

Playing Promotional Politics: Mythologizing Hockey and Manufacturing “Ordinary” Canadians

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Résumé de l'article

Il y a plus de 15 ans, Andrew Wernick a décrit un nouveau stade de promotion, au sein de la politique des démocraties capitalistes évoluées, dans le cadre duquel le dialogue politique était effectivement subsumé par le langage et les pratiques contemporaines de commercialisation et de création d'images. Ici, nous examinons la manière dont notre sport national, le hockey, et ses traditions et identités culturelles connexes continuent d'être des éléments mythiques et d'être déployés dans le nouveau millénaire à des fins de stratégies politiques promotionnelles contemporaines. Nous avançons que, en tant qu'élément central de culture populaire nationale, le hockey reste le signifiant d'une marque particulière de « Canadianité » pour le gouvernement fédéral conservateur actuel alors qu'il modèle sa plate-forme politique néolibérale pour en faire un élément démographique de Canadiens ordinaires – un concept clé de discours néolibéral qui redéfinit la citoyenneté et l'identité dans tout le Canada contemporain.

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and Manufacturing “Ordinary” Canadians***

Abstract

Over 15 years ago, Andrew Wernick described a new stage of promotion within the mainstream politics of advanced capitalist democracies through which political dialogue was effectively subsumed by the language and practices of contemporary marketing and image-making spectacles. In this article, we examine how the national sport of hockey and its associated traditions and cultural identities continue to be mythologized and deployed in the new millennium for the purpose of contemporary political promotional strategies. We argue that, as a central element of national popular culture, hockey remains the pre-eminent signifier of a particular ‘brand’ of Canadianness for the current federal Conservative Government as it massages its neoliberal political platform to a demographic of imagined, “ordinary Canadians”—a key concept of neoliberal discourse that is redefining citizenship and identity across contemporary Canada.

Résumé

Il y a plus de 15 ans, Andrew Wernick a décrit un nouveau stade de promotion, au sein de la politique des démocraties capitalistes évoluées, dans le cadre duquel le dialogue politique était effectivement subsumé par le langage et les pratiques contemporaines de commercialisation et de création d’images. Ici, nous examinons la manière dont notre sport national, le hockey, et ses traditions et identités culturelles connexes continuent d’être des éléments mythiques et d’être déployés dans le nouveau millénaire à des fins de stratégies politiques promotionnelles contemporaines. Nous avançons que, en tant qu’élément central de culture populaire nationale, le hockey reste le signifiant d’une marque particulière de « Canadianté » pour le gouvernement fédéral conservateur actuel alors qu’il modèle sa plate-forme politique néolibérale pour en faire un élément démographique de Canadiens ordinaires – un concept clé de discours néolibéral qui redéfinit la citoyenneté et l’identité dans tout le Canada contemporain.

Introduction

The CBC usually has a half-hour with the Prime Minister [PM] for his year-end interview. This year, however, the Corp. was offered 15 minutes ... with Stephen Harper.... Now this is revealing as the Harper government is no fan of the media and many Conservatives especially don’t like the CBC, believing it is left-of-centre and does not treat the Harper government fairly. Com-

pare this with CTV. The network got its usual hour-long interview.... The [CTV] ... journalists asked the Prime Minister about his love/hate affair with the national media. Mr. Harper said he likes to do interviews “when I have something to say. Otherwise, I don’t... think that’s what Canadians expect.... They don’t expect the prime minister to aspire to be a media star as an end in itself.” Meanwhile, the reluctant media star is appearing in two 15-second spots on TSN to promote the IIHF World Junior Championship, which is taking place over the holidays in the Czech Republic. The hockey-fan PM asks Canadians to watch the series. (Taber, “Stephane Dion” A6)

Political pundit Jane Taber’s year-end column in 2007 revealed a host of fascinating tensions within the Canadian political landscape. While highlighting the PM’s well documented (e.g. Lawrence Martin) antagonistic—but carefully managed—relationship with the media,¹ Taber identifies Harper’s less-than-subtle rebuke of the public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), in favour of the privately owned CTV network. For many conservatives, including Harper, the CBC is a leftist public institution that holds little relevance in an age of globalization and media deregulation, a sentiment that has fuelled the Conservative Party’s (CP) ongoing attempts to “demonize” the CBC for its perceived partiality (Doyle). Ironically, Harper’s affection for the national game of hockey, like many middle-aged men who grew up in post-war Canada, was cultivated every Saturday night when he watched the CBC’s iconic program, *Hockey Night in Canada* (Johnson). Taber also adroitly illuminates a consistent media tactic in the political arsenal of both Harper and his Conservative strategists that we seek to excavate critically herein: the ongoing representation of Harper as a hockey fan and scholar of the game, and the (re)production of an imagined national culture as common sense in an effort to target various Canadian electoral constituencies.

Evidenced through the Taber quote is an extension of what Andrew Wernick has described as “promotional politics”—a new stage of promotion within the mainstream politics of advanced capitalist democracies through which political dialogue has been subsumed by the language and practices of contemporary marketing and image-making spectacles. These developments—and the personalization of political figures from across the political spectrum via well-rehearsed and enduring links between nationalism and the mythology (to use Roland Barthes’ terms) of hockey—are certainly not unprecedented in Canadian history.² In the early 1970s, for example, former PM Pierre Trudeau advanced his domestic and foreign policy agenda and public image by vigorously championing the 1972 Summit Series between Team Canada and the USSR (Macintosh and Hawes). Even prior to the legendary series, Trudeau skilfully utilized the National Hockey League’s (NHL) refusal to allow Canadian players from the rival World Hockey Association to represent Team Canada as a promotional opportunity. In response to the

NHL's contentious decision, Trudeau sent telegrams to the NHL, the NHL Players' Association, and Hockey Canada:

You are aware of the intense concern, which I share with millions of Canadians in all parts of our country, that Canada should be represented by its best hockey players ... in the forthcoming series with the Soviet Union. On behalf of these Canadians, I urge Hockey Canada, the NHL and the NHL Players' Association to take whatever steps may be necessary to make this possible.... I would ask you to keep the best interests of Canada in mind and to make sure that they are fully respected and served. (qtd. in MacSkimming 17)

As Scherer, Duquette, and Mason note, "such a provocative statement was little more than political posturing by Trudeau; the US-dominated NHL had regularly prioritized its economic agenda over Canadian national interest in numerous instances and would continue to do so in the near future" (172). However, Trudeau clearly recognized an opportune moment to articulate a populist and nationalist position in light of his invocation of the War Measures Act in 1970 to quell nationalist forces within Quebec; the failed Victoria Charter of 1971; his new Foreign Policy for Canadians (1970), which championed Canada as an international player beyond the shadow of the US (Macintosh and Hawes); and, finally, an upcoming general election that was soon to be called. Beyond this, it should also be noted that Canada's narrow victory over the USSR "provided the opportunity for many pundits and politicians to celebrate the result as a triumph not only for 'Canadian virtues' but also for capitalist liberal democracy—a point frequently portrayed by the players themselves" (Gruneau and Whitson 253).

