Contemporary Canadian Freemasonry: Social Dynamics and Possible Futures

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While academic interest in Freemasonry has grown in recent years, the predominant emphasis has been on historical and philological matters. Indeed, to the extent that a sociological focus exists, it largely involves Freemasonry's role in social history (Hackett, 2014; Dunbar, 2012; Morrison, 2012; Egel, 2011; Fozdar, 2011; Cano, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Walker, 2008; Clawson, 2007; Quiroz, 2007; Beaurepaire, 2006; Scanlan, 2002; Wade, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Beito, 2000; Uribe-Uran, 2000; Bullock, 1998; Hetherington, 1997; Jacob, 1991; Clawson, 1989; Carnes, 1989; Jacob, 1981). Yet, aside from a few recent forays into the area (Kaplan, 2014; Mahmud, 2012; Poulet, 2010; Mahmud-Abdelwahib, 2008), the contemporary Craft has garnered less sociological attention.

In this presentation I begin addressing this neglect. Building upon extensive qualitative data from 121 contemporary Freemasons in two Canadian provinces - which are discussed in greater detail in my forthcoming book Brought to Light: Contemporary Freemasonry, Meaning, and Society - I will share with you the analytic model that emerged from my research.

My study represents a detailed look at what remains a moving picture. It is a snapshot in time of an old and venerable institution in flux – and one very much in reciprocal evolution with society at large. While the ultimate path the "regular" Freemasonry of the Anglo-Saxon world will take remains somewhat unclear, my findings contain clear hints of emergent issues involved in the Craft today – often hidden, at other times more open – with important implications for the future direction of the order. In what follows I will sketch out, in broad outlines, the principal factors and social dynamics at play – both within Freemasonry and in relation to broader society – to suggest possible, perhaps even probable, directions the Craft may evolve as time goes on. In so doing my goal is to help analytically highlight the key sociological dynamics to be considered for both future researchers and members of the Craft.

Based upon available information, I contend that regular 21st Century Freemasonry may evolve in two broad directions. In one possible future it may become increasingly responsive to the rapidly evolving diversity of contemporary society, attempting to more effectively integrate its ideals, practices, members, and organization in parallel with broader social developments. In the second, it may remain something socially, ideologically, dramaturgically, and organizationally set apart. In this latter case it will continue on doing things the way they have "always been done," and, in response to declining numbers, pitch its appeal to a select demographic group attracted to traditional ideals and forms. The former, more liberal and convergent path holds the potential benefits of greater relevance to a broader demographic, but risks watering down some longstanding traditions and alienating both senior and more traditional members. The more traditional, divergent path holds out the potential for success among a smaller, select group alienated by various aspects of rapid social change, but risks irrelevance to a wider demographic, will likely turn off potential, especially younger recruits, and effectively turns the Craft into an aging, increasingly “deviant” subculture, at least as perceived by the wider society.
This does not imply that these two possible futures are pure, mutually exclusive alternatives. Indeed, the present situation can fairly be characterized as a precarious, evolving balance between aspects of each. What I am suggesting is that these scenarios are much like two points on a continuum. Nevertheless, rapid social change, evolving demographics, economic and structural changes will likely make this balancing act more precarious over time such that the Freemasonry of the future will probably be characterized by a predominant emphasis closer to one or the other end of this spectrum. The Craft will likely survive as it has through the vicissitudes of past centuries, but its size, and the predominant form that it will likely take, are the question.

In the sections below, I develop the argument as follows. First, I discuss the social and demographic composition of the Craft in relation to society, and what this can tell us about where things may be heading. Next, and relatedly, I turn to issues of social stratification, noting that the makeup and organization of the Craft today in relation to the social structure suggests very different – and at times conflicting – dynamics in relation to social ideals than in the past. Third, given the concerns raised above, I turn to ritual, including the method or means of facilitating social bonding and integration of members across social boundaries, raising questions about its liminal flexibility, its ability to do so equally well for all groups, which may, along with the matters above, be ultimately reflected in form. Fourth, I integrate each of these factors into an analytical model/series of figures representing the possible impact of each on the potential outcomes at each end of the continuum. Finally, I discuss the relevance of all of these matters for future research.

(1) Social Demographics: The Craft vs. Contemporary Society:

If the Craft ultimately depends on the wider society to provide members, and, in various ways, to sustain its relevance in their lives, then it becomes important to consider whether this is a mutually beneficial relationship or one fraught with problems. One significant way to approach this is by building upon the demographic issues discussed in my book. In effect, the key questions involve asking: (1) who are Masons today? (2) How well integrated are they with ongoing changes in today's society?

