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**Narrating the Self and Painting an Image:
Stéphane Dion (2006-2008) – Not a Leader?**

Darcy Knoll

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submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

This thesis examines how the personal narrative of former Liberal leader Stéphane Dion was shaped in the mediated environment of a minority Parliament. It is based on William James' (1890) consciousness of self and George H. Mead's (1934) notions of the self and the communicative gesture, coupled with work on narratives and self-presentation. These were combined with political image and the role of opponents and journalists in creating a leader's personal narrative. The thesis employs a qualitative research design with a microscopic conceptual approach and inductive reasoning for a textual analysis utilizing a narrative criticism method of rhetorical criticism, followed by in-depth interviews with journalists and political strategists. The analysis digs into the depiction of Dion in the English print media from the period of December 3, 2006 to September 6, 2008.

Although the individual had the personal narrative as a politician with honesty and integrity, the analysis identifies that the dominant narrative of Dion was that he was a weak leader. The research finds the Liberal leader's opponents help reshape his narrative, which is granted legitimacy by journalists covering the political scene, and reinforced through the actions of Dion himself. In addition, the thesis outlines the challenges an opposition leader faces under the scrutiny of a minority Parliament and raises questions of what this means for Canadian political culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Preface

It was a Saturday morning on November 25, 1995 when Stéphane Dion received his formal invitation to Canadian politics. In the midst of a snowstorm, the academic trudged to the front gates of 24 Sussex to meet the prime minister at his Ottawa home. As Jean Chrétien later said in his memoirs, “When he showed up wearing heavy boots and a toque, covered in snow and carrying a knapsack on his back, I thought to myself, ‘Oh my God, what have I got myself involved with?’” (2007: 155). However, after a fruitful conversation between the two men, Chrétien offered Dion a cabinet position as minister of intergovernmental affairs.

The initial invitation came upon the advice of the prime minister’s wife, Aline, who first spotted Dion on a Quebec news program and was impressed with his arguments against the separatists. Watching a later interview, Chrétien also saw potential in Dion: “The more I watched, the more I became as impressed as Aline had been by his firm, intelligent defence of Canadian federalism” (2007: 154). Indeed, the country was still recovering from a hurricane of a political storm after federalist forces narrowly won the 1995 referendum and the prime minister was looking for some new talent from Quebec for his cabinet. After more than a month of deliberation, Dion accepted Chrétien’s offer and was sworn into office on January 25, 1996. He was later elected as a Member of Parliament in a by-election that March. (Chrétien, 2007).

According to a 2007 biography of Dion, the reason for this hesitation in accepting the cabinet position was that he felt he might be sacrificing his career as an academic, which he had spent his life building. The son of prominent Quebec professor Léon Dion, Stéphane grew up in a suburb outside of Quebec City with four other siblings. Like his father, he took a shine towards education, graduating with a bachelors and masters in political science at Laval University. Following this, he traveled to the Institut d'études politiques in Paris where he received his Ph.D. in sociology. Returning from Europe, Dion taught political science at the University of Montreal from 1984 to 1996. (Diebel, 2007).¹

Like other students in the 1970s, he was originally a member of the Parti Québécois; however, his appetite for the separatist movement shortly vanished. Despite the excitement of Quebec politics during the 1980s and pro-sovereignty leanings on his own campus, Diebel (2007) noted that Dion attempted to stay away from the question of independence focusing his energy on the study of public administration. It was not until 1991 that he decided to take on the issue during a sabbatical at the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C., where he was asked to write an essay on Quebec nationalism. A subsequent book on the issue earned Dion a considerable amount of coverage and Diebel wrote that he returned to Canada with a growing “public profile as an analyst on the Quebec-Canada question” (Ibid: 76). As the province surged towards the 1995 referendum, Dion’s status as a prominent federalist in the Quebec media accelerated as he appeared on talk shows and penned opinion pieces across the French

¹ He also briefly taught at the University of Moncton.

dailies. Such commentary drew intense criticism from the sovereigntists, while earning the plaudits of the prime minister's wife.

Representing the Montreal riding of Saint-Laurent – Cartierville, Dion's role as minister of intergovernmental affairs mainly related to picking up the pieces after the Quebec referendum. Chrétien (2007), Diebel (2007), and Goldenberg (2006) noted that these were politically sensitive times and Dion earned the respect of his cabinet colleagues by rebutting the separatists with a series of letters and opinion pieces in the Quebec media disproving senior Parti Québécois politicians. Beyond this, all three authors noted that Dion's most significant political effort was his role in drafting and promoting the government's Clarity Act – a bill designed to formally legislate the terms of secession for a province.

The notion of the federal government laying such ground rules created much controversy, and Dion faced “even more withering criticism from the Quebec media” (Diebel, 2007: 143). For example, Diebel noted how on one occasion *La Presse* cartoonist Serge Chapleau, who normally depicted Dion as a rat, drew the animal as a psychiatric patient. The doctor then said to him, “There's good news. You're not paranoid, people really do hate you” (Ibid: 145). According to Diebel, there was “an air of hysteria” against Dion and the minister needed an RCMP security detail because of threats made towards him and his family. Political analyst Don Macpherson told the author, “Chrétien wasn't despised and derided in the way that Dion was. In Dion's case, the feeling against him was more intense because he was seen not just as an ethnic traitor, but as a class traitor” (Ibid: 146).

Despite this, the battle over the Clarity Act was won and Dion retained his position as intergovernmental affairs minister until December 2003. He was then initially left out of cabinet under the government of Paul Martin and had to struggle to maintain the nomination in his riding. However, he was later handed the environment portfolio in July 2004, which he held until the Liberals' downfall in January 2006. During this time Dion earned praise for his role as chair of the 2005 UN Conference on Climate Change held in Montreal. However, as the new Conservative government took power, debate existed over the Liberals' past record in protecting the environment.

The change in Ottawa also prompted a change within the Liberal top brass. Paul Martin stepped down following the election and a new leadership race was on. Nearly a dozen candidates announced their intentions to run, including an environmentally-oriented Stéphane Dion. Despite this large pool, the media's focus was on the two frontrunners – former Ontario premier Bob Rae and Harvard academic Michael Ignatieff.² Nevertheless, Ottawa's political brain trust was in for a surprise. Despite holding only 17.8 percent of delegates after the first ballot of the 2006 Liberal convention (only two votes ahead of fourth-place finisher Gerard Kennedy), Dion managed to jockey his way to the fourth round where he emerged the victor (Diebel, 2007).

The above background on Dion was put together using political memoirs and a biography written about the Liberal leader in 2007. It presents him as a man who hesitantly left academia to enter government and fight the sovereignty battle against those

² For example, according to an FPInformart scan of newspaper articles from May 1 to December 2, 2006, the *Globe and Mail* ran 268 stories with Michael Ignatieff's name in the headline or lead, while the *National Post* had 132. In the same timeframe, Bob Rae acquired 128 stories in the *Globe and Mail* and 101 in the *National Post*. Dion, meanwhile, was only able to garner 75 stories in the *Globe and Mail* and 43 in the *National Post*.

in his home province. Running under an environmental mandate, he then surprised the media and political establishment by winning the party leadership. But how would the average voter come to know the new head of the Official Opposition?

Research Purpose

On a beautiful sunny day in September 2008, a young voter³ grabbed a pen and notebook and headed off on her bicycle. Her goal: To meet as many political candidates as she could and question them on issues she deemed important. As an effort of political participation, this seemed valiant as she sought to engage federal politics at a local level. Unfortunately, in Canada, such civic engagement is not the norm.

Although Canadian federal politics has a local component in its issues and representatives, the focus is on the top. Party leaders guide the competition and clash of ideas. These individuals personalize policy discourse, symbolize their party, and leave an imprint on the local candidate. However, the average voter cannot head off on his or her bicycle one pleasant fall afternoon and strike up a conversation with these politicians. Unless he or she makes a concerted effort to attend a political event, his or her only interaction with a party head will be through the media.

As such, it is the nation's televisions, radios, newspapers, and increasingly, Internet that become the platforms the candidate uses to reach the majority of voters. Through these media, the politician attempts to create a favorable impression of himself or herself as a leader who understands the needs and feelings of the populace. In painting this image, the candidate – along with his or her team of party supporters, communication

³ The identity of this individual is kept confidential for this thesis.

personnel, and strategists – seeks to build a narrative about himself or herself that emphasizes certain characteristics, themes, and traits. This hopefully will resonate with voters and be recalled when they choose their next prime minister.

However, the candidate this individual presents is not necessarily the one that will be perceived by voters in the end. Throughout the competition for political power, a politician's personal narrative will be subjected to resistance and reinterpretation. The main attack inevitably comes from the politician's opponents who seek to attach a new narrative to the candidate through the use of political strategies and communication tactics. Overseeing the competition between these two sides are journalists and columnists who cast their interpretation based on their own frames of reference. After the original politician, opponents, and journalists put forward their definition of the candidate, the dominant personal narrative that emerges is judged by voters according to their own personal values and beliefs based on what they want in a leader.

Such would be the case for Stéphane Dion. It may be safe to assume that winning the leadership was a high point for this politician as he stood before the nation as head of Canada's most successful political party. The next step was to present himself as ready to lead the country. As such, the effort to define the new Liberal leader began the moment Dion stepped on the stage to accept his nomination. In this new role, he faced a crowd beyond those embroiled in the Quebec sovereignty debate and the environmental movement. For many in English Canada and national media focused on the two former frontrunners, Dion was an unknown product. Thus, he needed to introduce himself to the Canadian public.

The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the narrative of Stéphane Dion was created and reinterpreted after his nomination as Liberal leader. Through an analysis of the portrayal of the Liberal leader in the English print media, the study determines how the candidate, his opponents, and journalists interacted to create a dominant personal narrative of Dion. Since this occurred during the heightened tension of a minority Parliament, the thesis also examines what role this political setting may have played in defining the Liberal leader.

Thesis Overview

The next chapter, Literature Review, outlines the epistemology behind the research. It begins with a section called “The Individual Self”, which discusses William James’ (1890) theory of the consciousness of self and George H. Mead’s (1934) notions of the self and the communicative gesture. These theories highlight the belief that one’s self extends beyond the body and is created through social interaction. As the self is created through experience, narratives provide the self with the ability to organize these experiences and come to a better understanding of the self. This discussion is followed with an examination of Erving Goffman’s (1959) theories on the presentation of self and the various characters individuals play according to social interaction.

The above information is then put in the context of a political leader in a section called “The Political Self”. Here, the discussion focuses on the importance of image to a politician and how one must seek to present himself or herself as prepared to lead. This segment is followed with a section called “The Coauthored Self”, which, using Ochs and Capps’ (1996) discussion of coauthored narratives, outlines how the politician’s narrative

faces competition from a number of sources. The section looks at the political environment as a mediated field where opponents seek to destroy their rivals' reputation, while journalists view the spectacle from their own frames of reference. As Just and Crigler (2000) argue in this section, how the political leader manages these sources determines his or her overall image in the end. All of the above information is then combined into a final section called "Theoretical Framework", which utilizes the theoretical elements to guide the direction of the thesis.

Chapter 3, Methodology, begins with a description of the research design, followed by a definition of personal and dominant narratives, and an analysis of the medium of study. The chapter then outlines the research questions before providing a description of the data collection methods to be engaged along with ethical considerations for the thesis.

Based on the theoretical framework in the Literature Review, a methodology is developed to examine how Stéphane Dion's personal narrative was created and reinterpreted in the mediated environment of a minority Parliament. A qualitative research design is used, which utilizes a microscopic conceptual level approach to focus specifically on the portrayal of Dion. Using inductive reasoning, it is inferred that through studying political events, along with the characterizations and descriptions made about the Liberal leader, determinations about his personal narrative can be made.

The data collection methods are a textual analysis, which uses a narrative criticism method of rhetorical criticism, along with in-depth interviews. The first method analyzes the personal narratives of Dion found in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Canadian Press* from December 3, 2006 to September 6, 2008. Following this study,

some of the journalists who wrote the articles analyzed in the textual analysis are interviewed. In addition, a senior Conservative strategist is interviewed to provide a better understanding behind his party's counter-narrative against Dion. As the study is based on how the Liberal leader sought to present himself, advisors who were senior organizers for Dion's campaign team offer their perspective.

Chapter 4, Findings and Analysis: Narrative Criticism, details the results of the narrative criticism. This analysis follows the significant political events that helped frame Dion's overall personal narrative. It outlines how Dion was introduced to the public as an honest politician who was in touch with the leading issue of the time. Less than two months later, the dominant narrative changes with the introduction of negative advertisements from his opponents, which offer an alternative perspective to the Liberal leader. This narrative builds strength as it gains prominence in the coverage of journalists and earns the endorsement of Liberals who increasingly criticize their leader. With a party hindered with infighting and fundraising issues, Dion loses the ability to challenge his opponents and cements his personal narrative as a weak leader.

Following the narrative criticism, Chapter 5, Findings and Analysis: In-depth Interviews, begins with a synopsis of the interviews with journalists. These individuals discuss how Dion's narrative changed, the role of the Conservative advertisements, Dion's performance in question period, the difficulties an Opposition leader faces, Liberal criticism, and how a minority Parliament affects media coverage. Following this are the results of an interview with the senior Conservative strategist who organized the "Not a leader" campaign against Dion. He discusses how this narrative was formed, the importance of a narrative in today's political climate, and the role of journalists and Dion

himself in the success of the Conservative campaign. This chapter then provides a summary of interviews with two senior Liberal strategists. They discuss the significance of image, Dion's team at the beginning and how the Conservative ads caught them off guard, Dion's personal narrative vis-à-vis his role in Canadian history, his decision to focus on the environment, the challenges for an Opposition leader, media coverage, internal Liberal criticism, and what lessons these individuals learned from their experience with Dion.

The chapter concludes with a section called "Significant Findings", which provides an overall analysis of the picture of Dion that emerged and the importance placed on certain personal narratives over others as political events unfolded. These details are related back to the various theories outlined in Chapter 2. Overall, the sources interviewed in Chapter 5 aid in verifying the results of the textual analysis, while painting the picture of a politician that did not have the political or communication skills necessary to present himself as able to lead the country.

Finally, Chapter 6, Conclusion, begins with a section called "Discussion", which looks back on the findings and analysis chapters and outlines how the study answers the research questions posed in the methodology. It is then argued that the study provides an understanding of the difficulties a new Opposition leader faces under the intense political atmosphere of a minority Parliament. This leads to questions of what a politician must do to accurately present himself or herself to the public, and what the emphasis on communication and performance means in terms of Canadian political culture. A "Thesis Summary" then follows, which reviews the previous chapters. The conclusion ends with

a section called “Limitations and Implications”, which discusses the limitations of this study and areas that can be researched in the future.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

When a politician attempts to present himself or herself to the public, the conversation is not necessarily a straightforward discussion between voter and candidate. Instead, s/he must reach voters through an environment of varying interpretations and perspectives. To understand how a politician's image may be portrayed and shaped, this thesis draws on theories by William James (1890) and George H. Mead (1934) into the creation of the individual self, accompanied by threads of knowledge discussing narratives coupled with Erving Goffman's (1959) presentation of self. The background into the individual then leads to an analysis of literature studying political image, leadership, opposition, and political journalism. The chapter then concludes with a theoretical framework, which uses the theoretical elements to outline how the public's image of a political leader is the product of the interaction between these elements.

The Individual Self

A century after William James (1842-1910) first published his two-volume account *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890, Leary (1990) wrote that the philosopher's chapter on the "consciousness of self" still remained quite remarkable. Indeed, as an essay in a book dedicated to James' publication, Leary notes that this work was a source of great influence in psychology, which cleared "the road to our current understanding and treatment of the human self and personality" (Ibid: 124).

Most relevant to the discussion herein would be James' classifications of the structure of the self; a definition he expanded beyond previous conceptions. At the start of the chapter, he states, "*In its widest possible sense . . . a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his*" (1981: 279; *emphasis is in original*). The author's use of italics and capital letters reflects the importance he places in this point. The self, states James, not only includes one's body and "psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account" (Ibid). Such external aspects can affect one's disposition and trigger emotions.

All of the above components play a role in the various "constituents" of the self, which James divides into "the material Self", "social Self", "spiritual Self", and "pure Ego" (1981: 280). Regarding the social self, James states this is based on "the recognition . . . [a man] gets from his mates" (Ibid: 281). He says, individuals "have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind" (Ibid). An individual does not possess a single social self. Rather, "*a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him*" (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*). In addition, each person has as many such selves as the number of groups of people he cares about – showing a "different side of himself to each of these different groups" (Ibid: 282). The social self also encompasses the relations an individual has with a loved one and that person's "*fame, good or bad, and his honor*" (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*). In terms of the latter, "It is his image in the eyes of his own 'set,' which exalts or condemns him as he conforms or not to certain requirements that may not be made of one in another walk of life" (Ibid).

In reviewing James' (1981) concept of the social self, Leary notes that previous studies treated "the mind (or soul) as either an indivisible, autonomous unit or as an accretion of discrete, associated ideas" (1990: 109). James, meanwhile, "was quite innovative in mapping the *larger* dimensions of the self" (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*), extending it beyond internal aspects to external forces surrounding the individual. According to Leary, James was preoccupied with this study of the self and the philosopher spent his remaining years dedicated to the topic. However, he never felt his analysis was complete. As such, his thinking was passed on to generations of scholars.⁴

One such successor was University of Chicago professor George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Although Leary laments that his "reading of James is somewhat questionable" in certain regards, he states that Mead was a "major force in promoting and developing" his work on the social self (1990: 121). According to Kashima, Gurusurthy, Ouschan, Chong, and Mattingly, "James did not theorize fully where the bulk of its content and process come from. . . . Mead augmented the Jamesian self by providing an answer to the question" (2007: 74). States Leary, "Building up a theory of the self on the initiating notion of the communicative gesture, Mead helped to establish a strong and lasting tradition of the social psychology of the self" (1990: 121).⁵

⁴ According to psychology historian Edwin G. Boring, James's work placed him alongside the likes of Darwin, Helmholtz, and Freud as the "four great men" in psychology's history (cited in Leary, 1990: 119).

⁵ Although it has been noted that Mead took the scholarly torch from James, his work is also intertwined with others such as John Dewey and Charles Horton Cooley. Dewey eulogized Mead at his funeral saying, "I dislike to think what my own thinking might have been were it not for the seminal ideas which I derived from him" (1931: 311). In the forward to Cooley's book *Human Nature and the Social Order*, Mead notes how Cooley followed James' idea of the self – and clearly had a place in his own studies – stating, "Its development is wholly dependent upon another or others who are necessarily as immediate as the self" (cited in Cooley, 1967: xxiv-xxv). Nevertheless, it is Mead's views of the self that are often cited in what was later referred to as "symbolic interactionism".

The blueprint of Mead's thinking can be found in his 1934 book *Mind, Self & Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Here, he traces how gestures and simple communication transform into language, which leads to an awareness of the social world beyond the self through the understanding of meaning. "The self", states Mead, "is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity" (1955: 135). In comparing it to the body, he says, "The self has the characteristic that it is an object to itself, and that characteristic distinguishes it from other objects and from the body" (Ibid: 136). Becoming "an object to itself" requires a person to experience himself or herself "indirectly" from others "of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs" (Ibid: 138) – external forces referred to as an "other" for an outside individual or the "generalized other" for the group at large.

Communication, vocal or otherwise, is the catalyst in this procedure. In responding to a gesture stimulus from another, the individual must attempt to step outside of his or her self and consider that person's view in order to determine how the response will reflect on one's self. According to Mead, "We are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as others see us. . . . We are calling out in the other person something we are calling out in ourselves, so that unconsciously we take over these attitudes" (1955: 68-69). In this process, one is basically trying to see one's self as another does. This is an "indirect" procedure since one cannot get inside the mind of the other, but an attempt is made to see through another's eyes, to use the cliché. It is with the conversation of gestures that an individual begins to see himself or herself in a self-reflective sense. According to Mead,

So far as that type of communication is a part of behaviour it at least introduces a self. . . . [I]t is where one does respond to that which he addresses to another and where that response of his own becomes a part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself but responds to himself, talks and replies to himself as truly as the other person replies to him, that we have behaviour in which the individuals become objects to themselves.
(1955: 139)

Fundamentally, the self is created through the social relationships it encounters. States Mead, “The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience” (1955: 140). The full development occurs in two stages: the first comes through encounters with other individuals in “specific social acts”, while the second involves the self “constituted not only by an organization of . . . particular individual attitudes, but also by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other” (Ibid: 158). The individual thus organizes and reorganizes this collection of attitudes gained through experience with others and society as a whole to create the self.

The decades since Mead’s death in 1931 have brought criticism and revision to his work. Felson (1981) notes that “symbolic interactionists” (a term later used to describe the sociological approach taken by scholars such as Mead) may tend to over-rely on the role of significant others in self development. He points to Bem’s self-perception hypothesis, which argues that individuals judge “themselves based on observations of their own behavior and internal states, and the contexts in which these occur” (Felson, 1981: 69). Callero also highlights how some postmodernists and poststructuralists believe that the self “is simply a political artifact of the European Enlightenment” (2003: 117). He cites Foucault who discussed how power arrangements created notions of the self,

saying, “The individual is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects” (cited in Callero, 2003: 117). Baldwin (1981) also argues that Mead’s emphasis on a stimulus-response may not be a sufficient explanation for human behavior. Instead, he stresses the importance in examining the relationship between stimuli, responses, and consequences. Despite this, Baldwin joins other scholars (e.g. Callero, 2003; Dunn, 1997; Rose, 1969) in arguing that analysts of the self would be wise to recall the foundations Mead laid many years ago, as they remain pertinent to modern discourse.

One line of study that echoes Mead’s insight is work on narratives and the presentation of self. In an extensive review of the literature surrounding narratives and self, Ochs and Capps argue that, “Personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience. In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable” (1996: 20). Narrative allows humans to organize memories and experiences as a way of making sense of life in general and their own lives in particular (Bruner, 1991). Such stories are not necessarily truth, rather “versions of reality” that embody “one or more points of view rather than objective, omniscient accounts” (Ochs & Capps, 1996: 21). As Bruner contends, at best narratives can only realize “verisimilitude” (1991: 4). All the same, White notes that these stories offer a solution to translating “*knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning” (1981: 1; *emphasis is in original*).

The study of this topic has its toes dipped in sociology, psychology, linguistics, and literary analysis. Based on previous literature, Bruner (1991) succinctly details the characteristics of narratives. Among these, he suggests that narratives detail events that occur over a period of time. Although not necessarily time in the 24-hour sense, they

feature a sequence or chain placing events in some type of order evolving around a particular theme “that is in some sense generic” (1991: 7). To make these sequences a narrative – and worth telling at all – there must be a breach or deviation in the normative setting or the “canonical script” (Ibid: 11). Such stories regard how people act in a given situation and whatever happens to them relates to their position in this setting. Bruner suggests that such “happenings” must be consistent to the protagonist’s “intentional states while so engaged”, which he describes as their “beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on” (Ibid: 7). Although there may be no prediction as to how this individual will act – it is presupposed the individual acts based on free will – their “intentional states” provide a “basis for *interpreting* why a character acted as he or she did” (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*). The context of the narrative itself and its relevance to an audience determines how such a story will be received or told.

According to Ochs and Capps, “An important challenge to humanity is to recognize that lives are the pasts we tell ourselves” (1996: 21). It is in the autobiography that the person places himself or herself as the focus of attention in the narrative. Such stories are a “curious” thing, states Bruner:

It is an account given by a narrator in the here and now about a protagonist bearing his name who existed in the there and then, the story terminating in the present when the protagonist fuses with the narrator. . . . But the larger story reveals a strong rhetorical strand, as if justifying why it was necessary that the life had gone a particular way. The Self as narrator not only recounts but justifies. And the Self as protagonist is always, as it were, pointing to the future.

(1990: 121)

Ochs and Capps contend that these stories provide “an opportunity for fragmented self-understanding”, which deal with only “certain memories, concerns, and expectations”

(1996: 22). Such narratives “are apprehended by *partial* selves, and narratives so apprehended access only fragments of experience” (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*). Nevertheless, these stories allow a self to reconcile these pieces while making sense of their place in the past in order to understand who they are in the present and who they may be in the future. Such self-definition inevitably intersects with one’s relations with those around him or her and society as a whole. As Ochs and Capps state: “[W]e define our selves through our past, present, future, and imagined involvements with people and things; our selves extend into these worlds, and they into us” (Ibid: 30).

Such a definition to the external environment ultimately depends on how the self is presented. In Act 1, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* the depressed Antonio sighs, “I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano; A stage where every man must play a part, And mine a sad one”. Such a metaphor is a fitting description for Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-1982) who describes self presentation under the analogy of a theatre performance. He argues that humans naturally strive to manage the impressions they give off in social interactions, akin to an actor playing a character in front of an audience. According to Goffman, “[W]hen an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation” (1959: 15). Like Ochs and Capps’ discussion of the fragmented selves displayed in a narrative, Goffman notes that the individual’s performance may contain “at least a few facts which, if introduced . . . would discredit or at least weaken the claims about self that the performer was attempting to project” (Ibid: 209).

For Goffman, the individual is both a performer and a character. As a performer, the individual is “a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of

staging a performance” (1959: 252). In our daily lives, we seek positive relationships with others and are aware of the shame and embarrassment that can result from a failed presentation. Given this, the individual strives to ensure their performance appeals to the audience. At the same time, the performer attempts to display the proper character for the social situation, in a theme akin to James’ social self discussed earlier. The individual seeks to present his or her self as a particular character, which will in turn lead the audience to perceive this character as the individual’s self. However, Goffman points out that although it may appear that the self dwells within the individual, it is in fact created by the situation in which it is displayed. According to Goffman, “The self, then as a performed character, . . . is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited” (Ibid: 252-253).

The Political Self

In a review of the various texts on the presentation of self, Buss and Briggs credit Goffman for laying strong bedrock for further research. They state, “Following Goffman, many social psychologists have accepted that ‘All the world’s a stage,’ thereby equating onstage behavior and self-presentation . . . with all social behavior” (1984: 1310). They note that successive scholarship has taken Goffman’s work further arguing that self-presentation may extend beyond social interactions with a real audience to one that is imaginary. As Buss and Briggs suggest, it can be assumed that “people are always onstage” (Ibid: 1311). However, they note that social behavior requires reconciling the

management of appearances with one's individual personal traits, which they refer to as "one's personal needs, impulses, and dispositional tendencies" (Ibid).

In regards to the former, one dimension of the presentation of self, Buss and Briggs (1984) highlight, is "pretense". Using the theatre metaphor, this relates to the various characters actors play when they step on the stage with the assumption that once they return to their dressing room they become their normal self. Individuals with a high degree of pretense in their relations "regard social interaction as some sort of game that one plays to win" (Ibid: 1312). Success in this "game" can lead to rewards such as "money, privileges, status, and praise" (Ibid).⁶

Based on the assumption that pretense occurs under situations where individuals seek a reward, Buss and Briggs state that the clear example of a high degree of this characteristic would be in the politician. They argue that this position "requires its participants to speak before audiences, issue public statements, and in general, live their working lives in a fish bowl" (1984: 1313). However, they note that since impression management of politicians is "so well known . . . we discount much of the stage-managed behavior of politicians and tend not to trust them" (Ibid).

Although it may be easy to disparage the politician's display as stage management, it can be argued that they are simply conducting social interaction with a far larger audience. In the "all-too-human task of staging a performance", Goffman notes that the individual is cautious for "he has a capacity for deeply felt shame, leading him to minimize the chances he takes of exposure" (1959: 253). Such is the situation for the high

⁶ Buss and Briggs outline "six kinds of deception" (1984: 1313) individuals portray to appeal to their audience. These include presenting oneself with positive social traits and abilities, motivation, intelligence, high level of status, and a sense of morality.

school student chatting with friends, the job applicant, the individual in a meeting with coworkers, the councilor in a town hall debate, the Member of Parliament seeking to represent a particular riding, and the party leader hoping to appeal to the nation as a whole. For these examples, the proverbial “other” in the social interaction grows in scope from a few friends and coworkers to an entire population of voters. At the same time, so does the risk of shame in such an interaction. As such, in the latter scenario, the leader is attempting to create a political self or public image, which, to use Mead’s words, appeals to, understands, and takes on “the social attitudes of the generalized other” (1955: 158).

