Shock Radio: Tracing the Roots of an Expressive Social Movement

Richard Hinton

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By: Richard Hinton

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Signed by the final examining committee:

David Howes	Chair
Meir Amor	Examiner
Beverley Best	Examiner
Daniel Dagenais	Supervisor

Approved by _____

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

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Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

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Richard Hinton

Since the 1980s, an important trend in talk radio has established itself in various North American cities, and has come to be known as "shock radio." Where they have not looked at the issues of free speech and regulation of the genre, previous studies have provided rich insights into the audience and discourse. The present research lays out a profile of the listening audience and connects it with the themes of shock radio within the framework of a social movement perspective. It is hypothesized that shock radio expresses the resentment of a demographic that has been denied recognition in the emerging structure of group rights. Semi-structured interviews combined with questionnaires were administered to listeners of Quebec City's CHOI-FM and of American shock host Howard Stern. Respondents were mostly male and non-unionized private sector workers or self-employed. Resentment at group claims was present among a certain segment of the audience, offering support to the hypothesis that shock radio draws its appeal from its expression of resentment.

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« À Québec, mieux vaut être un Noir gai en fauteuil roulant qu'un Blanc bilingue en santé. »

- *Dominic Maurais, host of CHOI-FM's morning show,* Maurais Live*, in Le Journal de Québec, September 21, 2012.*

Introduction

The development of talk radio since the 1960s has provided the sociologist with a valuable window on group politics. Since the 1980s, a new form of talk, labelled in the media as "shock radio" has asserted itself. But like other forms of contemporary populism, shock radio is too easily dismissed when subsumed under the heading of some other social current. That this is understandable makes such reduction no less unfortunate. It is understandable, since the application of a broad concept like "populism" always runs the risk of failing to explain its object by labelling phenomena as simple expressions of manipulation, of long-standing "folk" prejudice, or of power struggles, etc, and thus distancing any pursuit for further explanation. Such qualifications are unfortunate because they remain at arm's length from the actual lived experiences that are the substance and soil of all populism.

Outside of talk radio, such disparate phenomena as the Tea Party movement, Latin American socialism and the *Front National* of Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen have been branded with the label of populism. Populism is applied to movements on the left and right; political, social and economic features are emphasized to varying degrees in each; and whereas the Tea Party has been qualified as an artificial grassroots movement conjured by wealthy Republicans (astroturfing), the spontaneous success of the French far-right party *Le Front National* surprised political commentators during the 1990s. Analysts have often pointed out the irrationalities of these and other populist movements

in their ideological stances and their claims. To take a recent example, in examining the claims of the Tea Party, commentators have pointed to the fact that many of its participants rely on the very government benefits or salaries they denounce. Because of these perplexities, populism provides rich ground for research, at the same time as it poses significant challenges. As with the Tea Partiers, such apparent irrationality in the phenomenon of shock radio should invite deeper investigation rather than the contempt that often greets these movements.

What is shock radio? Our study will explore this form of populism by attempting to grasp those currents that have converged to create the contemporary phenomenon. By doing so, we can connect the overall phenomenon with important trends in contemporary society. Above all, we want to begin a project of approaching shock radio as a phenomenon rooted in our society.

To do so we will have to navigate a double challenge at the theoretical level. The first challenge involves establishing a framework that can successfully account for the elements of shock radio: its specific appeal, milieu, activities, etc. Shock radio is open to three main avenues of approach: first, it can be seen as an expression of ideology – usually associated with libertarianism; second, it may be seen as the manipulation of listeners, especially in its mobilization but also in its attraction. As we will see, these approaches neglect significant aspects of shock radio, either overlooking the anti-political dimensions that set these shows apart, or downplaying the genre's consistent appeal to a certain demographic, engaged in a search for a particular type of discourse. To overcome these limitations, this paper looks at shock radio as a movement expressing the frustrations of the audience.