We want to suggest, however, that there has been a discernable expansion of promotional politics in the new millennium. Indeed, if we return to our initial example, what appears to be on display is an increasingly complex vortex of promotion through which a number of interrelated circuits recursively promote each other in a condensed 15-second televised advertisement. That is, in addition to the promotion of an international hockey tournament and its sponsors was the brand marketing of a privately owned sports network, its associated advertisers in search of national audiences, and by extension junior hockey players who arguably exist as emergent national sporting celebrities and potential brands themselves. Moreover, the presence of the PM confirmed to viewers that this event was an event of national significance, thereby linking the politician with a dominant mythology associated with hockey that continues to emphasize patriotism, masculinity, and normality. Also promoted, then, were Harper's identity and the CP brand as the political party of choice for "ordinary" Canadians who, like the PM, embrace the tradition of watching the World Junior Championships over the Christmas holidays. Such developments speak to the ascendancy of the

continual image-making practices of contemporary promotional politics in Canada, and by extension, the position of members of the chattering class, like Jane Taber, who play key roles in the circuitry of this new politics of impression management.

In the remainder of this article, we examine how hockey and its associated traditions and cultural identities continue to be deployed in the new millennium for the purpose of contemporary political promotional strategies. We argue that, as a key element of national popular culture, hockey remains the pre-eminent signifier of a particular “brand” of Canadianness for the current federal Conservative Government as it massages its neoliberal political platform to a demographic of imagined, “ordinary Canadians”—a key concept of neoliberal discourse that is redefining citizenship and identity across contemporary Canada (Mackey). Beyond transforming understandings of citizenship and further naturalizing the often unrecognized problematic link between hockey and Canadian identity, we posit that such promotional strategies also function to normalize powerful political elites “ordinary Canadians” who, at least temporarily, appear on the same level as other citizens, thereby obscuring their class backgrounds and often “unseen” connections and access to the upper echelons of the Canadian business community. These networks have been carefully documented by a number of authors, including the Marxist scholar Leo Panitch who, many years ago, noted “a particularly striking characteristic of the Canadian state—its very close personal ties to the bourgeoisie” (11). Indeed, the vast majority of Canadians would likely be unaware of the close business connections of countless federal leaders, including Paul Martin, Jean Chrétien, and Brian Mulroney, each groomed for political power by billionaire Paul Desmarais Sr., head of Power Corporation (“Paul Desmarais”).

More recently, for example, these normally subterranean politico-economic articulations have been thrust into the public limelight. In 2007 at the North American Leaders’ Summit in Montebello, Quebec, Canadian, US, and Mexican leaders met to discuss the trilateral Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), which “outlines an agenda for greater cooperation in areas as diverse as security, transportation, the environment and public health” (Government of Canada); arguably an agenda that facilitates the neoliberal objective of eliminating barriers to the movement of capital. Its critics maintain the SPP is the three governments’ response to intense corporate lobbying “to speed up the corporate goal of continental economic integration by linking it to US government security demands” post 9/11 (The Council of Canadians). Greeting these leaders were thousands of demonstrators protesting the meeting’s undemocratic and unaccountable nature (“Canada, U.S.”). Germane to our discussion, though, was PM Harper’s response to this democratic protest, which he dismissed as insignificant for “ordinary,” hard working Canadians: “I heard it’s nothing. A couple of hundred? It’s sad” (“Harper dismisses”);

implicitly Harper assumed "there were no hockey dads [sic] or Tim Hortons customers among them" (Moore A15), two of the central characteristics symbolizing the CP's "ordinary" Canadian.

Harper's dismissal of such protests is not altogether surprising given his commitment to further entrenching a neoliberal agenda implemented by successive generations of Canadian political and business elites who, commencing in the 1980s and gathering full momentum in the 1990s (Cameron), have steered the nation's political-economic agenda sharply to the right. These policies have targeted the welfare state, decimating publicly funded social programs (e.g., healthcare, education, social support programs for low-income families, etc.), privatizing public programs and institutions, increasing tax cuts, and de-regulating various areas, including labour (e.g., Human Resources and Social Development Canada). The most conspicuous effect of this agenda, however, has been the widening gap between rich and poor Canadians (Yalnizyan). Equally disconcerting is how dissension to this political platform, in terms of democratic rights to free speech through protest, has increasingly been circumvented by state forces (notably the police), taking its cue from state officials (i.e., elected representatives), through violent engagements evidenced by anti-globalization demonstrations dating back to Seattle 1999. Within such logic, dissenters are represented, particularly within political and conservative media discourses, as "extremists," or in Harper's case, as "un-Canadian." Such representations signal "a form of government where corporate CEO's are regarded as consiglieres and unionists and environmentalists [along with feminists, nationalists, poverty activists, etc.] are troublemakers" (Moore A15).

As Canadians confront what Henry Giroux has labelled the "terror of neo-liberalism", it is vital, then, to examine when the mythological cultural/sporting nation is conjured up by various politicians for promotional purposes so that "an affective unity can be posited against the grain of structural divisions and bureaucratic taxonomies" (Rowe, McKay, and Miller 120). To that end, we offer a critical media analysis of the cultural work that hockey accomplishes for the CP's public relations strategy that, since 2004, has endeavoured to soften Harper's image as an uncharismatic, right-wing ideologue, making the PM more palatable to middle- and working-class Canadian voters. While Harper has actively pursued an association with a range of popular sporting practices (e.g., curling, the Canadian Football League, the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, etc.), hockey remains the *key* element in a promotional arsenal that has habitually marketed him as a passionate hockey fan, an avid and dedicated hockey historian, and an "ordinary" Canadian hockey Dad, thereby obscuring his ideological leanings and the effects of the CP's neoliberal agenda on Canadians. Prior to engaging these issues, however, we map Stephen Harper's ascendancy to Canada's highest elected position.

The Rise of Stephen Harper: The Right Strikes Back

The emergence and rebranding of Stephen Harper as a federal political leader is a direct result of the recent reunification of the Canadian Right, in the form of the CP of Canada, and the downfall of the Liberal Party which, in the new millennium, imploded under the weight of a devastating sponsorship scandal. Regarding the former, it is important to note that since the late 1980s, the right-wing vote had been divided between the Reform Party/Canadian Alliance Party and the PC Party, which, under PM Brian Mulroney, governed Canada from 1984–1993. Led by Albertan Preston Manning, the Reform Party was formed in 1987 by a range of Western interest groups disillusioned with, they argued, the PC's favouritism towards Quebec, its lack of fiscal responsibility, and its failure to meet the needs of Western Canadians. For example, in 1989, at a Reform convention in Edmonton, Manning delivered his (in)famous "House Divided" speech that disparaged the PC government's 1986 decision to award a billion-dollar maintenance contract for CF-18 fighter planes to Canadair of Montreal, even though a Winnipeg consortium's bid was cheaper and judged by the federal government's own experts to be technically superior. Manning opened his speech with a joke that played on the Calgary Flames' Stanley Cup championship that temporarily disrupted the Edmonton Oilers' legacy in the late 1980s:

Last year, in a magnanimous effort to redress regional disparities, Edmonton allowed Calgary to win the Stanley Cup. While it is Edmonton's nightmare that this might be repeated this season, Les MacPherson of the Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* had an even worse nightmare. He dreamt that Mulroney and the federal government intervened after last year's Stanley Cup final to give the cup to Montreal even after Calgary had won the series. (qtd. in Johnson 149)

