

Enlightened Feminism and Charles Adler: The New Backlash?

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Abstract. For many young women, feminism is no longer a salient issue. Indeed, women, particularly young women are regularly told in the media that they are doing just fine and that the goals of gender equality have been reached. This paper examines the construction of feminism and more specifically, the backlash against feminism in talk radio. It explores the construction of gender found in the Charles Adler radio program, broadcast across Canada on Corus radio. The paper argues that the way that Adler represents the issues of women's equality is important. It is evident that he employs a language of "backlash" to suggest that equality and rights-based discourse are anti-men and that feminist views are not supported by mainstream Canadians. In doing so, Adler endorses the moves by the current Conservative government to dismantle advocacy programs that support women's rights.

Keywords. Feminism; backlash; Conservative; talk radio; Charles Adler; Stephen Harper; advocacy; women's rights; labour.

Since the election of the Conservatives under Stephen Harper, feminists have been concerned about the effect of the policy direction on women's equality issues, particularly because of Harper's perceived ties to the religious right. Cuts to advocacy programs that allow for rights-based challenges on constitutional grounds are particularly worrisome. The concerns expressed in Canada echo concerns raised in the United States and the United Kingdom of a growing anti-rights rhetoric heard in the media and in particular in populist venues like private political talk radio and the tabloid press. These discussions are being held during recessionary times and the implementation of entrenched neoliberal cuts to government spending. This paper examines select podcasts of Charles Adler, Canada's only syndicated private talk radio host, who broadcasts a decidedly right-wing analysis of daily news events from his studio in Winnipeg. It is not intended to be a quantitative analysis of Adler and his topic choices. Instead, it is meant to provide an impression of the framing of equality claims and feminism found in his radio

Résumé. Pour de nombreuses jeunes femmes, le féminisme n'est plus un sujet de préoccupation central. En fait, les femmes, et en particulier les jeunes femmes, entendent dans les médias qu'elles se portent bien et que les objectifs de l'égalité entre les sexes ont été atteints. Cet article examine la construction du féminisme, et plus spécifiquement, la réaction brutale contre le féminisme dans des émissions de radio. Il explore la construction des genres dans l'émission de radio de Charles Adler, diffusée au Canada sur la chaîne de radio Corus. Cet article soutient que la manière dont Adler représente les questions de l'égalité des femmes est importante. On remarque aisément qu'il emploie un vocabulaire de « réaction brutale » pour suggérer que l'égalité et le discours lié aux droits sont contre les hommes et que les vues féministes ne sont pas soutenues par la majorité des Canadiens. En procédant de la sorte, Adler approuve les actions du gouvernement conservateur actuel, qui démantèle les programmes d'information publique et de défense des droits des femmes.

Mots clefs. Féminisme; réaction brutale; Conservateurs; émission de radio; Charles Adler; Stephen Harper; information publique; droits des femmes; travail.

program and made available online. It is in the way that Adler represents the issues of women's equality that is important, because in listening to his program, it becomes evident that Adler uses the language of "backlash" to suggest that equality and rights-based discourse are anti-men and that feminist views are not supported by mainstream Canadians. Adler also relies on the social construction of gender to identify appropriate roles for women and men, demonstrating an anxiety about gender performativity and suggesting that equality claims have resulted in women acting unnaturally. Adler's program suggest that those who agree with him are "normal," "mainstream," and "real" Canadians and his depiction of discussions about gender identity and equality pits the "citizens of the Adler nation" (what Adler calls his listeners) against women and other rights seeking groups. As Penny argues this distracts us in times of economic austerity (26 January 2011).

My paper begins with an overview of Canada's talk radio market both private and public. It compares Canada's pri-

vate talk radio to the American market and explores the rhetorical devices of both as part of the backlash against feminism in the media. My analysis then reviews Adler's rhetoric that plays up a dichotomy between "real" Canadians and those seeking "special rights" by examining selected portions of Adler's podcasts that talked specifically about rights. These podcasts were broadcast in May of 2010 and January of 2011 and were selected for analysis because of their topic headings. As indicated, the findings discussed are intended to provide an impressionistic overview of these particular broadcasts.