Once we determine to approach shock radio as a movement, the second challenge has to do with the relative lack of theorization with respect to expressive social movements as opposed to movements organized toward accomplishing goals. As a guide, we rely on the body of work initiated by Hannah Arendt in grappling with the type of movements for which "a political goal that would constitute the end of the movement simply does not exist" (Arendt 1973, p.326). Confronted with the apparent irrationality that marks the ideology and behaviour of the mass movements she studied, Arendt (1973) draws on historical parallels whose common feature is the expression of resentment. This thesis finds that through this lens, the insults, gratuitous sexuality, unusual spontaneity, shocking fantasies of violence, etc, which characterize shock radio can be accounted for. At the same time, those more common elements of talk radio, like the fragments of libertarian ideology that often crop up or conversely the openness of listeners to the hosts' contradictory opinions, are not left aside by such an account.

Proceeding along these lines this research paper aims to test the approach to shock radio as an expressive social movement which gains an appeal through its expression of resentment. Thus the research relies on preceding literature to identify salient elements in the discourse of the shock radio shows of Quebec City as well as The Howard Stern Show based in New York City. Questions for the interviews and questionnaires were designed based on the findings of the literature review. Because the research is aimed at understanding the appeal and activities of shock radio as more than the effect of media manipulation, the interviews engaged with listeners' own opinions in order to uncover those aspects of the show that appealed to them. Listeners spoke about the shows they listened to, described their work experiences, their political views and engagement as

citizens, and finally, they were asked about their views with respect to other groups in society. Before turning to an overview of these results, let us make a brief comment on the ways in which the choice to apply a social movement approach to shock radio was reflected.

The variety of responses from listeners within and between the audiences indicates that even if shock radio presents opinions which can be associated with ideologies, especially with those that attach to individualism, one finds that there is no overarching ideology across respondents. We also did not find the kind of homogeneity of responses that might be expected from manipulated listeners. Even the most devoted listeners were capable of expressing dissatisfaction with aspects of the show, supporting the view that the media manipulation framework for approaching shock radio audiences indeed overlooks the importance of the audience's own desires when it comes to media consumption.

While the results for the political implication of listeners and their work experiences are mixed, there is evidence to support an approach to shock radio that sees in it a response to the development of new group relations. By no means were all the listeners interviewed resentful, but several respondents expressed their resentment toward one or another group that they felt was given special treatment. The variety of groups targeted suggests that this resentment is not aimed at a single group that may indeed be seen as getting special treatment in an objective sense (for example, the wealthy), but instead the commonality of the targeted groups resides in their status *as groups* with the solidarities and increased influence that comes from that status. This sheds light on the perception among these listeners that their radio, which regularly breaks with the norms

of political correctness and even the norms of basic civic discourse, is more honest and frank than mainstream programming.

Our questionnaire also helps situate these responses, revealing that most of the listeners are either part of the working class but not represented by labour unions, or are self-employed. These findings throw into relief the expressed dislike of groups and "agendas" in society. Indeed, the discourse of shock radio often takes issue with a range of groups, from unions, artists, civil servants and welfare recipients, to media and government, to immigrants, homosexuals and feminists. The fact that many listeners find themselves without group affiliation in a context of emerging group politics draws attention to them as individuals whose overall position in society is vulnerable, if not declining. The anger towards a range of groups in society either benefiting from public programs or making political claims can be viewed in this light.

This paper will therefore undertake to trace the roots of a form of talk radio by first identifying the levels at which the discourse strikes a chord with the audience. These points of contact will then tie in with larger social phenomena related to status, class, power and so forth. The social trends that come together in shock radio to form an ensemble will contribute to distinguishing it from other forms of talk or conservative radio.

The results of this study represent only a tentative step in applying Arendt's insights to a new media genre. The research is inspired by and builds off the work of researchers Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) who likewise integrated Arendtian perspective, while this thesis sets itself apart by advancing an alternative framework in which shock radio and its components can be viewed.

Chapter 1: Problem Statement

Background

In the summer of 2004, Quebec activists marched and petitioned the federal and provincial governments in reaction to a decision by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. Responding to complaints it had received, the CRTC, which issues licenses for radio broadcasters, had refused to renew the license of CHOI-FM. Commonly known as *Radio X*, the Quebec City station, and particularly the morning program hosted by Jean-François Fillion had been the source of complaints by offended listeners for years, earning it the title, "*radio poubelle"* or trash radio[1]. Tens of thousands of protesters mobilized in Quebec City and Ottawa at Fillion's request, leading many to wonder how such an offensive radio host could stage such a large scale demonstration of support.

