

Unmasking the Petro- Narrative: Shifting Discourse on Alberta's Oil Sands

Changing the Narrative on
Alberta's Oil Sands

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June 2024


PHIL 359



Introduction

- The public perception of oil is shaped by narratives controlled by those benefiting from the capitalist distribution of oil, heavily influencing cultural attitudes in Alberta.
- The extensive marketing and PR campaigns by big-oil make it hard to discern the true foundations of Albertan feelings toward oil. Likely largely due to propaganda
- Discourse around curtailing oil usage often cites catastrophic environmental consequences, evoking feelings of loss and despair, which are less effective in persuasion.
- The failure of anti-oil/environmental advocates to effectively influence discourse suggests the need for adopting similar rhetorical techniques as the pro-oil lobby to alter public consciousness about the oil-sands controversy.



A man with a beard and long hair, wearing a dark suit and a red tie, is seated at a wooden desk in a dimly lit study. He is holding a quill pen and writing in a large, open book. On the desk, there are several stacks of old books, a glass jar, and a pen. In the background, a large window shows an oil pumpjack in a field at sunset. The scene is warm and atmospheric, with a curved white graphic element on the right side of the image.

Historical Influence of Oil Narratives

- Controlled by Capitalist Interests:
- Narratives have been shaped to benefit those who profit from oil.
- Propaganda has been used to create a positive image of oil in the public mind.
- Examples of Propaganda:
- Campaigns and rhetoric used to promote oil as essential to Economy
- Ex. Molding of American Economy around energy consumption

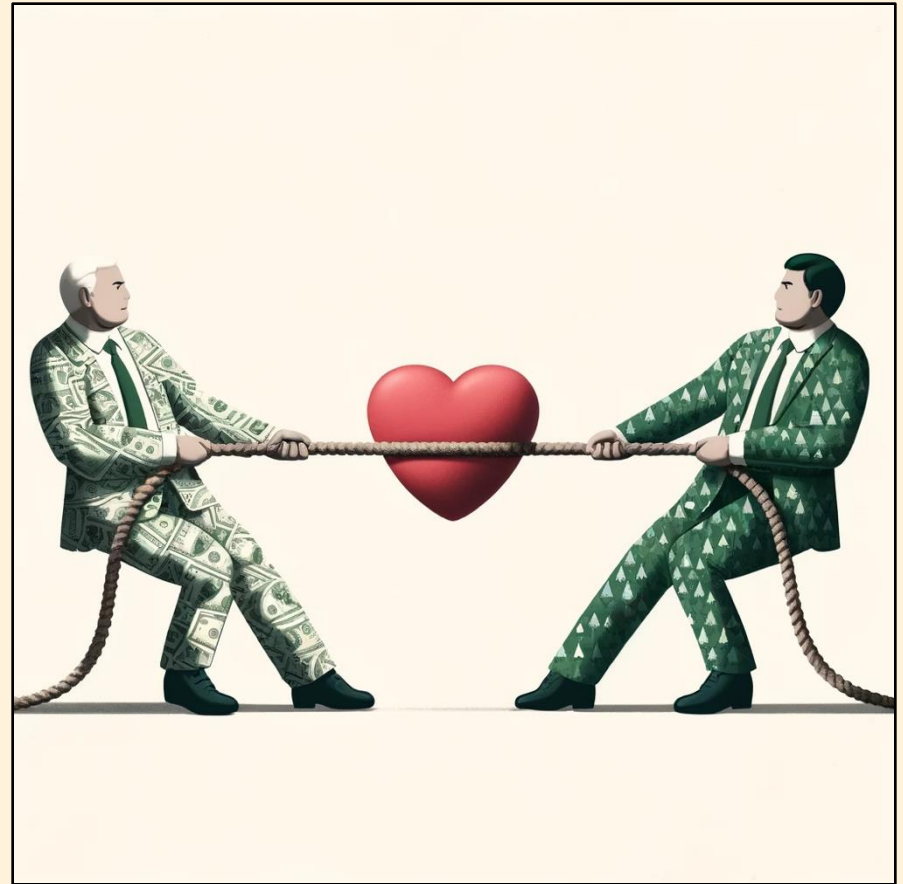
Oil as a Cultural Symbol in Alberta

- Significance in Albertan Identity:
- Oil is deeply ingrained in the cultural identity of Alberta.
- Examples: Edmonton Oilers, Alberta as the “Energy Province.”
- Campaigns like “Alberta is Energy”
- Efforts to link oil with provincial pride and identity.
- Use of slogans to reinforce the importance of oil in Albertan culture.
- Made to seem indispensable to Albertan Economy
- Low royalties and subsidized (ACITTS)



Superior Rhetorical Techniques of Pro-Oil Lobby

- Effective Strategies:
- Pro-oil campaigns use emotionally resonant and psychologically compelling rhetoric.
- They create narratives that make oil seem indispensable and beneficial.
- Comparison with Anti-Oil Approaches:
- Environmental advocates often focus on facts and statistics as well as warnings of future catastrophe.
- These approaches are likely not as effective in changing public opinion.