Canada's private talk radio market

Long before the rise of the Internet and the idea of "citizen" journalism, talk radio in Canada and the United States allowed non-elites to have their say in a public forum. Since the 1930s, CBC gathered Canadians together around the electronic hearth as a way of uniting Canadians and to this day, the publicly funded radio franchise remains committed to call-in programs offered both locally and nationally that allow Canadians to discuss an array of topics. Private radio has also done this in Canada, although Adler remains the lone syndicated national host. His program airs on select Corus stations across the country. Adler, the self-described "boss of talk," broadcasts daily out of the Corus station CJOB in Winnipeg and his show is heard in 14 radio markets: Vancouver, Victoria, Kamloops, Kelowna, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, London, Hamilton, Wingham, Toronto and Cornwall.

According to Adler's website, his show has a distinct purpose: "We don't just break news. We break heads, educating without pain of tedium. We break hearts, giving grown men the license to cry. And, we break down the doors of political correctness. When boredom breaks out, we break in like a burglar" (www.charlesadler.com downloaded 24 January 2011). Adler relies on two female producers to assist him on the air: Stephanie Tsirgiotis, who works out of Montreal and Brett Megarry in Winnipeg. Adler also uses a plethora of guests including newspaper columnists from the *Toronto Sun*, the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* to expand on the topic of the day. Topics range from discussions about dating, multiculturalism, circumcision, or the latest scandal in the House of Commons. He then opens up the phone lines for callers to provide their opinion of the topic at hand. The callers are screened by Adler's producers and it is clear that their purpose is to provide entertainment and to largely support the viewpoints being expressed. Adler's show is not only heard on the radio, but is also made available on-line and these podcasts are accessible free from I-Tunes.

Adler's popularity appears to be growing. Most recently he was made host of a prime-time television program on Sun TV which became available to Shaw subscribers in Canada in spring 2011. Sun TV has been dubbed the Fox News of the North and its perspective is decidedly right of the political spectrum. Adler's show on television replicates his style on radio. The station's head of development Luc Lavoie suggested that the Sun TV news format will echo the "the style

of *Sun* newspapers ... They're not going to be a carbon copy of one another, but they're going to be linked...It's close to the people, blue-collar, no nonsense" (*Winnipeg Sun* 16 September 2010). Thus, one cannot underestimate the extent to which Adler is viewed as a member of Canada's media elite particularly because his audience reach is expansive. Moreover, while many marginalize Adler as mere entertainment, his topics and his guest, including Canada's Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet suggest that his program is marketed as news or current affairs with limited room for alternative debate.

The rhetorical style of talk radio hosts including Adler echoes the style of newspaper tabloids like the *Sun*-chain in Canada, which rely on short sentences and blunt words to maintain accessibility to its working class demographic. The tabloid format is imbued with ideology, finding its origins in the right-wing stances of tabloids in the United Kingdom and filled with what Stuart Hall calls authoritarian populism which appeals to "competition, possessive individualism, and a them-against-us ideology". Politically conservative, the language and format privilege a "heterosexual, male, white, conservative, capitalist world view" (Hall in Shattuc 1997, 21). Moreover, tabloid private talk radio, like tabloid texts must cater to audiences who "insist on reading stories that somehow are about them, are related to their own life work environment or cultural practices. Tabloid literature must be based on a reality-like context, something that the public has had a chance to experience" (Debrix 2003, 152).

Adler's broadcasts do put forward a world-view, however narrow, by uniting his listeners as "citizens." In doing so, he describes the type of Canada to which we should aspire. His use of the word citizen to describe his listeners emulates Rush Limbaugh, who has made a fortune setting the tone for American political discourse through his nationally syndicated programs (Douglas 2002 498). Both Adler and Limbaugh are short-tempered with those who use an "equivocation here, no 'on one hand, on the other hand'" genial approach (Douglas 2002, 500). Indeed, in one interview Adler described discussions that incorporate alternative perspectives as "dead-end conversations" (Adler Podcast 25 January 2011). Instead, Adler's viewpoint (like Limbaugh's) appears uninterested in alternative ideas for understanding Canada's political landscape. Overall, private political talk radio, particularly as it is heard on Adler, is highly personalized and individualistic, with clear delineation of black and white and little ground for nuance and grey. As Douglas has documented, it is the perfect arena for men to be angry, allowing them a public airing of perceived snubs (see Douglas 2002).