Quebec's journalists and media have frequently compared Jean François (Jeff) Fillion to New York City's Howard Stern. Some point to their parallel career trajectory from conventional to satellite radio;[2] others emphasize the similar misogynist content of their shows;[3] still others argue that both belong to a broader pool of combative radio hosts with a longer history in talk radio like Rush Limbaugh, André Arthur and Gilles Proulx.[4] Some have surmised that Fillion's popularity is inscribed in the *mystère de*

[1] *Radio poubelle, radio de confrontation, radio extrême*, shock radio, insult radio – these are some of the terms used casually to describe offensive or vicious radio styles. The literature and research I propose will hopefully contribute to a more precise definition of the term. For now, I use the term *trash radio* to refer to radio that offends and attacks. The "shock" style of radio frequently associated with Howard Stern falls within the category of trash radio for the purpose of this study.
[2] See for example, Stéphanie Bérubé. (26 February, 2006). Jeff le pirate. *La Presse*.
[3] Nathalie Petrowski. (14 March, 2005). Défaite extrême. *La Presse*.
[4] François Bourque. (29 January, 2008). Une radio privée de ses rois. *Le Soleil.*

Québec,[5] others in the cry of a generation, and still others would not limit Fillion's affinity to Stern, but subsume the whole phenomenon within American style neoconservative media.[6] Such ambiguities as to the scope and nature of the phenomenon have not been resolved as Fillion pursues his career on satellite and online radio and CHOI-FM continues to operate in Quebec City.

Howard Stern has a longer media career than Fillion, with his first successes in the 1980s and later excursions into television, print and film. His repeated success in gathering audiences and profits in the millions contrasts with his notoriety in the eyes of the American public (Newport, in Feldman 2004, p.38). Like Fillion, he is adored by some and abhorred by others, however, little attention has been paid to the development of his loyal audience.

One possible approach to the problem of ambiguity is to conduct a comparative study of the audience of Howard Stern with that of Jeff Fillion. Research on trash radio has looked at the content and discursive techniques used on the radio shows, the audience's socioeconomic characteristics, experience and political behaviour; and the place of trash radio in the larger society. Numerous other American studies have examined the efforts to regulate Stern's broadcasts from a pragmatic standpoint, which can be taken as an indication of the degree to which the phenomenon is seen as a policy problem arising from the deregulation of media, and not as a barometer of sociological change. Journalistic, popular or academic literature on the discourse of trash radio has identified features like group following, sense of community and feelings of resentment;

[5] Quebec City's populism is often treated as an anomaly in the province with reference to election and referenda results, public opinion, and in this case CHOI radio. This has qualified it as a mystery or enigma in the eyes of many commentators.
[6] Cauchon, Paul. (4 October, 2004). Un vent venu du sud. *Le Devoir.*

a study that draws on listeners' perspectives will help us to connect the discourse and the audience of shock radio.

In our literature review, two main currents of research will be examined with respect to shock radio: discourse analysis and audience profiles. This will help us to identify the elements of the discourse that the audiences find appealing, and to sketch a profile of the radio audiences. The present research will then attempt to connect the two, to contribute to an understanding of the aspects of that discourse that listeners are drawn to, and the levels at which they find it appealing in connection with their own experiences (ideological, identitary, emotional, etc).

Humble Beginnings

Howard Stern began his career as a small-time disc jockey on a university radio station in 1972 and from there moved around from one small station to the next over the course of the 1970s (Feldman 2004). His style remained relatively tame during those early years although he gradually began experimenting with more off-colour humour, integrating prank calls, having guests call in to his on-air "dial-a-date" contest with Penthouse girls, and inviting listeners to call in and speak about places they had had sex (Feldman 2004; Zechowski 2002; Hahn 1999). Stern helped increase ratings on small-time stations through a new format that he developed in which morning radio's strictly compartmentalized news, commentary and entertainment were melded together (Feldman 2004). For example, Stern would play sound effects during news segments or turn news stories into entertainment. Once that approach had been established, he continued to push boundaries throughout his career.