Although initially a PC supporter, Harper became disenchanted with Mulroney's fashion of conservatism, and thus found a welcome home in the Reform Party. After delivering a powerful speech at Reform's 1987 founding convention in Winnipeg, Harper became the party's Chief Policy Officer. His speech offered a preliminary indication of his ideological leanings, and singled out the Canadian welfare state as having

grown a highly centralized political culture which is inherently and righteously biased against western Canada. ...[W]henver challenged, it wraps itself in a flag called "Canadian identity," "Canadian nationalism," "national unity," or the "national interest" ... The whole concept of "Canadian culture" no longer means the values and lifestyles of Canadians in a diverse country. Instead it means the protection of narrow arts and media interest groups based in Toronto. Unilingualism in Quebec is a legitimate desire—*Maitres chez nous*. In Manitoba, it is "redneck" and "racist." (qtd. in Johnson 84)

While not directly associated with the Reform Party's extreme social conservative wing, Harper embraced a number of deeply conservative viewpoints, including opposing the legalization of same-sex marriages. Elected as a Calgary MP in 1993, Harper had a strained relationship with Manning and the Reform Party over the next four years. While Manning sought a more populist approach representing the rural resource-producing regions, Harper believed the Reform Party needed to target a broader constituency of Canadians by emphasizing conservative social values consistent with the traditional family, the market economy, and patriotism. These strategies, he anticipated, would appeal to those parts of the urban middle- and working-classes, and rural constituents who agreed with those values (Wells). As Harper saw it, "the real challenge is ... the social agenda of the modern Left. Its system of moral relativism, moral neutrality and moral equivalency is beginning to dominate its intellectual debate and public-policy objectives" ("Rediscovering the Right" 6). Significantly, this political discrepancy would foreshadow the terrain of cultural values upon which Harper and the newly formed CP would wage their promotional campaign for the hearts, minds, and ultimately votes of Canadians. However, after realizing that he was unlikely to defeat the more populist Manning, Harper quit the Reform caucus in 1997, and became president of the National Citizens' Coalition, an "organization that stands for the defence and promotion of free enterprise, free speech and government that is accountable to its taxpayers" (National Citizens Coalition).

Despite his departure from the federal political landscape, Harper maintained close ties with other Western-based conservatives, and carefully followed the Reform Party's trials and tribulations. During this time, he was a frequent commentator in the media; predictably, his columns found a home in the conservative-leaning *National Post*. His most infamous column appeared in 2001 as an "Open Letter" to Alberta Premier Ralph Klein. Titled "The Alberta Agenda," Harper and other prominent conservatives, including University of Calgary³ political scientists Tom Flanagan and Ted Morton, argued that Alberta should: withdraw from the Canada Pension Plan and the Canada Health Act, collect revenue from personal income tax instead of the federal government, and create an Albertan provincial police force to replace the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Or, as the authors argued: "It is imperative to take the initiative, to build firewalls around Alberta, to limit the extent to which an aggressive and hostile federal government can encroach upon legitimate provincial jurisdiction" (qtd. in Flanagan 23). Nevertheless, the "Alberta Agenda" was widely vilified as the "firewall" document, and ultimately tarnished Harper's political reputation as being an uncharismatic Westerner and a right-wing zealot: a persona that continues to haunt him to this day.

By the end of the last millennium, the Reform Party had been disbanded and replaced by the Canadian Alliance Party, led by Albertan Stockwell Day. However, the right-wing vote continued to be split and conservative politics reached its nadir in November 2000 when Canadians awarded Jean Chrétien and the Liberal party its third consecutive majority government, although the Alliance remained the official opposition party. Still, the Alliance's failure to make inroads in Ontario, Canada's most populous region, along with growing concerns about Day's leadership opened the door for Harper's return to the federal political scene. After receiving encouragement from a range of conservative supporters, Harper resigned his NCC position, formally declared his leadership candidacy on 2 December 2001, and by March 2002 was elected leader of the Canadian Alliance. As Leader of the Opposition, Harper was well aware that he could not realistically defeat the Liberals without giving "unity a try" (Wells 49), which meant reaching out to the PC Party to unify the Canadian right. After protracted negotiations with PC leader Peter MacKay, in October 2003, the two parties announced that they would merge to form the rebranded Conservative Party of Canada. Equally significant, on 20 March 2004, Stephen Harper was elected its leader, completing a remarkable rise through the federal political ranks.

Selling Harper to "Ordinary" Canadians

In June 2004, after an exhausting leadership campaign, Harper and his "little band of Calgary policy wonks" (Wells 71) lost a hastily called federal election to the Liberals and former Finance Minister Paul Martin who had succeeded Jean Chrétien as PM. The Conservatives remained the official opposition party having made some progress in Ontario, but were shutout in Quebec, the first time a centre right party had failed to win a seat in Quebec. Nevertheless, the Liberals were only re-elected with a minority government thanks to revelations that between 1997 and 2002 up to \$100 million of a \$250 million sponsorship program was awarded to Liberal-friendly advertising firms and Crown corporations for little or no work. Despite this disturbing publicity, the Liberals inflicted considerable damage to the CP's credibility in a number of attack ads that played on Harper's image as a right-wing ideologue, and effectively accused the Conservatives of a "hidden agenda" in line with US interests.

While Harper was despondent over the loss, he responded by shifting his party closer to the political centre and attempted to reinvent his image to make him more palatable to non-Western Canadians—particularly in Ontario and Quebec—through a careful promotional orchestration. As one of the "Calgary School" players, David Bercuson, explained: "I think there was a sharp epiphany after the last election. The people around Stephen Harper realized the only way to win power was to transform themselves and their message" (Walkom F1). A key element in this promotional transformation

was the Conservative Convention in March 2005. As one Conservative adviser recalled: "[i]t was a giant PR exercise. The goal was to go into the convention, come out of the convention, not fuck up, and come up with moderate centre-right policies and show the public that we were not a scary prospect" (qtd. in Wells 140). That summer, Harper took his PR exercise on the road and traveled across Canada in a promotional mission nicknamed the "Glad as Hell Tour." As the CBC reported, Harper's image makeover strategy was clear: "Conservative Stephen Harper will hit the festival and barbeque circuit across Canada this summer to persuade voters he's a nice, warm guy with a good sense of humour" (qtd. in Johnson 426).