In such a situation, the management of image is essential. According to Scammell, “Parties/candidates . . . *must* attend to political image if they want to be serious players in the political market” (1999: 729; *emphasis is in original*). It is the political leader that is responsible for safeguarding this image, as political attention tends to focus on the top of the party hierarchy. One of the more frequently cited examples of this would be the status granted to the American president. However, parliamentary democracies, which distribute power based on a party’s ability to garner the most seats, have also shifted their gaze to a contest of leadership. In an analysis of the marketing of British Prime Minister Tony Blair for the 2005 U.K. general election, Scammell (2007) highlights how focus group testing found Blair personally was pulling down the brand perception of his party. As well, Soderlund, Romanow, Briggs, and Wagenberg (1984) note that the Canadian electoral scene has shifted its interest to whom will be the next prime minister. Despite the fact that Canadian leaders have always played a significant role, the focus on leaders has reached the height that “the individual candidates for parliament (of whom after all

the party leader is but one) have been relegated to a relatively insignificant role” (Ibid: 129).

Scammell (1999) suggests there are similarities between the marketing of politicians and that of service-industries that sell a product the customer may be uncertain of (e.g. legal aid or financial advice). In these situations, successful marketing focuses more on gaining the trust of the consumer since they are unable to see or feel a physical product before sale. As such, the company’s reputation is essential: “In the service model this . . . [variable] determines whether or not the product will be considered seriously at all” (Ibid: 728). Similar to Ochs and Capps notion that the personal narrative is “born out of experience and gives shape to experience” (1996: 20), Scammell argues that for politicians and political parties, “Reputation, based on record and credible promises, is the *only thing of substance* that a party can promote to potential voters” (1999: 729; *emphasis is in original*).

As the individual takes the reins of the party apparatus, s/he must define himself or herself as worthy of the leadership role. To do so requires coming to an understanding of the public’s preconception of what a leader should be. Max Weber suggests that in looking back in history, “natural leaders” (1967: 245) have been found to possess the intangible quality of charisma. Such individuals are perceived to be “holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody” (Ibid). Other scholars have deemed these leaders to be “visionary”, “transformational”, and “inspirational” (House & Howell, 1992: 81). According to House, Spangler, and Woycke (1991), charisma is not necessarily a personality trait – although some traits may inspire charisma – but a relationship between

a leader and follower. They point to an example listed by Bryan R. Wilson who said, “If a man runs naked down the street proclaiming that he alone can save others from impending doom, and he immediately wins a following, then he is a charismatic leader”. If this does not happen, “he is simply a lunatic” (cited in House, Spangler & Woycke, 1991: 366). In their “charismatic leadership theory”, House and Howell argue that “[s]uch leaders transform the needs, values, preferences, desires and aspirations of followers from self-interests to collective interests” (1992: 82). In addition, these individuals “cause followers to become highly committed to the leader’s mission, to make significant personal sacrifices . . . and to perform above and beyond the call of duty” (Ibid).⁷

The Coauthored Self

In their discussion of narratives, Ochs and Capps (1996) note how one’s personal story can be coauthored and revised through social interaction. As an example, they suggest that questions arise within families and communities over who has the right to narrate. For instance, it may seem more pertinent for parents to tell the stories of their children’s experience, since a child might not be seen as a competent storyteller. This concept of coauthorship also involves others deciding what should be narrated. Regarding children,

⁷ These authors join Max Weber in pointing out that charisma should be treated as a neutral concept, since the description has been applied to leaders whose moral standards have ranged from good to evil. House and Howell (1992) break this down stating there can be both “personalized” and “socialized” charismatic leadership. The first refers to leadership that is more authoritative and dominant, which is based on self-interest and exploitation. The second type looks to enhance the collective rather than the leader’s personal self-interest. Although both types of leaders are seen as displaying high levels of self-confidence and a need for power and influence, House and Howell note that studies have shown the second type to display more sensitive “feminine” characteristics while seeking to influence followers without being dominant.

they give the example of a parent initiating a particular narrative (e.g. “Tell your father what you did in science class today”). In so doing, parents “attempt to determine the timing, content, and teller of narrative topics” (Ibid: 34). Ochs and Capps also argue that the primary recipient of the narrative plays a role in its form, as it offers feedback to the story. Such responses may include questions, teasing, refutation, or ignoring the narrative altogether. This feedback could force the narrator to change the story content, theme, and focus, or force him or her to find a new recipient altogether if the narrative is ignored. Ultimately, the ability for varying sources to shape and control the structure and topic of a narrative comes to reflect power arrangements and social hierarchies. According to Ochs and Capps, “Differential control over content, genre, timing, and reciprocity is also critical to the selves that come to life through narrative” (Ibid: 35).

Likewise, the construction of a leader’s narrative is a collaborative matter. According to Just and Crigler, “Leadership images . . . are built collectively by leaders and their relevant constituencies – elected officials, the news media, and the public” (2000: 179). This process inevitably begins with the leader and his or her advisors, party cohorts, and friendly surrogates outside of the political party. Like a sport, politics is a team affair that requires a collective effort to promote each party’s captain. Goffman highlights the importance of the team in presentation stating, “[T]he definition of the situation projected by a particular participant is an integral part of a projection that is fostered and sustained by the intimate co-operation of more than one participant” (1959: 77-78). In this relationship, Goffman argues it is essential the team maintains discipline and loyalty; otherwise, the consequence can be quite detrimental:

Some scenes occur when teammates can no longer countenance each other's inept performance and blurt out immediate public criticism of the very individuals with whom they ought to be in dramaturgical cooperation. Such misconduct is often devastating to the performance which the disputants ought to be presenting; one effect of the quarrel is to provide the audience with a backstage view, and another is to leave them with the feeling that something is surely suspicious about a performance when those who know it best do not agree.

(1959: 210-211)

Such an incident can be disastrous to a team's appearance as a whole and especially harmful to the individual seeking power.

Under this competition scenario, the role of one's rivals is to redefine their opponent. According to Edelman, "The effective gesture for creating difference is the constitution of opposition for an incumbent or aspiring leader" (1988: 49). He argues that such is the case in a democracy as it is in a dictatorship where the leader seeks to define himself or herself as different from some outside evil. Edelman states, "Political oppositions create each other by invoking the differences between them. Construction of symbols of that difference inevitably follows and helps reify the alternative" (Ibid: 50).

Such differences may be based on ideology, policy, or faint nuances amplified to seem significant (Edelman, 1988). Recalling Scammell's discussion of image, a politician's most cherished possession is his or her reputation. With federal elections focused strictly on leaders, a political party's public image is then tightly wrapped around whoever is in charge. Thus, to be successful, marketing theory would suggest a party should seek to destroy its competitor's main asset: the reputation of its leader.

One of the most glaring tactics utilized in this strategy is the use of negative advertising. Despite the objections of many politicians over "going negative", this method often seems to sneak into a campaign. The oft-cited reason for this is that the

strategy works and negative ads help lower voters' perceptions of the target (Fridkin & Kenney, 2008). As reprehensible as they may seem, such campaigning fits into Ansolabehere and Iyengar's view of an election as a zero-sum game – where one candidate's loss is the other's gain. Thus, one side engages in negative advertising ultimately to harm or discredit an opponent, which translates into a gain for the source of the ad (cited in Procter & Schenck-Hamlin, 1996).

Whether the ad is effective or not is another issue altogether. A negative ad that offends or insults its audience can turn the focus on the source rather than the target, creating what is referred to as a boomerang effect or backlash. Furthermore, the ad can create a "victim syndrome" effect that leads to the target actually looking better in the end. Of course, such advertising can also smear both the source and target in what is known as a "double impairment". (Haddock & Zanna, 1997; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008). In other words, there are *good* bad ads and there are *bad* bad ads.

From a Canadian perspective, the frequently cited example of a poorly received negative ad is the Progressive Conservatives' 1993 commercial against then Liberal leader Jean Chrétien. With only a couple weeks remaining in the campaign, the Conservatives released an ad that appeared to criticize the facial paralysis of the Liberal leader. Running alongside close-up images of Chrétien's face were comments such as, "I personally would be embarrassed if he were to become prime minister" and "Is this a prime minister?" After considerable public outcry, the ads were pulled within a day. (Haddock & Zanna, 1997). The Conservatives later went on to be devastated in the federal election due to a number of factors including the advertisements.

Fridkin and Kenney suggest that the effectiveness of an ad is based mainly on the “variance in the content and tone of negative information” (2008: 695). They note that a variety of research indicates the relevance of the message to the viewer is one of the essential elements of persuasion. With audiences constantly inundated by messages (both political and commercial), the significance of the ad to their own lives will relate to how it is retained. The other factor, tone, will also affect how strongly the message reaches the target audience. According to Fridkin and Kenney, civility is seen as one of the base elements of normal public discussion. An ad that breaches this norm can be both surprising and shocking – factors that bring attention to “the novel stimulus” (Ibid: 699). As such, they argue, an ad that is both shocking (or “uncivil” as they call it) and highly relevant to an audience will be very effective.

However, the battle to define one’s opponent is not a straight discussion between politicians and voters. According to Bennett and Entman (2005), today is the age of “mediated politics”. Although traditional door-to-door campaigning, conventions, and speeches continue, “politics have reached a point where governance, along with a host of related processes such as opinion formation, could not occur in their present forms without various uses of media” (2005: 1). Johansson agrees with this sentiment, noting that the “media . . . organize and provoke political events” (2008: 398). In this mediated atmosphere, “the media are one of the main spaces of political action. . . . This happens to the extent that one could say that the legitimation of politics is partly obtained through media” (Ibid). Stanyer and Wring continue this logic and argue that the media are “indispensable” to politics, providing “the public with insights into the world of politics and enable politicians and parties to address a mass audience” (2004: 1). As such,

recalling Goffman's theatre metaphor, it can be argued that in this "mediated" atmosphere, newspaper, television, radio, and the Internet offer the stage for today's politics.

In her article on political marketing, Scammell notes that the media complicates the relationship between candidates and voters. She states, "The media are a more pervasive and active presence in politics than in any other service market, [and] are clearly the most important channels of political information and crucial for political image" (1999: 729). O'Shaughnessy takes this further in arguing that the comparisons between business and politics only goes so far. The political arena is much too complicated for marketing techniques to be seen as a "panacea" (2001: 1047). In this setting, the media are "an independent communications power centre, . . . which . . . [political marketers] may be able to influence but cannot control" (Ibid: 1050).

As an example, O'Shaughnessy references the 1993 Progressive Conservative advertisements about Chrétien discussed earlier. Here, the media reinterpreted this communication product as "an attack on physical disability; thus, to be Tory was to hate people with disabilities" (2001: 1054). It was through this "interpretive framework" that most voters experienced the ads (Ibid).⁸ According to O'Shaughnessy, such an example suggests that "media and the press, with their own agendas of information manufacture, are often more influential on public opinion" (Ibid: 1047).

As discussion emphasizes such words as "agendas", the reaction for some critics is to point to ideological biases in the media based on corporate ownership or the

⁸ According to Haddock and Zanna, "after their initial broadcast, the advertisements became the source of widespread criticism . . . and they were removed within 24 [hours]" (1997: 206). Nevertheless, images from the ads continued to be aired in news reports, which is how O'Shaughnessy (2001) argues that most voters were exposed to the ads.

supposed liberal disposition of journalists. Schudson (1995) agrees that both the left and right may have some pertinent arguments, but he argues that they are missing the crux of the issue. He states, “An alternative view is that the media are not politically but professionally biased” (Ibid: 9). Such a perspective joins other scholars in arguing that it is the structures, norms, and conventions journalism adheres to that characterize how the news is reported.

Hence, it is pertinent to discuss the notion of objectivity from a journalistic viewpoint. According to McKercher and Cumming,⁹ “If the term is taken at face value . . . it seems obvious that it is an admirable journalistic goal” (1998: 22). At its base, objectivity can be defined as a way of seeing the world outside of personal biases or preconceptions. In detailing the various “aspects of ‘good’ journalism”, Eid (2008) cites Kieran who notes the importance of being impartial in the discovery of truth. He argues, “A failure of impartiality in journalism is a failure to respect one of the methods required in order to fulfill the goal of journalism: getting at the truth of the matter” (cited in Eid, 2008: 110). According to Eid, research has shown that “*good* journalism” is based on “principles and cornerstones” such as “truth telling, accuracy, fairness, balance, verification, and maintaining context” (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*).

However, McKercher and Cumming acknowledge, “full objectivity is impossible to achieve” (1998: 22). Inevitably, they note perceptions are shaped by “cultural conditioning”, “language”, and “(in the case of journalists) institutional practices and values that come to be taken for granted” (Ibid). Nevertheless, they argue that reporters

⁹ McKercher and Cumming’s *The Canadian Reporter: News Writing and Reporting* was selected to offer a reporter’s perspective on objectivity as this textbook has been used to teach future journalists at such schools as Carleton University in Ottawa.

should come to understand these limits and still “strive for objectivity” (Ibid). To do so, they list four patterns of journalism related to this concept:

- fairness, in which major points of view on a current issue are given serious treatment and aired in more-or-less equal time;
- neutral, unloaded language, especially in stories by reporters without expert credentials;
- professional detachment in manner, in which reporters at news conferences, interviews or public meetings are careful not to seem partisan; and
- detachment from causes, in which reporters in their private lives are urged (or required) not to identify themselves publicly with controversial views, since readers might assume the reporter or publication is biased.

(1998: 23)

Efforts to achieve objectivity also come down to the amount of research put into a story.

“In part it is a matter of trying to identify biases or preconceptions, of setting aside a desire to promote particular causes and focusing instead on *finding out*” (McKercher & Cumming, 1998: 23; *emphasis is in original*). However, in the end the authors note that “[f]ew journalists attain the wisdom that will allow a future generation to judge them fully objective, but that does not mean they should abandon the attempt” (Ibid).

Nevertheless, other scholars argue that the journalist’s ambition for objectivity is hypocritical to the narrative structure of journalism. Woodward contends that the term itself should be purged from the culture of news. He says, “As a value for journalism, objectivity shapes expectations that cut deeper than perhaps we know” (2000: 139). Striving for this goal, is in effect asking “for the impossible” (Ibid: 140). In a paper stressing the importance of narrative analysis, Cornfield concurs with this statement, arguing that despite a reporter’s best intentions to be objective, “her story carries forward

terms and scenes loaded with the argumentative intentions of news sources and actors” (1992: 48).

According to Woodward (2000), the narrative organization of journalism begins from its cornerstone foundations of the five Ws – who, what, when, where, and why. Although this may provide the appearance of an objective endeavor, he argues that this is an illusion: “[T]he act of assessing and assigning motives defies any neutral intentions. . . . What we end up with in popular journalism is a running account of plausible relationships that will give an event significance and meaning” (Ibid: 129). This statement echoes Bruner’s earlier sentiment that narratives allow individuals to organize memories and experiences in order to make sense of life. Such logic can be applied to journalism as Woodward contends, “The process of narration blends what we know with what we think, imposing on moments of time a self-contained sequence with a dominant theme” (Ibid).

Woodward (2000) highlights three purposes narratives serve as a way of portraying human events. To begin with, he notes that this device “provides a context for our urge to find closure to serious conflicts” (Ibid: 130). As such, they lead to an inevitable final conclusion to an issue. Second, narratives bring clarity to the chaos of reality by “clearing away a good deal of ambiguity about the complex relationships that naturally exist between institutions and people” (Ibid). Finally, he states, “both fictional and factual narratives play to a basic human impulse to judge the actions and motives of others” (Ibid).

Regarding news narratives specifically, Woodward (2000) suggests that journalists tend to rely on certain themes, conventions, and presuppositions in their

reporting. He says, “In ways that are both obvious and mysterious, any information that is conveyed in a narrative context can usually be made to fit into a number of preexisting and comfortable habits of thoughts” (Ibid: 131). As such, he argues that this gives life to particular stereotypes and myths as reporters structure their stories within the cultural definition of news. According to Schudson, “News in a newspaper or on television has a relationship to the ‘real world,’ not only in content but in form; that is, in the way the world is incorporated into unquestioned and unnoticed conventions of narration” (1982: 98). Whether referred to as a “frame” (Edelman, 1993), “schemas” (Jamieson, 1992) or “preconceptions” (Schudson, 2007), certain truths eventually tend to become axiomatic in reporting.

Examples of this phenomenon can be found across various genres of news. In his account of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, David Cullen wrote that many of the so-called “truths” behind this tragedy grew from the crisis reporting as the incident unfolded. He states:

We remember Columbine as a pair of outcast Goths from the Trench Coat Mafia snapping and tearing through their high school hunting down jocks to settle a long-running feud. Almost none of that happened. No Goths, no outcasts, nobody snapping. No targets, no feud, and no Trench Coat Mafia. Most of those elements existed at Columbine – which is what gave them such currency. They just had nothing to do with the murders.

(2009: 149)

Regarding the Trench Coat Mafia in particular, Cullen argues that this took hold in the media “because it was colorful, memorable, and fit the existing myth of the school

shooter as outcast loner” (2009: 149).¹⁰ Following the murders, rampant speculation gave birth to myths, which then reverberated between victims and media creating apparent truths about this disaster. Although later disproved by investigators, Cullen laments that many of these myths continue to be taken “for granted” (Ibid).

Political reporting contains its own presuppositions. One of the most frequently cited criticisms is that journalism tends to view politics under the frame of a contest. In her analysis of the American experience, Jamieson (1992) notes that the analogy of the game, horse race, or war dominates the discussion in the media. Under this context, “a single perspective – the strategy schema – is the ‘script’ or ‘story form’ through which reporters, scholars, and occasionally politicians most often invite us to view political elections” (Ibid: 165-166). Returning to the theatre analogy discussed earlier, “In the strategy schema, candidates are seen as the performers, reporters as theatrical critics, the audience as spectators. The goal of the performer is to ‘win’ the votes of the electorate projected throughout the performance in polls” (Ibid: 166). Such polls provide benchmarks of strength that separate the front-runners from the underdogs, and determine “whether the candidate will be described as achieving goals or ‘trying’ to achieve them, and how the candidate’s staged and unstaged activities will be interpreted” (Ibid: 166-167). Using this perspective, she states the emphasis is on winning and losing, rather than who may better serve the public.

Such assumptions may be partially rooted in how the reporter views himself or herself within the political process. In a similar vein as Jamieson’s “theatre critic”,

¹⁰ Ironically, Cullen (2009) notes that one of the most truthful accounts of this event was sent to press the afternoon of the shooting. This *Rocky Mountain News* article chronicled the indiscriminate nature of the attack while being removed of the conjecture that was to come.

Schudson comments that American journalists tend to see themselves as the interpreters of politics. He says, “[A]lthough as journalists they hold to principles of objective reporting, they nevertheless view their role as involving some fundamental translation and interpretation of political acts to a public ill-equipped to sort out for itself the meaning of events” (1982: 99). Based on such conventions, it is then determined that meaning may be found in assessing the motivations of the individuals operating within politics. “The journalist’s responsibility, as they see it, is to discover in the conscious plans of political actors the intentions that create political meanings” (Ibid).

However, Jamieson (1992) argues that regarding politics strictly under the gaze of strategy shifts focus from holding political leaders accountable to the race for political power. This can be detrimental as it provides the public with information on who may be winning the game without informing them of how the various political leaders plan to deal with the problems affecting the country. In addition, she suggests that voters are only invited “to critique a campaign as if it were a theatrical performance in which the audience is involved only as a spectator” (Ibid: 187). Such reporting only asks for audience participation in judging the appearance of the candidates. Also, she argues that the strategy focus asks the audience to rely on expert opinion and polls to interpret politics. “It is experts who take and report the meaning of polls, ‘experts’ who tell us who ‘won’ and ‘lost’ debates, ‘experts’ who evaluate the strategic successes and failures of the candidates” (Ibid). According to Jamieson, this reliance may separate the voters from making their own decisions.

In a conclusion to a study on the use of frames in the news, the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism and Princeton Survey Research Associates

noted that such devices are not in themselves harmful. “Frames are a necessary way of organizing information to make it more coherent and interesting and to put it into perspective” (1998: 13). However, they note journalists need greater balance in which frames they use, citing a “tendency to view the news through a combative frame” while minimizing the use of explanation stories, neglecting “points of agreement”, and limiting reports focused on policy (Ibid). In the end, they argue that “Journalists framing by rote may be failing to ask the right questions, choose the right stories and serve the public as they intend” (Ibid).

But what actually sinks in with the news recipient? Schudson notes that despite an extensive amount of research, it remains difficult “to measure media influence” (1995: 22). Nevertheless, he argues that the media have considerable influence in its ability to amplify the news. In so doing, a story on a newspaper’s front page or at the top of a television broadcast is a statement in itself that the issue has been granted importance over others. “It suggests that what is published has a call on public attention” (Ibid: 21). Indeed, he continues, “the greatest media effects may not be measurable influences on attitudes or beliefs produced by media slant but the range of information the media make available to individual human minds” (Ibid: 24-25).

Such a notion is also well received by advocates of agenda-setting theory, who argue that the media provide “salience” to certain issues keeping them in the public debate (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar & Rey, 1997). Later research has granted a second-level to this line of study, which contends that not only do the media shine a spotlight on certain areas, but it also casts attention to specific attributes surrounding these issues. This is done with the aid of the various frames journalists utilize. According

to McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar and Rey in paraphrasing Bernard Cohen, “[W]hile the media may not tell us *what to think*, the media are stunningly successful in telling us what to think *about*. . . . [T]he second level of agenda setting further suggests that the media also tell us *how to think* about some objects” (Ibid: 704; *emphasis is in original*).

In a study of mayoral candidates in the 1994 Taipei, Taiwan election, King (1997) found there was a significant correlation between the images attributed to the various candidates in the press to the images established in the minds of voters. For example, King noted that “Certain candidate attributes that were negatively reported in the press were also negatively perceived by the voters” (Ibid: 40). However, King also mentioned that voters’ candidate evaluations were also influenced by other factors such as partisan leanings, age, education level, and ethnicity. Nevertheless, the author suggested media coverage did indeed have an effect. In a similar study of a 1995 Spanish regional and municipal election, McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey (1997) found there was a correspondence between the pictures of candidates presented in the media through advertising and press reports and voters’ perceptions of the politicians. According to the authors, “The media may not dictate to voters what their opinion will be about political candidates, but they may well direct, guide or orient the content of what the public deems worthy of saying about them to a significant degree” (1997: 706).

Although there are various opinions on how directly journalists influence voters, it is still perceived that media play a role in the construction of a public image. In a study of the public images of U.S. presidents Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, Just and Crigler (2000) suggest that the creation of image is a mutual effort between the leader, other officials, and the media. They state, “[H]ow the president and other officials construct his

image finds its way into the press and then to the public, and how the media portray the president may influence how other officials and the public think about the president” (2000: 180).

Beyond the reward of being elected to office, a strong public image offers significant advantages. According to Just and Crigler, “Throughout an administration, the public’s image of the president is a crucial ingredient of political power” (2000: 180). They note that research has shown that popular leaders are perceived to be more powerful, which can allow them to push forward more controversial policy. At the same time, they argue that well-liked presidents tend to garner more positive media coverage and are granted more compassion when political crisis strike. For example, the authors note that Bill Clinton was able to ward off impeachment thanks to the strong image he cultivated as a successful president. However, a negative public image offered no such cushion for Richard Nixon when the Watergate crisis unfolded. Political leaders who are found to be out of favor with the public also tend to lose their power in promoting certain policies. (Just & Crigler, 2000).

Similar to Scammell’s discussion of a politician’s reputation, Just and Crigler (2000) state that the formation of a leader’s image is partly based on prior expectations the individual has set for himself or herself and also whatever success they may have had in crafting policy. They argue that a leader’s ability in the latter regard is more important than whatever personal attributes they may have. They state, “Images integrate traits, so much so that positive or negative evaluations of political competence can influence the assessment of what are generally regarded as personal qualities (such as honesty and trust)” (2000: 182).

Events outside of one's control also reflect back on a leader's image. "When a leader has a string of accomplishments, even small successes are magnified. Likewise, when a leader fails over time, even minor setbacks loom large in the overall image" (Just & Crigler, 2000: 183). In addition, the resources a politician has at his or her disposal can also be a great asset in strengthening image, which was mentioned earlier in the discussion about the importance of a team. As well, simply being granted power as president or prime minister bestows considerable assets in promoting an image as such positions dictate a level of respect (Ibid: 184).

This benefit does not extend to those in opposition. In a marketing based analysis of the 2004 U.S. presidential election, O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg (2007) discussed the advantage George W. Bush had over his opponent as the incumbent. Such a role brings familiarity to voters, "aided by the best speechwriters and advertising executives and the best funding" (Ibid: 254). Meanwhile, his competitor John Kerry was new to the political arena. O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg state, "The problem this presents for the challenger is that their brand often has to be created virtually from scratch" (Ibid: 255). Thus, in the 2004 example, Kerry's inability to construct a clear "'narrative' holding his offering as a persona together" (Ibid) was a significant factor in the Democrat's defeat. They noted that Kerry's team seemed unprepared for an attack on his character, a vulnerability the Bush campaign was able to capitalize on.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the epistemology of James and Mead's theories regarding the construction of the individual self, coupled with Ochs and Capps' discussion of narrative and Goffman's

presentation of self, it is proposed that the relationship between the politician and the populace is an accentuated version of that of an individual vis-à-vis an “other” in everyday life. According to Goffman, “A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character” (1959: 252). Such is the case for the individual who seeks to construct a political self that voters view as a natural leader. To do so, the candidate must come to an understanding of the social attitudes of the populace to determine what they are asking for in their head of government.

The definition of leadership is a reciprocal affair. In creating this political self, the individual cannot simply announce that he or she is a leader and assume others will follow. This individual must be perceived as someone worth following. However, at the same time, an aspiring political leader operates in an environment where the personal narrative he or she presents may be resisted, reinterpreted, or rejected. According to Ochs and Capps, “Narratives are coauthored and as such allow for the possibility that particular contributions will be challenged” (1996: 36). Such is the case in “narrative-laden political discourse”, which the authors note, is dominated by “to-and-fro challenges and counterchallenges” (Ibid).

As Scammell highlighted, a politician must seek to protect his or her image because this “[r]eputation, based on record and credible promises, is the *only thing of substance* that a party can promote to potential voters” (1999: 729; *emphasis is in original*). For both incumbents and opposition leaders, building and safeguarding an image requires an understanding of the political scene and the role of both opponents and journalists. As such, the candidate’s personal narrative is a coauthored affair between the leader and his or her team, his or her rivals, and journalists. In this scenario, opponents

seek to discredit the politician's image and offer an alternative using whatever tactics are available in the quest for political power. Reporters, meanwhile, oversee the spectacle and interpret it using their own frames of reference, such as the "strategy schema" described by Jamieson. In so doing, as argued by agenda-setting researchers McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey, "The media may not dictate to voters what their opinion will be about political candidates, but they may well direct, guide or orient the content of what the public deems worthy of saying about them to a significant degree" (1997: 706).

According to Just and Crigler, "The media concentrate on the passing scene, elected officials tend to their own political interests, and the public takes the long view" (2000: 196). Under this perspective, they argue that how a candidate manages these various fields in order to construct a strong image is a testament to his or her abilities as a leader. Although voters may base their decisions on a number of factors, the dominant personal narrative that emerges from the interaction of those sources listed above will play a role in determining whether the public accepts the self the candidate sought to present. Based on this framework, the thesis examines how the presentation of self can be manipulated and reinterpreted in the mediated political forum and how this shapes a candidate's dominant personal narrative.

Chapter 3

Methodology

As outlined in the previous chapter, it is the political leader who represents and symbolizes the party. This individual's personal narrative not only relates to the self, it becomes the public image of the organization he or she is leading. However, once a politician steps forward as aspiring to lead his or her country, s/he must be prepared to acquiesce this personal narrative to a certain amount of opposition and revision under the national spotlight from both opponents and journalists. In today's mediated politics, the stage for this performance is across a nation's newspapers, broadcasts, and online forums. How the politician and his or her team manage this debate will ultimately determine the way in which he or she is presented before the public.

The following outlines the methodology used in determining how former Liberal leader Stéphane Dion's personal narrative was defined in this mediated political environment. The chapter begins with a general discussion of the research design, followed by a description of personal and dominant narratives along with an analysis of the medium of study. The research questions, sample selection, and data collection methods are then outlined, including an explanation of the ethical considerations.

Research Design

Based on Frey, Botan, and Kreps' (2007) discussion on methods of textual analysis, the research design is qualitative. As the study focuses specifically on the portrayal of Dion,

it follows McLeod and Tichenor's microscopic conceptual level approach, which places the "emphasis . . . primarily on the individual" (2007: 14). The investigation seeks to determine the dominant personal narrative about Dion before the beginning of the 2008 federal election campaign with the various themes, assertions, or descriptions about the Liberal leader as the unit of analysis. To draw conclusions about the personal narratives created about Dion, inductive reasoning is utilized, which McLeod and Tichenor note "proceeds inferentially from particulars to more general statements" (Ibid: 10). As such, it is inferred that through the study of political events along with characterizations and descriptions made about Dion, determinations about his narrative can be made.