When Jeff Fillion arrived at CHOI in 1996, it was a small station up for sale in Quebec City. Fillion had done some radio in the Saguenay region and had lived in Florida for a short time before coming to Quebec. Under new owner Patrice Demers and his company, Genex Communications, Fillion introduced the same informal style used by Stern and other American hosts at that time. The station's audience grew over the next 8 years (with Fillion hosting the massively popular morning program) to become the most popular station in the city. Like Stern, Fillion had found an audience for radio blending shock and anger. Among his influences he cites Gilles Proulx, an often aggressive and insulting AM radio host with a long history in the province, and who broadcasted from the predominantly white working class neighbourhood of Verdun (Martineau 2007).

Early on, the introduction of the shock radio genre contributed to rapidly increasing the ratings for stations that were otherwise negligible (Chestnut 1990). As we will see below, it managed to find the pulse of the listeners who did not see themselves in the old style of radio. This new format of talk and hard rock music was leaving behind the artificial landscape of radio formatting wherein the news, with its rigid style of presentation, was clearly distinguished from entertainment and commentary.

The fact that this radical departure from the norms of radio broadcasting has often been the key to rapid success for these young male disc jockeys is significant in itself. Indeed, Stern set a record with 1.7 million dollars in fines from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), while Fillion was the subject of scores of complaints, fines and lawsuits. The audiences for these shows appear to have come out of nowhere, but in fact were gathering around similar shows in the different cities of North America from the 1980s on (Chestnut 1990). There are instances when an attempt

to apply the shock radio formula in a city has failed, as in the case of Perry Stone in San Jose, California in 1987 – the audience simply was not there (Chestnut 1990, pp.37-38). Thus the phenomenon of shock radio should not be reduced to a simple expression of morbid curiosity, as if its decades of success could be explained by its capacity for attention-grabbing alone. However much hosts like Stern or Fillion may play up their talents as hosts, what they have in fact done is to experiment with a style of angry talk radio that they themselves enjoy. As it happens what these hosts discovered, and what has been the key to their success, was the fact that they were not alone. When asked in interview who were the fans (so-called "*Pirates*") who listen to his to his satellite radio station *Radio Pirate*, Fillion replied, "c'est un endroit pour les désabusés, c'est un *shelter* pour les *homeless* […] qui sont écoeurés de la politique québécoise de la manière qu'elle se produit sous nos yeux quotidiennement" (Francs-Tireurs 2007).

The rise of these shock radio hosts apparently out of nothing sheds light on the question of what shock radio is. Talk radio was already established when these hosts came onto the scene, and there were even insult radio hosts like Don Imus and Gilles Proulx shaking things up. Evidently the younger generation of hosts managed to rapidly draw in an audience that even these veteran hosts did not. Note that the broader angry talk radio genre has influenced the development of shock, but also that there is good reason to see them as separate genres.

Chapter 2: Research Question

The 2004 demonstration of support for CHOI-FM is only the most remarkable example of audience mobilization; talk radio more generally has proven its effectiveness in other contexts as well. The following are some examples of radio as a force associated with mobilization. In 1993, American talk radio host Ray Appleton turned popular outrage into political pressure for the now-infamous "three strikes" legislation after a young woman was murdered by a repeat offender in California[7] (Boggs and Dirman 1999). During the Cronulla Beach demonstration of 2005, white Australians marched against the presence of Arab-Australians on the beach. Several studies have pointed to the coordinating and encouraging role played by call-in radio in that demonstration (Turner 2009; Poynting 2002). Radio host, former wrestler and libertarian Jesse Ventura defeated Democratic and Republican candidates to become governor of Minnesota, attracting late-registration voters and young people[8] (*Time* 2008). Following the 1994 Republican Party success in the United States Congress, many credited the victory to conservative talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh.