Beyond these significant reimagining and personalizing efforts, in 2005 the Conservatives began to rethink their advertising strategies to woo "ordinary" (a staple of Harper's rhetorical devices) lower-middle- and working-class Canadians. As Wernick has observed, complimenting the rise of political advertising within a broader promotional culture has been the adoption of sophisticated techniques to analyse and predict voter presence—practices that were developed in the field of market research and are widely used throughout the advertising industry and the commercial market. Taking their cue from former Australian PM John Howard's successful 1996 campaign manual, the CP's focus on these demographics signalled Harper's recognition that, just as centre-left parties have made inroads into wealthier and more urban sections of the electorate, Conservative success equally hinged on their ability to disconnect lower-middle- and working-class voters from their traditional centre-left positions (Montgomerie; Barns). The Conservatives were particularly impressed with Howard's appeal to an imagined Australian constituency nicknamed "the battlers:" middle-class families struggling to raise their children on a modest income. The Conservatives thus rearticulated their appeal to Canadians through an advertising strategy revolving around groups of fictional people reflecting *core voters*, *non-Conservative voters*, and *swing voters* who might prove to be within their grasp. "Steve and Heather," identified as core voters, were a Protestant couple in their forties, who were married with three children and owned their own business. "Zoey," cast as the non-Conservative voter, was a single, twenty-five-year old, organic-eating, yoga-practicing, urban resident. Swing voters, however, represented a particularly interesting snapshot of middle- and working-class Canadians to which the Conservative policy book made a number of appeals (Flanagan). "Mike and Theresa" were cast as having "a mortgage and two kids ... [who] moved out of Toronto to suburban Oakville because they hated the bustle of downtown" (Wells 214). "Dougie," however, represented the "Conservatives' fondest hope" (ibid.): single and a tradesperson in his late twenties, "Dougie" agreed with Conservative policies on crime and welfare abuse, but was "more interested in hunting and fishing than politics and often didn't bother to vote" (Flanagan 224). Through this market demographic approach,

the Conservatives concluded that they could profitably target the likes of “Dougie” through a new round of brand advertising and enticements (e.g., a tax credit for his tools and an environmental tax exemption on the truck he drove to his fictional job).

On 1 November 2005 Justice John Gomery’s report on the Liberal sponsorship scandal greeted Canadians. While it exonerated Paul Martin, it concluded that a “culture of entitlement” existed within the federal government, and described an elaborate kickback scheme designed to benefit the Liberals’ Quebec-wing. These revelations prompted Harper to initiate a motion of non-confidence that was seconded by the New Democratic Party’s Jack Layton, forcing Martin to call an election for Monday, January 23. The Conservatives were well prepared and had gained valuable electioneering experience from their 2004 election foray. Promoting their policy platform under the rubric “Stand up for Families” (Porter), they proposed cutting the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and replacing the Liberal’s embryonic “Universal Childcare Program” with a “Choice⁴ in Child Care Plan,” while simultaneously rebranding Harper’s identity so as to appeal to various swing voters. Building on earlier strategic reformulations, the Conservatives released their advertising strategy to target their imagined “ordinary” Canadians. Entitled “Stand up for Canada,” the ads featured a woman asking a series of scripted questions, and receiving equally scripted answers from Stephen Harper about pensions, taxes, and government ethics as the sponsorship scandal continued to engulf the Liberals. Despite their simple, direct, and hokey nature (Wells), the advertisements represented an important discursive shift in Conservative strategy and explicitly addressed core and potential swing voters; in Flanagan’s terms, they were targeting working people who “get their coffee at Tim Hortons” (225) rather than Starbucks. Conservative pundit Tim Powers likewise utilized a hockey analogy to explain the new ad strategy: “There’s a school of thought that we’re more Don Cherry than Giorgio Armani. And the ads reflect that. Look at the success that Don Cherry has had with Rock’em Sock’em Hockey [videos]. A low-tech production, but a messenger with a product people wanted” (qtd. in Wells 182). Underscoring this point, Plamondon maintained that to pursue the lunch bucket crowd, “Harper would [need to] look and talk more like Don Cherry than Adam Smith” (425). Such comments provide a window to the CP’s framing and reimagining of Harper through symbols of Canadian identity and aspects of national popular culture to capture swing voters like “Dougie” with his “workaday concerns” (Wells 221). It also gestures to the type of “ordinary” Canadian envisioned within both the CP imaginary and neoliberal discourse. Significantly, “Dougie” is likely white, presumably heterosexual, and from a working-class background: arguably the exact constituency of Canadians for whom the deeply conservative and hypermasculine Don Cherry still holds considerable appeal. Moreover, Dougie is cast as a neoliberal citizen—an economic actor and

consumer who seeks neither special status nor special treatment from the state and has the ability to provide for his own needs and to service his own ambitions (Brown).

Harper's tactics are noteworthy on three additional fronts. First, they point to the ascendancy of the discourse of marketing in contemporary promotional politics, which has been transformed into a continual advertising campaign that is increasingly fought via the terrain of popular culture. Second, Harper's relatively recent embrace of popular symbols of Canadian identity (e.g., hockey and Tim Hortons) is ironic. Prior to this shift, he was at pains to admit that such things as Canadian identity and culture⁵ even existed ("Federal leaders"). Third, is the profoundly penetrating, essentializing, and divisive "us versus them" binary logic that frames Harper and his Conservative colleagues' understanding of the Canadian populace and rival political parties: the Tim Hortons (vs. the Starbucks) electorate, the "Dougies" (vs. the "Zoeyes") demographic, or more recently, supporters of popular cultural practices (e.g., hockey vs. what could be termed the more "high-brow" performing arts community⁶). As with all binaries, the Conservative "Other" is framed through mutually exclusive oppositional terms that work to devalue and denigrate critical perspectives and rival images, which can be seen in Harper's approach to non-Tim Hortons, pro-CBC, anti-Don Cherry, non-hockey loving Canadians who are represented as not being sympathetic to a neoliberal vision.⁷ Central to the workings of the CP's very public discursive "us versus them" strategy then is a "cultural war" (Chase and Vu; Taber, "CBC Clears") that continues to foment in an effort to not only attract particular swing-voters, but also to pin down what it means to be a "real" Canadian in terms of the terrain of values, ideology and convictions; areas in which, as Caplan argues, "Canadians have [historically] disagreed [upon]."

On 23 January 2006, the Conservatives were elected with a minority government, 31 ridings short of a majority. While the Conservatives made substantial inroads into Ontario and Quebec, they took only a handful of seats in Atlantic Canada and were shut out in Canada's three largest cities (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver), a profound indication of the urban-rural divide that the Conservative Party has agitated through its culture war approach to promotional politics. Despite deploying attack ads that "revealed" Harper's ties to right-wing groups in the US, the Liberals were unable to recover from the Gomery report's damning revelations. However, Harper's victory cannot be solely attributed to public anger over the sponsorship scandal; rather over the course of the last two decades, a salient shift has occurred in Canadian political ideology, public policy, and attitude (Cameron). Since the 1990s, parties on the political right have been steadily climbing in popularity and influence; the merger between the Canadian Alliance and the PC Party ultimately solidified this trend. As journalist Paul Wells argued, "Harper's victory wasn't a fluke. It accelerated a decade-long trend by which conservative

parties slowly displaced the Liberals as the party of the average working Canadian” (264).

