

Justin Trudeau smokes pot, raises coolness quotient:

Justin Trudeau smokes pot. Stephen Harper has never done so. Spot the loser.



Sean Kilpatrick / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Prime Minister Stephen Harper wears the Canadian Ranger sweater in Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, this week. Trying too hard, says Heather Mallick.

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Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has smoked pot, and Stephen Harper has not. Spot the doofus.

I don't know if political calculation entered into Trudeau's recent casual remark that he had smoked dope three years ago, while an MP, under the most mundane of circumstances. "We had a few good friends over for a dinner party, our kids were at their grandmother's for the night, and one of our friends lit up a joint and passed it around."

The signal sent out is that Trudeau is normal. He is like us. He's laid-back and he thinks it's weird you can be arrested for having one joint. So do we.

But maybe he *is* normal, not just packaging himself as such. A normal human as prime minister, imagine that. I am only now recovering from the photo of Harper posing in a red hoodie with Inuit rangers who look normal, even attractive, in a red hoodie, but Harper is playing with what appears to be a duck puppet. Spot the white guy.

I wish Harper would give up on attempts at coolness. Be yourself, I say, however hideous that may be. Trudeau is himself.

Every phrase of Trudeau's description of a normal social evening with pot sends out a blast of pop culture references and links to our own past.

First, Trudeau's friends were "good" friends because you don't want to get high with overwrought strangers, or cops. At dinner, your basic food groups were visited because later, when you're high, you will land with delight on snacks. "I'm sensing oats, a little bran, maybe chokecherries" you say, munching enthusiastically on cork drink coasters and the pot pourri.

Of course the kids were at their grandma's place — I hope he was referring to Margaret Trudeau, that maternal woman, that eternal beauty, immersing them in love. The kids are all right, no need to get paranoid about that.

And you smoke according to pot etiquette, which is all about sharing. Then you dive into mental and social linguine over what music to listen to and whether the sand in your shoes is honest Iles-de-la-Madeleine sand or left over from a trip to Antigua. Caribbean sand is bigger-grained. This discussion, which takes hours, has actually lasted four minutes.

At some point, people are weak with laughter and someone says, "We should be recording this." No one says this now. It wouldn't be funny, not with CSIS.

Harper has never done this. That is not normal. Trudeau's "actions speak for themselves," Harper said dismissively. Yes, they do. Trudeau is one of us.

Pot should be legalized. It is not decent to arrest people for a little pot — it is sad that 23-year-old Michel Trudeau was facing such a charge for a minor amount before his 1998 avalanche death — and more significantly for the prime minister, it is not enforceable.

Pot possession laws are as difficult to enforce as Quebec's planned law against public service workers wearing religious headgear. It's not a bad law, as such. Secularism is, or should be, a pillar of Canadian life. Quebecers suffered so much under Roman Catholicism that they are entitled to celebrate the Quiet Revolution and erase religion from public life. They are a bold people. When they

want gun registry information, they go to the Supreme Court to get it. Good for them.

I had initially thought the religious-symbols law would apply to people on the street — as the anti-niqab law in Franc does — and was appalled at the thought of people being arrested on the street for hattery.

But it's fair to tell people not to bring religious symbols to work. And hats are a bad idea fashion-wise.

The silliness of hats is an old story among humans. Whether it's Turkey abolishing the fez for more European-style hats as part of modernization — that worked out well — or Jackie Kennedy's pointless pillbox, Duchess Kate with her "fascinator," that silly little beige puddle of catsick sliding over her head, the British bowler hat as a symbol of conformity, the fedora for sad hipsters, the baseball cap as a signifier for idiocy, the fishing hat as a declaration of elderly male rage ... I could go on.

All right, I will. My mother used to wear those accordion-folded purse-sized plastic rainhats. I have a shower cap with stupid polka dots on it. I had a lot of hat trauma in my childhood.

All hats are bad. That said, hats will only disappear when people take a good hard look at themselves in the mirror. You can tell people not to wear religious symbols to work, just as you can tell them not to show up stoned. But they may still wear crosses at home and maybe smoke a little pot as a vacation from daily life.

Can we agree that we are fine with this?

Harper is working so hard to up his coolness quotient, posing and sniping with his long-suffering wife Laureen in Nunavut. Trudeau makes one remark and wins a major tranche of laid-back voters. I don't smoke pot anymore. I wish I did. I like people who do.