Misrepresentation of Scientific Evidence

- Tactics by Pro-Oil Propagandists: (Merchants of Doubt)
- Bankrolling scientists to create doubt about climate change.
- Magnifying dissenting voices to confuse the public.
- Impact on Public Understanding:
- Misrepresentation makes it difficult for people to commit to concrete actions.
- Creates confusion and apathy towards environmental issues.



Psychological Manipulation and Lacanian Theory

- Richard Kover's Analysis:
- Lacanian psychoanalytic theory explains the deep psychological impact of pro-oil narratives.
- Oil is presented as the “object petit a,” an object of desire and identity.
- Can create sense of belonging
- Impact on Identity and Community:
- Oil becomes more than a commodity; it's integral to personal and collective identity.
- This deep psychological connection makes it harder to shift public opinion.





Frontier Masculinity

- Motifs of rugged individualism and toughness are good examples of these psychological associations
- Men can be emasculated or shamed for any behaviours that could be considered emasculate compared to cowboy motif like supporting feminism or asking for help (expressing support for green solutions can be extrapolated to be in this category)

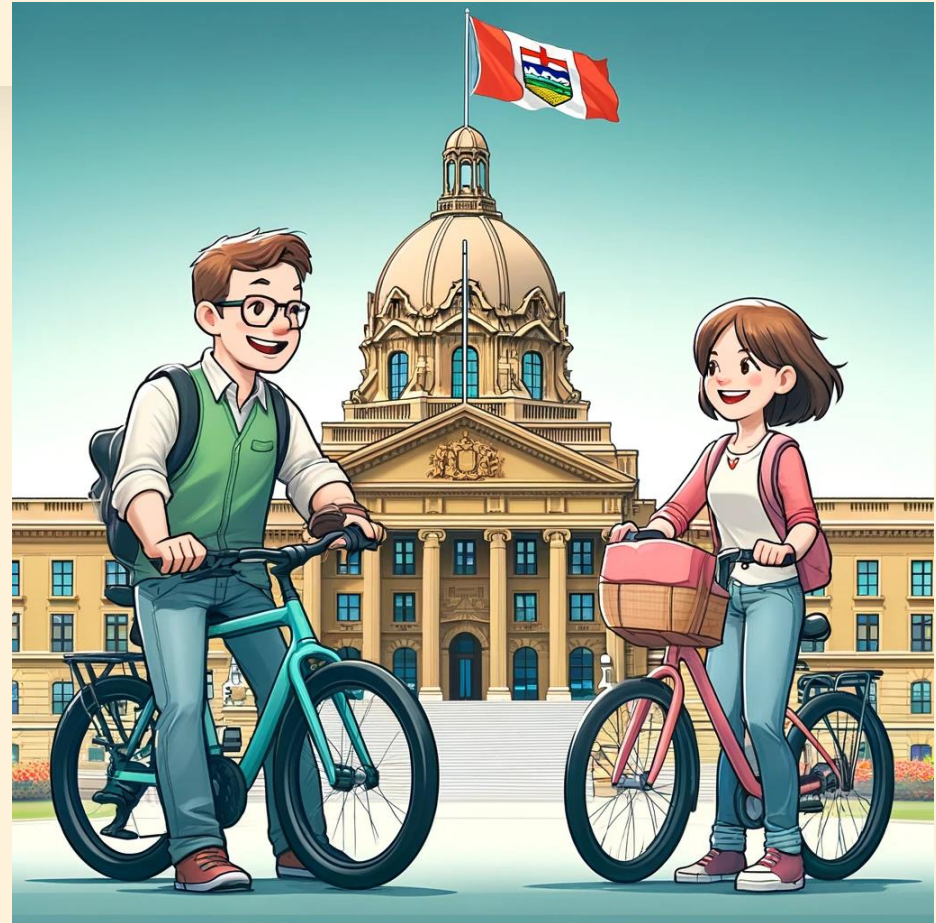


Climate Denial and Psychological Barriers

- Kari Marie Norgaard's Findings:
- Climate inaction is not due to ignorance but a "socially organized denial."
- People compartmentalize climate knowledge to avoid negative emotions such as cognitive dissonance in daily life.
- Espen Stoknes:
- "Collapse porn" and disaster fatigue desensitize people to climate warnings.
- Psychological barriers allow people to ignore the immediacy of climate issues.

Shifting the Narrative: Positive Framing

- Importance of Optimistic Discourse:
- Negative framing leads to fear and apathy.
- Positive framing inspires hope and action.
- Examples of Campaign Slogans:
 - “Pioneering a Sustainable Tomorrow” & “Innovation Drives Us Forward”
- Evoke Positive Emotions
- Focus on resilience, progress, and provincial pride.
- Highlight benefits of a green future rather than sacrifices.