To some extent the first question can be answered by commenting on the sample in my study. Subjects were largely white, middle class Christian men in their 60s and 70s, many with post secondary education, and with more of an emphasis on white rather than blue collar occupational backgrounds. They exhibited relatively little ethnic or religious diversity, though less so among urban dwellers. In addition, because North American membership statistically declined since the early 1960's (Masonic Service Association, 2014) until a slight uptick in interest in the new millennium, the "missed generations" have resulted in a significant "generation gap" between a relatively small number of new and a much larger group of seasoned members. Considering that today we have moved away from a more traditional society of widely shared social traditions, status hierarchies, and high social capital to one rapidly changing into one with greater diversity, stress on equality, and low social capital, in many instances current demographic composition and generational divides do not bode well for a broadly meaningful interface between the Craft and society at large.

Against this backdrop, one might also consider the social characteristics respondents claimed lay behind their recruitment. My data show that predisposing factors include: (i) longstanding personal or family
connections with Freemasons; (ii) congruent personal traits or interests (e.g. religion or history); (iii) unfulfilled social needs (e.g. friendship, status); and (iv) experiencing a state of anomy or alienation in relation to society at large. On balance, these factors further point in the direction of heritage and tradition, and, while it may be that unfulfilled social needs and anomy affect a broader group in today's socio-economic climate, many individuals may find other ways to deal with such issues than join the Masons. These predisposing factors largely suggest demographic congruency between the Masonic order and a select subset of the wider population.

Indeed, none of this is inconsistent statistics revealing that the number of Masons have dropped throughout North America for decades (Masonic Service Association, 2014). Masons are characterized by an aging membership, retention problems (Belton and Henderson, 2000), and decreasing periods of involvement (Belton, 1999) - all in the context of a society with a much larger population than the past and changing, rather than declining, patterns of civic involvement, with greater volunteer emphasis today on expressive, social justice issues (Van Groenou, 2010; Curtis, Baer, Grabb, and Perks, 2003; Bekkers and Graaf, 2002; Cox, 2002; Bickel and Lalive d'Epinay, 2001).

Given these matters, and regardless of promotional campaigns, one might reasonably question the breadth of the meaningful interface between regular Freemasonry and contemporary society. Which social groups would be most interested in Freemasonry today? Which would be more likely to be indifferent? To face opposition? Which social backgrounds are most conducive to "getting it," to "having it click?" Which are not? Which recruits are more likely to drift away? While the data here cannot completely answer these questions, several reasonable suppositions can be made on the basis of attractive and repelling factors noted by respondents.

One flows from a discussion of "fit," where data revealed that those who relish tradition, roots, history, religion or spirituality may find "sanctuary" in the lodge, as may some who have a sense of anomy or alienation from contemporary society in the context of rapid social change and a stressful, neoliberal work environment.

In contrast, various "hurdles" to joining were noted, along with series of factors that inhibited involvement. Beyond lack of information and presumed membership requirements, these included the many negative stereotypes that have been circulated by conspiracy theorists in popular culture, religious opposition, spousal opposition, family opposition, and a variety of other matters such as regulatory constraints, friends' opposition, secular ideals, and comments from disillusioned former members. Along with an increase in alternative recreational opportunities, changes in gender relations, ethnic diversity, and the rise of two job families in a neoliberal, consumer economy, these things may dissuade many and stand in social tension with the select group predisposed or attracted to Masonry as noted above.

Such tensions were further manifested in members themselves, from discussions about the "generation gap," questions about remaining true to old ways of doing things versus "rebranding" and promotion to make the lodge more relevant to, and better "fit," the need for a greater diversity of potential members, even to comments about whether the traditional "male only" membership requirement is problematic. Indeed, intertwined with the above were respondents' doubts, manifest in comments about "unmet
expectations," a "disconnect with the reading," the social irrelevance of language, music, and social activities, "boring business meetings" and the like.

In effect, both socially and within individuals themselves, there is clearly tension as to whether involvement in the Craft makes sense in relation to their lives in the broader society. For men of some social backgrounds (e.g. with busy lives, few congruent interests, facing opposition and other hurdles) the answer is likely to be no. For those exhibiting many of the predisposing factors and better "fit" as described herein, the answer - against the backdrop of our larger society - seems to be more of a qualified yes.

Such demographic and social issues, and the apparently shrinking breadth of the relevance interface between the Craft and contemporary society, may be usefully contrasted with the way that things operated in the past. It has been noted that Freemasonry in the 19th century helped ritually resolve social contradictions of class and gender for members in a changing society, integrating members of somewhat differing backgrounds into a shared symbolic order of solidarity, even emotional intimacy (Hetherington, 1997; Clawson, 1989; Carnes, 1989). While there is some evidence of bonding and integration in the current data (e.g. claims of increased "tolerance," "trust," and the ability to socially engage with a network of "more diverse" others through the shared symbolic vehicle of Masonic talk), it was also noted that this exists in tension with an attraction to "likeminded" individuals sharing common interests. Hence, the overall impression is that this bonding dynamic operates most effectively for a relatively select group in a narrowing relevance interface with society at large.