The data collection methods are a textual analysis, which utilizes a narrative criticism method of rhetorical criticism, followed by in-depth interviews. These methods are described in detail later in this chapter.

Personal and Dominant Narrative

In the previous chapter, Ochs and Capps argue that "Personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience" (1996: 20). As such, for this study, the concept of personal narrative relates to an overarching theme attributed to Dion built using a series of descriptions and assertions characterizing the Liberal leader. Like Ochs and Capps definition, this notion is "born out of" Dion's previous experiences and given "shape" by new experiences he encounters. This description also has its foundations in a series of narrative analysis of politicians conducted by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) in 2004 and in 2008 with the Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics, and Public Policy. In these studies, researchers focused on what they

called the “master narratives” about the candidates for the 2008 U.S. presidential primaries. Such narratives relate to a candidate’s “personality, history, leadership, and appeal” (2008: 4) and carry a considerable amount of influence in a campaign. For example, they state that in 2000 the theme of Al Gore as someone who lies or exaggerates or George W. Bush as a “compassionate conservative proved to be enduring messages that shaped how the press covered the . . . race and possibly influenced the outcome” (Ibid).¹¹

Although journalists seek to “strive for objectivity” (McKercher & Cumming, 1998: 22), the PEJ study notes that reporters “may look for instances that illustrate or validate these master narratives” (2008: 4). Similar to the discussion of narratives and journalism in the previous chapter, the authors suggest that journalists may be more likely to cover stories that correspond to certain narratives, while ignoring those that do not. Ultimately, they argue that the study of such personal narratives leads to a better understanding of how candidates are actually presented:

Examining the positive and negative master narratives is also a way to evaluate the tone of media coverage about the candidates, while filtering out judgments that reflect whether a candidate is winning or not. Studying the personal narratives, in other words, rather than the tone of all coverage, gives a better sense of how candidates themselves are being depicted.
(2008: 4)

¹¹ Regarding the PEJ and Joan Shorenstein Center’s (2008) analysis of the 2008 primaries, the study attributed such narratives as “represents hope and change”; and “has charisma and strong rhetoric”; to Barack Obama (Ibid: 6) and found that his campaign team and the press promoted the majority of positive personal narratives. The leading personal narrative about Republican candidate John McCain was that he was “not a reliable conservative” (Ibid: 13). States the report: “[This] criticism . . . was hard to get away from. Attempts by the McCain campaign and his supporters to quell charges of him as an unreliable conservative got little traction in the press” (Ibid: 14).

The dominant personal narrative is then determined through an analysis of which of the various personal narratives is most prevalent in the period of study.

Medium of Study

The thesis focuses on the Canadian English print medium from December 3, 2006, the day after Dion was elected Liberal leader, to September 6, 2008, the date before the start of the 2008 federal election campaign. These dates were selected for the reason that the study intends to focus on Dion's term as head of the Liberal party under a minority Parliament setting before the start of the 2008 federal election. The analysis does not cover the subsequent election campaign and the period thereafter as the thesis investigates the creation of Dion's dominant personal narrative under the background of a minority Parliament as such governments appear to be an increasing phenomenon in Canadian politics and this underlying context must be considered. It is argued here that a minority scenario increases the pressure on framing a politician as political teams must constantly be prepared to head to the polls. At the same time, this situation leads to an increase in reporting on the political horse race in Ottawa, making Jamieson's "strategy schema" (1992: 165) a dominant frame and creating a stronger emphasis on a politician's characterization.

The election of Dion introduced the Liberal leader to a new audience across English Canada. It is for this reason that the study targets English media specifically. Dion took a strong public stand during the Quebec sovereignty debate throughout the 1990s, and, as such, he was already well established in the French media. Although he earned coverage in English Canada as the minister of intergovernmental affairs and

environment during the time of the Liberal government, his footprint in Quebec was considerably larger, more controversial, and better defined.

For the period of study, the Canadian media market was rather limited with only three major English television networks, two of which with their own news networks, and only one national radio network. Thus, the focus is on Canadian newspapers for the reason that print offers the widest variety of in-depth commentary and selection. In addition, the print medium in Canada offers a base to the other media as columnists serve as experts on television news analysis programs.¹²

The analysis also targets the print medium because it seems to carry more weight in encouraging political involvement. According to a 2007 Statistics Canada report, those “who follow the news on a weekly or daily basis are 1.8 times more likely to participate in the political arena” (Keown, 2007a: 39). However, the same report added that those whose only source of news was television “were 1.8 times less likely to engage in non-voting political activity” (Ibid) – making the effect of television news negligible without additional sources. As such, the above suggests that voters who may be drawn towards political activity are more likely to do so through a newspaper. Although one’s political involvement and persuasion are based on a number of individual factors, it can be argued that the depth of print may better educate voters – making this a more relevant medium to focus research.

This concentration on newspapers is also based on previous media studies. In an analysis of the effect of strategy versus issue frames engaged in the media, Rhee (1997) found that newspaper reading had a “significant” impact on test subjects. For example,

¹² For example, CBC Newsworld’s Politics with Don Newman or CTV NewsNet’s Mike Duffy Live during the period of study.

the author discovered that individuals who read strategy-oriented print stories about a particular campaign were more likely to discuss the election using similar strategy-based language. The same pattern was also found for individuals reading issue-framed articles. This led Rhee to conclude “print news frames helped the participants construct corresponding discourse models by providing them with conceptual building blocks of campaign interpretations” (Ibid: 42). However, it was noted that broadcast viewing did not translate into a similar response. The reason for this, according to the author, was that viewers might interpret television differently as it provides information using a variety of audiovisual means rather than the “explicitly written texts” (Ibid) of print. Such components of television may carry a different impact on which content is retained.

According to Graber (1972), newspapers are also more worthwhile to study for the simple reason that they offer more material. She states, “While television is the most widely used medium, people who want more complete data than the constraints of visual coverage permit, tend to turn to the press for needed information” (Ibid: 48-49). However, this does not suggest that newspaper readers do not look to television to be further informed. Choi and Becker (1987) found that those who read political articles would also be inclined to watch television. Yet, in a similar result as the aforementioned Statistics Canada study, those who watched local television news first were not necessarily drawn towards reading political articles. The authors therefore concluded that “a newspaper is an effective medium in helping audience members develop a distinctive picture of each candidate and, thus, discriminate issue positions among them, whereas television news is not” (Ibid: 285).

It should be acknowledged that the Internet has a growing influence on political discussion in Canada; however, it is argued here that at the time of study, newspaper columnists and mainstream news organizations still led and legitimated this conversation. As a result, newspaper opinion transcends the different mediums.¹³

Research Questions

From December 2006 to the federal election campaign in September 2008, the dominant personal narrative of Stéphane Dion seemed to change from one of great optimism to that of weakness. This shift began after the Conservative Party aired a series of negative advertisements in February 2007 casting Dion as “Not a leader”. To reiterate from the opening chapter, the purpose for this research is to investigate how the personal narrative of Stéphane Dion was created and reinterpreted from the period of December 3, 2006 to September 6, 2008. Based on the theoretical framework outlined at the end of Chapter 2, which argues that under a mediated political forum a candidate’s personal narrative may face resistance or reinterpretation from opponents and journalists, the following are the research questions for this thesis:

1. What personal narratives were used to describe Dion in the Canadian English print media?
2. How were these narratives constructed/presented?

¹³ In addition, although the rapid expansion of the Internet raises skepticism towards older studies, the above Statistics Canada examination based on a 2003 survey found that 70 percent of frequent news consumers aged 19 and older relied on newspapers as a source of news versus only 30 percent for the Internet (Keown, 2007b: 14).

3. What role did opponents and journalists play in creating and promoting the various narratives about Dion?
4. What role did external political events play in shaping these narratives?
5. What was the dominant personal narrative about Dion before the beginning of the 2008 federal election?
6. Why were the Liberals unable to counter this narrative about Dion?
7. What role did a minority government situation have on the discussion of Dion?

Data Collection Methods

Textual Analysis - Sample Selection

Qualitative researchers “focus on how the sample or small collection of cases, units, or activities illuminates key features of social life” (Neuman, 2007c: 346). To do so, they use a method of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling. According to Neuman, “[T]he qualitative researcher selects cases gradually, with the specific content of a case determining whether it is chosen” (Ibid). As a result, this study uses a purposive technique of nonprobability sampling, which Neuman defines as a method in which the researcher “uses judgment in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind” (Ibid: 347).

Thus, this technique is used to select those news outlets that best determine how the Liberal leader was portrayed before a national audience across English Canada.

Therefore, the following outlets are analyzed on a daily basis:

1. The Globe and Mail
2. National Post

3. The Canadian Press

Although there are a variety of metro newspapers across Canada, the study concentrates on those organizations with a national mandate to compliment the notion of Dion stepping into the national spotlight as leader of the Official Opposition. As such, the thesis analyzes a daily representation from the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post*.

In terms of background, according to a Canadian Newspaper Association (2008) study of newspaper circulation, these two outlets collectively published an average of 3,260,340 copies every week across the country in a six-month analysis in 2007. From Monday to Friday the *Globe and Mail* published 322,807 copies a day and 410,285 on Saturday. The *National Post*, meanwhile, distributed 203,781 copies each day during the week and 217,115 on Saturday. Neither publication offered a Sunday edition. Although there are various means of calculating readership, based on circulation numbers alone, it can be assumed that these two papers reached more than half a million Canadians on a daily basis.

In terms of ownership, during the time of study CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. operated the *Globe and Mail* while CanWest Global Communications Corp. was responsible for the *National Post*. Regarding the latter, the *National Post*'s relationship with CanWest provides it with substantial news resources as the company owns a number of metro dailies and television stations across the country. As such, columns and news articles may be shared between CanWest's regional and metropolitan outlets providing the *National Post* with a variety of content.¹⁴ It should also be noted that politically

¹⁴ For example, *National Post* columnist Don Martin is also a regular columnist for the *Calgary Herald*.

speaking, it is generally accepted that the *National Post* leans more to the right than its national competitor, which makes for an interesting comparison between the two.

In addition, as many community and metro newspapers across the country do not have the resources to hire full-time reporters to cover federal politics in Ottawa, they rely on stories distributed by the *Canadian Press*. According to the wire service (2009), this outlet provides content to 100 daily newspapers as well as 500 radio and television stations. It bills itself as “keeping Canadians informed and telling people the story of their country for almost 90 years” (Ibid). As such, the sample for this study also covers a daily representation from the *Canadian Press* to further determine what news is distributed to a national audience.¹⁵

Textual Analysis - Narrative Criticism Method

In their discussion of textual analysis, Frey, Botan, and Kreps argue, “How a text is analyzed depends on the purpose of the research and the particular method used” (2007: 565). As stated, this research seeks to investigate how the personal narrative of Stéphane Dion was created and reinterpreted from the period of December 3, 2006 to September 6, 2008. This study utilizes rhetorical criticism as an approach to the textual analysis of the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Canadian Press*. Andrews defines this as follows:

¹⁵ Although information for 2006-2008 is not available, an analysis of the number of reporters in the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery (2009) would suggest that the three outlets have contributed a significant amount of resources to covering Parliament Hill. According to a June 2009 membership list, the *Canadian Press* and its French equivalent *La Press Canadienne* have the most journalists from a single outlet with a total of 21 reporters. *The Globe and Mail*, meanwhile, has the largest number from one specific publication with 17. Finally, as it draws upon the newspaper resources of CanWest, the *National Post* also has 21 affiliated reporters covering politics in Ottawa – a number that does not include reporters from CanWest’s Global TV.

For scholars, the word *rhetoric* is traditionally associated with Aristotle's definition: "the available means of persuasion." And *criticism* is "the systemic process of illuminating and evaluating products of human activity". . . . [Rhetorical criticism], therefore, is a systematic method of describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the persuasive force of messages embedded within texts.

(cited in Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2007: 565; *emphasis is in original*)

The authors note that "rhetorical critics view texts through a method, or 'lens' that illuminates the meaning of the text" (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2007: 566). As such, the textual analysis for this study uses the narrative criticism method of rhetorical criticism. The authors note that under this approach it is assumed "that many (or all) persuasive messages function as narratives – stories, accounts, or tales" (Ibid: 571). Narrative criticism seeks to analyze these narratives and evaluate "how effective they are at shaping an audience's perception of reality" (Ibid). As a result, the unit of analysis for this study is those elements that make up the personal narratives about Dion – the descriptions, characterizations, themes or assertions used regarding the Liberal leader.

The narrative criticism begins with the collection of all articles that specifically mention "Stéphane Dion" found in the Factiva news database – a total of 3,045 stories.¹⁶ These articles are divided according to the outlet and month of publication. Each article is then reviewed and stories or columns that relate to a personal narrative about Dion are highlighted, noting a theme, description, or characterization regarding the Liberal leader. These aspects are copied and recorded separately, noting the source of the assertion, and the news item in which it appeared. As this examination is conducted, key political events occurring during the sample period are noted to determine what role political events may

¹⁶ 1,288 for the *Globe and Mail*, 687 for the *National Post*, and 1,070 for the *Canadian Press*.

have played in the portrayal of Dion. Also, a list of the reporters and columnists who covered the Liberal leader is compiled along with any politicians or political operatives who advanced a certain narrative about Dion. These names are highlighted as potential participants in subsequent in-depth interviews.

The process follows Neuman's discussion of coding qualitative data (2007a), which he bases on Strauss' three types of qualitative data coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first phase, the data is studied to "assign initial codes" (Ibid: 597), which are shaped in accordance with the discussion of personal and dominant narrative found earlier in this chapter and in the literature review preceding it. As such, these codes are based on the unit of analysis – the elements of the various personal narratives – highlighting some of the themes, assertions, and descriptors attached to the Liberal leader. After this is completed, the data is returned to with a stronger focus on these initial codes seeking to discover links between descriptions, events that may relate to them, and various sources that promote such characterizations. In so doing, the overarching personal narratives attributed to Dion are determined while political events unfold. For the final phase, the data is reviewed again to find material that supports the personal narratives discovered in the previous coding process.

In accordance with Neuman's definition of reliability of measurement as based on "dependability or consistency" (2007b: 222), the process outlined above is repeated each month for each media outlet. One particular month is studied at a time for all three outlets before moving on to the next to maintain a consistent focus on a specific period of time. In addition, to maintain consistency in analysis, articles from each outlet are collected using the Factiva news database.

In-depth Interviews

Although as Neuman states “[q]ualitative researchers are more interested in authenticity than in the idea of a single version of truth” (2007b: 222) as implied in the concept of “validity”, in-depth interviews are used to validate the narrative criticism results. As mentioned in the first chapter, the thesis seeks to determine how Dion and his team, opponents, and journalists interacted in the creation and reinterpretation of the Liberal leader’s dominant personal narrative. Based on this, like the textual analysis, a purposive sampling technique is utilized so that a sample from all three of these sources is interviewed to understand their perspective on the creation of Dion’s image. These discussions are done according to the definition offered by Prus and Grills as “extended, open-ended inquiries into the experiences (circumstances, viewpoints, dilemmas, activities, adjustments) of others” (cited in Jackson, Gillis & Verberg, 2007: 448).

The purpose of this data collection method is to compliment the textual analysis and provide additional context to the study. As they were the individuals responsible for creating the articles in the medium studied, journalists from each outlet are interviewed. These individuals are selected based on their frequency in commenting or reporting on the Liberal leader. Along with the issues exposed during the textual analysis, these individuals discuss how the personal narrative of Dion was created; why one narrative was dominate over others; what role the news media had in this; and how they feel a politician can shape his or her image. In addition, they discuss how the overall minority Parliament political context affected their reporting.

To understand how opponents sought to redefine Dion, a senior strategist who worked for the Prime Minister's Office during the period of study is also interviewed. This individual is asked how the Conservative's counter-narrative against Dion was created and what role journalists and the Liberal leader himself played in its success.

As the discussion behind this thesis begins with the presentation of self and personal narrative, additional input is sought from Liberals who worked with Dion. These strategists provide their perspective on how Dion attempted to present himself and the challenges his team faced in shaping his personal narrative. In addition, they are asked to discuss the difficulties Dion had as leader of the Official Opposition and how a minority Parliament affected the situation.

Ethical clearance has been obtained from the University of Ottawa's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board from the period of September 29, 2009 to September 28, 2010 as in-depth interviews require the use of human subjects. In accordance with ethics requirements, interviews were conducted face-to-face for a maximum of one hour in a location of the participants' choosing. These sources were well versed on the topic of investigation and each signed consent forms detailing the purpose of the study, what participation entailed, and any risks that may be associated with involvement. In addition, each participant was given the choice of whether or not they wished to be anonymous for this study.

For many participants who worked within the realm of Canadian federal politics, the ongoing minority Parliament situation made it difficult to arrange interviews. As the House of Commons was in session following the approval of ethical clearance, the majority of interviews needed to be conducted while the House was on break the week

after Thanksgiving in October 2009. Indeed, all sources were extremely busy individuals and as such interviews were conducted at the time and place of the participant's choosing.

Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis: Narrative Criticism

Starting with his surprising victory in December 2006 until the beginning of the 2008 federal election campaign, more than 3,000 articles across three separate media outlets were analyzed to understand the various personal narratives attached to Stéphane Dion. During this time, Dion, his opponents, journalists, and political events all transpired together to create a public persona for the enigma that was the Liberal leader.

Based on the theoretical framework outlined at the end of the literature review, this chapter explores how this politician was presented through an analysis of the various events highlighted in the media and how they intersected with a variety of narratives regarding the Liberal leader. As outlined in the third chapter, the thesis uses a narrative criticism method of textual analysis to uncover the various narratives embedded in the coverage of Dion found in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Canadian Press* from December 3, 2006 to September 6, 2008.

A “Stunning Come-From-Behind Victory”

Canadians picking up their newspaper on the morning of Monday, December 4, 2006 were greeted by extensive analysis of the new Liberal leader. The *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Canadian Press* sent their top talent to record and define what was largely categorized as a surprising Liberal convention that ended in the crowning of Stéphane Dion as head of the country’s so-called “natural governing party”.

According to reports in all three outlets, the days leading up to this were exciting. *National Post* reporter Graeme Hamilton led his front-page story looking back to the previous Friday as Dion headed “toward the climax of the most important speech of his political career” (2006, December 4: A1). Unfortunately, the candidate spoke too long, music came up, and he was unable to finish. As Hamilton said, “It was a demoralizing moment, the kind of mistake you might expect of a political rookie, not a contender for office” (Ibid). Nevertheless, Dion was a contender, and thanks to the help of Gerard Kennedy’s delegates, he managed to rise up and overtake leading competitors Bob Rae and Michael Ignatieff in the fourth ballot.

This was an unexpected outcome. In its front-page story, the *Globe and Mail* ran a headline calling Dion’s victory an “upset win” (Clark & Laghi, 2006: A1), while the *Canadian Press*’ Joan Bryden described it as a “stunning come-from-behind victory” (2006, December 3). One expression frequently cited was that Dion was a “dark horse”¹⁷ throughout the race. Said the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial, “Mr. Dion was a dark horse at the start of the Liberal leadership race 10 months ago, and he was a dark horse almost to the end” (2006, December 4: A22). As such, the consensus was that he had not built the same profile as the leading candidates. Columnist Roy MacGregor summed up this sentiment saying, “So very little is known about him. We know . . . almost everything there is to know about Ignatieff and Rae and are now freed to kill off those brain cells” (2006, December 4: A2).

Throughout the entire textual analysis, there was no other day that garnered as many column inches dedicated to answering the question of who was this unexpected

¹⁷ The Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary defines a “dark horse” as “a little-known person who is unexpectedly successful or prominent” (Bisset, 2000: 239).

winner, what his victory meant, and where Canadian politics may lead. The themes and messages touched upon December 4, 2006 were essentially the focus of conversation for the next two months, and to a considerable extent, remained attached to Dion throughout the entire period of analysis.¹⁸

To begin with, many columnists mentioned Dion's background as an academic in Quebec, his role in the sovereignty debate in the 1990s, and his work as a cabinet minister during the implementation of the Clarity Act. In particular, it was noted that he gained prominence in fighting sovereigntists with sharp logic and took on the Parti Québécois with a series of strong letters debunking his separatist rivals. It was then highlighted that he was briefly left out of Paul Martin's cabinet only to work his way back into becoming environment minister in 2004. After the Liberals lost power in 2006, talk of Dion's leadership aspirations were met with skepticism.¹⁹ Regardless, what some Liberals called "the little red train that could" (Ditchburn, 2006, December 3) gradually built momentum culminating in Dion's "dark horse" victory.

As such, one leading theme about Dion was that he was not to be underestimated. The headline to a profile in the *Globe and Mail* stated he was "The master of proving people wrong" (Leblanc, 2006, December 4: A10). Indeed, the new Liberal leader himself was quoted in the *Canadian Press* saying, "I've always been underestimated . . . My personal weakness, I guess, is to be underestimated, but at the same time it is my

¹⁸ For this study, the coverage of Stéphane Dion following his nomination as Liberal leader began Sunday, December 3, 2006 in the *Canadian Press*. However, since neither the *Globe and Mail* nor *National Post* published a Sunday edition, their initial reports on the new leader came Monday, December 4.

¹⁹ *Canadian Press*' Alexander Panetta noted that after Dion announced his intentions, one Montreal newspaper headline commented that it seemed everyone was running for the Liberals, "Even Dion" (2006, December 3).

strength” (Cheadle, 2006, December 3). *National Post* columnist L. Ian MacDonald agreed with this, stating, “As he has said himself, he is often underestimated, a great personal attribute in politics. As he has proven ever since the referendum, he can take a punch. The man doesn’t know how to quit” (2006, December 6: A22). More ominously, the *Globe and Mail*’s Jeffrey Simpson opined, “Mr. Dion may yet prove a disaster . . . for he has some of the makings of one. But if his career is any guide, Mr. Dion will be derided and underestimated, then surprise everyone” (2006, December 4: A1).

While readers were warned not to underestimate Dion, the new Liberal leader was also characterized as an academic nerd. Random facts included that he wore a leather backpack rather than a more professional briefcase; he once owned a parakeet that could say the word “ideology”; and he had a Husky named Kyoto after the international climate change treaty. Accompanying this, a variety of adjectives and descriptive terms were used to physically describe Dion. *National Post* columnist Don Martin opined that a “geek” had inherited the Liberal crown (2006, December 4: A5). Fellow *National Post* scribe John Ivison noted that “[h]e may look like he tucks his shirt into his underpants” (2006, December 4: A5). *Globe and Mail* television columnist John Doyle said, “This Stéphane Dion guy is a tall, gangly, bespectacled prof with a bad haircut and a goofy grin” (2006: R3). Later that week, the *Globe and Mail*’s Tralee Pearce wrote an article on how he was in need of a style change.²⁰ Nevertheless, Don Martin noted that “there are hints there will be more to Dion than the sum of his glasses, grey-white mop of hair, tight facial features and other defining geekiness” (2006, December 4: A5).

²⁰ The headline for this piece: “Bye-bye backpack? Stéphane Dion wears ill-fitting suits, has messy hair and squints behind near-invisible specs. All of which puts him in line for a serious makeover – or makes him a pro at a political fashion statement” (Pearce, 2006: F3).

In what would later be referred to as his “honeymoon period”, the initial focus on Dion was largely positive and he was portrayed as an intelligent man who displayed such virtues as honesty and integrity. Ivison commented, “Most opponents concede Dion is as honest as a Rotary Club treasurer” (2006, December 4: A5). NDP supporters were also reminded that party leader Jack Layton once said Dion was “a committed Canadian and a man of principle and conviction” (Curry, 2006b, December 4: A9). In addition, reporters quoted Jean Chrétien’s former senior policy advisor Eddie Goldenberg, who described Dion in his memoirs as a man “recognized by even his fiercest adversaries as the perfect example for those who go into politics for principle, who serve selflessly, and who are prepared to take a lot of slings and arrows for doing what they think is right” (Panetta, 2006, December 3).

Columns and editorials were also complimentary. In an editorial under the headline “The Liberals’ smart choice”, the *Globe and Mail* said, “By choosing Stéphane Dion . . . [the Liberals] rewarded three virtues – courage, intelligence and loyalty – over the usual political calculations about winnability” (2006, December 4: A22). The *National Post* said in its editorial, “He will be a worthy opponent to [Prime Minister] Stephen Harper in the next federal election, and we offer him our congratulations on a battle well-fought and well-won” (2006, December 4: A22). *National Post* columnist Andrew Coyne also described the new leader as a strong competitor for Harper: “In intellect, courage, and conviction he is a match for Mr. Harper, as he is in diligence, perseverance and integrity” (2006, December 4: A1).²¹

²¹ The coming months were predicted to be a battle of the “eggheads” (Cowan & Kennedy, 2006: A4) as Dion faced a prime minister who was also regarded as an academic. In an article comparing the two leaders, James Cowan and Mark Kennedy noted that both Harper and Dion

Although strong in intellect, several commentators noted Dion was lacking in presentation. Consider this lead²² to a column by Lysiane Gagnon of the *Globe and Mail*: “Unbelievable. Of all the candidates for the Liberal leadership, Stéphane Dion was the one with the least charisma. . . . His presentation speech, on Friday, fell completely flat. His spoken English is halting. And he won” (2006, December 4: A23). Former Liberal communications strategist Warren Kinsella defined Dion as “a politician who is an anti-politician – someone who is uncomfortable with the glitziness and glamour of political life” (2006: A23). *Globe and Mail* writer Melissa Hughes took this further, noting that Dion was “unglamorous in the extreme and painfully earnest – the perfect incarnation of ‘band camp’” (2006: F7). Other commentators described Dion as “awkward”, while Don Martin quipped that “Charisma has officially left the Commons” (2006, December 4: A5) with Dion and Harper leading the two main parties. In an editorial offering advice for the new leader, the *National Post* said to Dion, “You’ve already been told too often that your icy, deliberate style of public presentation is a major disadvantage” (2006, December 6: A20) and suggested he rely on others to carry his message. In addition, they stated, “Do try to look friendly” (Ibid).

were “widely respected for their willingness to tackle complex issues and their grasp on the finer points of public policy” (Ibid). According to the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial board, “the Liberals chose a new leader who in many respects is Mr. Harper’s equal. . . . [B]oth are studious, cerebral, disciplined and stubbornly principled – and both are outsiders” (2006, December 4: A22). Indeed, Don Martin noted that “we have policy wonks in the two top party positions. Never has the collective IQ of leadership been so high” (2006, December 4: A5). The differences between the two leaders would be apparent, he argued, as Dion would “bring real policy options to the next election” (Ibid).

²² The “lead” is a term used for the first sentence of a newspaper story. In teaching potential editors, the *Canadian Press Stylebook* describes this as follows, “The first sentence is supposed to lead the reader into the story. If it isn’t interesting, why would the reader go any further? If readers aren’t enticed by the first sentence or two, they’re not going to stick around to be informed or educated or provoked” (Tasko, 2004: 170).

Coupled with this, the other issue with Dion's presentation was, as he himself reportedly joked about at the start, his "awkward English" (Bryden, 2006, December 4). His difficulties were occasionally mentioned in passing, such as columnist Julie Smyth who highlighted comedian Ron James saying, "He'll make a great leader once he learns to speak English" (2006: A4). However, despite criticism that he may be "rigid and tone-deaf", Simpson argued that Dion's "English has improved hugely. . . . His accent remains thick, but it too will get better with more practice" (2006, December 4: A1).

Despite whatever struggles he had with English, it was his home province that raised the most questions about the new Liberal leader. Although his battles with sovereigntists may have strengthened his profile in English Canada,²³ Quebec was reported to be another matter. In a column titled "Quebec's surprising anti-hero", Gagnon summed up his problems in the province: "English Canada rightly sees Mr. Dion as the proud son of Pierre Trudeau. In Quebec, precisely because of that, Mr. Dion is considered – even outside sovereigntist circles – as too uncompromising when it comes to accommodating Quebec nationalism" (2006, December 4: A23).²⁴ However, this theme was challenged by Simpson and the *National Post's* Hamilton, who criticized the Quebec media for immediately attacking Dion and returning to the old narrative that Quebecers despised him. The *Globe and Mail* sought to further dispel this by featuring the results of a Strategic Counsel poll stating that "in a reaction that defies the conventional wisdom of Quebec pundits, 62 per cent of respondents in the province said that Mr. Dion was a good

²³ A *Globe and Mail* editorial said, "With respect to national unity, he saved the Liberals and probably the country" (2006, December 4: A22).