In contrast, publicly funded talk radio as found on the CBC is required by its mandate to provide fair and balanced analysis. Unlike Adler, the CBC's mission and values as articulated in its journalistic standards and practices demonstrate a commitment to "reflecting accurately the range of experiences and points of view of all citizens. All Canadians, of whatever origins, perspectives and beliefs, should feel that our news and current affairs coverage is relevant to them and lives up to our Values" (<http://cbc.radio->

canada.ca/docs/policies/journalistic/xml/policies.asp downloaded 04 February 2011). Moreover, journalists working for the CBC are expected to provide fairness and balance:

We contribute to informed debate on issues that matter to Canadians by reflecting a diversity of opinion. Our content on all platforms presents a wide range of subject matter and views. On issues of controversy, we ensure that divergent views are reflected respectfully, taking into account their relevance to the debate and how widely held these views are. We also ensure that they are represented over a reasonable period of time... We provide professional judgment based on facts and expertise. We do not promote any particular point of view on matters of public debate. (<http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/docs/policies/journalistic/xml/policies.asp> downloaded 04 February 2011)

Thus, the publicly owned CBC can be viewed as the alternative to private talk radio like Adler in Canada, serving as the anti-thesis to this tabloid style populism. However, there are continual concerns with cutbacks to CBC radio, which is reliant on government funding in order to continue its operation (see for example the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting website http://www.friends.ca/About_Us. for an overview of funding cuts to the CBC in the last decade). Many are concerned that Harper will implement further cutbacks to funding and could dismantle the current publicly funded model now that his government has won a majority government.

The Canadian talk radio market is obviously much smaller than the American market. In total, there are over 14-thousand licensed radio stations in the United States (Radio World <http://www.rwonline.com/article/108448> downloaded 26 January 2011) and of those, over 21-hundred are considered News/Talk radio (Inside Radio <http://www.insideradio.com/Article.asp?id=1336095> downloaded 26 January 2011). By comparison, Canada has only 12-hundred licensed radio stations and of those only 35 stations are private News/Talk radio stations (Government of Canada 2010, 32). Talk radio hosts in the United States are also better paid. Rush Limbaugh, considered the number one political talk show host in the United States, renewed his contract with Clear Channel Communications in 2008 for a hefty \$38-million a year until 2016 (Lewis, 02 July 2008). Controversial talk show host Don Imus signed a deal with Citadel Broadcasting in 2007 where it was anticipated that he would make up to \$10-million annually in syndication (McBride 02 November 2007). There is no information available regarding Adler's salary, but given Canada's smaller market, it is most likely only a fraction of the American amounts. Indeed, in conversations I have had with people working in the talk radio market in Toronto, salaries hit the very low six-figures in Canada, nowhere near the million dollar mark of the American market.

While Canadian radio stations do collect demographic information about their listeners through the Bureau of Broadcast Measurements, this information is not publicly released. However, Statistics Canada has collected information that provides us with some insight into who listens to radio in Canada. First, listenership goes up with age, as does the number of hours tuned (Statistics Canada 2007). It is antic-

ipated that those who listen to talk radio in Canada are similar to those who listen in the United States. In other words, they are men, particularly men who are in their vehicles for long periods of time and who rely on talk radio to help pass the time while they are at work. Indeed, according to the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 63% of the talk radio audience is male (Pew Project, 2010). Additionally, statistics indicate that Canadians (particularly older Canadians who are more likely to vote) still consider radio a source for information. Canadian Media Research Consortium research indicates that 61% of Canadians spend at least some time listening to the radio, about the same number of Canadians who said they had read a newspaper off-line (62%). Newspapers and radio stations were virtually tied when respondents were asked how important various media sources were as sources of information (Canadian Media Research Consortium 25 May 2010). An Ekos poll conducted in conjunction with the 2008 federal election indicated that 44% of Canadians relied on radio for information about the election, while 49% relied on the print media (Ekos Politics 2008). Politicians are aware of this and any good politician worth his or her salt will have staff monitor who is appearing on talk radio both privately and publicly in their ridings, as a way of evaluating future political trends.