True, Masonry is not as much of an "elite thing" as in the past, and there does seem to have been some broadening of the membership in terms of class (more on this below). However, today it is not as socially acceptable to bond across certain social divisions using others (e.g. gender) as the foil, as noted in a generational split on the issue of remaining a male-only order. Such a "generation gap," to the limited extent it may have existed in the past, would have been of relatively little consequence as the overall membership profile was much younger in those days. Further, while the slight uptick in new members may reflect less the culture of contentment of the baby boom than the economic and social uncertainty of the new millennium, one might question who these new members are. Could they at one and the same time show a fluctuating range of economic achievement and social devaluation in a rapidly changing cultural and moral landscape? Despite some claims using societal buzzwords like diversity, this is often more rhetoric than reality, suggesting that what we are largely seeing is the recruitment and integration of a few younger, likeminded people with older, more traditional members, and the attrition of those who don't fit the mould. Freemasonry is notoriously resistant to change, so we are likely witnessing the integration of that relatively small, socially congruent group of people in society to an existing order of authenticity and relevance ("conservatives who wanna find a place to be") rather than the adaptation of a group rich in symbolic diversity to the great bulk of a changing society. In effect, links between Freemasonry and society seems to be occurring where it is easiest, and Masonry is not adapting itself quickly enough to the vast social changes that have occurred in past decades. For now, from the demographic standpoint at least, Freemasonry effectively appears to be headed in the direction of a traditionalist subculture and this is unlikely to change so long as the old guard remains relatively dominant both in terms of numbers and authority.
Implicit in the above are a series of interrelated issues surrounding the social class and status of Freemasons relative to the surrounding society. Historically Freemasonry frequently found success as an elite organization in stratified societies (Morrison, 2012; Fozdar, 2011; Cano, 2009; Mahmud-Abdelwahib, 2008; Auge, 2007; Greene, 2002; Harland-Jacobs, 2000; Karpiel, 1998; Smith, 1996; Griggs, 1994; Doan, 1993; Papademas, 1991; Clawson, 1989; Carnes, 1989; Combes, 1989; Schmidt, 1987; Jeremy, 1984), where the "civilizing process" often placed great cultural emphasis on status groups (e.g. royalty, aristocracy, sophisticated elites, professionals, political and business leaders). Meanwhile, the higher social classes often significantly overlapped, or attempted to associate themselves with, these status groupings. Correspondingly, not everybody got in, and, in such instances, much of Freemasonry's membership draw involved individuals of relatively more diverse social standing seeking to be "on the level" with them. Under such circumstances Freemasonry served as an alternate status hierarchy, a means of symbolically integrating select individuals across social inequalities into meaningful groupings.

Yet Western society has changed significantly since those days, and, while today social class no doubt remains relatively stratified, some historical status groups have gone through considerable devolution, been replaced by others in relative social esteem, all in a context where there is much more emphasis on social equality as a primary cultural value. Given such changes, it is valid to question whether the alternate status hierarchy that operated historically can work in the same fashion in today's social landscape.

In my book, on the one hand, membership demographics certainly revealed a picture of a moderately high social class grouping vis-a-vis the surrounding society - though remaining far from being the virtual who's who of community bankers, lawyers, business magnates, and politicians seen in many communities in the past. Meanwhile, lodges have become significantly less selective in class terms than they once were. With regard to membership, it would thus be fair to say that there has been both a relative devolution in class terms coupled with a relative democratization in recruitment. The overall membership frame has moved downward in stratification relative to the society at large.

Perhaps this has something to do with the cultural turn away from deference to traditional elites in the direction of egalitarianism, or perhaps Freemasonry is simply not as popular as it was in the past and needs to broaden recruitment. In either event, the order now exists in a society where the emphasis on diversity above is found alongside a strong cultural, institutional, and moral emphasis on equality, which at least partially undermines the historic dynamics identified in the literature. Meanwhile, the devolution and downward movement of the membership frame partially undermines the motivation of those who still retain the earlier outlook. Put bluntly, in a society that places less cultural value on traditional status elites, there is likely to be less desire among a broad swath of the general public to emulate or associate with them, but for those that do, the membership is not quite as elite as it used to be. In this sense, the symbolic vehicle of the skilled craftsman that formerly served to foster bonds between relative unequals increasingly becomes irrelevant from two directions at once.