²⁴ Following Dion's win, Quebec Premier Jean Charest said, "If he wants to form a government, he has to, in good part, gain the confidence of the people of Quebec", while Parti Québécois leader André Boisclair said he was seen by sovereigntists "as a villain in a western movie" (Rakobowchuk, 2006).

choice for the Liberals” (Clark & Laghi, 2006: A1).

In response to Dion’s victory, it was reported that the Conservatives sought to tie him to the other major issue that hindered the Liberals in Quebec – the sponsorship scandal.²⁵ However, despite attempts, the pundits did not appear receptive. In its December 4th issue, the *Globe and Mail* ran an article stating how Dion was not related to the scandal and the following day columnist John Ibbitson wrote the Liberal leader was “ethically pure as the driven snow” (2006, December 5: A7). In the *National Post*, Don Martin added that Dion was “barely tainted by any lingering sponsorship scandal stain” (2006, December 4: A5), while Ivison considered the Conservative attack “graceless” (2006, December 4: A5).

However, the focus on Quebec still suggested that there was a disparity between Dion and his party in this province. According to Gagnon, “most of Quebec’s heavyweights in the federal Liberal Party were behind Michael Ignatieff . . . It is not clear yet whether the senior Quebec organizers will rally to Mr. Dion – an important question since the Liberal Party is in dire straits in Quebec” (2006, December 4: A23). Ivison, meanwhile, commented that a Quebec delegate told him “a win for the author of the Clarity Act would herald a ‘bonfire of Liberal memberships’” (2006, December 4: A5). In addition, he observed that “[a]s Dion fought his way to the stage for his acceptance speech, streams of Ignatieff-supporting Quebec delegates left the convention floor

²⁵ This scandal brought considerable criticism to the Liberal party with some commentators noting that it played a role in the downfall of the Liberal government, while further harming the party’s reputation in Quebec. According to a report in the *Globe and Mail*, the scandal related to the Liberal government’s funding of “sponsorship and advertising contracts” in Quebec “purportedly to bolster Canada’s image. Much of the money went to well-connected ad agencies, and some of it was pumped back to local party officials” (Ha, 2006: A10). Stéphane Dion was minister of intergovernmental affairs during this time, however, he was reportedly cleared of any wrongdoing in the subsequent public inquiry into this scandal.

disconsolately” (Ibid).

Nevertheless, after years of public feuding between supporters of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, the consensus was that the Liberals were united. As the *National Post* said in an editorial, “The Liberals, for too long a soap opera, will now go back to becoming a regular political party” (2006, December 4: A22). Peter Donolo, the former communications director for Chrétien, wrote in the *Globe and Mail* that the party “feels pretty good about itself and united, for the first time in a long time” (2006: A10). Such a sentiment was also echoed by Dion’s past rivals, with Ignatieff saying, “He’s going to be a good leader, he’s going to be the next prime minister of the country and I’m going to work real hard to make that happen” (Cheadle, 2006, December 3).

In the following weeks, Dion revealed what he called his “dream team”, and gave former rivals key positions within the Opposition.²⁶ *National Post* writer Chris Wattie noted this was “an apparent attempt to patch up any rifts” and Dion said, “We’ll be a strong team together . . . We’ll all work together to help the party” (2006: A6). In an editorial, the *Globe and Mail* complimented Dion saying he “reached out to his former opponents and initiated the process of building a unified party” (2006, December 20: A22).

Yet after such a prolonged leadership race, it was still perceived that a threat of potential divisions remained. For example, in an article about a meeting between Dion and Ignatieff, *Globe and Mail* writer Jane Taber made sure to mention in her lead that following the discussion, Ignatieff went to a Christmas party for his “supporters to which

²⁶ Ignatieff was designated the deputy leader, Bob Rae and Scott Brison were selected to form the platform, Gerard Kennedy was responsible for election readiness, and Martha Hall Findlay was in charge of platform outreach.

his new leader was not invited” (2006, December 19: A1). Later in the same story, in two sentences she prefaced her comments on the party’s unity with the words “So far” (e.g. “So far, there is not the atmosphere or culture of nastiness that was so pervasive during the Chrétien/Martin years”) (Ibid).

Dion’s victory was promoted as one built on grassroots momentum, however, the campaign also suggested that, as Coyne noted, the Opposition leader had “little in the way of caucus support” (2006, December 4: A1). The *Canadian Press*’ Bryden noted that Dion had a reputation in caucus “as stern, inflexible and prickly, more prone to lecture than to listen” (2006, December 4). According to Simpson,

Almost every former ministerial colleague can recount tales of Mr. Dion's righteous rectitude around the cabinet table. He didn't schmooze, make friends or build alliances. He just mastered his briefs, plowed forward and jack-hammered his arguments against any opposition. Not surprisingly, therefore, very few senior members of those cabinets supported him. His intellect, they respected; his political judgment and personal skills they did not.

(2006, December 4: A1)

Dion had won a decisive victory, and as Coyne said at the time, he “has no serious rivals at the moment, such is the devastation of the party old guard. But should he fail to perform, they will in time regroup. He can no longer enjoy the luxury of being overlooked” (2006, December 4: A1).

What was not ignored was the signal his victory sent to the future policy direction of the Liberal party. In adding some color to the new Liberal leader, one of the most frequently cited facts was that he owned a dog named after the Kyoto international

climate change agreement.²⁷ For his December 4th column about the new Liberal leader, Ibbitson opined that Dion was focused strictly on “only one mission. He has dedicated himself and, now, the Liberal Party to a single cause: reshaping the federal government, the Canadian economy and the behaviour of Canadians, all in the service of an environmental agenda” (2006, December 4: A23).²⁸

Speaking with the press as the new Liberal leader, Dion “signalled immediately that he intends to place the environmental-sustainability theme . . . at the centre of the Liberals’ platform” (Laghi & Clark, 2006, December 4: A9). He told the media, “My plan for energy and climate change, more efficiency, more recycling, less waste, that’s at the heart of what I want to do” (Curry, 2006a, December 4: A9). This would be combined with the other “pillars” of “economic prosperity and social justice” as he said he was not simply focused on one issue like the Green Party (Laghi & Clark, 2006, December 4: A9).

Nevertheless, some commentators felt Dion’s policy orientation to be a bit much. Coyne, for example, said “on the environment . . . he risks coming across as a fanatic” (2006, December 4: A1), while the *National Post*’s editorial board said to Dion, “We’re not suggesting you should sell your dog Kyoto. Yet. But your single-minded obsession with the protocol is already looking a little bit – what’s the polite word? – idiosyncratic”

²⁷ For example, Mary Vallis said in a profile, “The dog is now a poignant symbol both of Mr. Dion’s personal life and his political passion – so much so that his leadership campaign buttons featured a dog’s paw” (2006: A6).

²⁸ Dion’s position on the environment did earn the support of other environmentalists. Green Party Leader Elizabeth May reportedly “heaped praise on Dion” saying he was “a very, very good environment minister” (Cheadle, 2006, December 28), while the Sierra Club’s John Bennett also complimented Dion’s record in that portfolio. According to Panetta, Dion’s focus on this cause came after he became environment minister under Paul Martin’s government. He then “reinvented himself as a champion of the sustainable economy, and built his leadership campaign around the concept” (2006, December 3).

(2006, December 6: A20). At the same time, readers were reminded that under the previous Liberal government greenhouse gases continued to increase. Others noted that the “green” Liberal leader did not have a strong reputation with economics. Ivison, for example, referred to a former Liberal cabinet minister who once told him Dion “couldn’t balance a cheque book” (2006, December 5: A5). Based on such anecdotes, the columnist stated that “Dion’s victory is inevitably going to mean much greater scrutiny of the man and his abilities by a media and Conservative party playing catch-up” (Ibid).

“Not a Leader”

After a year in which Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* startled audiences worldwide and strange warm weather crept into January in Central Canada, it seemed the Liberal leader had caught on to the zeitgeist of the times. The *Globe and Mail*’s MacGregor stated that Dion was “running ahead of most of the Liberal pack on an issue in which the people of the country, particularly the young, are soaring well ahead of the politicians” (2006, December 4: A2). It was a “new political paradigm”, stated the *Canadian Press*’ Dennis Bueckert (2007, January 4). The *Globe and Mail* commissioned a Strategic Counsel poll that showed the environment was the top concern for Canadians – over issues such as health care and terrorism. The following day, the paper’s editor-in-chief Edward Greenspon declared his newspaper would “turn 2007 into our year of going green” (2007: A2).

This seemed to be the case for the Conservatives as well. Shortly into the new year, the prime minister shuffled his cabinet, replacing Environment Minister Rona

Ambrose with John Baird.²⁹ For Coyne, the move was not intended to signal the environment would be a major issue in the next election, rather Baird was appointed to ensure it would not be (2007, January 5: A1). The *Globe and Mail*'s Rex Murphy was also skeptical about the prime minister's shift on this file, saying "Mr. Dion has an odd gift: He looks like a leader who worries about the planet. That famous knapsack of his is, curiously, almost a badge of authenticity" (2007, January 6: A19). As such, he said Dion was credible on this issue and Canadians would see Harper's conversion as a response to the Liberal leader.

In the coming weeks, the government released a series of environmental announcements, which Dion criticized as carbon copies of previous Liberal initiatives the Conservatives cut. At the same time, the Tories began to take aim at the record of the former government, as Harper told journalists, for example, "If . . . [Dion] chooses to force . . . [an election], I'll be very comfortable comparing our record of action on the environment with his record of inaction on the environment" (Meissner, 2007).³⁰

Finally, on the weekend of January 27th, the Conservatives set in motion their full campaign to re-define Dion. That Saturday evening, the *Canadian Press* carried a report from *CTV News* saying sources informed the network that the Tories would be releasing attack ads against the Liberal leader. Less than 24 hours later, the news media were assembled in Ottawa for a preview. By Monday morning, both the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* ran front-page stories announcing that the Tories were launching an ad

²⁹ An individual the *Globe and Mail* characterized as a "more forceful and convincing politician" (2007, January 5: A14).

³⁰ Complimenting this was Baird who lamented the government had much work to do to fight climate change: "We are sort of behind the 8-ball in that the starting pistol went off 10 years ago when Kyoto was negotiated but the challenge for us is to play catch-up" (Levitz, 2007).

campaign to discredit Dion. According to the *National Post* lead, “the Conservatives are going on the offensive against Liberal leader Stéphane Dion with aggressive TV ads attacking him as a weak and indecisive leader with a shoddy record on the environment” (Tibbetts, 2007: A1). The *Canadian Press* lead was essentially the same, while the *Globe and Mail* began its story noting how the Conservatives’ tactic was being used to bring the Liberals down in the polls and erase “any appetite the Liberals might have for an early election” (Chase, 2007, January 29: A1).

All three articles quoted Conservative Secretary of State Jason Kenney, who told reporters, “We want to demonstrate that the only thing green about Stephane Dion is his inexperience as a leader” (Bryden, 2007, January 28). In addition, each report described the three ads. The first featured a clip from the Liberal leadership debates in which Ignatieff scolded Dion about the Liberals’ environmental record arguing that “We didn’t get it done”. The voice-over at the end then stated, “The Liberals had 13 years to get it done. Let’s not go back”. The second ad then continued from this setting, in which Ignatieff made the same comment as before and Dion responded saying, “This is unfair. . . Do you think it’s easy to make priorities?” Again, a voice-over ended the ad with the words, “Leaders set priorities. Leaders get things done. Stéphane Dion is not a leader”. The final ad then sought to tie Dion to past Liberal scandals by juxtaposing a clip of him saying, “Liberals, we need to go back to power as soon as possible”. A voice then said, “Let’s not go back”. (Chase, 2007, January 29: A1; Bryden, 2007, January 29).

The Liberals’ response was to attack the Conservatives for their use of campaign-style negative ads. Ignatieff said in the *Globe and Mail*, “They’re running scared . . . They govern like an opposition. Instead of . . . doing their job, they spend their time

attacking the previous administration” (Chase, 2007, January 29: A1). Dion was then quoted from an interview on *CBC Newsworld* saying, “Harper has nothing positive to say about his own record . . . he wants to spend all this money to try to attack me in a very negative way” (Ibid).³¹

He said he was “proud of his record as a former environment minister and billed himself as ‘a man of integrity, a man of loyalty, a man of honesty’” (Bryden, 2007, January 28). However, the *Globe and Mail* noted that Dion was “still a relative unknown to many Canadians and the Tories appear eager to capitalize on that by defining him themselves” (Chase, 2007, January 29: A1). The *Canadian Press*’ Bryden agreed with this and added that “[t]he three television ads . . . constitute a frontal attack on his reputation as a straight-shooter and champion of the environment” (2007, January 28).

Although the Conservatives were criticized for further eroding “all pretences of civility” (D. Martin, 2007, January 30: A4) in Parliament, the pundits largely agreed that the ads might be effective. Allan Gregg of the Strategic Counsel was quoted saying, “[Negative ads] communicate extremely well. People know exactly what they are saying . . . it feeds into both the general cynicism and the belief that no political party has got a particularly good agenda on the environment. It’s probably smart politics. I don’t know if it’s good public policy” (Chase, 2007, January 29: A1). According to Don Martin, the back-and-forth between Dion and Ignatieff was scathing: “For the voter who has yet to decipher a first impression of Mr. Dion as a party leader, it’s hard not to wince at the

³¹ The Conservatives were indeed reported to be spending a lot of money on this campaign. The ads were scheduled to run during the Super Bowl and the weeks thereafter. The English version would then reportedly be followed by a French-language campaign in Quebec. Although Kenney would not tell reporters how much they were spending, he did say his party would pay “as much as it takes to drive our message home” (Chase, 2007, January 29: A1).

most devastating exchange of the three commercials” (2007, January 30: A4). This scene condemned “Mr. Dion’s modest environment record, his halting English language skills and gave us a glimpse of his odd view that priorities are difficult to set” (Ibid).

The *Globe and Mail* gave the ads extensive coverage with columnists Simpson, Ibbitson, and Murphy all providing an opinion, along with an editorial, an analysis piece about how the commercials would affect the government’s climate change strategy, and an article where advertising critics provided a technical point of view. Simpson noted that ads attacking Dion’s environmental record were “a fair line of attack since it was much hyped but poorly conceived” (2007, January 30: A21). Ibbitson, meanwhile, criticized the “pre-election frenzy” and lamented that “The Liberals may dismiss the attack ads as a sign of desperation, but, if they had the money, they’d be doing exactly the same thing” (2007, January 30: A4). Meanwhile, the editorial dismissed claims the ads were disingenuous. Under the headline “Attack ads? Hardly”, the editorial stated that the Conservatives were fair to criticize Dion’s environmental reputation: “[I]t’s reasonable to question whether the Liberal governments in which Mr. Dion served deserve any credit. As the ad points out, greenhouse-gas emissions rose sharply under the Liberals” (2007, January 30: A20). In conclusion, the editorial argued, “Canadians aren’t stupid. They know that an ad is trying to sell them on something. That’s politics. The ads are part of a spirited political discourse” (Ibid).

“Fledgling Leadership”

After a dozen weeks as head of the Official Opposition, several journalists declared that Dion was in trouble. According to the *Globe and Mail*’s Lawrence Martin, “[t]he

consensus” amongst “political hacks of various stripes” was that Dion’s start was “wobbly” (2007, February 15: A17). Bryden, meanwhile, characterized the Liberal leader’s first few months as “shaky” (2007, February 17). This sentiment was reflected in the various polls released in February and March. After rising above their opponent following the convention, the Liberals were trailing the Conservatives with less than 30 percent support and Dion’s personal leadership numbers were seen to be dismal. As MacGregor noted, the chatter around Ottawa was “Dion’s honeymoon . . . had been so short he hadn’t even managed to get his pyjamas off” (2007, March 2: A2). As such, the assumption was that the Conservatives’ “devastating attack ads” (Beltrame, 2007) had “been brutally effective in negatively defining . . . [the Liberals’] blank canvas of a leader” (D. Martin, 2007, February 21: A1).

Another reason for Dion’s poor start was attributed to his performance under the media glare. According to Murphy, “[A]ll politics is theatrical, the House of Commons is Broadway, and Mr. Dion is not a theatrical person” (2007, March 3: A25). Rather than appearing to attack Harper in Question Period, Murphy said, “it looks like he’s doing an imitation of someone attacking Mr. Harper” (Ibid). Bryden stated that Dion’s colleagues were concerned about his performance, noting he was “ill-suited” for the style of debate (2007, March 4). Part of the problem was the Liberal leader’s English, which Ivison compared to the “French soldier in Monty Python and the Holy Grail” (2007, March 30: A4). In a front-page column, Don Martin observed, “When Mr. Dion stands in the Commons, he is stiff, scripted and backed by a shaky grasp of spontaneous English” (2007, February 21: A1). For Murphy, the conclusion was that the Liberal leader was

“not securing that sharpness of profile that is quintessential in a media age” (2007, March 3: A25).

The day the Conservatives’ negative commercials were released, the *Canadian Press* carried a story with the headline “Tories turn first question period of 2007 into extension of TV attack ads”. Here, Panetta reported that the Conservatives “used the 2007 debut of Parliament to level the same accusations in person against their chief rival as they have in a series of new TV spots” (2007, January 29). This would continue for the next year and a half as the governing party’s accusation that Dion was a weak leader would be the basis of their counter-narrative against the Liberal leader.³²

“[M]ore damning”, according to a headline in the *National Post*, was the criticism of former Liberals. Don Martin noted that Eddie Goldenberg had stated the Chrétien government was not ready to deal with Kyoto, while former environment ministers Christine Stewart and David Anderson could not recall Dion being so passionate about the planet when they knew him in cabinet. Stated the columnist, “How Mr. Dion will continue to lament Mr. Harper’s ‘wasted year’ on fighting climate change when his own former colleagues confess to a guilty conscience on their own inaction is a serious problem”. (2007, March 9: A4).

Beyond this, other commentators criticized the Liberal leader for his argument that Canada could still meet its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. Simpson echoed a view in the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial stating there was no way Canada could do this,

³² The Conservatives were not the only party criticizing Dion’s environmental record. Although they did not earn the profile of the Tories, nor launch a series of highly-publicized ads, the NDP also disparaged the Liberal leader’s past as environment minister. For example, the party’s environment critic, Nathan Cullen, said in February 2007, “Mr. Dion has very little credibility on climate change. He was unable to deliver as environment minister and now he’s trying from the opposition benches” (Bueckert, 2007, February 5).

and if Dion did not know this he “should be sent to a special cram school on Kyoto” otherwise he was being “political [*sic*] disingenuous or intellectually dishonest or, worse, both” (2007, February 2: A19). This criticism was amplified in the *National Post*, which continuously chided the Liberal leader for his position on Kyoto and the environment in general. Ivison carried a similar statement as Simpson, arguing that “Either Mr. Dion knows . . . [Kyoto is a disaster] and is being duplicitous for political gain or, worse, he doesn’t and has been duped by the environmental lobby. Neither explanation inspires much confidence in him as a future prime minister” (2007, February 1: A4). Peter Foster, meanwhile, commented that “Mr. Dion’s political promises all represent threats to the Canadian economy” (2007: FP19).

The perception was also growing that Dion was too focused on this file at the expense of other issues. As Harper stated, “Mr. Dion has made the environment his, not just No. 1, but kind of sole political crusade” (Auld, 2007). Bryden reported that “[s]ome Liberal MPs are worried that newly minted Leader Stephane Dion is too fixated on the environment” (2007, February 7). Said one source, “There’s a lot of talk about how we can’t be one-dimensional” (Ibid). This view was echoed in the *Globe and Mail* where Laghi wrote, “There is some fear in Liberal ranks that the party is putting all its eggs in one environmental basket” (2007, February 3: A4).

With the House of Commons back in session, the new Liberal leader faced a number of issues. In particular, he earned considerable criticism for whipping his party to join the NDP and Bloc Québécois in voting against a piece of anti-terrorism legislation. The *Canadian Press* reported that “The vote presented Stephane Dion with the first real test of his fledgling leadership” (Bryden, 2007, February 27). As Don Martin opined,

“While it shows refreshing spine for Mr. Dion to stick to his guns and whip Liberal MPs into backing his position over their personal objections, it’s the wrong issue to insert backbone into his sagging political shoulders” (2007, February 21: A1). As Dion was in the cabinet of the previous Liberal government that supported this law, his decision to vote against it gave rise to accusations that he was a “flip-flop”, particularly in the *National Post*.³³

Amidst such charges, it was argued that Dion was pulling the Liberals away from their base in the centre of the political spectrum. The *Globe and Mail* reported that “Although Mr. Dion told his caucus . . . that the Liberals were ‘centrists,’ some Liberals now believe Mr. Dion is ceding that middle ground to the Conservatives” (Taber, 2007, March 3: A8). This opinion was shared by several pundits, such as Ibbitson who said, “He has pushed the party well to the left of where it was under Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin” (2007, February 20: A4). Coyne, meanwhile, said that “having decided they no longer wished to be the party of soulless pragmatists, . . . [the Liberals] appear to have decided the only alternative was to drop out and join a commune” (2007, March 10: A24).

Under the background of such themes, it was reported that Dion would embark on a national tour “seemingly aimed at persuading Canadians that he’s more than just a one-issue leader focused solely on the environment” (Keller, 2007). According to Bryden, the purpose of this trip was to “restore some lustre to his fledgling leadership” (2007, March

³³ Coupled with so-called policy reversals on the Afghanistan mission, Kyoto, and the appointment of judges, the paper’s editorial board renamed the Liberals the “hypocrisy party” and commented that, “One is reminded of communist history books, in which the past is continuously altered to suit the propaganda campaign of the moment” (2007, February 17: A20). Accusations of hypocrisy were also delivered by the Conservatives, in addition to criticism from the prime minister that Dion was “soft on terrorism” (Sallot, 2007: A1).

4), while Don Martin described it as “a national damage control tour to defend a Liberal leadership swaying between pathetic and pitiful” (2007, March 3: A6).

A “Nightmare Scenario”

Amidst this conversation, rumours were circulating that the Liberal leader was becoming closer with the head of the Green Party.³⁴ After months of speculation around the nature of this relationship, in April 2007 it was announced they reached an agreement in which the two would not run candidates in each other’s riding.³⁵ As part of this deal, the Green leader would endorse Dion for prime minister.

Such an arrangement was deemed to be quite unorthodox. According to Bryden, “The extraordinary back-scratching between two supposedly rival leaders is unheard of in Canadian politics” (2007, April 12). The notion of collaborating with a supposed political adversary inevitably prompted criticism from opponents,³⁶ while several pundits were similarly dismayed. Murphy stated this move was “the latest signal that the natural governing party is seriously off stride. Real parties don’t help their rivals” (2007, April

³⁴ Back in January 2007, it was reported that Dion was open to allowing Elizabeth May into the election leaders debate, a move the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial board called an act of “foolhardy nobility” (2007, January 22: A12). A month later, Ivison observed that the two leaders “had something of a mutual admiration society going” (2007, February 20: A5), with May praising Dion’s environmental record, and the Liberal leader supporting her bid for the debates.

³⁵ For the upcoming election, Elizabeth May announced she would run in the Nova Scotia riding of Central Nova. This was largely considered a safe Conservative seat, as it was the riding of prominent Conservative cabinet minister Peter MacKay.

³⁶ The Conservatives noted that this was another example of Dion’s weak leadership, with Human Resources Minister Monte Solberg raising the rhetorical question, “If Stéphane Dion’s leadership is too weak for Central Nova, then why should it be acceptable for any Canadian?” (Taber, 2007, April 14: A4). The NDP, meanwhile, complained that the arrangement was a product of “backroom wheeling and dealing” (*The Canadian Press*, 2007, April 13) and was unfair to voters.

14: A23). The *Globe and Mail*'s editorial board said the agreement was "bizarre on so many levels that only one word does it justice: flaky" (2007, April 14: A22). It then continued saying the arrangement was an affront to Liberals who worked in the riding, and the assumption was to be made that Dion "is so single-mindedly pursuing the environmental cause that he is willing to subordinate the interests of his party" (Ibid). The *National Post* was equally critical, noting that the deal was not only an endorsement of May, but an endorsement of the entire Green platform and every "lunatic statement" from a Green candidate would then reflect on the Liberal leader's judgment (2007, April 14: A24).³⁷

Nevertheless, Coyne argued there might be some strategic thinking beyond the arrangement. The columnist suggested that in making the deal with May, Dion's ulterior motive could be to "unite the left" and "squeeze" the NDP (2007, April 14: A24). Other columnists noted that with this agreement the Liberal leader could be attempting to present himself as a new type of politician. *Globe and Mail* columnist Lawrence Martin stated the move was "a bold initiative" and said, "Dion is out to show he is a new kind of political leader" (2007, April 14: A23). Dion described the arrangement himself as "a gesture of co-operation in order to be sure that Canada will put together all its assets as a great nation" (Taber, 2007, April 14: A4) and noted "there are larger issues at stake than the petty partisanship of politics" (L. Martin, 2007, April 14: A23). The *Globe and Mail*'s Rick Salutin also suggested this alliance "showed a respect for . . . [a] new kind of

³⁷ Shortly following the announcement of the deal between Dion and May, it was reported that a Green Party member in B.C. had said he "felt an urge to pump [his] fist into the air" in celebration after the 9-11 attacks (*National Post* editorial board, 2007, April 14: A24).

politics” (2007: A21). Such an approach, he argued, was threatening to the traditional “oldsters in the parties and media” (Ibid).

Despite Liberal spokespersons highlighting the deal as an example of new politics, the move prompted criticism of the leader from within the party. Taber reported “many party members are shaking their heads, calling it ‘goofy,’ ‘dumb’ and ‘crazy’” (2007, April 14: A4). A “long-time Liberal” told her, “Not running a candidate in [Peter] MacKay’s riding is truly the stupidest thing that a group of people who wrote the book on stupid things have done yet” (2007, April 13: A1). Bryden reported that some Liberals said privately they were concerned “the pact reinforces a slew of negatives” such as the perception that Dion was “weak and needs to be propped up by another party” (2007, April 12).

As the months passed for the new Liberal leader, criticism from such anonymous Liberal sources began to increase.³⁸ In a 2,000-word article summarizing the main internal criticisms, Taber highlighted the views of a number of anonymous Liberal MPs and strategists. For example, she reported that Dion asked Nova Scotia Liberals in a private conversation what they thought of the arrangement with May. The sources said they “didn’t get the sense Mr. Dion was listening to them” and despite their unfavorable views, Dion made the announcement the next morning. Although the agreement did not seem to dismay voters, Taber reported that “it caused divisions within Liberal ranks that highlight continuing questions about Mr. Dion’s leadership”. Among internal issues, she said Liberals were displeased with “a lack of consultation with MPs, not enough

³⁸ For example, unnamed Liberals complained to the press the leader’s decision to vote against the anti-terror legislation was quite divisive. According to Ivison, the Liberals at this time were “at the brink of mutiny” (2007, February 20: A5) while Don Martin commented that the leader was “punch drunk by internal strife” (2007, February 22: A1).

emphasis on party renewal and dissatisfaction with research and travel staff in the Opposition Leader's Office". (2007, April 23: A4).

The other area that was raising complaints was the Liberals' ability to mount an election. At the end of March 2007, Dion "put on a show of force" and delivered "an impassioned partisan stemwinder before boisterous Liberal MPs, senators and their parliamentary staff" (Bryden, 2007, March 29) announcing the party was prepared to fight. He said, "If the prime minister wants to force an election on Canadians, so be it. The Liberal party is ready" (Ibid). Nonetheless, it was reported that "[d]espite Dion's bravado about being ready, Liberal insiders privately admit they could use a few more months to raise money, develop a comprehensive platform and recruit candidates" (Ibid). One week later, the *Globe and Mail* revealed that the Liberals were "scrambling to find a campaign plane" and another MP joined the list of "nearly a dozen" Liberals who did not want to run in the next election (Taber, 2007, April 5: A4). Finally, at the beginning of May, the status of the Liberal election machine became apparent when the party fundraising numbers were first revealed. According to the *Globe and Mail*, between January and March 2007 the Liberals raised \$588,841 from 4,365 contributors, while the Conservatives acquired \$5.1-million from 45,192 donors (Taber, 2007, May 2: A4).

Luckily, as one strategist admitted, the party's readiness would not be tested that spring. "The time they really had us on the ropes . . . was back in February and March. That's when they could have nailed us to the wall", the source told Lawrence Martin (2007, May 3: A21). However, such a test would come soon enough as the prime minister had a number of empty seats he needed to fill in the House of Commons.