Massaging the Voter: Manufacturing Harper’s Hockey Identity

MP’s Christmas cards have been arriving in mailboxes during the past couple of weeks.... Stephen Harper’s card shows him gazing at a collage of photos of himself from the past year—the Prime Minister with his family, hoisting the Stanley Cup, holding up a hockey jersey, posing with the Queen and various foreign leaders. (Smyth A3)

Building on his successful electioneering strategy, Harper has continuously sought to entrench his popularity with “ordinary” Canadians and various swing voters by vigorously promoting his identity as a hockey fan, proud hockey Dad, and dedicated hockey historian. Less than a month after being sworn in as PM, Harper’s identity as a hockey fan and “ordinary” hockey Dad was reinforced in an article that discussed how the RCMP now drive Harper to hockey rinks to watch his son, Ben, play hockey. The article featured pictures of Harper taking his son to his hockey practice, sitting in the stands with the other “ordinary” hockey parents. In the article, Harper noted: “No matter how tired I am, no matter how many things I have on my agenda, if I can find time, I can always get up and always make it to the hockey rink” (“Stephen Harper”). Notably, the story also emphasized a range of comments from other parents about Harper’s presence, including one father’s observation that the PM is: “A regular guy like all the rest of us, he still walks, talks and chews gum the same way as we do” (*ibid.*). Central to these media narratives is the Conservative frame of not only the “ordinary Canadian” juxtaposed to the “elite” ones favoured by the Liberal Party, but also the “ordinariness” of Harper and his family (Taylor; Smyth). As the conservative blogger, Stephen Taylor⁸ has remarked, “Ben and Rachel are the ordinary kids in hockey and gymnastics, Stephen and Laureen are such an ordinary couple that one or the other may forget an anniversary, similar to ... any other ordinary Canadian couple.” Discursive promotional strategies like these function to obscure class differences and the growing socioeconomic divide between “ordinary” Canadians and their counterparts in Canada’s business establishment and political circles who, in Zygmunt Bauman’s terms, have seceded from the Canadian commons, and now exist in a “socio-cultural-bubble” that has insulated them from any real awareness of how low middle- and lower-income families actually live, and the deleterious effects neoliberal social policies have on their lives.

In a similar vein, Harper’s routine tapping into national symbols, like hockey, is evidenced through his (self-)promotion as a hockey historian. For example, in 2006, while attending hockey games in Toronto and Calgary respectively, Harper was referred to as a “hard-core hockey fan” who is a

"member of the Society for International Hockey Research," and is currently "penning a book about the pre-NHL history of the game"⁹ ("PM's hockey"). Despite these plaudits, Harper readily admitted the challenge of being PM and completing this endeavour: "My original plan was to have that published by the end of this year, but I have to admit, that since Jan. 23, I've been spending a little less time on it than before so we'll have to see" (ibid.).¹⁰ Four days after this coverage, Harper granted an exclusive one-on-one interview to The Sport Network's (TSN) Gord Miller, reiterating his identity as a proud hockey Dad, while extolling: "I love my job as Prime Minister, but if you could be a hockey player, I mean, what could be better than that" ("Prime Minister").

Harper's fondness for representing himself via an affective national symbol is far from unintentional; rather it illustrates his skilful adaptation of the promotional strategies of the George W. Bush administration. Indeed, in May 2006, Harper met with Frank Luntz, a US Republican pollster, communications adviser, and adjunct fellow at the conservative think-tank, the Hudson Institute. Credited with both having a momentous impact on contemporary US political and public discourses, and with being the mastermind behind the Republican rise in fortunes dating back to its 1994 sweep of Congress, Luntz was also the wordsmith underpinning Bush's carefully crafted successive wins and his administration's policies (Berkowitz, "Spurned by" and "Politics"; Mason). Notably, Luntz claims to be in the "language guidance" profession: "my job is to look for the words that trigger the emotion. Words alone can be found in a dictionary or telephone book, but words with emotion can change destiny, can change life as we know it" (Mason A5). Luntz's central promotional strategy is thus to use carefully tested and often repeated simple messages, in conjunction with key words, images, pictures and national symbols in order "to deflect suspicions of unpopular policies" (Moxley; "Tories influenced"). In 1997, for example, he fashioned a communications how-to guide, *Language of the 21st Century*, which became the Republican Party's "language bible" (Mason). However, its reach also stretched north of the 49th parallel as Luntz's tactics have been readily observed in the Harper Government's repertoire of communication strategies (Berkowitz, "Spurned by" and "Politics"; "Tories influenced"; Dobbin; Mason). Luntz's interest in Canadian politics and his relationship with Western Canadian economic and social conservatives dates back to Reform Party days when Preston Manning's political advisers hired him as an official election pollster and strategic adviser; his focus was to coach Manning on the art of negative political campaigning (Walker).¹¹

Harper's 2006 meeting with Luntz occurred the day before the Republican pollster (Doskoch) gave the keynote address at the tenth-anniversary conference of the Civitas Society (Gairdner), described as "the premier venue in Canada where people interested in conservative, classical liberal and liber-

tarian ideas can not only exchange ideas, but meet others who share an interest in these rich intellectual traditions” (Civitas Society). Its founder, William Gairdner, described the conference as such: “there were about 250 members of Civitas there from all across Canada drawn from a membership that constitutes a kind of lonely platoon of conservative/libertarian thinkers, journalists, professors and policy wonks who are pretty excited to find one of their own as Prime Minister of Canada” (Gairdner). As Gairdner alludes to, the *Civitas Society* has particularly close ties to the PM; Harper’s former chief of staff Ian Brodie (2006–2008) is a director, and Harper’s mentor and former campaign manager, Tom Flanagan, was a founding director and past president.

Luntz’s speech, “Massaging the Conservative Message for Voters,” was a communications blueprint offering a range of promotional strategies for “tailoring a conservative message and selling it to moderate voters” (Moxley); its objective was to solidify the conservative minority government with a view to expanding it to a majority in the next election. The pillars of Luntz’s “message” to *Civitas* members were accountability, opportunity (read: the neoliberal favourite of “choice”), security, and families. “Massaging,” for its part, encompassed language, images, and national symbols. As Luntz explained, “language is your base. Symbols knock it out of the park...” (Mason). To this end, Luntz encouraged Harper to link his identity and right-wing agenda to national symbols like hockey: “If there is some way to link hockey to what you all do, I would try to do it” (qtd. in Thompson A6). According to Luntz, these types of personal appeals to national popular culture play a critical role in appealing to “average voters,” the “Mikes and Therasas” and “Dougies” of the Conservative playbook, who may not traditionally vote Conservative: “You have a gentleman who may well be the smartest leader intellectually. Now, that is half the battle. The other half of the battle is to link that intelligence to the day-to-day lives of the average individual” (qtd. in Thompson A6).

Lakoff’s work on framing within political and public discourses is constructive in making sense of Luntz’s counsel to *Civitas*, and the CP of Canada. Lakoff argues that central to deconstructing contemporary political discourse is understanding how issues are framed through particular values which resonate within the type of promotional politics described by Wernick. As Lakoff elucidates, “politics is about values; it is about communication.... And it is about symbolism” (8); the positioning of an issue follows “from one’s values, and the choice of issues and policies should symbolize those values” (8).¹²

Luntz also encouraged the CP to promote neoliberal policy initiatives through carefully manipulating discourse by deploying less threatening cultural terms like “tax relief” rather than “tax cuts”, and “personalization” instead of “privatization.” Such discursive initiatives arguably represent

an Orwellian version of Newspeak designed to massage Canadian voters, particularly as they are uncritically transmitted via either right leaning corporate media conglomerates, or through alternative (i.e., "unfiltered") media sources. Neoliberalism is, in this instance, clearly much more than an economic theory; it "constitutes the conditions for a radically refigured cultural politics" (Giroux 107) that reinforces dominant values, social relations, and understandings of citizenship.