I would suggest that this historic shift - from a scenario where class and status show relative structural and ideological convergence to one where they show, at the very least, more ideological separation in
favour of a cultural fetishization of equalities - cuts the traditional draw of Freemasonry in favour of volunteer recruitment and involvement in more fashionable, expressive "social justice" groups more in line with prominent societal values. A further difficulty here is that Freemasonry often still articulates its legitimation in favour of what Max Weber referred to as "traditional authority" for a shrinking demographic, while newer groups tend to more strongly emphasize concern over culturally favoured issues in terms of the rhetoric of "rational legal" authority. These developments can be represented graphically as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Historical Comparison: Masonic Social Stratification Issues</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>18th/19th Centuries</strong></td>
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<td>Membership</td>
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<td>Relative Class/Status</td>
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<td>Convergence</td>
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<td>Ideology</td>
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<td>Relative deference to Traditional Elites/ Status by Association</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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<td>Legitimation by Traditional Authority</td>
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<td>Freemasonry</td>
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<td>External Legitimation by Traditional Authority</td>
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How has Freemasonry responded? In some cases, it has not, while in other instances it has struggled over various internal issues related to recruitment, retention, and attempts to become more socially relevant. Yet one thing stands out: the emergence of bureaucratization. Historically there seems to have been a move from the lodge being primarily a local group, with a minimal internal officer hierarchy, to one that is more and more bureaucratically organized, geographically spread, containing an extensive ladder of grand and district grand lodge officers, along with numerous committees and their associated paraphernalia. Many issues and debates in the data over offices, tasks, dues structure, grand lodge, and the like noted in my book must be seen in this context. While likely reflecting a broader societal trend towards bureaucratization, this means that Freemasonry has, at least in part, effectively attempted to replace its traditional elite status vis-a-vis society by compensating with a more extensive internal status hierarchy. Where the external status referencing is breaking down, the internal hierarchy is, in theory at least, taking up the slack.
Yet this is a tricky balancing act, one that requires maintaining a productive tension between meaningful social inclusiveness alongside recognition/acceptance of the rank and file by high status members (in both internal/external terms). If this is not carefully handled, and there is too much emphasis, for example, on grand lodge officers to the neglect of the rank and file, members may grumble about elitism; if there is too little emphasis - formally and informally - on internal hierarchies, lack of recognition may similarly undermine the motivation, even retention of those seeking to move up.

The overall picture here is of an organization struggling to find itself in the changed landscape of class and status in the 21st century. While retaining a membership scoring relatively high in class terms, it is not as high as in the past. Meanwhile, status referents have changed significantly in tandem with culture, moving away from the status groups historically associated with the Craft, while traditional authority has somewhat given way to rational-legal authority in a culture emphasizing equality. Freemasonry has lost status, indeed retained a membership with more class than status, yet often not wanting to even admit its class context in the current cultural milieu. It struggles to remain culturally relevant through various internal programs, all the while importing bureaucratization from the surrounding society to, among other things, effectively compensate for these disconnections.

In effect, Freemasonry has moved from being an elite group to a culturally marginalized one, a group often treated with relative indifference. To the extent that it still serves as an alternate status hierarchy, it does so among a relatively small, select group of traditionalists, conservatives, and alienated individuals, often seeking to make common cause with one another and construct an alternate status hierarchy within an alternate subculture, thus enabling recognition and a sense of identity standing in contrast to their relative devaluation by the wider society. Yet, even then, problems remain.

I would suggest that one of the major problems here is that, unlike those Masons in the past that have faced persecution in hostile societies (Cools, 2012; Clark, 2012; Mahmud, 2012; Cano, 2009; Mahmud-Abdelwahib, 2008; Quiroz, 2007; Gramsci, 2007; Hellman, 2001; Uribe-Uran, 2000; Jacob, 1991; 1981; Hazelrigg, 1969), and thus found meaning and integrative solidarity in the tight knit brotherhood of the lodge (Dunbar, 2012; Marshall, 2009; Walker, 2008; Summers, 2003; De Los Reyes and Lara, 1999; Wallace, 1995; Canepa, 1990), many Masons today are not so much persecuted as neglected, not so much faced with hostility as cultural indifference. The risk involved in being a Mason is often not great in the West today. Meanwhile, their social class position makes it relatively hard to claim marginalization other than, perhaps, in terms of cultural status and esteem. In the end, the alternate status hierarchy that worked so well in the past is in the process of fragmenting and only time will tell whether the Masonic order will be able to meaningfully reconstruct it in the changing social and ideological landscape of the 21st century.