He waited until the end of July 2007 before announcing that three by-elections were to be held in September in the Quebec ridings of Saint-Hyacinthe – Bagot, Roberval – Lac-Saint-Jean, and Outremont. Of the three, it was the latter that was granted the most significance and determined to be a key test of Dion’s leadership. According to the *Canadian Press*, this Montreal riding was “[h]istorically considered locktight Liberal turf” (Cheadle, 2007, July 27) and was previously held by Liberal MP Jean Lapierre who won the last election by 2,500 votes. Running for the Liberals would be Dion’s hand-picked candidate Jocelyn Coulon, a political science professor at the University of Montreal.

In its initial report on the upcoming by-elections, the *Canadian Press* noted that winning in Outremont would certainly be a bonus for any party, while “losing it would be an unmitigated disaster for Liberal Leader Stephane Dion, who is still viewed with skepticism by some Quebec Liberals” (Cheadle, 2007, July 27). This sentiment was echoed in the *Globe and Mail*, which reported that the Liberals needed to win in Outremont “to avoid the perception that the party is in trouble in Quebec” (Laghi & Clark, 2007, July 20: A4).

Over the subsequent month-and-a-half leading to the by-election, such would be the discussion of Outremont. In an article the day before the vote, the *Globe and Mail* reported that Dion would face “substantial criticism” (Curry, Séguin & Laghi, 2007: A4) if his party were to lose. This view was complimented by University of Montreal political science professor Antonia Maioni who said the Liberal candidate was actually very similar to Dion: “Coulon is sort of Stéphane Dion’s alter ego. . . . And so in many ways, this is not only a by-election, but it’s also a referendum on Stéphane Dion because he’s

chosen someone who resembles him the most” (Ibid). This theme was repeated again in the *Globe and Mail* the following day in an article with the headline “Outremont by-election a test for Dion; Loss of Liberal bastion could be viewed as evidence of weak leadership” (Clark & Leblanc, 2007: A4).

With such a build-up, the results were interpreted as nothing less than a “nightmare scenario” (Panetta, 2007, September 17). The Liberals lost Outremont to NDP candidate Thomas Muclair, and came in third and fourth in the other contests. For the *National Post*’s Hamilton it was a “stunning blow”, which gave “Dion’s party plenty of reason to panic” (2007, September 19: A5). Such was the sentiment in the *Globe and Mail*, which reported that the “blow” was “expected to cast a shadow over . . . [Dion’s] leadership” (Clark & L. Martin, 2007: A1). Indeed, as Simpson opined, “the three Quebec by-elections were the first serious electoral test for Stéphane Dion, and he flunked” (2007, September 19: A23).

In a front-page column two days after the vote, Don Martin observed Dion riding a float at a farming parade in rural Ontario. For the columnist, the float was a “hearse” and the Liberal leader was a “corpse”. According to Martin, with the loss in Outremont, Dion “generated a serious problem of perception, if not reality, and appearances matter most in politics. He has always had the geeky potential to look like a loser. He has rivals who openly think he’s a loser. Now he has an electoral result that confirms his status as a loser”. (2007, September 19: A1).

Quebec columnist Gagnon said the results were clear: “The simple truth is that Mr. Dion is not liked in Quebec and that francophone voters don’t identify with him”. Even before becoming leader, she said Quebec Liberals did not support Dion and were

sitting “on the sidelines, waiting for a general election and a change of leadership”. According to the columnist, in his home province Dion appeared “stubborn and arrogant” and “surrounded by anglophone advisors from Ontario”. She noted that his two francophone advisors had left, as the leader did not seem willing to take their advice. Said one “insider”, “The boss doesn’t listen to anybody, . . . and that’s a problem, especially when one doesn’t have a great deal of political instinct”. (2007, September 24: A19).

However, not all were ready to blame Dion entirely. In one sense, the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial said the Liberal leader was a victim of political strategy. Prime Minister Harper had six by-elections to call – three in Quebec, two in Ontario, and one in B.C. – and he chose the three in the province in which the Liberals struggled. As such, “Mr. Harper cleverly set the Liberals up for a fall” and created the “perception . . . that while Mr. Harper has his party on the rise, Mr. Dion’s is in disarray”. While the by-elections should raise Liberal concerns about the party’s organization, the editorial argued that there were too many “extenuating circumstances” to make the results “a definitive statement on Mr. Dion’s leadership”. (2007, September 19: A22).

Although the by-elections were portrayed as a Liberal “rout”, a “historic breakthrough” for the NDP,³⁹ and a triumph for the Conservatives,⁴⁰ Coyne argued that the main news was lost. He said, “[T]he real story of Monday’s byelections in Quebec is the party none of these headlines thinks to mention: the Bloc”. According to Coyne, it was true that the Liberals “did exceptionally poorly”, however there was not much of a change from 2006. “The worst that can be said of Stephane Dion”, said the columnist, “is

³⁹ The win in Outremont would bring the NDP its first candidate in Quebec in more than a decade.

⁴⁰ Despite poor results for the Conservatives in Outremont, they won the riding in Roberval and saw their vote percentage increase in Saint-Hyacinthe.

that he has not, in the space of 18 months, turned things around”. Ultimately, he argued, the loss in Outremont was the result of tremendous gains for the NDP at the expense of all parties, particularly the Bloc Québécois. (2007, September 19: A20).⁴¹

Despite this, the story was about the Liberals’ humiliating fall in a safe Montreal riding, which then spiraled into a battle between named and unnamed Liberal sources over the leader. In its front-page story the morning after the by-elections, a *Globe and Mail* headline announced, “Even before polls close, Liberals begin pointing fingers” (Clark & L. Martin, 2007, September 18: A1). The story then said some Liberals were criticizing organizers who supported Ignatieff for dissuading party members from working in the campaign. Sources added that they had been filling complaints for months about Ignatieff supporters and accused them of attempting to fill senior party positions with individuals loyal to Dion’s former rival.⁴² The following day, the newspaper’s front-page headline said, “Calls for Liberal shakeup dog Dion” and it was reported that “Quebec party insiders” were critical of Dion’s aides in the province, which were unable to rally francophone voters (Clark, Leblanc & Taber, 2007: A1).⁴³

⁴¹ The results of the vote in the 2006 federal election for Outremont were 35.18% for the Liberals, 29.01% for the Bloc, 17.2% for the NDP and 12.73% for the Conservatives. In the 2007 by-election, the NDP won with 47.5% (+ 30.3% from 2006), while the Liberals were left with 29% (- 6.18% from 2006), the Bloc at 10.9% (- 18.11% from 2006) and the Conservatives with 8.6% (- 4.13% from 2006) (Clark, Leblanc & Taber, 2007, September 19: A1).

⁴² Since Dion’s inception as Liberal leader, references to the potential aspirations of rivals and apparent slights between former leadership camps were not uncommon. For example, in August 2007 Dion supporters were reportedly rankled by an article Ignatieff wrote denouncing his previous views on the Iraq war. Stated Ivison at the time, “While he has reined in his supporters from actively campaigning for their man to replace Liberal leader Stéphane Dion, he must still harbour ambitions to take over the top job should Mr. Dion falter” (2007, August 4: A6).

⁴³ For example, Marc Bélanger, the party’s regional president for Lower St. Lawrence-Gaspésie, said, “It’s up to the leader to ensure that his people are reconnected with the population. Now the question is whether Stéphane Dion is capable of doing it”. When asked about accusations of “sabotage” from Dion’s rival, Bélanger, who supported Ignatieff in the convention, said, “Send

However, Dion did not criticize Ignatieff for the defeat in Outremont. Instead, he predicted the Liberals would win the riding in the next election. He said, “At that point we will look back on this night of Sept. 17 and say: ‘We Liberals had the strength to overcome a difficult period’” (Panetta, 2007, September 17). A few days later, in what all three outlets described as a “mea culpa”, the Liberal leader took the blame for the loss and said he needed to change his image. “I must fight against the caricature that is in people’s spirit more than the person I really am, or the values I really represent. . . . We need to restart the debate about Stephane Dion, who I am, what I’ve done”, he said (Perreux, 2007). Dion noted that attacks from both separatists and the Conservatives successfully created this “caricature” and he admitted that he should have responded. “I assumed that the debate would be more on the substance of what I have to propose than the personalities. And their character assassination is powerful for many people. It works” (Clark, 2007, September 21: A4).

The Liberal leader’s admission was described as both “emotional” (Perreux, 2007) and “remarkable” (Hamilton, 2007, September 21: A4). The *Canadian Press* said it “showed the human side of a political leader who is seen by many in Quebec as a stiff, stubborn academic who has sold out their nationalist aspirations” (Perreux, 2007). As well, it was reported that “Some Quebec Liberals who have been privately critical of Mr. Dion this week said they were impressed by his move” (Clark, 2007, September 21: A4). However, an editorial in the *Globe and Mail* was not so complimentary. Although taking responsibility was “appropriate”, the editorial argued that “there is only so much public self-flagellation any politician can engage in before it becomes unpleasant to watch”

a message to Mr. Dion to have him shut his people’s traps”. (Clark, Leblanc & Taber, 2007, September 19: A1).

(2007, September 24: A18). Ironically, it was stated that his repeated admissions of culpability and pledges to improve almost countered his message. “Groveling”, said the editorial, “better suited to the daytime talk-show circuit, only serves to reinforce the perception of weakness that continues to hurt him” (Ibid).

“His Own Unique Hell”

It had been nearly 12 months since Stéphane Dion first ascended the stage as the surprising new head of the Official Opposition. As such, it was seen as a time to assess the performance of the Liberal leader. Bryden noted that a one-year anniversary was traditionally seen as the “paper” anniversary, which seemed appropriate since “Liberal rank and file are giving Stéphane Dion what could be termed paper-thin support”. He would be marking the occasion with a meeting of Liberal presidents in Montreal and, after speaking with a sample of those presidents, the journalist said it appeared there was “a consensus that Dion deserved a chance to prove his mettle – mixed with lingering doubt that he’s up to the task of winning the next election”. (2007, November 29).

In the *National Post*, Don Martin agreed with this sentiment, noting that when asked about their leader’s past year, “Liberal insiders pause . . . pause some more . . . and then insist things can only get better – faint praise better suited to a deceased’s heaven-bound eulogy”. He continued, “By almost daily measure, it’s been an *annus horribilis* for” a leader who was described as having “a syntax-garbling command of English as his second language”. (2007, December 1: A19).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Nevertheless, polling numbers had not changed a substantial amount over the past 12 months. The *Canadian Press* reported that according to polling firm Harris-Decima, at the beginning of

The past three months appeared to be particularly bad for the head of the Official Opposition. The “humiliating” by-election loss (as some *Canadian Press* reporters continued to refer to it into December 2007) was followed with a series of stories about internal fighting that did not diminish after Dion’s “mea culpa”. By October, Brigitte Legault, the Liberals’ national vice-president (French), told the *Canadian Press* that the situation in Quebec for the party was a “bit of a free for all” (2007, October 4). Party members in the province were openly calling for Dion to fire national party director Jamie Carroll for comments he allegedly made in a private strategy meeting. Said Hamilton of the controversy, “What is telling is that a seemingly innocuous internal spat so quickly burst into the open” (2007, September 29: A4).⁴⁵

As this was taking place, reports arose that three Liberal candidates, Marc Garneau, Paul Leduc, and Pierre-Luc Bellerose, announced they would not run for the party. A so-called “star candidate”, the *Globe and Mail* said Garneau left the party because “he was frustrated by the leader’s delay in appointing him” (Clark, 2007, September 27: A6).⁴⁶ Paul Leduc, who was described as a “a three-term mayor of a large Montreal suburb”, announced he would not be running after he did not hear from Dion about his nomination, citing the Liberal leader for his “inaction” and “indecision” (Rodrigue, 2007). Finally, in discussing his decision, Bellerose said he thought Dion

2007 the Conservatives were at 34 percent with the Liberals at 31. By December, the Conservatives were still at this level, while the Liberals had gone down to 29 percent (Cheadle, 2007, December 19).

⁴⁵ This was not the first time Liberals had criticized Carroll. In May 2007 it was reported that Ignatieff had asked the Liberal leader to fire the party director after Carroll said he was kept “up at night” worried about what Dion’s Liberal rivals may be planning “behind the scenes” (Bryden, 2007, May 14).

⁴⁶ He would later change his mind and run for the Liberals. However, his announcement in late September 2007 that he was not running for the party only added to the stream of negative stories surrounding the Liberal leader.

should “think of the whole party” and step down (Bryden, 2007, October 2).

The fallout from the Outremont loss provided fodder for columnists to speculate on Dion’s future as Liberal leader. The *National Post*’s Craig Offman wrote that after the “party’s squalid performance . . . presumptive successors must be asking themselves the same question: Is it time to dump the boss yet?” (2007: A1) Ivison continued the discussion a couple weeks later saying rumors were circulating in Ottawa that rival teams were uniting against Dion, while others had asked the Liberal leader “to step down ‘in the interests of the party’” (2007, October 3: A6). In an editorial, the *Globe and Mail* said Dion was being squeezed, noting that “rarely do parties turn on their own leaders as quickly and viciously as the federal Liberals appear to be turning on Stéphane Dion. The result is an ugly spectacle that reflects poorly on Mr. Dion and his critics equally” (2007, September 29: A26). If this continues, the paper warned, the “party could soon plunge to depths it has rarely seen” (Ibid). For the *National Post*, the situation was a “Quebec meltdown”, and the paper’s editorial board suggested that “If the Liberals are to avoid being wiped out in the next election, Mr. Dion has to take decisive action” (2007, October 4: A20).

After first defending Carroll, Dion announced that his former campaign manager would no longer be serving as the party’s national director. At the same time, it was reported that there would be a “shake up” of the “party, office, [and] campaign team” (Bryden, 2007, October 2).⁴⁷ However, only a few weeks later, readers were informed that “Dion suffered another setback” in Quebec after “two key party organizers” resigned

⁴⁷ Dion would be bringing in new advisors and organizers, such as long-time Liberal organizer Senator David Smith as campaign co-chair.

(Hamilton, 2007, October 17: A4).⁴⁸ To add to the matter, the resignations were publicly announced only hours before the Liberal leader was about to tackle another fire to be set by his official adversary.

Back in early September 2007 before the by-elections, the prime minister announced he would start a new Parliament session with a speech from the throne in October. At the time, Dion was quoted saying his party would not support the government without knowing the future status of the Afghan mission. A few weeks later, on September 23, he said he would wait to read the speech before deciding, but said the Liberals would not give their support unless certain measures regarding the environment, Afghanistan, and poverty were addressed. Without this, he said, “you can understand we will not be able to rise to support such a throne speech” (The *Canadian Press*, 2007, September 23). Regardless, an “emboldened” prime minister issued what the *Canadian Press* referred to as an “ultimatum”; essentially telling his opponents to “bend to his government’s political vision for the foreseeable future or force an election” (Ditchburn, 2007, October 3). In other words, all major votes starting with the throne speech were to be declared confidence measures.

The consensus was that the prime minister had put Dion in a difficult position. Essentially, he was seen as having two options, either “chronic humiliation or potential political suicide” (Panetta, 2007, October 4) or as Ivison said, “political emasculation or

⁴⁸ The party’s Quebec lieutenant, MP Marcel Proulx, quit along with the executive director of the Liberals’ Quebec division. The article noted that two other Liberals, MPs Denis Coderre and Pablo Rodriguez, were offered Proulx’s job before it was given to Liberal Senator Celine Hervieux-Payette. (Hamilton, 2007, October 17: A4).

immolation” (2007, October 10: A1).⁴⁹ According to Don Martin, “To avoid a fall election now, Mr. Dion must unconditionally surrender to a Conservative agenda he’s duty-bound to oppose” (2007, October 4: A1).

The government’s throne speech was delivered October 16, 2007, just hours after two Liberal Quebec organizers said they would be resigning. The next day, the Opposition leader gave his response in the House of Commons. In what the *Globe and Mail*’s Campbell Clark said “must have felt a little like his own unique hell”, Dion “stern-faced” gave a “35-minute critique” before concluding that the “Liberals would duck an election by abstaining on a confidence vote” (2007, October 20: A4). As he spoke, the *Canadian Press* noted that his opponents openly mocked the Liberal leader and the chamber filled with “derisive guffaws”, “mass giggles”, “barbed heckles”, and “knee-slapping chortles” (Panetta, 2007, October 17). As the reporter commented, “They call laughter the kiss of death in politics – and the smooches rained down upon Stéphane Dion from the Conservative benches” (Ibid).

Over the next few weeks, the Liberal leader continued to face considerable criticism for what Don Martin called his “unconditional surrender” (2007, October 18: A1). Said the columnist, thanks to “a fetal-position Opposition, . . . Parliament appears to have elected a majority Conservative government in legislative power” (Ibid). However, in the end, the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial said, “Dion rightly lets the show go on”, noting that for the Liberal leader “to force an election would not have been brave; it would have been foolhardy” (2007, October 18: A18).

⁴⁹ The death metaphor seemed preferred for this situation, as Ivison commented that given Dion’s last “three weeks of internal crisis . . . less resolute men” would have reached “for their revolvers” (2007, October 10: A1).

Regardless, Dion's opponents were quick to criticize. In addition to the mockery in the House, Don Martin noted that sources were saying the Conservatives planned on dropping another negative ad campaigns on Dion, which he lamented would be "overkill of a twitching corpse" (2007, October 18: A1). Meanwhile, it was also reported that the NDP was attempting to position itself as the true opposition in the House. According to party leader Jack Layton in an op-ed called "Following our principles",

The NDP will oppose this Throne Speech because we have principles. We know what we believe. Our MPs will be in their place for each and every vote, and we will rise when it is our turn to vote and demonstrate clearly our opposition to the wrong direction in which the government is taking Canada.

I invite every Canadian who voted Liberal in the past, who today is disappointed with their former party, to join us in changing politics in this country.

(2007: A23)

As Simpson said, "Liberal weakness, real and imagined, has emboldened the other three parties in Parliament" (2007, October 19: A23).

This trend would not dissipate as the government put the Liberal leader in "another bend-over-and-take-it" (D. Martin, 2007, October 31: A4) position bringing forward what was referred to as a "mini-budget" promising tax cuts to Canadians, including a further reduction to the goods and services tax (GST). Although Dion had previously criticized this proposal, he let the financial statement pass. Adding to the matter, it was reported that Liberals were "shaking their heads" (Panetta, 2007, October 31) after hearing news their leader said he would then consider reversing the GST cut.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Said "one prominent Liberal", "Dion understands what makes good policy. But not so much about what makes good politics" (Panetta, 2007, October 31). The *Globe and Mail's* editorial board agreed with this sentiment, saying although Dion's "economic instincts may be right . . .

Taking into account the past two months, there was a sense that things could only improve. Said the *Globe and Mail's* MacGregor, after posing such a “brilliant and promising . . . victory in the Liberal leadership, [Dion] seems to have gone from underdog to dog” with his comments on the GST “just the latest pothole in what will soon be deemed a very poor first year for the would-be prime minister” (2007, November 7: A4). According to Ivison, it could be possible that Dion reached what in business would be called an “inflection point, where sales are still plunging, but not as fast as before” (2007, November 1: A6). Indeed, it was deemed that another politician whose reputation was under attack rescued Dion as the media spotlight shifted to the business relationships of former prime minister Brian Mulroney.

Although coverage of Dion in the fall of 2007 was predominately negative, it should be mentioned that there was some sympathy sent in the Liberal leader's direction. In an opinion piece, Toronto radio host John Moore wrote that Dion was a “victim” of a news media preoccupied with viewing “politics . . . [as] a soap opera”, which had been characterizing him as a “sad-clown . . . for some time”. Although acknowledging that Dion did have “serious troubles”, Moore argued that the recent “media pile-on obscures a more complex political story” in that Dion could be “genuinely bowing” to the public's desire not to have an election. (2007, October 20: A23).

Another columnist that showed some empathy was the *Globe and Mail's* Lawrence Martin. Despite the negative news surrounding the Liberal leader, this writer had repeatedly noted that Dion was a man of high integrity. In analyzing his past year, the columnist commented that not only was Dion a “victim . . . of his own folly, which was

his political instincts, never good, went particularly awry with this off-the-cuff declaration” (2007, November 2: A18).

ample, but also of a system that can make a mockery of any thoughtful, idealistic man”.

Over the previous 12 months the majority of the stories written about the Liberal leader were not about his policies, but instead “how he was doing politically, how he was faring in the polls”. According to Martin,

Babe-in-the-woods Dion didn’t know what hit him. He was savaged for his poor English, for his reaching out to the Green Party, for low polls in his home province, for the errant words of his national party director, for a by-election loss, for running away from a general election. Every policy pronouncement he proudly introduced was drowned out in a hailstorm of: “Look at the polls – this guy’s a loser.”

(2007, November 26: A19)

The column concluded quoting former Liberal MP Stan Keyes, who exclaimed, “Politics is a whore’s game”, and according to Martin, “A shell-shocked Stéphane Dion has just spent a year learning what he meant”. (2007, November 26: A19).

“Aggravating the Situation”

To mark his one-year anniversary in December 2007, the Liberal leader gave a series of interviews. The *Canadian Press*’ Bryden observed that “Dion seemed remarkably upbeat for a leader” who had a “tumultuous” first year (2007, November 30). He told her he had made the decision to abstain because voters did not want an election. According to Bryden, he acknowledged the year had been difficult and said “he sometimes worries he’s losing the battle to define himself to the ‘caricature’ perpetrated by his critics” (Ibid). However, he added that he knew his role as Opposition leader would be hard and he said he was following the example of others who succeeded thanks to their “conviction” and focus (Ibid). In an interview with the *Globe and Mail*’s Taber, Dion reportedly “described

himself as . . . discreet” and “private”, saying his hero was Galileo because he was brave enough to stand up for what he believed was right (2007, December 1: A6). “Still struggling with English”, Taber noted, Dion said “he is a leader who never looks back, only ‘straight ahead’” (Ibid). Despite what the reporter said were “constant rumblings” that Dion’s leadership rivals were waiting to “stage takeovers of the party”, the Liberal leader said his relations with Rae and Ignatieff were “great” (Ibid).

The main news peg that both reporters pulled from the interview was the fact that the Liberal leader “suggested” his caucus would “stop propping up” the Harper government and would “instead consider each vote on its . . . [own] merit” (Taber, 2007, December 1: A6). Most certainly, as Dion advanced into his second year he would face some significant issues that would require consideration and test his resolve in abstaining.

Looming in the background of Canadian politics since 2001 was the ongoing mission in Afghanistan. After Canadian soldiers were redeployed to the dangerous Kandahar region in late 2005, the mission earned a significant profile in the media due to a sudden increase in casualties. Slated to end in 2009 thanks to a vote in Parliament in 2006, pressure had been growing for the government to make a decision on extending the operation.

Although the past Liberal government first sent Canadian troops to Afghanistan, Dion voted against extending the mission in 2006. Shortly after the Liberal leader was elected, he faced criticism for being unclear on whether he supported an extension or withdrawal. By late February, Dion announced, “A Liberal government led by me will unequivocally commit to ending Canada’s mission in Kandahar in 2009” (Peritz, 2007: A4). This would essentially remain his position until 2008.

For a prime minister that was seen as a clever strategist, October 2007 marked the point in which he ascended to “the strategic realm of evil genius”. To provide advice on extending the Afghan mission, Harper appointed an independent panel led by former Liberal cabinet minister John Manley. In doing so, Don Martin said the panel’s “recommendations [would be] under a Liberal flag that current Liberal leader Stephane Dion will find difficult, if not impossible, to refute”. (2007, October 13: A5).

Nevertheless, in his party’s submission to the panel in early January, Dion remained committed to his pledge to end the mission in 2009. This position received criticism as it was submitted just before the Liberal leader travelled to Kandahar and saw the battlefield himself.⁵¹ He was then further disparaged after he made a comment in French about preventing Taliban insurgents from crossing into Afghanistan from Pakistan: “If they [Pakistani leaders] are incapable of doing it themselves, it is something that we could envision with NATO forces; how to help Pakistan help us bring peace to Afghanistan” (Curry, 2008, January 17: A14). Critics immediately interpreted this quote to mean he was calling for a military incursion into Pakistan.⁵²

Although Liberals clarified that Dion was proposing diplomatic cooperation rather than a military invasion, it increased skepticism from those already critical of the Liberal leader’s position on Afghanistan.⁵³ In addition, the *National Post*’s editorial board noted

⁵¹ According to the *Canadian Press*’ lead, “The Liberal vision for Canada’s future role in Afghanistan has changed little despite a whirlwind tour of the war-torn country by the party’s leaders” (Cohen, 2008). Said the *Globe and Mail*’s Christie Blatchford, “His visit there was a disingenuous and fraudulent exercise in bullshit public relations” (2008: A2).

⁵² Along with a rebuke from the Pakistan High Commission as “irrational” (Bryden, 2008, January 17), Defence Minister Peter MacKay said the suggestion was “absolute lunacy” (Curry, 2008, January 17: A14).

⁵³ According to Lorne Gunter, Dion may not have meant invading Pakistan, but if Harper made similar comments as Opposition leader, “the Liberals would have pounced on it as proof he

that Dion's remarks brought questions about his ability to communicate. It said, such comments "raises the frightening theoretical possibility that every time he spoke as prime minister the media would have to wait for someone else to . . . explain what he really meant" (2008, January 18: A14). Instead of "dreaming up new campaigns for Canada and its allies to embark upon", the editorial argued that the Liberal leader should "stiffen his backbone in regard to the war we are already fighting" (Ibid).

A few days later the Manley report was released, which the *Canadian Press*' Bruce Cheadle described as a document that "looks more like a 90-page rolled up newspaper with which to smack the Liberals on the nose" (2008, January 22). Among other recommendations, the panel called for the mission to be extended – provided the government sought additional allies in southern Afghanistan. In response, the Liberal leader said his party remained united on its 2009 deadline for combat duties, however, reporters noted that there was a division in Liberal ranks over the mission.

At the same time, Bryden reported that "[w]ith the future of Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan resting on his shoulders, . . . [Dion was] being tugged in opposite directions by his two main political rivals" (February 4, 2008). On one side, the NDP was calling for the mission to end, while on the other the prime minister was encouraging Dion to abide by the Manley panel recommendations with no clear deadline. Still, after meeting with Harper in early February, it was reported that Dion would not budge from his position. "We will never compromise our principles", he was quoted saying. "If they don't change their mind, we'll have to make our choice" (Iverson, 2008, February 9: A18).

Such posturing on all sides raised speculation that there could be an election

lacked the mental sophistication to be PM. There's no reason not to accuse Mr. Dion of the same now" (2008: A14).

surrounding the Afghan mission. However, the consensus was that no party wished to make the mission a question for the electorate. Dion's position was largely characterized as equivalent to waving a white flag and calling for surrender.⁵⁴ Finally, the Liberal caucus announced that it would be changing its deadline to end the war to 2011 and both sides came together towards crafting a motion to extend the mission to this year.

Nevertheless, clarity was needed over which political leader won and lost on Afghanistan. According to Macdonald, "Harper checkmated Dion" as he simply outmaneuvered a Liberal leader lacking in political strategy (2008, February 8: A16). Meanwhile, the *National Post* featured an editorial under the headline "Dion backs down" (2008, February 23: A20), while the text running above Ivison's column stated, "Dion makes right call, still loses" (2008, February 13: A4).

In the *Globe and Mail*, Norman Spector commented that Dion actually won the debate over Afghanistan. However, he warned the Liberal leader "should be concerned that large chunks of the media have bought into the Conservative definition of him as feckless". He said, "Dion was given scarcely any credit for tenaciousness. Worse, after he won the argument, scarcely anyone noticed". Although the Liberals had changed their deadline to 2011, the prime minister had insisted "all along that it was not feasible to set an end date". However, it was "to Mr. Harper's good fortune to have pressed Mr. Dion into a media template where even when he wins, he loses". (2008: A19).

⁵⁴ Those in support of the war labeled the Liberal leader "spineless" (Turley-Ewart, 2008: A12) and pointed out that Canada did not "cut and run" in 1917 or 1942 (NP, 2008, January 23: A16). In calling for both Harper and Dion to compromise, the *Globe and Mail* said, "[B]y pulling the rug out from under the troops, [the Liberals] not only risk all that has been accomplished by Canadian soldiers, but stand to be seen as the ones responsible for the mission's failure" (2008, February 7: A18). Meanwhile, in the *National Post's* editorial, it was deemed that leaving Afghanistan would "render futile the sacrifices of the 78 Canadian soldiers who have paid the ultimate price" (2008, February 12: A16).