Given Luntz's long-standing relationship with the CP and its political forerunners, it is likely that prior to the *Civitas Society's Conference* Harper was well aware of the promotional value of reframing potentially unpopular conservative policies by linking them to national symbols like hockey. Consider, however, Harper's media activity following Luntz's presentation on 6 May 2006. Two days afterwards, Harper appeared during the Game 2 second intermission of the Ottawa Senators–Buffalo Sabres NHL playoff series, where he spent the entire time posing for photos with other hockey fans, shaking hands, and signing autographs (St. Martin). Such practices juxtapose interestingly with Harper's assertion, noted earlier, that Canadians do not expect their Prime Ministers "to aspire to be a media star as an end in itself" (Taber, "Stephane Dion" A6), not least of which would contradict Harper's rebranding process and the strategy of appealing to "ordinary" Canadians through national symbols.

Returning to our initial remarks about Luntz's discursive philosophy, such articulations are apparent in Conservative attempts to "massage" and market various right-wing policies to appeal to moderate voters who are encouraged to embrace new identities as neoliberal citizens. For example, in a 2006 move to address the childhood "inactivity" and "obesity" "epidemics," federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, clad in skates and a hockey jersey after playing hockey with a group of peewees in his home riding of Whitby, Ontario (Department of Finance), announced a *Children's Fitness Tax Credit*, providing families with up to \$500 per child for registration fees. At a tax rate of 15.5%, the savings amounts to \$77.50. Yet, as McDermott points out, like other policies emphasizing tax cuts rather than investing in public programs, such initiatives ultimately serve to entrench further class differences by predominantly supporting families whose children are already registered in sports programs. Indeed, a tax credit is a moot point for families that cannot afford registration fees in the first place. Thus, while the tax credit failed to achieve its stated objective (to increase children's sport and physical activity involvement), it did serve important promotional purposes for the CP in its bid to secure the votes of Canadian families.

Characteristic of a neoliberal agenda is an anathema for governmental regulations, viewed as roadblocks to economic growth. Nowhere is this ideology so conspicuous for Stephen Harper than in the case of global warming

and Canada's commitment to the Kyoto Accord. In a 2002 fundraising letter to Canadian Alliance members, Harper decried the accord as an "economy destroying ... socialist scheme to suck money out of wealth-producing nations" ("Harper letter"). Harper's perspective is unsurprising given his connections to the Alberta oil industry, and his resolute commitment to aggressive oil sands development (McQuaig). Harper's opposition to the Kyoto Accord followed him into office where he demonstrated his environmental disdain through frequent denials of global warming, and his appointment of Rona Ambrose¹³ as Canada's environment minister. In 2006 Ambrose announced that Canada would not meet its Kyoto commitments; instead, it would focus on implementing a "Made in Canada"¹⁴ solution to climate change. Opposition Liberals, who had originally committed Canada to the Kyoto Accord, responded by introducing a private member's bill to force Canada to maintain its Kyoto commitment. Significantly, Harper skipped this bill's parliamentary vote to fly to Toronto on the Department of National Defence's executive jet with his son to watch the Maple Leafs season-opener against the Ottawa Senators (McGregor).¹⁵ The Harper government's dismissive attitude towards global warming, however, soon underwent a seismic political shift as polls indicated the importance of this issue to Canadian voters ("Harper letter").

On 5 January 2007, TSN interviewed the PM during the first intermission of the gold medal game of the World Junior Hockey Championships between Canada and Russia. Referenced, yet again, as a hockey historian, he offered his analysis of both the opening period and various rules and regulations, including his preference for games to be decided in an overtime period versus a shoot-out. Following a 4–2 Canadian victory, TSN covered a congratulatory phone call from Harper to Canadian Head Coach Craig Hartsburg, while the next day various newspapers carried a photo of Harper calling from his office with the Canadian flag behind him. Harper's hockey appearance, arguably, served to draw attention away from his removal, a day earlier, of the much maligned Ambrose from her environment portfolio to neutralize national and international criticism against his government's Kyoto Accord abandonment and the introduction of the Luntz inspired "Made in Canada" solution: the *Clean Air Act*. Lamenting Canada's rapidly declining environmental reputation, the Act was resoundingly attacked by opposition parties and environmentalists (Simpson). Harper's approach to pressing environmental concerns, however, has not deterred the PM from various promotional efforts designed to massage his party's position on the environment. When former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, widely lauded for implementing stringent greenhouse gas emissions caps, came to Ontario in 2007 to sign an agreement coordinating fuel efficiency standards to reduce greenhouse gases, Harper used it as an occasion to meet the governor. While a similar agreement was not forthcoming at the federal level, Harper and Schwarzenegger managed

to discuss the Ottawa Senators–Anaheim Ducks Stanley Cup finals and exchanged hockey jerseys in a photo op (“Arnie to”).

Perhaps the CP’s most conspicuous (and long-lasting) attempt to pin down and promote what it means to be an “ordinary” Canadian has transpired through its replacement of the Liberal’s Citizenship and Immigration study guide used by immigrants in their preparations for taking their citizenship exams. Friesen and Curry gesture to the culture war in which the CP has been engaged with their observation that “[t]he monarchy and the military ... are given much greater prominence in the new document. The land, the environment and healthcare, mainstays of Canada’s self-image through the past two decades, are largely ignored” (A1). In assessing the new guide and the re-envisioned “Canadian” projected through it, the Canadian historian Margaret Conrad remarked “[i]t’s kind of like a throwback to the 1950s. It’s a tough, manly country with military and sport heroes that are all men.... It’s a tougher Canada than the one the Liberals depicted” (ibid.). Conrad’s observations point to not only the CP’s masculinized representation of Canada, but also to its continued strategic deployment of hockey as an apparatus through which to promote the party’s brand, its leader, and its policies, as well as a medium through which it attempts to forge dominant understandings of “ordinary” Canadian identity.

Such efforts clearly continue to be played out on the cultural terrain of values. For example, in contrast to the new citizenship guide’s numerous references to hockey (13 in total),¹⁶ Jason Kenney, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism ordered the removal of all references to gay rights in Canada from an earlier iteration of it, including its decriminalization in 1969, and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005. Yet *The Globe and Mail*’s Tabatha Southey (along with potentially many other Canadians) represent fissures to the CP’s attempts at solidifying for political gain what it means to be an “ordinary” Canadian through popular cultural symbols when she sardonically notes:

Canada ... is one of only seven countries in the world in which same-sex and opposite-sex marriages have equal standing in law. However, we are one of only *four* countries in the world in which hockey cards are routinely traded. Before you judge Mr. Kenney ... who, either by inattention or design, included hockey-card information and excluded any reference to same-sex marriage, take a moment to imagine that you come from a country in which it’s not acceptable to trade hockey cards. Imagine you were raised somewhere you’d be discriminated against or beaten senseless or risk untimely death because of your hockey-card collection—or that you yourself, while uninterested in collecting cards, beat other people in your homeland with impunity the second you discovered they owned a deck. (F2)

These developments, it can be suggested, further reinforce how the notion of the “ordinary” Canadian—as a key concept of neoliberal discourse—can be mobilized politically “to re-define citizenship and to naturalise the exclusion of some citizens from notions of national belonging without direct reference to culture, race, sexual preference and gender” (Mackey 21).

Conclusion

Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s reticence toward the media apparently doesn’t apply to sportscasters. Harper invited TSN’s Gord Miller to 24 Sussex Drive on Wednesday night so he could be filmed watching Game 2 of the Stanley Cup final. The Prime Minister hasn’t held a news conference in Ottawa this year, and only rarely stops on the staircase outside the House of Commons to deliver a message to the news media. His relationship with the parliamentary press is charitably described as frosty... But when it comes to hockey, Harper is expansive and accommodating. (“Harper makes” A13).