(3) Ritual Issues: Theoretical Expansion and Integrative Complications:

As my book is one of the first major studies to qualitatively examine the lived experienced of contemporary Freemasons, the historic role played by ritual suggests a very important theoretical frame for understanding the interrelation of the Craft with society today. Its relevance has been empirically extended by employing the theoretical tools of symbolic interactionism (Hewitt, 2003; Mead, 1934), dramaturgy (Mangham and Overington, 1987; Goffman, 1959), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967),
and the sociology of emotion (Denzin, 1984; Hochschild, 1983) outside of the lodge itself, for example, in examining ritualized processes of formal and informal recruitment. In tandem with these, it has facilitated an empirical elaboration of the work of ritual theorists like Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969; 1967) in relation to the liminalities within liminalities revealed in Masons’ experience of the degrees, among other things. Moreover, in the multifaceted evolution of respondents’ experiences in the Craft over time, whether through taking an office, participating in degree work, performing administrative tasks, or variously engaging with society in their day to day lives, formal and informal ritualized interactions can serve as both gendered forms of emotion management and transformative practices in relation to self, helping to construct both meaningful and less than congruent identities over time. In all of these ways, the concept of ritual has made a contribution by informing, yet being theoretically extended through this exercise.

Yet, given the previous two sections, important questions necessarily arise. How flexible is ritual? How far can the rites of passage that frame liminality be stretched and still operate effectively? Given the increasing demographic and ideological diversity of society and the evolving social stratification issues noted above, can the formal and informal rituals surrounding Masonry serve to attract and form bonds between society and the order as effectively as in the past? Can it do so equally as well for all groups, or are some more prone to find the ritualized interactions associated with Masonry more meaningful? Are ritually constructed identities more well grounded, more durable for some than for others? Is this reflected in retention? While the present data do not enable a complete answer to all of these questions, cutting through all of them is a common theme: is the social bonding that occurs in ritual occurring primarily among those who are similar, or predominantly integrating those that differ from one another on a host of social characteristics?

From the available evidence, it seems reasonable to assert that today there is undoubtedly some meaningful integration of diverse individuals across social boundaries. Nevertheless, on balance, more bonding seems to be occurring among those who are relatively similar to one another on a number of measures. It would suggest that those who are already predisposed on the basis of their social background are most susceptible to the bonding offered by Masonic ritual; those who are socially dissimilar face a steeper curve, indeed, may find, rather than meaningful integration to a relevant group, these processes are short circuited by a relative lack of social relevance such that they experience mere ritualism, a sense of bonding to anomie, cognitive dissonance, and irrelevance.

While more research is undoubtedly needed on the questions above, the general thrust of this conclusion is not only congruent with the two sections above, but supported by a number of matters in the data. Thus, on one hand, social bonding is supported, in part, by respondents’ comments about developing close friendships among individuals who would never otherwise have met, “brotherhood,” the sense of purpose involved in common activities, the ready availability of common topics and discourse, and particularly the reverse onus of trust that occurs for some brethren when dealing with others. The somewhat greater demographic diversity of brethren in urban areas also provides some evidence for both this bridging effect of ritual and some fruitful interface with the broader society. For that matter, the split over the gender issue shows that, for some at least, gender effectively serves as the ritualized foil that, in part, fosters integration across other social boundaries as in the past (Clawson, 1989). Indeed, it may, in part, interact with the male gender in a ritualized, masculine form of emotion management to
help bridge the gap between young and old, traditionalists and younger members of various stripes alienated by social change, to find a place of sanctuary in today's society.

But this somewhat limited bonding across boundaries needs to be seen against the backdrop of a far more pronounced bonding within already congruent groups. Thus, beyond the broad demographic similarity of contemporary Masons, both in the sample and the research literature, the fact is that bonding often occurs between family, friends, and acquaintances. Such connections are supplemented by shared interests, likeminded people, common activities and topics, the ritualized development of new (often traditionally masculine) skills and abilities, that enable relatively narrow differences to be overcome among relatively similar individuals. Indeed, claims of "moral improvement," while not necessarily showing differences between generations, often tends to stress traditionalist ethical concerns. Taken together, when supplemented by social support and building trust, such bonding can be meaningful for those relatively predisposed to it.