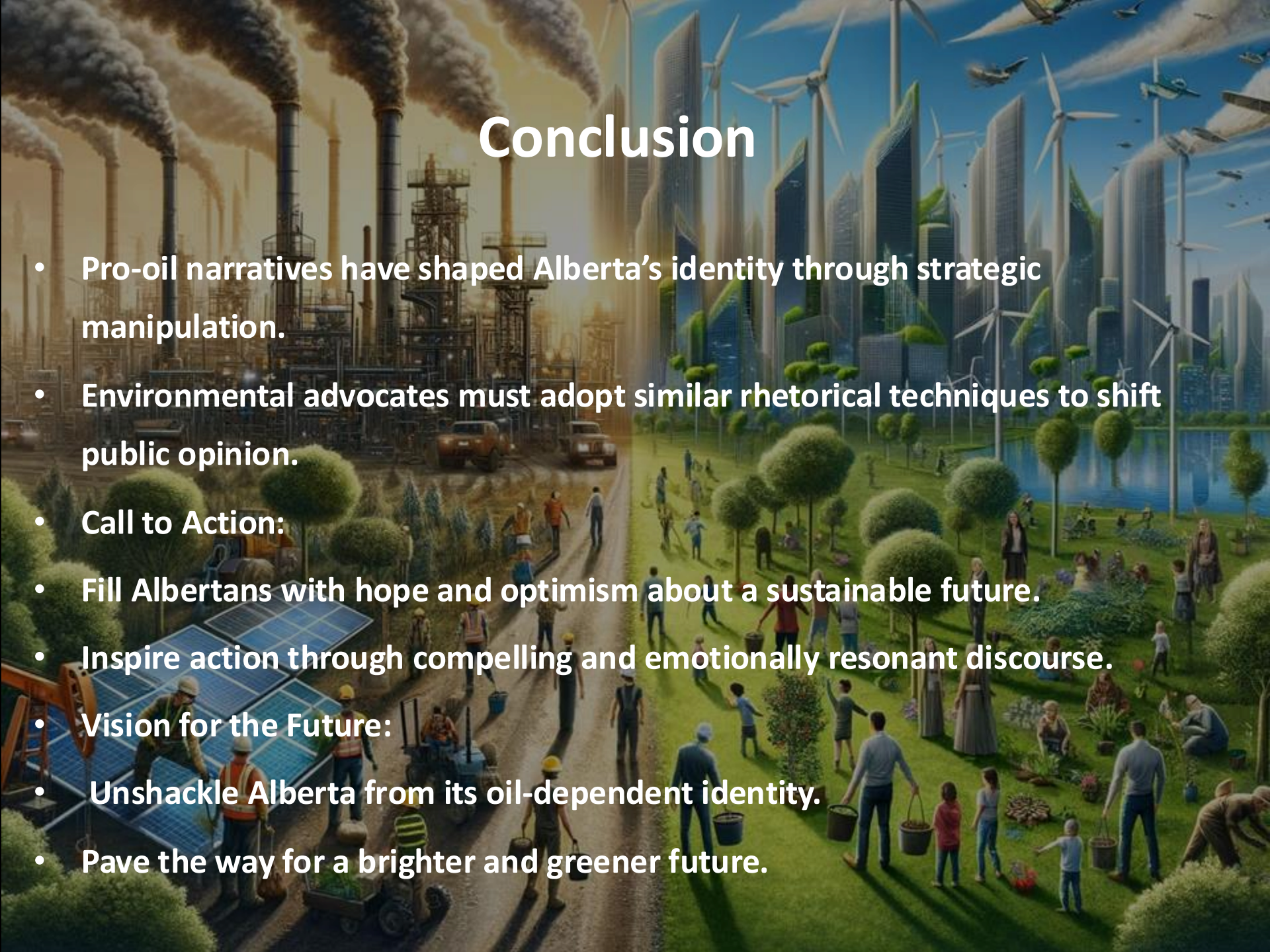
Strategies for a New Discourse

- Create emotionally resonant narratives with skillful rhetoric
- Use Lacanian signifiers to connect with core values of Albertans
- Inspire Collective Shift:
- Frame sustainability as an extension of Alberta's pioneering spirit.
- Make green energy a source of provincial pride and identity.
- Highlight what Albertans have to gain



Conclusion

- Pro-oil narratives have shaped Alberta's identity through strategic manipulation.
- Environmental advocates must adopt similar rhetorical techniques to shift public opinion.
- Call to Action:
 - Fill Albertans with hope and optimism about a sustainable future.
 - Inspire action through compelling and emotionally resonant discourse.
- Vision for the Future:
 - Unshackle Alberta from its oil-dependent identity.
 - Pave the way for a brighter and greener future.



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