The New Feminist Backlash

In the United States and Canada, the rise of the new right has created some trepidation for feminists concerned about the erosion of equality issues. Susan Faludi in her groundbreaking book *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* argues that the gains made by the women's movement are often met with a backlash:

Each revolution promises to be "the revolution" that will free her from the orbit that will grant her, finally, a full measure of human justice and dignity. But each time, the spiral turns her back just short of the finish line. Each time, the American woman hears that she must wait a little longer, be a little more patient – her hour on the stages is not yet at hand. And worse yet, she may learn to accept her coerced deferral as her choice, even to flaunt it. (Faludi 1991, 46)

Faludi suggests that the media play a primary role as "backlash collaborator and publicist" (Faludi 1991, 78).

As indicated earlier, with the election of the Conservatives first in 2006 and again in 2008 with a minority government and then in 2011 with a majority government, there has been some concerns about cuts made to funding a number of women-friendly programs including the Status of Women Canada's advocacy, lobbying and research projects¹ along with funding cuts to organizations such as the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women² and the Sisters in Spirit Initiative³, and the elimination of the Court Challenges program⁴ (Granke and Legault 2010, 9). For many feminists, these decisions to cut back on funding initiatives underline an "anti-women, anti-poor, and racist" agenda (Granke and Legault 2010, 9) that is in line with right-wing political practices in the face of neoliberalism which demands a dismantling of big government in favour of

market forces. As feminists have argued, neoliberal restructuring is neither gender-blind nor neutral (see Brodie, 1996). Research indicates that neoliberalism has not only contributed to “women’s economic dependency and vulnerability to labour market fluctuations, but also reiterates the social marginality of women’s unpaid labour” (Ilcan et. al. 2007, 88).

At the same time that neoliberalism has limited women’s economic sovereignty new backlashes against feminist have arisen. As Douglas argues, the media have given us “little fantasies of power” that assure women that “women’s liberation is a fait accompli” (Douglas 2010, 5). We are led to believe that women are “more stronger, more successful, more sexually in control, more fearless, and more held in awe that we actually are” (Douglas 2010, 5). In the United Kingdom, *Guardian* columnist Laurie Penny argues that the myths about feminism in light of the British government’s government austerity budget pit men against women. She suggests these myths include the belief that “feminist bigots have made men’s lives worse,” that “men work harder, longer hours than women,” that “equality legislation is anti-men,” and that “equality legislation is anti-family” (Penny 26 January 2011).

The sense that women and in particular feminist women are making economic gains to the detriment of men was given great credence in 2000 with the release of Christina Hoff Sommers’s *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men*. However, it has been given even more mileage as a result of the economic recession and the spirit of a new anti-feminist discourse is apparent in the media coverage of the economy. For example, in the UK Dominic Raab, a 36-year old Conservative MP, complained that men are getting a “raw deal” at work because of feminist ‘bigots’ being unreasonable on issues such as equal pay (Penny 26 January 2011). Raab suggested that “from cradle to the grave, men are getting a raw deal. Men work longer hours, die earlier, but retire later than women” (Prince 24 January 2011). Closer to home, University of Alberta President Indira Samarasekera voiced her concern that Universities now have more women than men in their undergraduate courses:

“The presidents of the major universities are very concerned we are not attracting young men in the numbers we should,” Samarasekera says. “I got asked recently about special programs to get more women CEOs, and my response was let’s not worry about that because that will come in due course. The bigger worry is that we’ll wake up in 20 years and we will not have the benefit of enough male talent at the heads of companies and elsewhere.” (Gerein 20 October 2009 A1)

Newsweek magazine joined others in the popular media in labeling the economic recession of 2007-2008 the “mancesion” – so named because men employed in the manufacturing trades were experiencing the bulk of the layoffs. One article claimed that women are now ruling the working world (Bennett and Ellison 05 July 2010).