What this all suggests is that "fit" remains important. The ritualized bonding process may be externally short-circuited along the way by a number of cumulative factors, including lack of family connections, differing backgrounds, beliefs, social opposition, contemporary work schedules and family structures, the generation gap, or a particular lodge's inability to remain socially relevant. In such cases, Hirschi's (1969) bonds of belief, attachment, commitment, and involvement are already far more connected externally and leave little room or relevance for the lodge. Meanwhile, within the lodge even relatively congruent individuals may experience irrelevance or lack of meaningful common activities, poor ritual work, excessive emphasis on status, politics, or filling up meetings with boring business rather than something interesting and engaging for members. Under such circumstances ritual becomes drained of meaning and becomes ritualism (Merton, 1968), a "disconnect with the reading," and bureaucracy merely forms the organizational structure of meaninglessness. Whether out of social irrelevance, or the perceived usefulness of anomie linking with anomie, meaningful social bonding is undermined. In other words, for ritual to facilitate social bonding, the best results are likely to occur when there is meaningful bonding within the lodge that is simultaneously connected to congruent individuals and social groups outside of the lodge (i.e. those whose existing social bonds do not so readily get in the way). The better the "fit," the narrower the social gaps between potential members and the lodge, and the better job the lodge does on these internal measures, the easier it is likely to be for the ritual bonding process to successfully take hold and facilitate a strong Masonic identity.

All of this raises the issue of both getting and keeping members, as reflected both in the literature on declining membership and reduced periods of retention (Masonic Service Association, 2014; Belton, 1999), as well as in the various involvement factors outlined by respondents noted in my book. In order to have a broad based membership it is necessary for an organization to play to, and remain relevant to prominent societal values. In today's world, this introduces a tension between the ability of leadership to maintain a healthy "balance," to adaptively remain on top of the moving target of change, and a conservative tendency toward maintaining things as they are, doing things the way they have "always" been done, and circling the wagons. For the Craft at least, this tension is being predominantly settled in one direction. Despite room in the ritual to be interpreted more broadly, the generation gap and relatively small proportion of younger, more diverse members means that the Craft remains relatively more traditional in its orientation than the broader society. Barring a radical reorientation in stance, in
an organization already notoriously resistant to change, this points to the Craft drawing from, and ritually integrating, a narrower and narrower pool of alienated traditionalists, effectively maintaining itself as a traditionalist subculture. In terms of congruency, such bonding may be easier in rural areas with few young people and a membership drawn mostly from the same generation, but such lodges face the problem of few new members and existing ones dying off. The congruency gap is wider in cities, and bonding harder when there is a more pronounced generation gap - but that is where the new blood is to be found. As such, the Craft may still prosper for a time by targeting its recruitment to congruent demographics as they are variously found throughout society, engaging - in effect of not intent - in selective bonding. It may stave off organizational death for some time. Yet, the Craft will be smaller, and its ritual bonds relevant to more limited segments of society.

(4) Analytic Model: Convergence of Demographics, Social Stratification, and Ritual:

The previous three sections provide different, yet closely interrelated vantage points on the state of regular Canadian Freemasonry today. Indeed they suggest a series of important analytic dimensions for understanding the Craft - and, perhaps, to some extent, other community organizations - in the context of a rapidly changing society. Moreover, they point to a convergence on these dimensions that bears significant implications for the Craft in the future. In this section, these frames will be unpacked and arranged in an analytic model. Following this, the current state of the Craft will be discussed and various conclusions drawn.

It is my contention that it is useful to understand Freemasonry, both historically and today - in relation to three interrelated sociological dimensions: (1) the lateral/compositional; (2) the vertical/hierarchical; and (3) the interactional/processual. Each of these is analytically implicit throughout my book.

The lateral/compositional dimension stresses the social makeup of the Craft in terms of its relative structural homogeneity or diversity, and how this compares to the rest of society. It comprehends issues of relative convergence or divergence between these populations, as well as in corresponding social beliefs and ideologies. All of this speaks to the relative breadth or narrowness of the social interface between society and the Craft, to whether there is a high degree of congruence or relative inconsistency between the membership and society. The answer to this question, in any historical context, will have much bearing on the relative success of the Craft, or its marginalization, in any specific social context.

The vertical/hierarchical dimension, in contrast, emphasizes issues of internal vs. external social stratification between the Craft and society, particularly on the analytically distinct, but closely related, issues of class, status, and predominant type of legitimacy/authority. Freemasonry has historically operated as an alternate status hierarchy in relation to these, but this dynamic, and the membership frame, has been changing along with society in more recent times. This dimension attends to the way in which these changes can serve as either a fruitful evolution or discordant devolution in this important historical dynamic.

The interactional/processual dimension, finally, turns away from these primarily structural issues to stress the role of ritual, particularly the processes and interactions that individuals engage in and are subject to in their time in the Craft. In particular, this dimension addresses the relative flexibility of
ritual, the potential impact that this may have on the meaningfulness of the social bonding process and identity formation, and how this is reflected in the social bonds formed both within the lodge, and between the lodge and outside individuals, groups, and society at large.