In this article, we have endeavoured to illuminate the symbolic role of hockey in a new stage of promotional politics in Canada. There are, as we noted earlier, no shortage of examples of politicians from across the political spectrum who have recognized the importance of maintaining popular associations with the national sport of hockey and, indeed, other elements of national popular culture. Still, unlike earlier eras of promotional politics where PMs such as Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau recognized the promise of sport in general, and hockey in particular, to fashion political interests regarding national unity and international prestige (Macintosh and Hawes), under Harper’s tenure there has been an expansion of these meticulously calculated practices that are now deployed exclusively for personal image-making and advertising.

The expansion of promotional politics has been spurred, of course, by substantial technological and political-economic changes to the Canadian media landscape: notably, the advent of the 24-hour news cycle and the commercialization of the Internet, affording infinite possibilities for (virtual) public engagements, including, but not limited to, mainstream online news sites. To this we can add the ascension of marketing discourses that occurred in the 1990s through the confluence of database marketing (i.e., compiling customer databases), one-on-one marketing (i.e., using technologies to foster enduring customer relationships through strategies like personalized communication) and the Internet, which provides the technology to further transform customer communication processes into real-time interactions (Neuman). All of these developments, in conjunction with the CP’s masterful execution of Luntz’s promotional blueprint of often repeated messages invoking national symbols, have been fully exploited by the CP for promotional purposes as the party solidifies strategic affinities amongst key elements of national popular

culture, the PM's political persona as an "ordinary" Canadian hockey fan, and the CP as the political choice of middle- and working-class Canadians.

We have also argued that such strategies have fluidly unfolded against a backdrop where citizens are being encouraged to embrace understandings of neoliberal citizenship as various national institutions representing real points of connection for all Canadians are being dismantled; where, as Raymond Williams argues, "the active promoters, the ideologists and the agents" of these processes "speak to the rest of us, at least from one side of their mouths, about traditional values of settlement, community, and loyalty" (Resources 186). Here Williams' words assume a prescient quality in relation to the contemporary Canadian political landscape: while seemingly paying homage to Canadian community and identity through its promotional deployment of Canadian symbols of popular culture, in practice the Harper government has all the while implemented a neoliberal program designed to erode the fabric of this community and identity.

What further marks Stephen Harper and the CP's promotional political strategies as unique is the manner in which this has been accomplished: through a focused commitment to neutering democratic processes, as we noted at the beginning of this discussion. Democracy, as Canadian political scientist Michael Byers asserts: "should be the marketplaces of ideas.... Markets, of course, depend on the free flow of information and basic norms of good conduct.... For some reason, Stephen Harper either doesn't understand this, or doesn't care." Occurring alongside this democratic deficit, the CP's unremitting promotional agenda continues to unfold on a variety of fronts: the conspicuous visibility of the PM during the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver; his frequent photo-ops with professional hockey players, including national icon Wayne Gretzky; and the use of hockey imagery and sporting rhetoric to massage Canada's military presence in Afghanistan (see Scherer and McDermott; Scherer and Koch).

Still, there are no guarantees with respect to how Canadians encode these promotional strategies both in relation to what it means to be an "ordinary" Canadian, and to the neoliberal agenda the former attempts to massage. Fault-lines in these attempts to secure power can, in fact, be detected on at least two fronts: first, are the occasional opinion editorials (even within mainstream media) "pulling back the curtains" on the CP's strategy "that a good way to distract voters is to talk as much as possible about hockey" (Smith); and second, what has become apparent is that Harper and his hypermasculine image (e.g., as someone who "walks his own talk" [Gairdner]) and policies are much more palatable to some Canadians than others: repeated polls suggest that Canadian women are less inclined to support him (Delacourt, "Macho Symbols").¹⁷ These trends may reveal various aspects of the organization of power in Canada, and the privileging of hockey by groups of dominant white

men who continually articulate national cultural values in “a manner that reflects and promotes their interests and that continues to place their image at the centre of a shared national identity” (Adams 82).

Finally, these developments also point to a number of issues facing the Canadian Left. Here it may be helpful to return to an observation made by Stuart Hall over two decades ago about the willingness—and success of the Right—to maintain a popular presence and connect with British citizens via the terrain of popular culture: strategies that the Left largely neglected. Indeed, as we have argued throughout this article, Hall’s concerns arguably hold true in the contemporary Canadian context where the CP, in terms of promotional politics, has unquestioningly outmanoeuvred its political rivals who have struggled to establish a more active cultural presence.

It can be granted that those on the Right have considerably more resources to devote to such imaging strategies and, beyond this, are likely fluent in the language and practices of marketing, and have well-established “commercial” networks with the private sector. Moreover, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Left to challenge market-based policies and definitions of neoliberal citizenship via the terrain of a promotional political culture that has been effectively subsumed by the very same logic of advertising that continually nourishes understandings of possessive individualism and mobile privatization as common sense. Yet, as Williams once remarked, the market can only provide so much support for citizens, let alone nourish collective identities: for “other human needs, beyond consumption, other relationships and conceptions of other people are necessary” (*Towards* 190). While the subversion of a promotional political culture is by now increasingly unlikely, the challenge for the Left, then, will be to embrace elements of national popular culture that open up new possibilities for more enduring kinds of common interest and points of connection.

Notes

1. Since becoming PM, Harper has solidified his persona as a micro-manager intent on limiting the flow of public information, particularly through the mainstream media. Two examples illustrate this. First, is the Access to Information Commissioner’s 2008–2009 Report assessing 24 federal departments’ responses to public information requests, largely by the media. Thirteen departments were rated below average, unsatisfactory and/or “red alert” (notably Foreign Affairs whose performance “was so poor that the OIC [Office of the Information Commissioner] could not rate it against its established criteria” (OIC, “Out of Time” and “Interim Information”). Second, is the government practice of using *Message Event Proposals* (MEP), a communications tool for vetting public events requests. MEPs are a “political tool for literally putting words in the mouths of cabinet ministers, federal bureaucrats, low-profile MPs on the barbecue circuit, and seasoned diplomats abroad.... All major news organizations ... [in Canada] have had requests

for information dissected by individual MEPs" (Blanchfield and Bronskill). Harper's approach to government-media relations enacts what Rosen calls a "decertification of the press," which he suggests has two faces. The first is to put journalists in a diminished position (i.e., "Don't answer their questions, it only encourages the askers to think they're legitimate interlocutors ... for the public"). The second involves describing government efforts to inform the public as purely factual while dismissing mainstream media as inherently biased. Ultimately, through tapping into alternative media venues, notably provided through the Internet (e.g., blogs, YouTube, etc.), decertification has become an important strategy the Harper government deploys "to get its message out" to the public unencumbered by what are perceived to be the mainstream media's negative filters.