Yet, women are still struggling economically. Despite the fact that the gender wage gap is narrowing, the female to male earnings ratio has remained steady at 0.72 since the early 1990s (Drolet Spring 2011, 3). Recent statistics in the

United States and Canada suggest that government cutbacks to control deficit spending will hurt women more than men, if only because more women are employed in the public sector (National Women’s Law Centre 21 January 2011 and Boushey, 25 January 2011). Also affecting women’s equality in the workplace is that fact that in Canada, women are more likely than men to work part-time with limited benefits (Morrow and Alphonso 08 September 2010). Women may well be the ones maintaining their jobs. Indeed *Newsweek* quotes statistics that suggest two-thirds of the women are either bread-winners or co-breadwinners in the United States (Bennett and Ellison 12 July 2010), but it may be because women’s labour is cheap and more likely to be part-time (Morrow and Alphonso 08 September 2010).

Douglas also suggests that the media’s exaggeration of women’s achievements has translated into a belief that women are “getting too big for their britches” (Douglas 2010, 21). Perhaps the best example of a woman getting becoming too powerful is Hilary Clinton. When she was seeking the presidential nomination during a campaign stop in Salem, New Hampshire, Clinton was interrupted by a man carrying a sign which read “Iron my shirt!” (Wheaton 07 January 2008). The message was clear and it resonated deeply with feminists that there are still those who are uncomfortable with women challenging the public domain of politics. It was later determined that the protest was a stunt for a talk radio station in Boston (Huston 08 January 2008). This use of humour is a type of sexism and a passive/aggressive way to keep women in their place. As Douglas points out, men can no longer call women like Clinton a bitch outright, but they can insult her non-the-less under the guise of humour (Douglas 2010, 11).

Adler’s rhetoric

Listening to Adler, it becomes clear that he creates false scenarios in which men, particularly white men can become angry and he does this with over-inflated statements of claim, hyperbole and hysteria. As Mark Twain has said, Adler never lets the facts get in the way of a good story, particularly a good story that highlights his perception that “real” Canadians are in a struggle for power with special interests groups. For example, on January 25, 2011, Adler opened his program by reading from an email he had received from “Carol” writing on behalf of her 66-year old husband who was having a difficult finding a job. The email from Carol voiced her concern that her husband was being discriminated against because he is a white male. She said that in a job application for CN rail, he was asked if he was a visible minority or an aboriginal and because he was neither of those things, Carol believed that is why he was never contacted further for an interview. To support her assertion that white men are being discriminated against, Adler brought onto the program William Gairdner, a Conservative who has written a number of books, two of which deal specifically with the issue of Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms and discrimination.

In the 18-minute interview, Adler played fast and loose with information about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and its ability to control the hiring practices of the public sector. By that I mean he and his guest make it sound like the Canadian government is about to jackboot its way into private companies and demand that they hire minorities (Adler Podcast 25 January 2011). Of course, a more careful understanding of the Charter recognizes that the requirement to ameliorate differences only pertains to government organizations. Instead, both Gairdner and Adler obfuscated this fact and instead suggested that the private sector is under fire. As Adler asked: “Well, do you think we’ll ever get to a point where when people apply for a job, whether it’s a small company, big company where they won’t have to be asked whether or not they’re white, a visible minority, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera? You know, because as I said, as I said to Carol to me it’s a sad thing as a Canadian we get labeled as livestock.” (Adler Podcast 25 January 2011). Gairdner included women in his rubric of those demanding special rights. As Gairdner put it if you owned a private golf club on which you paid the mortgage and you attempted to keep it for men only, “Well you better believe that all the feminists in the place are gonna be going to the judges” to complain about their Charter rights being violated (25 January 2010).

Perhaps more telling in this exchange is that Adler and his “citizen” Carol are making several telling assumptions about why her husband was unemployed. These assumptions are that a visible minority or a woman was hired instead and certainly the tone suggests that they might have been hired with lesser credentials. Both intimated that it is possible that Carol’s husband may have been unsuccessful because of his age, but again, this is an assumption. Was he applying for a job that required physical stamina that may preclude a 60-plus year old man from participating fully? If CN was forced to hire him would this also not be discrimination? Perhaps more telling, Adler did not provide CN Rail the opportunity to discuss its hiring practices. Instead, he and his guest provided hysterical pronouncements, suggesting that all men, all white men, are at risk of being under employed or unemployed because of those seeking rights protection.