### Sociological Dimensions Relevant to Freemasonry

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<tr>
<th>Lateral/Compositional</th>
<th>Vertical/Hierarchical</th>
<th>Interactional/Processual</th>
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<tr>
<td>Homogeneity/diversity</td>
<td>Alternate Status Hierarchy</td>
<td>Ritual Flexibility</td>
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<td>Internal/External Makeup</td>
<td>Class, Status, &amp; Legitimation</td>
<td>Internal/External Bonds</td>
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<td>Congruence of Interface</td>
<td>Frame Evolution/Devolution</td>
<td>Meaningfulness/Identity</td>
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It is my contention that each of these dimensions can be usefully represented analytically in a series of ideal types to illustrate various possibilities for the relationship between the Craft and its social environment. Thus, on the lateral/compositional dimension, one can usefully compare a situation of relative social homogeneity within and without the Craft to one where there is much more divergence between the two (i.e. more social diversity in society than in the Masonic order). Furthermore, couple this with a greater ideological emphasis on promoting diversity in the wider society vs. its toleration in the Craft alongside widespread veneration of heritage and tradition. The former situation would likely be one with a much wider, more comfortable interface with society at large; the latter's social and ideological divergence would narrow the congruence interface resulting in the greater social marginalization of Freemasonry. Of course, when looking at any actual lodge, Grand Lodge, or jurisdiction, one will usually find examples closer to one or the other end of this continuum, but the current situation would likely find these more frequently clustering closer to the latter rather than the former end of this frame.

#### Lateral/Compositional Continuum

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<th>Traditional vs. Contemporary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Internal/External Member Homogeneity</td>
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<td>Ideology Valuing Heritage/Tradition</td>
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<td>Congruence of Interface</td>
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Next, on the vertical/hierarchical dimension, one might usefully contrast the operation of an alternate status hierarchy in a society where class, status, and traditional legitimation often intersect in an elite group, to one where social class, the cultural basis of status, and basis of legitimation diverge, the membership frame moves downward relative to society, and bureaucratization compensates by constructing an internal status hierarchy. Again, while any actual group may find itself with features at various points, on the basis of the available evidence, I suspect that many lodges and grand lodges today find themselves closer to the latter end of the continuum.
Vertical/Hierarchical Continuum

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Contemporary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Status Hierarchy</td>
<td>Alternate Status Hierarchy</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Class, Status, &amp; Legitimation</td>
<td>Internal Class, status, &amp; Legitimation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elite Social Membership Frame</td>
<td>Devolved Social Membership Frame</td>
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As for the interactional/processual dimension, one may draw a distinction between social contexts where ritual is flexible enough, congruent enough to meaningfully bond the vast majority of members both within the lodge, and between the lodge and outside individuals and groups, to one where liminality is stretched too far, ritual is seen as increasingly rigid, irrelevant, and meaningless to most exposed to it, and thus less able to form meaningful bonds within, or close connections with, those outside - many of whom are already more closely bonded in other ways. Today the picture painted here is, again, likely to bear more of a resemblance to the latter scenario, one where the ritual is not flexible enough, or at least perceived as relevant, to people more externally bonded to other ideas, groups, pastimes, and obligations. Here, for many, meaningful ritual devolves into ritualism, identity to nothingness, and bonding to something that evokes anomie and seems both meaningless and pointless at the same time.

Interactional/Processual Continuum

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<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Contemporary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sufficient Ritual Flexibility/Liminality</td>
<td>Insufficient Ritual Flexibility/Liminality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal/External Bonds Productive</td>
<td>Internal/External Bonds Inconsistent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness/Fostering Identity</td>
<td>Ritualism/Anomie/Identity Deficit</td>
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At the outset I asserted that contemporary Freemasonry has the potential to evolve in two broad directions - either it could become increasingly responsive to social change, to the nature of society today, or it could increasingly become something set apart. Either of these possibilities still remain, but it is nevertheless the case, based on the three sections above, and the analytic dimensions identified here, that Canadian Freemasonry today has already moved quite far along the road towards the latter scenario. Whether looking at it from the lateral/compositional, vertical/hierarchical, or interactional/processual dimensions, the Craft is diverging in many respects from society at large, and, while not actively persecuted, faces significant issues nonetheless. Due to convergence on the these three dimensions, unless things change radically, Freemasonry is likely to get smaller in the near term, to remain potentially successful among a small, select group alienated by various aspects of rapid social change, and thus to become an aging, traditionalist, perhaps even “deviant” subculture - at least as perceived by many in society. Indeed it may even find success by targeting individuals and groups most likely to fit in.