As Spector lamented in his column, rather than “exposing Mr. Harper when he beat a retreat, the media immediately turned their attention to whether Mr. Dion would have the guts to bring down the government on its budget” (2008: A19). Indeed, with Afghanistan settled, this was seen as the next major issue for the Liberal leader.⁵⁵ Despite statements of possibly ending their abstaining policy, by January 2008 it was reported that the Liberals had “toned down the sabre rattling” (Bryden, 2008, January 20). However, less than a month later, Dion told the press, “If the budget is wrong for the country, we will not support this budget, you may be sure. . . . We will see the budget and we will make our decision at that time” (Galloway, 2008, February 11: A1). With only a week to go before the budget, it was reported that the Liberal leader was hinting he would let the financial plan pass, provided it was “not too harmful for the Canadian economy” (Chase & Séguin, 2008: A1). In doing so, he said he would save taxpayers the cost of an election.

It was the day after the budget release and Bryden noted that Dion was wearing a pink tie in honour of anti-bullying day. Despite this occasion, she said it “didn’t stop his rivals from ganging up on the perceived weakling in the federal political playground”. Thanks to the Liberals’ decision to abstain from the budget, the journalist reported that “Prime Minister Stephen Harper, NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe took turns rubbing the Liberal leader’s nose in the dirt, mocking him openly for running away from an election fight”. (2008, February 27).

But as Dion’s opponents were disparaging him in Ottawa for being weak, in the

⁵⁵ The previous year the Liberals voted against the federal budget and it was passed with the aid of the Bloc Québécois. However, 2008 would be different as both the Bloc and NDP had made clear they would not support the government.

riding of Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River in northern Saskatchewan, Liberals were accusing him of being heavy-handed. Back in December 2007, the government announced that four by-elections were to be held on March 17, 2008. At that time, the *Canadian Press* reported that three of the ridings – one in Vancouver and two in Toronto – were considered safe Liberal territory, while the fourth “could yet prove another blow to Dion’s fledgling leadership, which has still not entirely recovered from three humiliating byelection losses in Quebec” (Bryden, 2007, December 21).⁵⁶

Complicating matters was the fact that prominent Saskatchewan farmer David Orchard was reportedly seeking the Liberal seat. The former Progressive Conservative-turned-Liberal was regarded as having a devoted base of grassroots supporters who were preparing a strong campaign for the nomination. In addition, Orchard’s campaign was also encouraged by the fact that they felt they would receive the party leader’s support since Orchard brought his delegates to Dion in the 2006 leadership convention.

Despite this, Dion “created a firestorm within his own party” (Ditchburn, 2008, January 10) after he announced he would nominate former Saskatchewan cabinet minister Joan Betty to run.⁵⁷ Orchard supporters were “irate” about the decision and it was also reported that “some native leaders are suggesting it’s racist to bypass the democratic nomination contest in the heavily aboriginal riding” (Bryden, 2008, January 4). The story reached the attention of the national papers, which both ran editorials. The *National Post* commented that Orchard was “unexpectedly betrayed” for the simple reason that he was

⁵⁶ In the 2006 election, the Liberals won this riding by less than 100 votes.

⁵⁷ As a First Nations woman, it was reported some Liberals felt she would be a strong candidate in a riding with a large aboriginal population. In addition, this appointment also fell in place with Dion’s pledge to have at least one-third of the party’s candidates be women – a policy that prompted discussion in the press throughout his tenure as Liberal leader.

not a woman (2008, January 9: A12). At the same time, the paper said it was hard to disagree with the argument expressed by one Métis leader who said he felt the appointment carried “the old Indian agent mentality . . . The idea that ‘we’ know better than ‘you’ the people, what is good for you” (Ibid). In the *Globe and Mail*, an editorial noted that the treatment of this potential candidate reflected “poorly on” the leader. It said Dion’s decision to accept Orchard’s support in the leadership convention, but not consider the candidate good enough to run for the party “speaks to a crass opportunism not normally associated with the Liberal Leader” (2008, January 8: A14).

For her report days before the contests, Bryden wrote, “After months of humiliation . . . Liberals are counting on victories in at least three of the four byelections to boost their sagging morale and provide enough momentum to allow them to finally pull the plug” (2008, March 13). In the end, the Liberals did win three ridings, while losing the Saskatchewan seat. The victories brought prominent Liberals Bob Rae and Martha Hall Findlay to Ottawa,⁵⁸ along with former B.C. cabinet minister Joyce Murray. In terms of the latter candidate, her win again raised concerns about the leader given that she won by less than 200 votes in what was considered a safe Liberal seat.

As pundits discussed whether the results in Saskatchewan and B.C. “exposed the weakness of his leadership” (The *Globe and Mail* editorial board, 2008, March 19: A20), the Liberal leader was again turning to his home province where a *Globe and Mail* front-page headline said he faced “revolt in Quebec ranks” (Leblanc, 2008, March 25: A1).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Rae and Findlay were reported to bring star power to the Liberal caucus, along with speculation on what impact the former leadership rivals could have on Dion.

⁵⁹ After disappearing from the news since the imbroglio in the fall, the situation in Quebec reportedly remained tense. Quebec columnist Gagnon quoted TV pundit Jean Lapierre who

The newspaper reported that senior Liberals in Quebec were openly blaming Dion and his organizers for a lack of election preparation in the province. Former Liberal cabinet minister Liza Frulla said Dion had “no instinct” there was a problem in Quebec, and called his senior organizer in the province, Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, “abrasive” and “narcissistic” (Ibid).

The next day, Dion responded to the criticism in Quebec, calling for the party to unite behind the “will to win” (Leblanc, 2008, March 26: A4). The *Globe and Mail* reported that the Liberal leader showed “a relentless optimism . . . [and] glossed over the internal divisions . . . and said the party must be united in its fight against the Harper Conservatives” (Ibid).⁶⁰ A few days later, Dion travelled to Montreal where he “moved . . . to regain control of his Quebec troops, calling on them to show a ‘steely discipline’” (Leblanc, 2008, March 28: A10).⁶¹

The above incidents generally contributed to the theme that Stéphane Dion was not inspiring his team to be prepared for an election. Such criticism would be accentuated when it was revealed that the Conservatives were adding an amendment to the budget implementation bill that would change the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.⁶² As it would be attached to the budget, a vote for these changes would be seen as a matter of confidence in the government.

said, “Stéphane Dion is a general without an army” and added that in his home province, “the federal Liberals don’t even heed the marching orders of their leader” (2008, March 3: A13).

⁶⁰ The report noted that “Mr. Dion made his statement in both official languages, but stumbled as he spoke in English, highlighting his ongoing communications challenges 15 months after becoming leader” (Leblanc, 2008, March 26: A4).

⁶¹ At the same time, it was apparently reported in a Montreal newspaper that Ignatieff “privately called [Dion’s leadership] into question” (Leblanc, 2008, March 28: A10), which the deputy leader denied.

⁶² According to the *Canadian Press*, the legislation allowed the government to “fast-track certain types of applicants while refusing to even look at others” (Panetta, 2008, March 14).

Columnists noted that the amendments were meant to demonstrate the weakness of the Liberals as immigrants had long been seen as a bastion of support for the party. Said Don Martin, “[T]he immigration poison pill was designed to hand the Liberals their most difficult test as an Official Opposition in absentia” (2008, April 8: A4). Advocates from this voting block were paying attention to the debate and the *Globe and Mail* reported that “[m]embers of some of Canada’s largest immigrant communities” were critical of the changes and urged “the Dion Liberals to vote against the proposals” (Galloway, 2008, March 24: A4). In response to the changes, Dion said, “It’s unacceptable in terms of procedure, and even more unacceptable in terms of content” (El Akkad, Curry & Leblanc, 2008: A14). Nonetheless, his party eventually allowed the amendments to pass.

The Liberal leader was ridiculed for abstaining on the budget; however, his party’s stance on the immigration changes brought this criticism to a new level. Perhaps one of the worst comments came from Ivison in a front-page column. After saying the party was “bereft of inner convictions”, he argued that “Liberal credibility is now just north of that of Max Mosley, the Formula One boss caught on film taking part in a Nazi fetish orgy with five hookers by a British tabloid” (2008, April 10: A1). Although not quite so crude, the *National Post*’s editorial carried the same sentiment saying, “It would be fair to say that whatever Mr. Dion’s bumbling, hypocritical caucus has become, it is not an Opposition” (2008, April 11: A14).

After complimenting Dion for showing leadership in letting the budget pass, the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial board was not so flattering regarding the immigration reforms. In criticizing the amendments, the paper said the Liberals were “either . . . feigning their

outrage” and hoping to rally their “support base”, or they were “so preoccupied with controlling the timing of an election that they are sacrificing their principles in the process”. In conclusion, the editorial stated, “Either scenario casts further doubt on Mr. Dion’s leadership. Asked what differentiates him from Mr. Harper, he is quick to cite his ‘sincerity’. After his handling of the immigration issue, that argument will carry less weight”. (2008, April 14: A14).

Thanks to a minority government situation that could fall into an election at any time, the Liberals appeared stuck between two intolerable options: “laughingstock Opposition or campaign roadkill” (D. Martin, 2008, April 8: A4). For appearing afraid to risk the latter, Dion was in “retreat” (Iverson, 2008, February 20: A1), waving the “white flag” (D. Martin, April 8, 2008: A4), and a “wimp” (Wente, 2008, February 28: A17) who “[folds] like a cheap suit” (MacDonald, 2008, March 14: A15).⁶³ According to Gagnon, comparisons between Dion and Harper further enhanced the Liberal leader’s wimpy image:

While Mr. Harper, despite his many flaws, projects the image of a leader, Mr. Dion looks like the aloof nerdish professor he is. Needless to say, the more he goes on propping up Mr. Harper’s minority government, the more people see him as an ineffectual wimp – “un grand paroleur, petit faiseur,” as we say in French: someone who is all talk and no action.

(2008, April 14: A15)

Only adding to this, journalists noted, was the fact that Dion seemed to keep raising speculation that there could be an election and then backing down. For example, in early

⁶³ Under such criticism, Liberal sources commented that Dion actually wanted an election, but was talked out of it by campaign organizers. The *Globe and Mail*’s Margaret Wente noted that the reason he was “chomping at the bit” was “to prove he is not a wimp” (2008, February 28: A17). However, she said, “He chickened out on Afghanistan! He chickened out on the budget! . . . What are people going to think?” (Ibid).

March, the *Canadian Press* reported that the Liberals were threatening to send Canadians to the polls in April. Said Dion, “If they (Tories) do something that we Liberals consider aggravating the situation they have created . . . we may decide, indeed, to trigger an election” (Bryden, 2008, March 11). As mentioned, similar threats were made before the throne speech and the budget, while the Liberal leader harshly criticized the Conservatives for their stance on immigration and Afghanistan. Bryden reported that Liberal sources had insisted Dion stop threatening to bring down the government. She wrote, “They fear that repeatedly threatening an election and backing down – a pattern that Dion has followed throughout the fall and winter – is only making him look indecisive and exposing the party to ridicule” (2008, March 30).

“Bravo to the Brave”

Again, as Stéphane Dion faced another season of criticism, he did receive a combination of both sympathy and pity. Robert Fulford wrote in the *National Post*, “After spending 17 months as an ineffective Liberal leader, he’s been more reviled than any Canadian since Brian Mulroney” (2008: A24). Based on the “torment visited upon this one hapless citizen”, he said he would be putting together a “brief to the torture committee of Amnesty International” (Ibid). In the *Globe and Mail*, Lawrence Martin agreed with this opinion. “[Dion] has become the biggest media punching bag since – take your pick – Stockwell Day or the early Joe Clark. His carcass is all over the canvas”, he said (2008,

April 14: A15).⁶⁴ Although the Liberal leader may actually be strong and tough, Martin said, “the attributes aren’t showing because he is letting pack journalism define him” (Ibid). Thus, he said, the solution is to change his communications strategy in “controlling the message” and setting “the terms of the debate” (Ibid).

Beyond improving his communications, Simpson said it was time Dion offered the voter something dramatic in terms of policy. Over the course of his tenure as Liberal leader, Dion had indeed revealed a series of policy announcements for such issues as the economy,⁶⁵ law-and-order,⁶⁶ and poverty.⁶⁷ These items, however, received very little coverage beyond their initial release. According to Simpson, the Official Opposition can have a difficult time getting the public to understand its policies as “the media are mostly interested in the noise it creates rather than its constructive alternatives”. The columnist said Dion was “a well-meaning, intelligent man”, but he “has got to stand for something, since his own persona won’t cut it as a political winner”. As such, he suggested the

⁶⁴ For example, he noted that journalists argued it would be “idiotic” for the Liberal leader to force an election, and then followed this up by denouncing “him for avoiding an election” (L. Martin, 2008, April 14: A15).

⁶⁵ For example, he did earn some positive coverage for the policy positions he advocated in an economic speech to a business crowd in Ottawa in March 2007. According to a *Globe and Mail* editorial, “After ill-advised, immoderate stands on the Kyoto Protocol and anti-terrorism measures, Stéphane Dion has cobbled together a largely commendable economic platform” (2007, March 10: A22). Afterwards, Ivison commented that “Mr. Dion probably came out of the day slightly ahead of where he went in” (2007, March 9: A4). For Coyne, the speech was “intriguing” and could potentially be “the first glimmer of a Liberal comeback strategy” (2007, March 10: A24).

⁶⁶ The general response was that the Liberals’ crime-fighting effort did not fly. The *Canadian Press* said the release was “viewed by many as an effort to blunt criticism that the Liberals are soft on crime” (La Rose, 2007). A *Globe and Mail* editorial described it as somewhat “warm and fuzzy” and suggested that “Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion is to law and order as Prime Minister Stephen Harper is to the environment: lacking in conviction” (2007, March 15: A16).

⁶⁷ In November 2007 he unveiled an extensive anti-poverty strategy, which the *Globe and Mail*’s editorial board said was “the most comprehensive anti-poverty package seen at the federal level in some time” (2007, November 12: A14).

Liberals “throw down the gauntlet” and announce that if elected, they will raise the GST to earn “\$60-billion” for the national treasury. Furthermore, he added, “If the Liberals wanted to up the ante, they would call for a carbon tax”. (2008, April 12: A21).

The idea of taxing carbon emissions had been seen as politically unpalatable. Regardless, leading environmentalists pushed for this concept and in January 2008 it received the endorsement of the federal government’s independent agency the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.⁶⁸ A few months later, the *Canadian Press* reported that a Harris-Decima survey revealed that Canadians were supportive of a carbon tax.⁶⁹ Harris-Decima president Bruce Anderson said, “This central idea of taxing particularly harmful behaviour, and rewarding the opposite, is a potential political game-changer for the party that can get it right and describe it clearly” (Panetta, 2008, May 7).

Despite its appeal in environmental circles, Dion reportedly did not support such a tax in his run to be Liberal leader. “I’ve always been against it. I will have other ways to get there”, he said at the time (Laghi & Leblanc, 2008: A1). Over the subsequent months he mused about considering this option, however this would then be followed with a clear denial that his party would not go this route.

Nonetheless, in the *National Post*, Ivison long believed that the “green” Liberal leader harbored a desire for a carbon tax. His instincts would prove correct when in March 2008 Dion started to hint that he might be examining the idea. At this time the

⁶⁸ At the time, it was reported that the panel joined “a chorus of the country’s top economists and major banking institutions who say the only way to alter Canada’s emissions is to change market behaviour with a tax” (Cheadle, 2008, January 7).

⁶⁹ According to the article, 61 percent of those surveyed said they “supported the idea of a carbon tax on businesses and people based on the carbon emissions they generate” (Panetta, 2008, May 7).

British Columbia government was structuring such a policy, and Dion said if elected, he too would seek to “put a price on carbon” in some fashion (Bailey, 2008: A4).

By April, Ivison was reporting that Dion wanted to “spend the summer selling the idea of a national carbon tax on fuels that damage the environment” (2008, April 17: A4). A few weeks later, Taber wrote that “Stéphane Dion says he is ‘very seriously’ considering a carbon tax to combat emissions” (2008, April 28: A4). Further details were released in early May in a front-page story under the headline “Dion touts carbon tax on fuels, billions in tax cuts” (Taber & Laghi, 2008: A1). The article quoted “senior Liberal sources” who told the *Globe and Mail* Dion was “poised to unveil a carbon-tax scheme and attempt to neutralize any political damage by offering corresponding personal income tax cuts of between \$10-billion and \$13-billion to working Canadians” (Ibid).

As the Liberals were releasing such details about their potential policy, the Conservatives were unveiling their counter-attack. The government had long said it was not considering a tax on carbon and they responded in May with what was described as “an aggressive campaign to brand the measure . . . as a giant tax grab”. Senior cabinet ministers accused the Liberals of wanting to dramatically increase the cost of gasoline at the expense of ordinary Canadians. For example, Environment Minister John Baird said, “I don’t want any senior citizen facing the choice between filling their refrigerator, filling their prescriptions and filling their gas tanks”. (Cowan, 2008: A4).⁷⁰

Conservative cabinet ministers were not alone in questioning this policy. Liberal sources were also raising concerns about the politics behind such a strategy and the

⁷⁰ At the same time, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty reportedly told a business crowd, the Liberals were “considering a massive tax on gasoline and other fuels at a time of rising gas prices” (Cowan, 2008: A4).

strength of the Conservative campaign against it. According to a “veteran Liberal strategist” in early May, “Just in the short time Dion has mused about a carbon tax, the Conservatives have already preframed the issue negatively in the media”. However, in the same article, a “senior Liberal strategist” defended Dion saying, “I think he is going to run on it and make it the platform of his campaign. He’s a man who believes in what is right. The political side doesn’t really interest him”. Indeed, this was the problem behind the plan, replied the first source. (Taber & Laghi, 2008, May 8: A1).⁷¹

For a leader regarded as a poor communicator, pundits were skeptical about Dion’s ability to sell his policy and questioned his political judgment in promoting a carbon tax. “Stéphane Dion . . . is brave to consider such a plan”, said a *Globe and Mail* editorial, “although he may be foolhardy to run in a future election on a proposal that opponents could so easily distort” (2008, May 9: A22). Ivison, meanwhile, commented that it could be possible Canadians may support Dion’s carbon tax. However, he asked his readers if they would bet “[o]n a man who seems to have Van Gogh’s ear for the public mood and no talent for swaying it through the mass media” versus an opponent who was “conjuring up visions of fixed-income seniors being forced to visit food banks because of his carbon tax” (2008, June 3: A4).

In a feature article under the headline “What are the chances Dion can sell a carbon tax?”, Taber noted the Liberal leader’s plan was “risky, controversial and bold, so

⁷¹ Over the next few weeks, it was reported that Liberals were increasingly concerned about the communications strategy. One MP told the *Canadian Press* “caucus members ‘massively and aggressively’ warned Dion that the sales job thus far has been abysmal”. The reporter noted that the Liberal leader had “yet to provide details of his plan . . . allowing the Tories to define the proposal as a massive tax grab that will boost the price of gas to as much as \$2.25 per litre”. Dion responded saying the plan would be released “in the coming weeks” and said the Conservatives “have lied and lied again and Canadians will not be impressed by that and we Liberals will not be intimidated by that”. (Bryden, 2008, May 14).

much so that many Liberals are twitchy”. According to “a veteran Liberal strategist”, “His dilemma is that both he and his team have been incapable of selling anything approaching positive for 18 months now, so what possibility is there for success now?” However, the reporter did mention that “not everyone is afraid that Mr. Dion will blow it”, noting that “[s]ome Liberals and other observers believe that this plan can be sold – if framed properly”. Nevertheless, Taber then returned to her theme by saying “nagging doubts about the leader’s ability to captivate Canadians with his plan remain”. The feature concluded with a quote from University of Ottawa professor Robert Asselin who said “he would rather see Mr. Dion ‘die on that hill than see him try to be just another politician who is just seeking power for the sake of it and willing to do or say anything to win’”. (2008, May 24: F3).

Such trepidation would only increase when the Conservatives enhanced their attack with a series of negative radio advertisements coupled with a highly-publicized, but unsuccessful attempt to place commercials on gasoline pumps.⁷² The party also put Secretary of State for Multiculturalism Jason Kenney as its lead spokesperson against what the Conservatives labeled “Dion’s tax on everything”. He told the media, “We think it’s incumbent on us to warn people about the kind of tricky language Mr. Dion is undoubtedly going to use in trying to pitch his carbon tax” (Cheadle, 2008, June 8). According to a *Canadian Press* report, the campaign was “just the latest media salvo from the cash-flush Tories to demonize Dion” (Ibid). The journalist wrote that Dion’s

⁷² It was later reported that these ads might have been revealed early in order to shift attention away from a political controversy involving the former foreign affairs minister. According to the *Globe and Mail*, “[A] senior Conservative familiar with the campaign said one of the Prime Minister's chief political aides, Patrick Muttart, told officials the ads had been released earlier to try to blunt bad publicity over the resignation of former foreign affairs minister Maxime Bernier” (Laghi, 2008, June 16: A4).

“carbon tax scheme” would apparently be balanced with cuts elsewhere, “making the program revenue neutral” (Ibid). However, the Liberal leader was “slow to fill in the details – creating an information void the Conservatives are keen to exploit” (Ibid).⁷³

On June 19, 2008 Dion unveiled his “Green Shift” taxation plan to Canadians. This strategy would see taxes placed on “every tonne of greenhouse-gas emissions produced by fuels such as diesel, aviation fuel and natural gas”, while “[g]asoline at the pumps” would be “exempt”. After four years, it was estimated that this tax would provide the government with \$15.4-billion. It was then reported that “[v]irtually everyone” would pay “higher energy costs under the plan”, although the Liberals said polluters would cover the majority of this amount. However, the article noted that homes heated with oil or natural gas would see an increased cost. In return, the Liberals promised to lower personal and corporate income tax rates. Also, families would receive a new child tax benefit, along with a tax break for energy costs. In addition, rural and northern Canadians would be given a tax credit. There would also be a \$1 billion contingency “fund to help charities and others with unexpected cost increases”. To ensure this plan was revenue neutral, Dion announced that the Auditor General’s office would monitor the program to see there was a balance between taxes taken in and benefits delivered. (Laghi & The *Canadian Press*, 2008: A1).

Both the *Globe and Mail* and *Canadian Press* covered the announcement in the context of Dion’s political future. In her lead, Bryden wrote, “Stephane Dion rolled the

⁷³ Indeed, this became somewhat of a consensus by mid-June. The Liberal leader failed to grasp the political rule that “if you don’t define yourself, the other side will do it for you” (Macdonald, 2008, June 20: A18). Said a *Globe and Mail* editorial, “this tenet appears to have been lost on Stéphane Dion’s Liberals, who in a peculiar act of self-sabotage have refused to define their plan for a carbon tax at all” (2008, June 10: A16).

dice Thursday on his future as Liberal leader, unveiling a complex and politically risky plan to wean Canadians off fossil fuels” (2008, June 19). On the *Globe and Mail*’s front-page under the headline “Dion stakes his future on being greenest of them all”, Laghi wrote, “The Liberal Leader staked his political future yesterday on a controversial plan that, experts say, is an effort to win support on the splintered left” (Laghi & The *Canadian Press*, 2008: A1). After a sentence outlining the basis of the plan, both reporters then analyzed its political impact.⁷⁴

In the third paragraph of her article, Bryden wrote that “In choosing to make the plan the centrepiece of the Liberal platform, Dion is setting up the next election as an epic battle over competing economic and environmental policies. But he’s also triggering a debate over character” (2008, June 19). She continued saying that in announcing the plan, “Dion cast himself . . . as a bold, visionary leader with the courage to do the right thing” (Ibid). Bryden then noted that the Liberal leader “is clearly hoping the bold initiative gives him a political boost and helps shake the Tory caricature of him as a weak, dithering leader” (Ibid). He said, “The environmental and economic challenges of the 21st century can only be solved by bold vision and courageous leadership” (Ibid). In the *Globe and Mail*, it was reported that Dion seemed aware of the obstacles he would face in proposing this policy. Yet, the Liberal leader stated, there were also risks when he pushed the Clarity Act in the 1990s. He said, “But I knew Canadians, including my fellow

⁷⁴ Over the following weeks and months, it should be mentioned that the Green Shift was examined as both an economic and environmental policy. For example, as an economic strategy, the *National Post* was largely critical of the concept of a carbon tax before and especially after the Liberal leader made his announcement, devoting several editorials to the topic. In addition, various premiers and groups from across the country would later voice their opinion on the proposal based on their regional concerns or interests. However, a considerable amount of the coverage granted to the Green Shift was related to how it fit in the political discussion, and pertinent to this chapter, the way in which this policy reflected upon the character and judgment of the Liberal leader.

Quebeckers, wanted clarity instead of confusion. And more importantly, I was, and am, convinced that good policy makes for good politics” (Laghi & *The Canadian Press*, 2008: A1).

Several pundits agreed that the Liberal leader was brave for coming forth with such a policy as it was considered a major risk. Said Ivison, “Mr. Dion has certainly shown bold leadership, but then so did the Earl of Cardigan, who led the Light Brigade into the Valley of Death” (2008, June 20: A1). Simpson, meanwhile, said that in promoting this policy, “Mr. Dion . . . showed himself to be a really serious politician about climate change” (2008, June 20: A21), although he was critical of some aspects of the plan. The columnist also warned this was “very politically risky” as “it takes 30 seconds to explain in a sound-bite world of 10 seconds” (Ibid). Regardless, he concluded his column saying, “Bravo to the brave” (Ibid).

For others, the gambling metaphor seemed appropriate. “Dion’s green gamble” ran the headline to a column by Macdonald, who said that after becoming party leader as a green candidate, Dion was now “doubling his environmental bet on the general election” (2008, June 20: A18). Murphy took the analogy further, saying “a tax on energy . . . is one of the most audacious gambles of any Canadian leader, national or provincial, I can recall. Politically, he has to run the table, shoot a hole in one and pull off a hat trick all in the same afternoon” (2008, June 21: A23). Don Martin also opined that Dion was “gambling his leadership on a policy that, while seemingly suicidal, has elements of strategic brilliance . . . He’s got a defining issue to call his own and seems to have found the backbone to stand up and defend a position with conviction” (2008, June 24: A4).

“Down to One Geeky Guy”

Over the next two months, the Liberal leader would travel the country giving speeches, answering questions at town hall-style meetings, and daring the prime minister to debate him on his plan. He earned credit for his bravery in traveling to Alberta, where opponents were busy conjuring up images of a new National Energy Program.⁷⁵ He was even voted best-dressed federal politician at the Calgary Stampede. By the end of July, Bryden remarked, “Stephane Dion’s risky proposal to impose a carbon tax hasn’t rocketed the Liberal party to the top of Canada’s political charts, but it does seem to have given the leader’s image a much-needed boost” (2008, July 27).

For the first time in 20 months, the election speculation was correct. In early August 2008 the prime minister was hinting that he might need to head to the electorate and by the end of the month it seemed more than definite. Poll numbers taken at this time looked similar to where they had been since February 2007, with the Conservatives at around 35 percent support and the Liberals near 30, yet Dion continued to rank below both Harper and NDP leader Jack Layton over who would be best prime minister.

After a few changes to the Green Shift, Dion said he was ready for an election. He needed to be, as it was believed that the next contest would carry considerable risk for the Liberal leader. Bryden reported, “Members of the self-proclaimed natural governing party are unlikely to show much mercy should Dion fail to win at least a minority government” (2008, September 5). His tenure as party head was increasingly marred with internal criticism, which some pundits stated reached the levels of rebellion, mutiny, and

⁷⁵ Introduced by the Pierre Trudeau Liberals in the 1980s, this energy program was seen as punishing to Western Canada and continued to raise intense criticism in Alberta more than 20 years later.

calls to dump the leader. Certainly, there was a growing supply of anonymous Liberals speaking out in the press. When he was first elected, Dion's victory had been portrayed as a stunning underdog victory. However, according to Bryden, privately, Liberal MPs reinterpreted his win as being "a compromise choice for leader, considered less polarizing than Ignatieff or Rae" (Ibid). She noted that less than 20 percent of Liberals picked him as their first choice for leader, which meant there was limited support for Dion in a leadership review should he lose the election.

Despite a reputation as a man not to be underestimated, the consensus was that this would be Dion's only campaign as head of the Liberal party. According to Bryden, "If expectations were low when Dion assumed the leadership, they are even lower now after 20 tumultuous months at the helm" (2008, September 5). Stated the headline to a Lawrence Martin column, "The campaign comes down to one geeky guy" (2008, September 4: A19). In it he said the choice of the next election seemed clear: "[I]n any battle between a shrewd strategist and a lofty academic, you have to like the strategist, especially when he has a superior campaign organization, a big mean machine, and doesn't have a new tax as his major campaign plank" (Ibid). Although columnists such as Lawrence Martin and Murphy previewed the campaign as a race between two leaders, a *Globe and Mail* front-page framed it differently the day before the campaign was to start. According to the headline, election 2008 would be a battle of "The Man vs. The Brand" (Laghi, 2008, September 6: A1). In other words, to win his majority, Harper would need to overcome those devoutly loyal to the Liberal party, but not necessarily its leader. If nothing else, this was telling of the regard for the abilities of Stéphane Dion.

Findings and Analysis: In-depth Interviews

In the previous chapter, a textual analysis was conducted to determine the various narratives about Dion embedded in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Canadian Press*. Following this study of the words, phrases, and descriptions of the Liberal leader, in-depth interviews have been conducted with those responsible for writing these articles to find their perspective on Dion's tenure as head of the Official Opposition and add more context to the political situation they were reporting on. A synopsis of these interviews is then followed with the results of a conversation with the senior Conservative strategist who organized the "Not a leader" campaign against Dion. As the discussion behind this thesis begins with the presentation of self and personal narrative, this chapter then features the results of interviews with two senior Liberal strategists who worked with Dion. The chapter concludes with a summary of the significant findings from both research methods and describes how this relates to the theoretical discussion in the literature review.

Journalists

In-depth interviews have been conducted with the following four journalists:

Joan Bryden (Personal communication, 2009a, October 14): A political reporter for the *Canadian Press*, she has covered Parliament Hill since 1988.

John Ivison (Personal communication, October 15, 2009): A political columnist for the *National Post*, he has covered Parliament Hill for six years.

Don Martin (Personal communication, 2009b, October 14): A national affairs columnist for the *National Post*, he has covered Parliament Hill since 2000.

Jeffrey Simpson (Personal communication, 2009c, October 14): A national affairs columnist for the *Globe and Mail*, he first became a member of this newspaper's Ottawa bureau in 1977 and has largely focused on Canadian politics ever since. He has won several newspaper awards and named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2000.

Looking back to Dion's leadership win, Joan Bryden said "people were surprised that he had won and there was a little bit of the rooting for the underdog coverage" from the English media. She noted that Dion was admired for the courage he displayed in the past with such issues as the Clarity Act. At the same time, she said his reputation on this file made him a target for the Quebec media: "I remember the opening news conference, the Quebec reporters in particular were zeroing in on that aspect: 'How are you going to ever make any headway in Quebec?'" Nevertheless, beyond his home province, Bryden noted that the initial "media coverage was fairly positive". (Personal communication, 2009a).

Jeffrey Simpson commented that he was one of the few who had predicted during the leadership race that Dion would win. He agreed that Dion took the narrative of the underdog, while bringing something new to the Liberal party:

People kind of like the underdog, like the narrative of coming from behind. And he very definitely captured something that the Liberals were looking for, which was a new issue, which was the environment. And for the Liberals, who had done such a horrible, horrible job on climate change over such a long period of time, to all of a sudden be led by someone who says, 'We're green', was astonishing to the Liberals.

It was during this beginning stage that Dion enjoyed a short honeymoon, he said. "I think any time a new leader comes on the scene he has a honeymoon period. People want to

give him the benefit of the doubt. And I think that happened to him”. (Personal communication, 2009c).

This period would not last very long. John Ivison recalled that the Liberals were briefly up in the polls, however, “the Conservatives got out ahead of the Liberals and managed to define Dion before Dion was able to define himself in the eyes of the public”. According to Ivison, this strategy was effective “because outside of Quebec he was not particularly well known. And the enduring image that most people will carry of Dion is of this nerdy looking guy shrugging his shoulders over a label that says ‘Stéphane Dion, Not a leader’”. (Personal communication, October 15, 2009).

According to Simpson, the Conservatives took their efforts to define the political narrative to heights unseen in Canadian politics. He said they did this not only through the use of a widespread ad campaign before an election, but also based on the “strong negativity of the ads”. “The question became one of leadership”, he said. “Which of these leaders is most grounded in reality? And they mocked him . . . it was terrible, but unfortunately that’s part of the Conservative repertoire”. The Liberals were not prepared for this strategy, said Simpson. “I think this is a new challenge . . . and I don’t think either Mr. Dion or [his successor Michael] Ignatieff were ready for this because it never happened before”. (Personal communication, 2009c).⁷⁶

Although reporters themselves may not have changed their own personal views towards Dion, Bryden argued that the ads influenced public perception and therefore

⁷⁶ More than two years after the initial attack on Dion, the columnist said Liberals continued to have difficulties in trying to come up with an adequate response. “I think the Liberals are still sort of shocked, and even traumatized by these ads. . . . Publicly they shrug and they say, ‘Ah this is negative stuff, nobody pays any attention’, but in fact they know better” (Personal communication, 2009c).

deserved to be covered. She said the fact that Dion's poll numbers dropped after the ads were released meant they were having an effect. "[Y]ou can't help but cover them. They are out there. They are affecting the public perception and so it starts getting included in all your stories", she said. As such, she stated, profiles and articles about Dion would refer back to the ads and he would continue to face questions about their effectiveness. "He'd like to talk about something else and instead he's saying that's not me", she said. "But you couldn't avoid asking about it because it was out there". (Personal communication, 2009a).

According to Bryden, "I would say those ads more than anything changed his narrative. And then unfortunately the events then conspired to reinforce the message in the ads" (Personal communication, 2009a). Ivison agreed saying, "I think political negative advertising only works if there's a kernel of truth in it. . . . And I think it was credible to many people that Dion was not a leader" (Personal communication, October 15, 2009). In addition, Ivison and Bryden both noted that Dion's criticism of the government, followed by abstaining on important votes, only further strengthened this perception.⁷⁷

According to Don Martin, this was also clearly evident in Dion's performance in question period. For the columnist, such a platform provides a forum where leaders are evaluated:

We shouldn't get in the business of judging a leader prematurely based on superficial nonsense like whether they're doing a good job answering a

⁷⁷ Ivison said, "Dion's behaviour reinforced the idea that he was not a leader. . . . That took the form of the Liberals criticizing the government and then either voting alongside them or sitting on their hands when it came to crucial votes. And it reinforced the idea in the public's eye that he was weak" (Personal communication, October 15, 2009).

question or two, but that's the reality. The theatre of question period is where you see a leader stripped sort of naked in front of you and you have to decide whether he's got what it takes.

He noted that Dion seemed to stick to his script and "he didn't have the ability, seemingly in English for sure, to jump into the fray and give as good as he got" (Personal communication, 2009b).

Nevertheless, all four journalists agreed that it can be difficult for an Opposition leader to define himself or herself when his or her job is simply to oppose the government. For example, if one were to promote a new policy, Martin said, "the government will either belittle it or steal it". He suggested that the ways in which the Opposition leader attacks the government can help in building a profile. "It doesn't define them in a proactive sense, it defines them in their ability to be reactive, in their ability to grab a headline, see the point of vulnerability in a government and attack it", he said. Even better, he noted that an opposition party should use its researchers to "find dirt on the government and throw it at them". Such was not the case with Dion's Liberals, said Martin. "If you're not doing original lines of attack, and you're not delivering those lines of attack very well, then you've got a double handicap going forward, and that's really all you can do as an Official Opposition" (Personal communication, 2009b). Only making this more difficult, was the fact that Dion's "political instincts were terrible", said Simpson. "That became clear fairly soon after he became leader of the Opposition, he just didn't have the political savoir-faire that you need and it's a very difficult job" (Personal communication, 2009c).

He added that the other problem Dion had was that the Liberal leader and his aides were unable to manage his party members. Over time, Simpson said more people

complained that Dion would not listen to them and that they were not treated well.

“That’s the Opposition leader’s plague”, said the columnist. “It’s very hard to herd cats as leader of the Opposition and he didn’t have the personality and his people didn’t seem to have the skills to do that”. This problem only accentuated when Liberals saw their poll numbers drop, which increased private complaints about the leader. “The whole thing feeds onto itself”, said Simpson. “They talk to the media, they talk among each other and things begin to deteriorate and that’s a problem” (Personal communication, 2009c).⁷⁸

One sort of “canary in the coalmine” for Dion was the Outremont by-election loss, said Martin (Personal communication, 2009b). According to Bryden, this was the point in which the Liberal leader’s media coverage actually changed: “I think that’s when the media really shifted into almost deathwatch mode because there’s this whole series of events that suggests this guy can’t control his caucus, can’t control his office, can’t control the party itself”. “Yes”, she said, in a way “it was probably unfair”, however, “these things take on their own dynamic and when you are battling image problems you need a boost” (Personal communication, 2009a).

In addition, she argued that Liberals themselves were “horrified” by the loss and “continued to add fuel to that fire”. Bryden said criticism of Dion at this time by anonymous Liberals was widespread. “When you get into one of those things they really do feed on themselves because anybody who is disgruntled, they start mouthing off because it seems like an opportune time”. Although she acknowledged that “media can

⁷⁸ Martin noted that “the number of anonymous sources tend to rise inversely proportional to the reaction in the polls of the party leader”. If the party looks like it has the potential to become the next government, “no one wants to rock the boat”. However, the situation can become perilous when party members feel the leader will never take them to power. “That’s where it gets really dangerous, when you realize this leader’s dead or going to die soon. . . . That’s when the lips start flapping like crazy” (Personal communication, 2009b).

generate a little bit of a frenzy”, she said “if there’s nothing there, if nobody’s reacting, then it doesn’t go anywhere”. (Personal communication, 2009a).

In recalling the Liberal leader one year after he led his party to a significant loss in the 2008 election, the journalists said they did not think the media was responsible for the negative portrayal of Dion. Said Ivison,

I guess I’m kind of skeptical of the idea that the media brought down Dion by creating the impression of a man that was completely removed from the reality because I think the media coverage reflected what was happening at the time and reflected his character and his shortcomings.

(Personal communication, October 15, 2009)

In addition, both Ivison and Martin pointed out that it is unfair to think of the media as a monolith, as individual reporters span the political spectrum.

However, Simpson argued that in general, the media tends to treat “politics as a horse race”. He said, “The media is always looking for – because it’s the easiest thing to look for – what’s the political angle on this or that. Who’s up? Who’s down? Who’s going to gain from this maneuver? Who’s going to lose?” For example, he noted that this was the situation with Dion’s carbon tax, where the focus was on the politics behind the sales job rather than the policy itself. (Personal communication, 2009c).

Bryden noted that the minority Parliament situation forces the media to keep a spotlight on the political shifts in Ottawa. She said, “Because we’re in a minority, we in the media are always focused on confidence votes: Will there or won’t there be an election? Can’t help it. That’s the nature of how the system works” (Personal communication, 2009a). However, the constant election-focus is “horrifying”, said

Martin, as “substance takes second place to speculation on an almost non-stop basis”. He continued,

On a day-to-day policy debate there really hasn't been much at all to say to Canadians this is why Parliament matters, this is how it's going to improve your life, this is why it matters that you vote in an election. We haven't given people any reason to do that. All we give them is a steady diet of . . . horse races, leadership popularity, poll analysis.

He added, “I've got to admit that as a journalist I'm just sick to death of the whole thing and I think my colleagues are starting to feel that way” (Personal communication, 2009b).

Conservative Strategist

An in-depth interview has been conducted with the following Conservative strategist:

Patrick Muttart (Personal communication, November 18, 2009): Muttart served as deputy chief of staff for strategy for Prime Minister Stephen Harper until spring of 2009 and acted as the chief marketing strategist for the Conservative party for the 2006 and 2008 federal elections.

Like other political watchers, Patrick Muttart said he felt the Liberal leadership would come down to either Ignatieff or Bob Rae. As such, he said his party was “not fully prepared” for the nomination of Dion. Nevertheless, by the start of the December 2006 convention, they had created a “giant binder” on each candidate just in case. “In those binders there was a biographical sketch of each individual, there was a draft narrative for the candidate, and a whole series of background information” regarding policy positions and contradictory statements, he said. (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

For Dion, “there were two competing narratives” the party had created. “One was called ‘Back to the future with Stéphane Dion’ and the other was ‘Not a leader’”. The

first was “very well developed” and related to Dion’s past with the Liberal party and its history of the sponsorship scandal and increases in greenhouse gases. “We thought there could be a way here of linking him to the previous government and saying, ‘He doesn’t represent the way forward, he just represents a step back’”, he said. (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

Regarding the second narrative, “Not a leader”, Muttart recalled a Saturday afternoon in October 2006 at his home in Ottawa where he was casually watching a Liberal leadership debate. He said,

I left the couch and I was in the kitchen . . . and I think I was actually literally making a sandwich, and suddenly I heard Ignatieff’s voice rising and he’s saying, “Stéphane we didn’t get it done. We didn’t get it done”. And then Dion starts responding, and Dion’s voice begins to go up, he’s clearly getting agitated, and he started saying things like “You don’t know what you speak about. You don’t know what you speak about”. And then he blurts out, “Do you think it’s easy to make priorities?” And I stood there shell-shocked in the kitchen and I remember picking up the phone calling my colleague and saying, “Are you watching the Liberal leadership debate?” He wasn’t. So I said to him, “If we are ever so lucky as to have Stéphane Dion leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, we just got him in his own John Kerry moment”.⁷⁹

Although the Conservatives did not believe Dion would be elected at that time, Muttart said this clip was “a golden nugget” if he became leader. “I just remember thinking to myself, ‘If he becomes Liberal leader, we’ve got him’” (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ In this last statement, Muttart was referring to comments made from the 2004 U.S. Democratic presidential nominee who commented that he voted for the war in Iraq before voting against it. This statement was then taken by his opponents and used in their narrative to define Kerry as a flip-flopper.

⁸⁰ The scene from the debate was “golden” for a few reasons. “It was . . . [Dion] engaged in a fight with a fellow Liberal – a fellow Liberal with all the source credibility that that provides –

According to Muttart, in today's political climate the crafting of a narrative around a candidate is important. The reason for this is that voters are busy people who have little time to think or talk about politics in their everyday lives. To reach these individuals, political parties need to "cut through the clutter and actually make an impression that is long-lasting. You need to focus on something that is very clear, very simple and that is backed with sufficient repetition to punch through" (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

According to polling data, he said, half of the adult population "consume some sort of news", but not necessarily political news. At the same time, upwards of 65 percent of Canadians vote. "You've got 10-15 percent of the population that doesn't really know what's going on and the only way to reach these people is through television advertising", said Muttart. However, this method is restricted by a format that only allows roughly 30 seconds to get a message across. (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

Nevertheless, anyone who "seriously wants to form the government" must gain the support of these voters, he said, as these individuals are notorious for switching their votes near the end of an election campaign. "So you look to build a narrative based on policies or character traits that are . . . meaningful to people, that are relevant to their vote decision, and that are unique". Regarding the first category, he said this means discussing subjects that "actually matter" to the voter. In terms of relevance, Muttart said a voter may have thousands of issues they have a position on, but there are only a few that will determine the outcome of their vote. Similar to the concept of a political wedge issue, the

telling him that he didn't get it done on a topic where Dion had been directly responsible," said Muttart. "For that to escalate into a rhetorical breakdown on Dion's part where he blurts out, 'Do you think it's easy to make priorities?' was just absolutely golden". (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

last category, uniqueness, is “very very important” as it relates to a position in which there is “a clear choice”. Said Muttart, “You need to find issues – meaningful, relevant, but also unique – where when the public looks at you they’ll say, ‘You’re talking my language and I also believe that you are the only party . . . that represents that point of view’ and that’s where uniqueness comes in” (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

In addition, he said, ideally a political strategist seeks to find a narrative “that is overarching, non-ideological, and goes beyond your traditional brand strengths”. This is where the notion of leadership took root for the Conservatives:

In an ideal world you want to find something that transcends ideology, that extends your voter appeal to groups that naturally don’t vote for the Conservative party. . . . And that’s where ‘Not a leader’ came in. Things like leadership. The idea of leadership. Having someone . . . who exudes competence, who exudes vision, who exudes integrity and who people believe fundamentally had the . . . intestinal fortitude to make tough decisions is something that, it’s not left, it’s not right, it goes beyond that. And that’s what was so appealing to me about focusing in on Dion’s lack of leadership or perceived lack of leadership was that it allowed us to put a value proposition out to the electorate that went beyond traditional left/right, east/west, Liberal/Tory.

To prepare for the 2008 election, Muttart said the campaign he “studied most” was Pierre Trudeau’s 1974 run against former Progressive Conservative leader Robert Stanfield, along with Trudeau’s 1980 contest against Joe Clark. “I took away a tremendous amount from those campaigns because Trudeau and the Liberals . . . made it a contest of leadership between a strong leader and a weak leader”. Combining this with U.S. President George W. Bush’s campaign against Kerry in 2004, Muttart said he was prepared for Dion. “Leadership is not left, it’s not right. Hence, I was able to take

inspiration from a left-wing Canadian Liberal and a right-wing American Republican in crafting the campaign” (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

The initial advertising effort against Dion was broken into three ads. The first related to the “Back to the future” theme, tying the Liberal leader to previous Liberal scandals. The second connected to the environment as a “defensive” effort as the Conservatives were being harshly criticized on this file and the ad intended to “muddy the waters” on this debate “by showing that . . . [the Liberals’] record really wasn’t that great either”. However, the overall focus was on the “Not a leader” ad. Said Muttart, “I have produced a number of political ads and I have never produced an ad that was easier to make, but that moved the numbers so much”. (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

One point he said many forget about Dion was that “initially he was a success for the Liberal party”. When he was elected leader, the Liberals “overtook the Conservative party in the polls for the first time since the ’06 election”. He essentially held this position until the release of the negative ads. “Within three nights . . . we saw his numbers begin to go south. It was immediate. That’s not unusual in negative political advertising, but it was how south his numbers were going, as quickly as they were, which was so amazing”. (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

In terms of media coverage for these ads, he said it seemed to follow a pattern that was repeated with Ignatieff. Although not wishing to generalize, he argued that “whenever you launch negative ads . . . you get all kinds of editorial criticism”.⁸¹

⁸¹ Such was the case at the press conference for the first Dion ads. Muttart said, “It was a hostile news conference and there was all kinds of elite opinion chatter about how bad this was and I

However, with time, he said the message of the ads begins to work its way into the political reporting:

There are pieces of information that are now in the public domain that were exclusively introduced to the Canadian public domain by Conservative party negative ads. They had never been broadcast before, they had never been written about before, and had they been written about or broadcast before it was very, very minimal. And what you find is four weeks, six weeks, 12 weeks, whatever, a lot of the facts, a lot of the perspective that you communicate into the ads, the journalists themselves end up quoting, like they had somehow done the research themselves.

According to Muttart, “journalists on one hand are journalists”, but “on the other hand . . . they are ordinary people”. As such, they come home and watch popular shows on television and “absorb . . . ads just like other people”, albeit perhaps “more critically”. “Although no journalist would admit this . . . negative ads can have a role in shaping their impressions of political actors. So I think the ads had an impact on the journalists who covered Dion”. (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

The most important factor for Dion, and again he said it seemed to be repeated with Ignatieff, was what happened after the narrative was introduced. “The ads establish a frame and the make or break moment is, does the leader . . . support the frame or does he challenge it? And what we saw with Dion was he began to prove all the things we were saying”.⁸² In addition, he said, a strategic mistake the Liberals made was the way they would attack Harper. He said he learned about this in speaking with British Conservatives “that were heavily involved in some of [Margaret] Thatcher’s early campaigns”. During

can’t tell you how many journalists referred back to the Jean Chrétien face ad of 1993” (Personal communication, November 18, 2009).

⁸² Such examples of this, he said, included Dion’s problems with his caucus, the by-election losses, and abstaining on confidence votes.

her years in power, Thatcher's Labour opponents would "criticize her for being authoritarian, for not listening, for being a bully, never compromising, etc., etc." and Muttart told these Conservatives that Harper would hear the same accusations. "Their response was, 'That can hurt a leader, if people perceive the opponent to be strong, yet respectful'". Thus, in referring back to "Harper versus Dion", the Liberal leader's criticisms just "reinforced the contrast" between the two. According to Muttart, "When Dion would stand up, and his voice would rise . . . he'd be up there complaining about Harper being a bully. . . . We'd be sitting there going, 'Keep talking, all you're doing is reinforcing the frame that we're trying to establish'". To conclude, he said,

I think the initial narrative is important, which is kind of the frame itself. How you communicate the frame is important, but . . . the two things that are frequently not discussed are does the leader, through his actions and his words, support the frame or does he challenge it, and, in attacking the government, does he unintentionally support the frame that the government wants on him.

(Personal communication, November 18, 2009)

Liberal Strategists

In-depth interviews have been conducted with the following two Liberal strategists:

Jamie Carroll (Personal communication, October 19, 2009): Carroll first worked with Dion as a senior advisor when he was environment minister in 2004. Carroll later acted as campaign director for Dion's leadership bid. He was then national party director for the Liberals until October 2007.

Senator David Smith (Personal communication, October 22, 2009): Smith acted as co-chair for Dion's campaign starting in October 2007. He has been active in the Liberal party since the 1960s working under prime ministers Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Trudeau. He later chaired election campaigns for Jean Chrétien in 1993, 1997, and 2000. At the time of the interview, he was serving as co-chair for Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff.

According to Senator David Smith, the personality of a leader is more important today than in the past. He noted that historically in Canada voters had much stronger allegiances to political parties based on such factors as religion and ethnicity. However, this is no longer the case: “More people don’t regard themselves as just an automatic supporter of a particular party as they did many years ago, so . . . the personality of the leader is, if anything, much more important than it was 50 or 100 years ago”. (Personal communication, October 22, 2009).

After Dion was selected leader, Jamie Carroll said the focus was on the internal structure of the Liberal party, as opposed to the external message. “One of the problems was that Stéphane on the first ballot had about 18 percent, and two days later he was leader of the party. So a significant part of our energy in the beginning was actually put into bringing the party together”, he said. Such organization involved “reaching out” to different leadership rivals and their supporters along with other party members. Said Carroll, “The Liberal party is a large organization and when you come from behind to win a leadership campaign, by definition you don’t have control of the party just because you won a leadership”. (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

According to Carroll, at this time, party workers assumed some sort of attack was coming from the Conservatives. He said, “We may not have anticipated the degree of the attack, which in retrospect was a mistake. They are ruthlessly professional, kind of like the way we used to be”. He continued,

Because the Liberal party was in a financial situation that it is just barely digging itself out of now – somewhat tentatively – we weren’t able to buy ads the way they were. They were able to define Stéphane in the only way that matters and that’s through television ads.

In doing so, he said, the Conservatives gained an advantage in defining their opponent to the public. (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

Looking back, Carroll said it did not seem that Dion presented himself according to his role in Canadian history. “One of the things somebody said afterwards . . . is that Stéphane didn’t fully understand his position in the Canadian narrative”, said Carroll. He noted that in this storyline, Dion was a federalist francophone who was a “staunch defender of Canada, à la Chrétien, Trudeau, [Wilfrid] Laurier”. Had he sought to portray himself in this manner, Carroll said he “probably would have had a better chance”. However, “by not playing that role, Canadians never really knew what to do with him”. (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

According to Carroll, Dion was clear from the very beginning that he wanted to run on an environmental platform. “He remains convinced to this day that he was elected leader of the party because of his policy positions. . . . So, as a result, he thought he . . . [had] some obligation to continue on this path”. However, Carroll noted that there were problems with being completely focused on one subject. To move from being leader of the Opposition to prime minister, he said, one needs to satisfy the demands of a variety of constituencies both inside and outside the party. Thus, “when you have firmly preconceived ideas about what it is you should be running on” it does not provide much room for negotiation to “find paths of least resistance” that will get you elected. According to Carroll, running as an environmental candidate was outside of the traditional Liberal mold that “made sense to” voters. Instead, “he was running on something new, something different, something people didn’t understand or expect from the Liberal party”. Given the fact that the Liberals did not have the necessary funds to

counteract the Conservative campaign, “there was no chance for Canadians to catch up”. (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

Indeed, part of the problem, said Smith, was that the Conservatives were so successful in misrepresenting Dion’s environmental policies. “I think they made a lot of Canadians feel these were things they’d be paying for . . . [out of] their . . . [own] pockets”, he said. Regarding the policies he was promoting, Smith said, “they were sound policies, but it wasn’t an easy sell and he wasn’t that effective in selling it to the audience he hoped to get”. (Personal communication, October 22, 2009).

Through his years in politics, the senator said he has found that a particular intuition must be ingrained in a politician:

Sometimes I make the analogy that political instincts . . . maybe it’s a bit like an ear for music and you have to be born with it. And if you’re not born with an ear for music, you can go to a thousand symphonies and you’ll still be out of tune. And it wasn’t always obvious, at least when he was speaking English, that . . . [Dion] got everything instantly, whereas Chrétien did and Trudeau did.

Although the party leader may have thought the environment would be a winning issue, Smith said “on balance it wasn’t the positive that I think he had hoped it would be”. (Personal communication, October 22, 2009).

Looking back at past Liberal leaders, Smith said it was fitting to compare Dion to Chrétien, as both were francophones from Quebec. One advantage that the former prime minister had was that he had such a “strong personality”, said Smith. In particular, he noted,

Chrétien had such warm vibes. Regardless, of what he was saying, he just had warm vibes, and he looked and sounded like a strong leader. I mean,

Dion's English was actually better than Chrétien's, but Chrétien was a more effective speaker because of the warmth of his speeches and his grammatical and vocabulary shortcomings people just kind of ignored it.

According to the senator, Chrétien conveyed a "strength of character" leaving few to doubt that he was the man "in charge". He said, "Chrétien . . . [had] a very strong, powerful personality and I don't think that vibe came across as clearly with Stéphane as it did with Chrétien". (Personal communication, October 22, 2009).

Regarding his performance in question period, Carroll argued that the problem with Dion "was never language, it was communication". He said, "The role of the leader of the Opposition is to communicate in sound bites, be pithy, witty, question period is so much about theatre now". In such a setting, Dion "could not possibly do well" since "he doesn't communicate in short simple-to-understand segments". Carroll noted that he still believed Dion would have made for a good prime minister. However, he said, Dion was "a terrible leader of the Opposition. And the nature of the job is such that they're completely different skill sets, but there's some presumption that you have to be able to do one in order to do the other". (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

For political parties, the minority situation accentuates all of those issues outlined above. Said Carroll, "Minority Parliaments exacerbate the problem. . . . [They] don't change any structural or substantive issues . . . all they do is magnify". In addition, this situation leads to "wear-and-tear on you and your people" as parties need to always be ready for an election. "It's one more thing that you don't have control of that you wish you did", he said. "On a good day, a minority Parliament can be your greatest ally as an Opposition leader. But, there aren't very many good days". (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

Regarding the media coverage of Dion, Carroll argued it was fair, with a caveat. He said, “I suspect he was fairly covered to the extent that media are largely into gotcha politics these days. There’s very little substantive reporting done anymore and therefore, the nature of the beast is that if you . . . [mess up], that’s a story”. He noted that this form of reporting was created by cuts in news bureaus in Ottawa, which limited the amount of serious investigative journalism. “So there’s a few things, 24-hour news cycle, cuts in news rooms, all those things come together, and, as a result, the best story to cover in politics is gotcha, and if you’re having a bad day, there’s lots of gotcha”. (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

In terms of the internal party dynamic, both Carroll and Smith acknowledged that Dion was not an effective manager. However, Smith said although some were frustrated, there was not a deliberate attempt to destroy his leadership:

That would be very stupid for anyone to do because you know we like to be a family and when Julius Caesar was slain Brutus was not selected to succeed him. . . . If you’ve got blood on your hands you will not be benefiting in having engaged in that. . . . [Some Liberals] might have been frustrated, but people did respect the individual, but they just recognized that he wasn’t connecting with Canadians in the way that previous Liberal leaders have.

(Personal communication, October 22, 2009)

Said Carroll, “If you’re going to run the country, you better be able to run your own party”. He noted that the leader’s difficulties in rallying the support of party members “contributed to the narrative” the Conservatives created about “his leadership, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that that was entirely of the making of someone other than Stéphane”. (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

To conclude the interviews with both Liberals, they were asked what they learned from the experience of Dion. According to Carroll,

For your purposes, I would say that you are absolutely right, the narrative matters. And ultimately what I learned about politics is that . . . if we've learned nothing else from Stéphane, and it's possible we didn't, ideas are not that important. It's sad, but true.

. . . So ideas are not as nearly important as the execution. The execution is everything and the old adage to define yourself before your opponent defines you is absolutely true.

(Personal communication, October 19, 2009)

According to Smith,

I'm not sure that there was new learning, but maybe instincts reinforced a bit. . . . Going into an election there are several criteria that I like to see guide you: Number one, do you have momentum? . . . Because if you're not moving in the right direction [in the polls] that's not a time to go. And do you have the brand that you want to convey as to what you and your party are all about in an election. Have you got it down? Is it working? And do you have the narrative and do you have the message that gets across to your average Canadian . . . if they understand, the chances are you're going to win an election.