While the Gairdner segment only mentioned feminists and women as part of a larger discussion of group rights, other interviews clearly articulated an opposition to women’s rights. Take for instance a discussion between Adler and *National Post* columnist Barbara Kay on May 18, 2010 regarding the Harper government’s G-8 maternal health plan which did not include funding for abortions. This decision had been met with some criticism by opposition parties in Canada as well as national and international women’s health organizations, who viewed it as antithetical to providing quality health care for women in developing countries. In this 15 minute segment, Adler did little to examine the different perspectives on the issue, relying instead on Kay who politicized it. As Kay says, “Politicians have a problem with it because they’re constantly, constantly courting the extreme liberal vote and feminist vote and the endorsement of feminist organizations. So when the word abortion is mentioned,

a red light goes off in their heads because for many liberals, abortion is a kind of litmus test...if you don’t think that abortion on demand is kind of a sacred concept for any reason what-so-ever then you’re not living up to your liberal credentials.” Adler’s response was to condemn organizations that complained, equating their support by the Canadian public to their level of funding. As he put it: “If these organizations were so immensely popular – if they had so much popular support, they wouldn’t be begging for funding all the time from the government” (Adler Podcast 18 May 2010).

What is remarkable is that the organizations that criticized Harper’s policy included the Centre for International Child Health at the British Columbia Children’s Hospital in Vancouver (Webster 08 May 2010, 1595-96), hardly a woman’s only organization. Moreover, American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton also took aim at the decision, calling it short-sighted. *Maclean’s* Paul Wells surveyed the United States and the United Kingdom’s protocols on providing funding for abortions and determined that these countries also support abortion funding (17 March 2010). However, Adler and Kay ignored these nuances, suggesting that the Liberal party and feminists organizations are out of touch with what real Canadians (or at the very least citizens of Adler’s nation) want. Additionally, the need for an organization to prove its worth based on level of support is a decidedly neoliberal concept and underlines the belief that the state should not be financing special interest groups.

As indicated earlier, another way that feminism is discredited according to Douglas is through the use of humour which allows for personalized passive/aggressive attacks that then can blame the victim for being humourless (a familiar stereotype of feminists everywhere). Adler regularly relies on the humour of David Menzies, nicknamed the Menzoid, who is a freelance columnist most frequently found writing for the *National Post*. The Menzoid appears on Fridays on the Charles Adler program and he and Adler work in tandem to discuss topics that appear in the news. It is clear that Menzoid is not to be taken seriously. Indeed, he is regularly chided by Adler for going too far in his sketches. But as Douglas says the humour putdown is part of the seductive message that feminism is dead (Douglas 2010, 166). Indeed, you can make sexist jokes because you know that sexism is stupid (166).

In his regular Friday segment on May 25, 2010, the Menzoid provided women with a list of things to not do while on a date lest they become “undateable” (Adler Podcast 25 May 2010). In many ways, the Menzoid replicated *The Rules* a 1995 guide for women to “catch” the perfect man. Ten years later, the Menzoid revisited the familiar territory that men are different than women, particularly on the romance front.

The first rule, according to the Menzoid is that women should avoid shirts with slogans because that will cause men to be distracted by their chests, leggings because it makes women’s legs look like too much meat stuffed in sausage casings and comfortable shoes because there is one true difference between the genders and that is women can wear high heeled shoes (Adler Podcast 25 May 2010). The focus on what women should or should not wear is nothing new;

however, as Douglas points out it has become more intense in recent years. Douglas classifies this as being “emphatically feminine” suggesting that this is “the price we’re supposed to pay for having freedom and independence: we must reassure everyone that we’re still girls, not at all threatening, not remotely lured in by anything resembling feminism” (Douglas 2010, 218).