In this case, it is possible that the outcome constructed through Masonic ritual could emphasize the idea of “haven” and “sanctuary” in an oppositional fashion, essentially grafting a "deviant identity" onto Masonry, and using emotion as shared, ritualized action as a Masculine form of emotion management by a marginalized, traditional subculture in the face of a rapidly changing society. In this sense, emotion as doing would take precedence over expressiveness, and Masonry itself become the method.
Then again, Masonic leaders still have time to read the writing on the wall, to make relevant adjustments and position the Order in a manner that aligns it more meaningfully with an evolving society. For example, the Craft’s multivalent ceremonies could be articulated and promoted in a manner that places more emphasis on their openness - and compatibility - with diverse multicultural groups and emotional styles, building sanctuary while building bridges. Perhaps even gradually opening to informal ties on select issues or events (e.g. participation in academic conferences) with European women’s lodges - many of which are themselves quite keen on traditional forms - might, in time, help lay a subcultural foundation for something more. While there are, of course, considerable difficulties here, time will tell if history is eventually made or merely repeats itself.

Aspects of both approaches are still at play now in regular Freemasonry, partly driven by different generations, which, as with gender and race in the past, remain glossed over by shared ritual. While one approach is apparently in the ascendant, how these ultimately play out for the Craft in the future is an empirical question for future researchers to discern. All I have done here is map out key issues to be considered along the way.

(5) Future Research/ Implications for the future?

As one of the first sociological investigations of contemporary Freemasonry, my book undoubtedly raises as many questions as it answers. That was the plan from the beginning. Any in-depth qualitative investigation of relatively uncharted social terrain is bound to shed light on some matters, but simultaneously raises a bumper crop of questions requiring further investigation. In a sense, this is an exploratory investigation highlighting specific theoretical and empirical issues for future researchers to follow up. If it has been successful in doing so, it has already more than served its purpose.

In what follows, I highlight what I see as the most significant matters that researchers might want to consider in the future.

First, and most broadly, it will be important to investigate whether the structural and demographic patterns, social processes, analytic typologies, and key issues raised in this study hold true elsewhere, or need to be modified and empirically extended in other contexts. This calls for comparative study of other Masonic jurisdictions, particularly those with more diverse demographic, age, ethnic, and cultural profiles. It suggests cross-cultural comparisons, especially when there are variations in ritual, language, organizational structure, and local culture. Given that there are women’s and co-Masonic lodges in many countries, it will also be important to make comparisons between them and what has been revealed here in relation to the larger, male orders. Indeed, future researchers will want to consider the relevance of the issues raised here to wider social and organizational contexts including, for example, volunteer organizations, community groups, and service clubs, religious, political, and educational organizations, and various other bureaucratically organized institutions.

Employing a more diverse array of methodologies will also be helpful in these respects. While the primarily inductive, qualitative approach utilized here is useful for generating in-depth data about a variety of issues, it cannot do everything. Other qualitative methods, such as ethnographic observation, content analysis of documents, media, even historical methods applied to recent years may help shed
further light in these respects. Yet the "deep but narrow" insights gleaned here must be followed up using a wider variety of methodological tools. In particular, future researchers may want to take some of the issues raised in this exploratory study and build them into more quantitative, survey based methods. This will provide easier comparisons, facilitate better generalization and broader conclusions in some of the contexts noted above. In particular, such methods will more readily enable comparing individuals who never joined with those who did, and those who joined with those who left. Further, adding longitudinal analysis to this methodological toolbox will enable future researchers to better examine key issues across time, discuss significant trends, and make better attributions of causality. All of these will help future researchers check, broaden, and deepen the initial understanding of issues raised here.

Finally, this presentation has highlighted one key analytical model that emerged, one focused on the evolution of key internal vs. external relationships between the Craft and society, outlining how these three theoretical vantage points converge to paint a distinct picture of contemporary Freemasonry as a traditionalist subculture. Nevertheless, the lateral/compositional, vertical/hierarchical, and interactional/processual dimensions also exist on an historical continuum, and this discussion provides clues as to how things could evolve. Examining these issues in broader Masonic, social, and organizational contexts, utilizing a variety of methods, will not only help glean a deeper theoretical and empirical appreciation of a variety of organizations and groups, it may ultimately help provide clues to meaningfully building the Freemasonry of the future.

Notes

1 This is in keeping with Max Weber's classic distinction between social class (based in acquisition) and status (based in consumption, lifestyle, relative social esteem and honour).

2 It was this status principle, and inability to get in, that historically led, in part, to the formation of groups like the Oddfellows (a.k.a. the "poor man's Masons") and other fraternal organizations in the 19th century.

3 Indeed, many of the Concordant bodies in Masonry emerged as a result of the inability of lower status members to move up in the internal ranks.

4 If, indeed, the symbolic tools can be properly understood by many in today's technological culture.
Bibliography:


