing the social sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Prus, Robert, and Scott Grills. 2003. *The deviant mystique: Involvements, realities, and regulation*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Prus, Robert, and Styllianoss Irini. 1980. *Hookers, rounders, and desk clerks: The social organization of the hotel community*. Toronto, Canada: Gage.

Quinnan, Edward J. 1997. Connection and autonomy in the lives of elderly male celibates: Degrees of disengagement. *Journal of Aging Studies* 11 (2): 115-30.

Rashad, A. 1982. Journal of a plagued year. *Sports Illustrated*, 25 October, 82-96.

Ray, Marsh. 1961. The cycle of abstinence and relapse among heroin addicts. *Social Problems* 9:132-40.

Rosenberg, Edwin. 1984. Athletic retirement as social death: Concepts and perspectives. In *Sport and the sociological imagination*, edited by N. Theberge and P. Donnelly, 118-26. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press.

San Giovanni, L. F. 1978. *Ex-nuns: A study of emergent role-passage*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Scott, M., and S. Lyman. 1968. Accounts. *American Sociological Review* 33:46-62.

Shaffir, William. 1997. Disaffiliation: The experiences of haredi Jews. In *Leaving religion and religious life*, edited by W. Shaffir and M. Bar-Lev, 205-28. Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Sharp, Susan F., and Trina L. Hope. 2001. The professional ex- revisited: Cessation or continuation of a deviant career? *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30 (6): 678-703.

Sijuwade, Philip O. 1994. Dimensions of disengagement among the Nigerian elderly. *International Review of Modern Sociology* 24 (1): 57-74.

Sinclair, Dana A. 1990. The dynamics of transition from high performance sport. Ph.D. diss., University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Strasser, H. 1984. Status inconsistency through role transitions. In *Role transitions: Explorations and explanations*, edited by V. L. Allen and E. van de Vliert, 130-42. New York: Plenum.

Swain, D. A. 1991. Withdrawal from sport and Schlossberg's model of transition. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8:152-60.

Sykes, Gresham M., and David Matza. 1957. Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review* 22 (December): 664-70.

Taylor, Steven. 1991. Leaving the field: Research, relationships, and responsibilities. In *Experiencing fieldwork: An inside view of qualitative research*, edited by W. Shaffir and R. A. Stebbins, 238-47. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Tomita, Susan K. 1990. The denial of elder mistreatment by victims and abusers: The application of neutralization theory. *Violence and Victims* 5 (3): 171-84.

Vaughan, Diane. 1986. *Uncoupling: Turning points in intimate relationships*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wacquant, Loic J. D. 1990. Exiting roles or exiting role theory? Critical notes on Ebaugh's becoming an ex. *Acta Sociologica* 33 (4): 397-404.

Waldorf, D., C. Reinarman, and S. Murphy. 1991. *Cocaine changes: The experiences of using and quitting*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Werthner-Bales, Penny C. 1985. Retirement experiences of Canada's successful elite amateur athletes: An exploratory study. Master's thesis, University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Wright, S. 1987. *Leaving cults: The dynamics of defection*. Washington, DC: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.