In this segment the Menzoid was clear that there are also certain topics that should be avoided. More specifically, he warned women to not identify themselves as a feminist “because that’s shorthand for no sense of humour and that you are sporting more hair under the pits than Chewbacca” (Adler Podcast 25 May 2010). This trite stereotype of feminists as “ugly, aggrieved, anti-sex, anti-men, and anti-fun” (Douglas 2010, 305) remains ingrained and in this case serves as a catalyst for Adler to open up the phone lines for others to comment. One woman called in to suggest that women are not men and so they should stop acting like men while another caller, this one a man, suggested that equality is the reason why we are in the “dumps” (Adler Podcast 25 May 2010). The use of humour quickly transitions into an attack on women and an attack on equality with no alternative perspective provided. No one called in to say that the Menzoid’s portrayal of feminists and feminism was hackneyed, stereotypical, and disrespectful. Again, the audience is left with a one-sided perspective.

The theme that a drive for equality, championed as an ideation that women are the same as men (an idea that most feminists have debated for the past 30-years) is the topic of another Adler segment which ran January 31, 2011. In this segment, Adler opened with a clip from the 1950s television program *Leave It To Beaver*. In the clip, the father Ward Cleaver is explaining to his son Theodore “Beaver” Cleaver that a woman’s place “is in the home and ... if she’s in the home she might as well be in the kitchen” (Adler Podcast 31 January 2011). Rebecca Scott, a producer and on-air personality at CKNW in Vancouver (another Corus radio station), Linda Steele a news anchor from Global television in Edmonton, and Barbara Kay from the *National Post* are brought in to chat with Adler about how generation Y women are losing their female attributes. Kay made the distinction between what she called “demeaning” work such as ironing and sewing, and cooking which she described as “creative” with “status.” As a result, she said more men are taking an interest in cooking. Adler then opened up the discussion to callers. It is interesting that cooking was portrayed a part of the woman’s working domain to which men can easily participate, however, the other so-called women skills such as ironing, sewing (and cleaning) remained a woman’s job. Indeed, there were no examples provided of men doing any cleaning in the home, only cooking. Moreover, the adjectives used to describe these skills include “women’s duties,” pulling a “mommy,” an “endangered” skill, showing women “their place,” and “an honourable women’s thing” (Adler Podcast 31 January 2011).

One self-described Generation Y woman called in to say that once she became a mother, she instinctively wanted to send her husband and child to school with pressed clothing and a home cooked meal. She said she likes to be considered

a “good mom, good nurturer, good wife” (Adler Podcast 31 January 2011). Thus, in this woman’s world-view, being a good woman means that she “naturally” assumes gender roles reminiscent of the 1950 post-war generation. Adler at this point asked rhetorically if she was developing any type of “anxiety about some of neo-feminist criticism of what you’re doing” to which she replied “No” (Adler Podcast 31 January 2011).

In many ways, the ability for men to take up the role of cooking and for women to pay others (likely immigrant women) to do the “demeaning” work of sewing and ironing was viewed as a post-feminist triumph because as Scott suggested, society has moved beyond the artificial roles of women/men’s work (although cleaning still seems to remain the domain of women). At the same time, however, the segment suggested a level of anxiousness about gender performance. There has been much written about the gendered division of labour which is often rationalized as natural (Faludi 1991, 296). While the “natural” gender divisions of labour appear to have been redrawn somewhat in the last couple of decades, there appears to be a certain level of anxiety about the need to have clearly defined roles with the assumption that “men and women have a basic, innate essence that is utterly distinct and unchangeable” (Douglas 2010, 105). To ignore this innate essence is to upset the gender apple cart. Moreover, from a neoliberal and neoconservative perspective, a “natural division of labour” means that the downloading of the duties carried out on the state can be taken over by the family (and more often by women) under the guise that it is “normal”.