2. The images, symbols, and language of sport in general, and hockey in particular have served as levers of political legitimacy for innumerable Canadian politicians. Former Progressive Conservative PM John Diefenbaker, for example, allowed a CBC television crew into his home to film him and his wife watching the final game of the 1972 Summit Series ("Paul Henderson scores"). In 1949, as Liberal Secretary of State, Mike Pearson (who would eventually become PM) noted the political ends of sport particularly at an international level (Macintosh and Greenhorn). Pearson also played for the Oxford Blues while at Oxford University during the 1920s (Smith) and subsequently coached the University of Toronto Varsity Blues' hockey team. More recently, Liberal PM Jean Chrétien donned a pair of hockey skates for a segment in the National Film Board documentary "Shinny: The Hockey in All of Us." After the 2002 Olympic men's and women's hockey teams won gold medals—Canada's first Olympic gold medal in men's hockey in 50 years—Chrétien sought to capitalize on the national mood: "In two golden weeks of triumph, the game that we have always called our own, that we have shared with the world, has become ours again. In the past two weeks, in homes and schools, at work and at play, Canadians have once again been united in a way that only hockey can bring us together" ("Golden nation"). Others, like former Liberal MP and Montreal Canadiens goaltender Ken Dryden have unassailable links to hockey in addition to his other impressive credentials as a writer, lawyer and executive. We are grateful to the anonymous reviewer who drew our attention to these, and other, examples.
3. Tom Flanagan, along with Ted Morton, Barry Cooper, Roger Gibbins, Rainer Knopff, and David Bercuson, form a group of political scientists from the University of Calgary known as the "Calgary School," who are attributed with facilitating Harper's swift rise to lead the CP and ultimately become PM. McDonald describes the "Calgary School" as being bound by a "neo-conservative agenda [that] read as if it has been lifted straight from the dusty desk drawers of Ronald Reagan: lower taxes, less federal government, and free markets unfettered by social programs such as Medicare that keep citizens from being forced to pull up their own socks."
4. Nikolas Rose's discussion of freedom is relevant here. Central to the workings of a neoliberal rationality is an understanding of freedom whereby the individual is represented as an autonomous, entrepreneurial self who has "the capacity to realize one's desires ... to fulfill one's potential through one's own endeavours, to determine the course of one's own existence through

- acts of choice” (84). The neoliberal subject is thus conceived in terms of self-responsibility (versus social responsibility) and self-actualization through choice. “Choice,” within conservative discourse, is thus far from innocent.
5. Harper rarely uses the term “culture,” which was noticeably absent in the CP’s policy document (Dobbin). A 1997 CBC interview provides insight into Harper’s views on Canadian culture. When asked “is there a Canadian culture?” Harper responded: “Yes in a very loose sense. It consists of regional cultures within Canada, regional cultures that cross borders with the US. We’re part of a worldwide Anglo-American culture. And there is a continental culture” (ibid.). Such an understanding of culture aligns well with the globalized economic relations being pursued through neoliberalism.
 6. In explaining why no members of Harper’s Conservative cabinet would be attending the 2008 Governor-General’s Performing Arts Award Gala, a Conservative MP noted that “he and many of his fellow Tories don’t get ‘jacked up’ by meeting arts and cultural celebrities, but would if they were honouring ‘hockey players’” (Taber, “Why Tories” R4). More recently identified has been Harper’s strategy of fostering a culture war within public discourse (Chase and Vu).
 7. According to a poll conducted for the *Vancouver Sun*, a CanWest Media daily, Stephen Harper’s political fortunes are grounded in male Tim Hortons voters who view HNIC’s Don Cherry as a “national icon,” watch more sports, and are most likely to fear a terrorist attack (O’Neil).
 8. Taylor is an example of the CP’s attempt to “decertify” the mainstream media as a source for political information and analysis, thereby allowing its message “to get out” “unfiltered” (Delacourt, “PM Can’t”).
 9. A Google search of “Stephen Harper” & “hockey book” (16 June 2010) returned 311 hits, which included links to all mainstream Canadian media outlets (*The Globe & Mail*, *National Post*, *Macleans*, *CBC*, *CTV*, *Financial Post*, and *The Toronto Star*) as well as online sites (including personal blogs, *Hockey News*, *NHL*, and interestingly the *Afghanistan News Center*). Consciously or not, such forums serve to reproduce the CP strategy of articulating national symbols to Harper and the CP.
 10. Azpiri notes Harper’s regularity of mentioning his hockey book in interviews. Azpiri goes on to disclose that when pressed for details regarding the book, Harper admitted that he “only spends about 15 minutes a day working on it.” As Azpiri observes: “it sound[s] more like a hobby than a serious work of historical research.” Regardless of whether a book comes to be published, Harper’s (and wittingly or unwittingly the media’s) tactic of repeated invocation of it not only keeps in circulation but ultimately solidifies his promotional image of a hockey-loving Canadian.
 11. Former Reform Party policy manager under Manning, Dimitri Pantazopoulos, described Luntz as “one of the few outside sources who has (sic) a real influence on party direction” (Vardy 12).
 12. Harper’s understanding of the centrality of values to politics and his deft enactment of Luntz’ key pillars to effective messaging is evidenced in a response he made while appearing on CanWest Media’s *Global National*, regarding his reticence to interact with the media: “I have no desire to be a celebrity or media star. I’m not in *People* magazine, talking about my hopes and fears as an individual. . . . While I don’t go on interviews and unburden my inner soul, at the same time I think Canadians know about me what most people

- know about me. I think they know that I'm a family man, they know that I'm a *hockey fan*. They know the kind of values I have, whether they agree with them or disagree with them" (qtd. in Mayeda and Martin A1, emphasis added).
13. Prior to running as a federal Conservative, Ambrose, whose father was an oil industry executive (MacDonald), was the Alberta (Canada's most vocal Kyoto critic) conservative government's senior intergovernmental officer. Her responsibilities encompassed fiscal, social, and constitutional policy issues, including Alberta's position on the Kyoto Protocol ("Ministers in").
 14. A "Made in Canada" climate change solution reproduces Luntz's "Made in America" one.
 15. The CP repetitively conveyed to the public that it paid for the jet expense to Toronto and Harper's two platinum level (\$182 per seat [Kernaghan]) seats next to Leafs' owner, Larry Tanenbaum (McGregor). The flight, ticket cost, and company shared at the game arguably debunk Harper's pose as an "ordinary" Canadian. His appearance at the game, however, did provide another Harper-hockey photo-op.
 16. For example, as stated in the guide: "Many young Canadians play hockey at school, in a hockey league, or on quiet streets road hockey or street hockey and are taken to hockey rinks by their parents. Canadian children have collected hockey cards for generations" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 39).
 17. This is unsurprising given the fact that few women are visible in the CP which: decreased funding to the Status of Women Canada by 37% resulting in 12 of its 16 regional offices being closed (Gergin); changed the government criteria for funding women's groups; and removed the word "equality" from its objectives. It also cancelled the court challenges program (which determined whether laws contravened women's rights), refused to adopt pay equity legislation, cancelled funding for a national child-care program ("1,000 protesters"), and recently responded, via a female Conservative Senator, to feminist critiques of its controversial G8 Maternal Health initiative that excluded abortion rights for women in developing countries, by telling them to "shut the fuck up on this issue.... If you push it, there will be more backlash" ("Senator drops"). The effects of such decisions are evidenced in international gender equality rankings: the World Economic Forum gender gap index ranked Canada in seventh place in 2004; by 2009 it had dropped to 25th on the list of countries regarding their gender equality records (Gergin).

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