The branding. The narrative. That was a bit of a challenge for Stéphane.

(Personal communication, October 22, 2009)

Significant Findings

“Welcome to Day One of the 2008 general election campaign” (2008, June 20: A1), John Ivison wrote in describing the release of Stéphane Dion's Green Shift. However, it is debatable whether the unveiling of this plan was the start of the 2008 election campaign. Indeed, one could argue that the competition was kicked off the moment an unlikely victor stepped onto the stage as new Liberal leader. From this point onward, the informal contest had begun.

The textual analysis in Chapter 4 outlines the various stages of this campaign for the Liberal leader, while the proceeding chapter adds additional context behind this chronological account from the various sources under study. To recapitulate, in the beginning, Dion was an underdog champion who managed to surprise Canadian politics with a “stunning come from-behind victory”. After a brief “honeymoon”, the Conservatives released their “Not a leader” campaign to re-shape Dion’s image. The “fledgling” leader then saw his appeal descend, as he did not appear to live up to the expectations of a prime minister-in-waiting. Internal criticism then reached a full boil in the fallout from the “nightmare scenario” of losing a by-election cast as a test of leadership. This was only accentuated when Dion faced “his own unique hell” of a political situation where he was too weak to oppose the government; circumstances he may have “aggravated” further as internal party difficulties prevented him from acting on repeated threats to bring down his opponents. Despite the introduction of a “brave” policy, the Liberal leader remained a “geeky guy” leading into the formal election campaign.

As highlighted by James and Mead in the second chapter, the individual creates his or her self based on his or her interactions with others. At the same time, this individual seeks to present a particular self that is favorable to the social situation he or she encounters. Returning to Goffman’s analysis of the self in a dramaturgical sense, the individual attempts to present his or her self as a particular character, which will in turn allow the audience to perceive this character as the individual’s actual self. Thus, for an aspiring political leader, the character the individual seeks to present is one who is prepared to lead the country with the hope that voters will in turn view the politician as a

natural leader. As Goffman states, “The self, then as a performed character, . . . is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited” (1959: 252-253).

However, as demonstrated in the case of Dion, the overall political scene is one with many elements that may discredit the self the individual is attempting to present. In their discussion of narratives, Ochs and Capps are clear to point out that “Narratives are coauthored and as such allow for the possibility that particular contributions will be challenged” (1996: 36). They argue, “Resistance to dominant narratives is salient among academics, politicians, and artists” (Ibid). Regarding politics, Ochs and Capps state, “The to-and-fro challenges and counterchallenges . . . characterizes narrative-laden political discourse” (Ibid).

Looking back to Chapter 2, Ochs and Capps provide a family analogy to illustrate how narratives may be coauthored. In this example, they note that parents may have a tendency to control their children’s narratives by deciding who has the right to speak and what should be told. At the same time, how the recipient responds to a certain narrative may force the narrator to change his or her story. In addition, this recipient’s reaction may reflect back on the storyteller’s appearance of competence. If this individual is unable to “secure feedback, the narrator may suffer loss of validation as narrator and protagonist” (1996: 35). According to Ochs and Capps, “Differential control over content, genre, timing, and reciprocity is . . . critical to the selves that come to life through narrative” (Ibid: 35).

This issue of an individual’s ability to control his or her narrative is paramount to understanding the plight of Dion and the “self” that seemed to “come to life”. In the

political scene, this politician saw his narrative coauthored and ultimately taken over by conflicting interpretations. According to the sources interviewed and texts studied, despite whatever admirable characteristics Dion may have possessed, the image of the Liberal leader was recreated by an adversary painting him as weak through negative ads and political strategy. Dion then strengthened this new portraiture with his own personal communication difficulties and inability to inspire his team to support him or raise the funds necessary to counter their opponent. Journalists then gave credence to this narrative as they informed Canadians of the spectacle. To use Goffman's analogy, all of these elements came together in the political scene to impute a new character to Dion.

From December 2006 until the beginning of the actual campaign, Canadian federal politics were characterized by election speculation thanks to a minority government that was constantly portrayed as on the verge of collapse. Given this dynamic, the notion of a continuous, permanent campaign setting seemed to apply not only to the political parties, but a media focused on winners and losers quantitatively fuelled with a steady stream of polls.

Such a scenario relates to Jamieson's (1992) argument that political reporters tend to view politics under the frame of a "strategy schema", which focuses on the overall horse race and quest for political power. This is not to say that reporters covering Dion had a particular bias against the candidate. However, it does seem to compliment Schudson who noted that although reporters may follow objective standards, "they nevertheless view their role as involving some fundamental translation and interpretation of political acts to a public ill-equipped to sort out for itself the meaning of events" (1982: 99). Using Jamieson's strategy schema, meaning is thus determined by how such

political acts relate to the overall contest. For example, she argues that during an election campaign, journalists use polls as a scorecard of who is winning and adjust their reporting accordingly: “The polls determine whether the candidate will be cast as a front runner or underdog, . . . described as achieving goals or ‘trying’ to achieve them, and how the candidate’s staged and unstaged activities will be interpreted” (Ibid: 166-167). According to the scholar, “The story line of the strategy schema encourages voters to ask not who is better able to serve as president but who is going to win?” (Ibid: 167).

Although her discussion pertains to American politics, Jamieson’s arguments do resonate with the coverage of Dion. Under a minority government scenario that could quickly descend into an election, the prevailing “schema” or “interpretation” attached to the coverage of Dion was how any given incident related to the overall political contest. One illustration of this was how the Outremont by-election was cast as a test of Dion’s leadership, rather than, for example, a collapse of the Bloc Québécois vote to the NDP in that particular riding. Indeed, some of the reporters interviewed agreed that the minority situation fostered such coverage. However, this should not be interpreted to fault reporters for covering the political competition obviously at play in Ottawa. As Bryden said, “Because we’re in a minority, we in the media are always focused on confidence votes . . . That’s the nature of how the system works” (Personal communication, 2009a). At the same time, Simpson stated that in general, “The media is always looking for . . . what’s the political angle on this or that. Who’s up? Who’s down?” (Personal communication, 2009c). Martin, meanwhile, lamented that “there really hasn’t been much at all to say to Canadians this is why Parliament matters . . . All we give them is a steady diet of . . . horse races, leadership popularity, poll analysis” (Personal

communication, 2009b).

In such an environment, definition seemed essential. For her study of political marketing, Scammell argued that “Parties/candidates . . . *must* attend to political image if they want to be serious players in the political market” (1999: 729; *emphasis is in original*). For politicians and political parties, “Reputation, based on record and credible promises, is the *only thing of substance* that a party can promote to potential voters” (Ibid; *emphasis is in original*). Thus, the Conservatives were relentless in seeking to define the narrative of their main opponent as a loser.

This began with a campaign of negative advertisements directly targeting the image of the Liberal leader. According to Fridkin and Kenney, “relevant and uncivil messages should produce the most powerful negative images of the targeted candidate” for an audience (2008: 699). Indeed, as shocking as these ads may have seemed to some, the message was clear and, as Muttart stated, they clearly had the desired effect in introducing a counter-narrative for Dion. The party’s negative advertisement campaign did not simply take place in the spring of 2007 and June 2008, new commercials were unveiled to the media throughout the pre-election period. In doing so, the party was also getting its message out in news reports while ads were hitting the airwaves.⁸³ Whether they were saying Dion was “Not a leader” or later, “Not worth the risk”, the theme was rooted in the initial concept. Conservative Members of Parliament would then repeat

⁸³ For example, in February 2007, the *Canadian Press* featured a poll on the Conservatives first attack ads against Dion. The Decima Research survey said 38 percent of people surveyed had seen the ads, and one-third of this number “recalled . . . [the commercials] only in the context of news coverage” (Cheadle, 2007, February 7).

these talking points in question period and press conferences.⁸⁴

Dion's response to these attacks was that he wanted to stay above the fray: "If the Prime Minister wants to go low; if he wants to take the bully approach, it will be his choice", he said in March 2007. "I will keep the high road, and I'm very convinced it's the best way to have majority support at the next election" (Clark, 2007, March 9: A4).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, had he wanted to respond in a similar fashion as his rival, fundraising numbers released showed that the Liberals did not have the capital to launch an attack at the scale of their opponent.⁸⁶

Only adding to Dion's troubles were conflicting messages from fellow Liberals. As Goffman stated in the second chapter, criticism from one's allies can be "devastating to the performance which the disputants ought to be presenting" and leave audience members "with the feeling that something is surely suspicious about a performance when those who know it best do not agree" (1959: 210-211). As he tangled with his main adversary, the Liberal leader's presentation was continuously undermined by his own teammates. However, as Carroll said, "If you're going to run the country, you better be able to run your own party" (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

The Conservatives' continual negative campaign against Dion did raise some

⁸⁴ In one presentation arranged to criticize Dion's spending plans, Industry Minister Jim Prentice was quoted saying, "His disregard for the consequences of his own overspending is more evidence that he is not a leader and not worth the risk". The reporter then noted that "[t]o reinforce their attack, the Tories erected a backdrop behind Mr. Prentice with the word 'Leadership' repeated over and over across it". (Chase, 2008, February 18: A1).

⁸⁵ It should be mentioned that there were some stories about Liberal YouTube advertisements and the party did release television and radio commercials in April 2007 seeking to show Dion as strong. However, like the campaigns themselves, the coverage was limited.

⁸⁶ Making matters worse, it was also revealed that Dion was unable to raise funds to pay off his own leadership debt. This gave Conservatives such as MP Pierre Poilievre a platform to state, "If the Liberal leader is too weak to manage his own finances, how can he run the country's?" (Bryden, 2008, June 2).

sympathy for the Liberal leader. Columnists warned that voters might end up seeing the Tories as mean-spirited. Said Murphy in response to a new round of ads in June 2007, “[T]he Conservatives’ continuous and nasty focus on him . . . may, in fact, stir Canadians to consider that Mr. Dion must have virtues to which they have not been alerted” (2007, June 2: A25). Regarding the same campaign, Don Martin said, “just because Mr. Dion serves up camera-ready verbal and visual material for his own political pulverizing doesn’t mean opponents should claim an open season on character assassination” (2007, May 30: A4).

Throughout the period studied in the textual analysis, the personal narrative that Dion was an honest politician with integrity still resonated. In addition, several sources reiterated this theme in the subsequent interviews. Ivison recalled during the Liberal leadership race telling a member of Dion’s staff that “‘the world needs Dion’ because he was a man of integrity – still is” (Personal communication, October 15, 2009). Bryden, meanwhile, said, “I liked Dion, I always did. I feel sorry for what happened to him” (Personal communication, 2009a). Finally, at the end of the interview with Smith, the senator turned the tape recorder back on to say, “Liberals really respected Dion as a human being and as a person and that he’d been so courageous in defending the cause of keeping Canada together. . . . He’s still very respected and damn well should be” (Personal communication, October 22, 2009).

However, as the research findings demonstrated, such characteristics, although honorable, were not seen to be sufficient to claim the country’s highest office. In their analysis of leadership images, Just and Crigler argued that there is a difference between a leader’s overall image and the various traits he or she may possess. They state, “Images

integrate traits, so much so that positive or negative evaluations of political competence can influence the assessment of what are generally regarded as personal qualities (such as honesty and trust)” (2000: 182). Similarly, in their discussion of agenda-setting, McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey note that journalists may tend to place importance on certain areas over others and orient the focus of the discussion. They argue that research into “second-level agenda-setting” has shown that the media plays a role in highlighting “specific features (or attributes) of the candidates from which voters will shape their own opinions about the candidates” (1997: 706). Whether this actually influences an individual’s vote is debatable, as a number of other factors need to be considered, however, the textual analysis of Dion has demonstrated that certain attributes about the candidate were deemed more important than others in the media coverage.

The theme that “Nice guys finish last” seemed appropriate to some writers. For a column on lying and cynicism in politics, Judith Timson wrote, “[I]n this context of polished image and perfect sound bites, the hapless Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion comes across as too haltingly human – maybe even too honest – to lead his party to victory” (2007: F7). Murphy said in April 2008, “Mr. Dion is a man of considerable integrity, character and intelligence” (2008, April 5: A21), before noting that given such qualities, surely he knew both Ignatieff and Rae would have made better leaders.

More than a couple journalists wrote of Dion using the analogy of the weakling facing bullies on a playground. Even physical descriptions of the Liberal leader conjured up this image. Said Don Martin, Dion had an “ivory tower tan and passive demeanor, which create the impression of someone who . . . was the favourite wedgie target for elementary school bullies” (2008, March 26: A4). In a feature article on the Liberal

leader, the *Globe and Mail*'s Michael Valpy describing him saying, "Mr. Dion, up close, looks untouched by life – not boyish but untouched. A too-smooth face" (2008: F1).

Of course, purchasing new glasses⁸⁷ could not mask other issues with his presentation. Said Don Martin, "[T]he optical makeover doesn't alter the reality that when Mr. Dion opens his mouth, the only oratorical fire that emerges are cold sparks of chronically mangled English with the emphasis on the wrong syllables" (2008, February 23: A8). Such a problem was repeatedly mentioned in columns and news stories alike. This was coupled with an overall lack of charisma, a trait that seemed to be more glaring as Barack Obama's oratory became the trademark of his presidential campaign.⁸⁸

As such, both columnists and anonymous Liberals were skeptical of Dion's political abilities in selling his Green Shift against a party launching negative advertisements deriding a "tax on everything" and a prime minister saying the policy was "crazy" and "will actually screw everybody across the country" (*The Globe and Mail* editorial board, 2008, June 24: A16). In addition, others noted that this was yet another example of the Liberal leader's poor political judgment and "tin ear for the public mood" (Wente, 2008, May 13: A21). Promoting what reporters would call a "complicated" (Taber, 2008, August 7: A1; Bryden, 2008, August 14) taxation policy at a time of rising fuel prices and growing fears of a recession seemed perilously risky.

Although the release of this plan may not have been the start of the 2008 election campaign, it was a point in which the Liberal leader attempted to regain the advantage in

⁸⁷ Five separate journalists noted this in their reports.

⁸⁸ It should be noted that there appeared to be a "charisma deficit" (L. Martin, 2008, February 25: A17) amongst all Canadian party leaders. However, Dion's performance in question period garnered considerable criticism along with unflattering comparisons to Michael Ignatieff, who was seen as a strong debater.

crafting his own narrative in the ongoing minority Parliament contest. However, after more than a year of discussions of Dion's weakness in his performance, strategy, communications, and leadership over his party, the negative portrayal was too firmly entrenched.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Discussion

Recalling the research questions highlighted in Chapter 3, the central purpose of this study is to determine how the various personal narratives about Stéphane Dion emerged and were created between December 2006 and September 2008 and how the candidate, his opponents, and journalists brought this together under a minority Parliament setting. In terms of significant findings for this study, it can be stated that throughout the period examined in the textual analysis, a number of narratives were used to define the Liberal leader, which were further elaborated in the in-depth interviews. On the positive side, he was considered a man with honesty and integrity, a candidate with a green conscience who was not to be underestimated. These traits were promoted by the leader through his words and his policies, and also reflected in the way journalists described him.

In reference to the title of this thesis, *Narrating the Self and Painting an Image*, the above depiction of Dion was essentially the narrative he sought to present for his “self”. However, the image that was painted in the end was a different matter. Although the above positive characteristics did remain attached to Dion the individual, as leader of the Liberal party, the overall picture that emerged was that he was a weak leader. As the research has shown across the textual analysis and subsequent interviews, this theme was promoted through the work of an adversary that utilized both a negative advertising campaign and political strategy to demonstrate Dion’s weakness. Journalists observing

and assessing the Liberal leader then gave authority to the narrative in their reports and commentaries. Meanwhile, members of Dion's own party further perpetuated this theme through criticism, whether anonymous or open. Finally, due to his inability to present himself as a strong candidate with a united, well-funded team, Dion inadvertently helped coauthor his own narrative as a weak leader.

After years of majority rule, it appears that minority Parliaments could potentially become the new normal in Ottawa. As the study has demonstrated, this creates a situation of intensity as the government is constantly on the brink of an election. Consequently, political parties are continually positioning themselves in case they are forced to head to the polls. Thus, tactics previously utilized in the midst of an election campaign are no longer considered out of bounds long before the writ is dropped. This overall dynamic pulls the press gallery to focus on the political gamesmanship abetted with the ongoing scorecard of polling data and leadership rankings.

As such, this analysis of Dion outlines the difficulties a new leader of the Official Opposition faces in presenting himself or herself in the current political landscape. Of course, as previously stated, Dion's political and communication skills seemed to make a tenuous situation worse. However, the minority Parliament structure provides serious obstacles that his successor Michael Ignatieff would encounter less than one year after Dion's departure in December 2008.

The experience of Dion chronicled in this thesis demonstrates the need for an Opposition leader to clearly and succinctly identify to Canadians whom he or she is and where they want to take the country. This message needs to be unambiguous, reinforced by one's actions, and repeated whenever possible. However, to use a cliché, this is easier

said than done. In their study of the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, O’Shaughnessy and Henneberg (2007) note that as the incumbent, George W. Bush had a distinct advantage over his opponent. They argue that beyond the resources at his disposal as president, this individual had already created a brand familiar to voters. Conversely, upon entering the presidential race, Democratic candidate John Kerry, “was in many ways an unknown with no public visibility or record beyond the ‘political nation’” (Ibid: 254). According to the scholars, “The problem this presents for the challenger is that their brand often has to be created virtually from scratch” (Ibid: 255). The Republicans successfully attacked their opponent’s character and Kerry “appeared to offer no self-explanation, no ‘narrative’ holding his offering as a persona together” (Ibid). Given this example, it does not seem surprising that Conservative strategist Patrick Muttart said he studied the Republicans’ campaign to prepare his party’s response to Dion.

As *National Post* columnist Don Martin noted in the previous chapter, an Opposition leader has a difficult time setting the political agenda. Indeed, much of the coverage of Dion dealt with how he was responding to the government. Stories of new policies he was promoting, with the exception of the Green Shift, earned very little traction in the press. Adding to this, Dion’s fundraising challenges made it extremely difficult to get his message out using alternative methods. However, even if he did have the appropriate funding, what then? How does a candidate effectively respond to negative ads, while at the same time selling himself or herself as a politician that takes the high road? This seems to be a question that Dion’s successor would face one year later.

Furthermore, the research shows that the importance of a team cannot be overlooked. As Goffman (1959) said in the second chapter, public criticism by a member

of one's own team can be "devastating" and lead audience members to question the performance. The same could be said regarding the negative criticism Dion received from his own Liberal party. As such, it seems fair to assume that Canadians contacted by a polling firm may have a negative view of an Opposition leader bombarded with attack ads and unable to grab the media's attention. This will only be accentuated when the media attention turns ugly thanks to friendly fire from one's own side.

Amidst this discussion of performance and presentation, the thesis raises a question for consideration about what this means for the voter who must interpret the image of the candidate in the end. What kind of political leader is the average Canadian asking for? Are voters today seeking Max Weber's charismatic leader; an individual who appears to hold "specific gifts of body and spirit . . . believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody" (1967: 245)? What separates a strong leader from a weak one? Is it the decisions one makes or how those decisions are seen to be made?

In the previous chapter, Carroll said one of the points he learned from the time of Dion was that "ideas are not that important" (Personal communication, October 19, 2009). Martin, meanwhile, said he found "substance takes second place to speculation" in a minority government and he lamented that "there really hasn't been much at all to say to Canadians this is why Parliament matters" (Personal communication, 2009b). Yet, are Canadians asking what is so important about this institution in the first place?

Given the constant rise of new media and forums for discussion, today's politics is becoming more mediated. However, as the *Globe and Mail's* Rex Murphy said in Chapter 4, Dion was unable to secure "that sharpness of profile that is quintessential in a media age" (2007, March 3: A25). Indeed, he was a "geeky guy" (L. Martin, 2008,

September 4: A19) who struggled with communication and was unable to rally his team behind him. At the same time, his opponents painted him as what he labeled a “caricature”, which was only reinforced as the minority situation transpired against him. But what should this “sharpness of profile” entail? Is the effort to narrate one’s self merely a matter of the proper communication strategy supported with sufficient capital? Perhaps. But, if this is so, then it seems to say more about the political culture in Canada than it does about Stéphane Dion.

Thesis Summary

After several months of campaigning, on December 2, 2006 Stéphane Dion was elected head of the Liberal Party of Canada. This came as a surprise to the party establishment and media alike. Despite serving a decade in federal politics, the new Liberal leader was still portrayed as an unknown outside of his home province. As such, he needed to present himself to Canadians and develop a personal narrative of a candidate ready to lead the country.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how the narrative of Dion was created and reinterpreted following his election as Liberal leader until the beginning of the 2008 election campaign. To do so, the thesis sought to determine how various sources interacted to construct a candidate’s public image. As this occurred amidst a minority Parliament setting, the study also sought to define what effect this situation had on shaping the image of a political leader.

To achieve the overall purpose, the literature review began with William James (1890) discussions of the “consciousness of self”. This philosopher expanded previous

notions of the self and determined that all aspects that relate to an individual are essentially a part of that person's being. Mead (1934) took this study further, noting how one's self is created through communication and "arises in the process of social experience and activity" (1955: 135). Through this, the self becomes an "object to itself" (Ibid: 140) as the individual grows aware of himself or herself from the perspective of another or society at large. In so doing, the self is built and created through the various social relationships it encounters.

The creation of this self is tied closely to the way in which one organizes and makes sense of the variety of experiences he or she comes across. These experiences are organized into narrative structures, which Bruner (1991) notes aid individuals in making sense of life in general and their own lives in particular. According to Ochs and Capps, "Personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience. In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable" (1996: 20). Although not necessarily true, these stories provide one with "an opportunity for fragmented self-understanding" (Ibid: 22) as they aid in putting one's life in some sort of context based on the narrative.

As one comes to understand his or her self in relation to the external environment, the individual also seeks to present his or her self in a way that that environment will find favorable. Using a theatre analogy, Goffman (1959) notes that the individual attempts to present himself or herself as the proper character for the social situation s/he encounters, this in turn leads the audience to perceive this character as the individual's actual self.

The "all-too-human task of staging a performance" (Goffman, 1959: 253) is just as common with the average individual in a social setting as it is for a political leader

attempting to appeal to voters. In the latter scenario, the politician presents a personal narrative of the self that constructs a candidate who voters see as a natural leader. However, this narrative does not necessarily travel direct from the political leader to the voter. Instead, it enters a mediated political environment where it may be resisted, reinterpreted or rejected.

Ochs and Capps (1996) note how one's personal narrative can be coauthored and revised through social interaction. They give the example of a parent who elicits a story from a child, or seeks to tell the story himself or herself for fear that the child is not an adequate storyteller. Likewise, the construction of a leader's personal narrative is a collaborative matter as it interacts with an opposition seeking to discredit its rival and journalists who view the political process under their own specific frames of reference. Ultimately, Just and Crigler (2000) note that the way in which one manages these various sources determines how his or her overall image appears to voters in the end.

Based on this discussion, a methodology was built to determine how the dominant personal narrative of Stéphane Dion was created from the period of December 3, 2006 to September 6, 2008. As a politician's image is built in a mediated environment, the study analyzed how the Liberal leader's personal narratives were presented in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Canadian Press*. To do so, the study utilized a qualitative research design, which took McLeod and Tichenor's (2007) microscopic conceptual level approach to focus specifically on the portrayal of Dion. Using inductive reasoning, it was inferred that through studying political events, along with the characterizations and descriptions made about the Liberal leader, determinations about his narrative could be made.

The data collection methods were a textual analysis, which utilized the narrative criticism method of rhetorical criticism, followed by in-depth interviews with journalists and Conservative and Liberal strategists. For the first section, in Chapter 4, the period studied was broken down according to the significant political events that played a role in shaping Dion's narrative. This began with his surprising "underdog" win of the leadership and "honeymoon period", which was shortly followed with the release of a series of negative advertisements from the Conservatives labeling Dion "Not a leader". From this point on, Dion's personal narrative eroded into his opponent's depiction of him as weak, as his own party members began criticizing their leader. This reached a crescendo when his party lost a by-election in a formerly safe Liberal seat, which journalists helped build into a test of Dion's leadership. At the same time, Dion's image continued to sink as his party was forced to abstain on key votes of confidence in the government because the Liberals were not strong enough to mount an effective opposition. Although his narrative briefly improved thanks to the introduction of a dramatic environmental economic policy, the Liberal leader's image of weakness persevered heading into the 2008 federal election campaign.

To follow up this narrative criticism, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with four journalists who covered Dion in the outlets studied, along with the Conservative strategist who organized the "Not a leader" campaign, and two Liberal strategists who previously served as campaign organizers for Dion. The participants verified the results of the textual analysis and painted a picture of a politician who did not have the political sense or communication skills necessary to lead his party – factors that were highlighted thanks to a successful Conservative campaign to label Dion as weak. He

also faced serious obstacles that continued to hinder successor Michael Ignatieff one year later. The sources noted that the role of Opposition leader can make it difficult to define one's self, a difficulty that is only accentuated by the intensely political atmosphere of a minority Parliament. Although several participants said they felt Dion was a man with both honesty and integrity, they echoed the textual analysis results and argued he was unable to manage the various forces resisting and reinterpreting his narrative, which, to use Ochs and Capps' expression, had been coauthored and essentially rewritten. In the end, Dion was unsuccessful at presenting himself as a candidate prepared to lead the country. Thus, for the audience, the self that had come to life in the political scene was not a leader.

Limitations and Implications

In looking back at the textual analysis in Chapter 4, some of the most intense internal criticism of Dion came from Quebec. This garnered a considerable amount of coverage in the outlets examined. One limitation to this study mentioned in the third chapter was that the analysis would only focus on English Canada. It was believed that the situation in English Canada provided an opportunity to see how the new Liberal leader attempted to present himself to a relatively new audience. With that said, a similar analysis into the depiction of Dion in the French media in Quebec is encouraged. Such a study may need a

greater timeline expanding back to the sovereignty debates of the 1990s when Dion began creating his profile in this province.⁸⁹

The print medium was selected to offer a more comprehensive view of Dion than what may be found on television. At the same time, an archived database of print articles over the entire period examined provided the available means to study this medium in particular, as opposed to broadcast or online content. However, with the language of theatrics and performance so prevalent in the discussion of politics, it would be interesting to see a comparative study of Dion with these other media. In particular, it is encouraged that such an endeavor examines how television news covered the Conservatives' negative advertisements.⁹⁰ In the print outlets studied, these ads were given extensive coverage when they were released. It would be interesting to examine how the commercials themselves were depicted on television news.

Finally, in discussing the negative commercials, it should be re-stated that the purpose of this thesis was to focus on how the overall narrative of a particular politician was created and revised in the mediated political atmosphere. As such, the central object of study was Stéphane Dion, his personal narrative, and how this was coauthored in the mediated environment of a minority Parliament setting. Indeed, a contributing factor to Dion's narrative change was the Conservative advertisements, which offered a counter-narrative to the dynamic that eventually overtook Dion. However, although these ads

⁸⁹ Such an analysis could also be interesting given the conventional knowledge that Dion was seemingly hated in Quebec. However, for some reason, the Liberal vote in the province was higher in the 2008 election than it was while Paul Martin was leader.

⁹⁰ In his interview, Carroll discussed how these ads were first released to the news media. He said, "Media are the cheapest way to release ads. If you release your ads to the media and only buy a limited amount of time on TV, particularly on the news channels, it's a very economical approach and media will do your work for you" (Personal communication, October 19, 2009).

were mentioned – as it would be irresponsible not to do so – the study itself was not an analysis of negative campaign commercials per se, rather the message they injected into the debate over who Dion appeared to be. Although it was beyond the scope of this thesis, a suggestion can be made for a further complimentary study into the Conservatives’ campaign against Dion. Such an in-depth investigation could examine the content and structure of the various negative advertisements against the Liberal leader and how they specifically operated as tools of persuasion. As mentioned earlier, the study could also look at how journalists and new media are used to expand the reach of these commercials or disprove their messages entirely.⁹¹ In addition, this analysis could also examine the ethical considerations behind negative advertising and how this fits into the quest for political power vis-à-vis democracy in general.

⁹¹ For example, in the previous chapter Muttart said there seemed to be a pattern in how the messages from such ads worked their way into news coverage. In addition, shortly following the 2008 federal election, an Angus Reid Strategies (2008) poll showed that one particular negative advertisement against Dion persuaded 11 percent of Canadians not to vote at all. At the same time, the same poll found that negative ads caused 10 percent of Liberals to “most likely” switch their vote to Stephen Harper (Ibid: 24-26).

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