The differences between men and women were brought up in a May 11, 2010 Adler podcast that suggests that men are more generous than women. In this 18-minute piece, a female listener wrote in to say that she sells raffle tickets for the Montreal Canadiens Children Foundation at hockey games. She emailed Adler to say that she avoids two groups of people when selling her tickets. The first is groups of young people aged 18 to 25 and the second is women. She concluded that middle-aged men are a far better target, which led Adler to ask the question if women are cheap. Along with *Toronto Sun* columnist Mike Strobel and Linda Steele from Global the segment examined the differences between genders in gambling and spending patterns. While the dissimilarities between women and men’s disposable income seem to be an obvious interpretation, it remains underexplored. Strobel did point out that women are statistically more generous than men, but they tend to support organizations that solicit funds in a more traditional manner. However, this is again underexplored. Instead, there is a false dichotomy created of men/generous versus women/cheap with a hint of normative moralizing.

The undercurrent in this segment however is the intimation that pretty young women use their sexual wiles to target men to buy tickets and that men will buy the lottery tickets particularly if they want to impress the pretty women sellers or their female dates. In other words, these women are using their sex to sell their wares. Their ability to effectively sell a worthwhile product was subsumed by the image of an

attractive woman in a come-on to a middle-aged man. This serves as another example of Douglas's enlightened sexism:

...sensationalism, titillation, and ridicule, all reminding girls and women that they will always be defined by and reduced to their sexual attractiveness (or lack thereof) and their sexual behaviors – now that's an effective form of social control. Enlightened sexism rests on that every-quaking and shifting fault line about female sexuality: it should be exploited and stoked (especially to sell products) but it should be policed and punished (to keep women in their place). (Douglas 2010, 57)

The beautiful woman as dangerous is a theme that was dealt with in some detail on May 6, 2010. This podcast entitled "Beautiful Woman = Bad" discussed in detail research from Spain indicating that 5 minutes alone with an attractive woman can raise the stress hormones of men to dangerously high levels. Adler could not control his glee when interviewing his guest psychiatrist Irvin Wolkoff. Wolkoff explained that when dealing with a beautiful woman, men feel stressed in their ability to perform turning all men into "frightened cavemen wanting to mate and are afraid to go ahead" (Adler Podcast 06 May 2010). The phone-in portion of the program talked about the difficulty men have in trying to "figure out" women, creating a dilemma for women everywhere. The message is clear; if you are too beautiful you scare men away. If you are not beautiful enough, you will not get any men. This focus on what a woman looks like "tells us that beauty standards are actually empowering because they turn men into helpless, salivating dung beetles" (Douglas 2010, 214).

In conclusion, this analysis attempts to provide an impression of how Charles Adler's talk radio program frames equality claims and feminism, examining the language of backlash. His depiction of rights based demands and feminist claims for equality pits "normal" Canadians against women and minority groups. It is clear that this program operates as a voice for those who are affiliated with the new right in Canada and Adler works to articulate the view of his citizens of the Adler nation as being the view of "real" Canadians. To do this, he sets up a dichotomy that pits his citizens against those who make demands on the state including those who seek equality. While the program is meant to be entertainment, the tone of debate is derogatory, particularly towards women and feminists. Moreover, in the broadcasts examined here, it becomes clear that there are clear expectations of "feminine behavior." Failure to perform to those expectations is met with hostility disguised as humour.

Why should this matter? The ability for individuals to express themselves freely is considered a fundamental right under a democratic system. However, the failure of Adler to provide the potential for other viewpoints, to provide fairness and balance narrows the scope of full expression. It would appear that Adler's broadcasts are aimed (to borrow from Douglas) at inciting "male hysteria" (2002, 501) rather than actively understanding and debating issues. His rendition of the "real Canadian" -- white, dominantly male, middle-class, heterosexual -- is more exclusionary than inclusionary, fuelling class, race and gender antagonisms. More-

over, his perspective fails to ask hard questions about neoliberal practices and its support of capitalist elites. Instead of blaming women and minorities for middle class men's failure to thrive, perhaps it is time to blame those who are really in power.

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Endnotes

- 1 Status of Women Canada is a federal funded government organization designed to promote the full participation of women in Canadian Society.
- 2 The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women is a feminist research institute exploring issues of social justice.
- 3 The Sisters in Spirit Initiative under the Native Women's Association of Canada worked on the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and to address violence against native women.
- 4 The Court Challenges program was set up by the Canadian government to provide financial assistance to organizations which were initiating a court challenge to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Set up in 1994, it stopped taking applications for funding in 2006.