The role of talk radio in these ostensibly visceral, populist mobilizations, and the elements brought together by "trash" talk radio specifically, are areas requiring further examination. What is the relationship between group mobilization, audience characteristics and the discourse of trash radio? To what extent does the anger expressed toward various groups on trash radio correspond to the experience of the audience?

[7] This legislation "imposes mandatory life sentences for many categories of both violent and nonviolent repeat crimes" (Boggs and Dirman, 1999.)
[8] Minnesota enjoyed its highest voter turnout during the elections.

Competing Perspectives

As a point of departure, we will consider the three major ways of approaching the phenomenon. First, shock radio could be seen as an expression of a larger, encompassing ideology. Inversely, its attraction and mobilizations could be a matter of simple media manipulation. Finally, I will present a third alternative which integrates the pertinent elements of the other two: to view trash radio as a social movement.

In the first approach, the argument could be made that the listeners' choice of radio, (the discourse that attracts them and their engagement with the show) then fits within or rests upon a larger worldview. The advantage of this perspective is that it can acknowledge the primacy of the listeners' specific socioeconomic situation in society, their desires, opinions, prejudices, etc., and therefore, what they *look for* in their media consumption.

Although some audiences seek out talk radio on the basis of an encompassing ideological allegiance (see below on Rush Limbaugh), the evidence nonetheless indicates that for shock radio, opinions and mobilizations often have no apparent connection with an existing ideology or rationale. It is doubtful, for example, that any political or ideological rationale underpins their involvement in Maurais' *"Let's honk a cyclist"* campaign[9], or Marto's burger-eating drive[10], or the prank calls made by Howard Stern

[9] Frustrated with seeing cyclists on the streets in winter, Maurais told listeners to honk at cyclists as they drove past, which a number of listeners reported doing (audio available on www.radioego.com/ego/listen/8268). According to an article in *Le Soleil*, (Isabelle Houde, "Le vélo au hangar," June 15, 2010) one cyclist reported having been harassed on the road and had close calls with drivers.

[10] Over 2000 of Marto's fans came together to break a record for burgers sold at a Burger King in Vanier, and 3000 showed up the next day to repeat the exercise at a Burger King in Lévis (Patricia Cloutier, "Marto Napoli: l'animateur mobilisateur" Le Soleil, 22 April, 2009.)

fans to other call-in programs[11]. This is not to say, however, that the form of mobilization is arbitrary.

The second and inverse possibility is to approach the phenomenon as media manipulation. In this view, the programs would guide the listeners' thinking, feeling, acting and so forth. The advantage of this approach is that it can account for the homogeneous, conformist and counterintuitive character of opinions that has been documented, at least among Jeff Fillion's mobilized listeners.

Unlike the first approach, the emphasis on manipulation downplays the importance of the specific convergence of an audience having a certain set of socioeconomic characteristics, with a certain discourse, certain forms of mobilization, etc. In other words, any radio audience is looking for something in its media consumption choices – and what they look for is what we must try to understand. The counter-argument could be made that listeners are appealed to using themes relevant to them, the way advertising targets specific demographics. Still, advertisers are constrained to manipulating *already existing* desires.

Taken to their extremes, neither explanation is satisfactory. One approach does not sufficiently account for the specific character of trash radio in terms of its audience and its appeal, and the other lacks an explanation of what we might consider its "impulsiveness". Based on what we know, it is likely that there is a grain of truth in each approach as well: listeners *do* have in mind something that they are looking for in their media consumption choices (independent of any manipulation) even if it is not necessarily ideological. And as the media manipulation perspective points out, it is true

[11] For example, on one occasion, a fan called in to a news program during the live broadcast of the O.J. Simpson murder investigation claiming to have information, only to end the call with the Stern Show's familiar prank callout, "Bababooey!"

that the hosts *do* rally, suggest, direct and inform the ideas and actions of their audience. This will become clearer below.

Let us attempt a third, "middle" way to get beyond this impasse by drawing from our analysis of the first two without negating them. This third perspective should be comprehensive of the political or ideological elements of the discourse (libertarianism, neoliberalism, etc.) as well as the unconventional, impulsive mobilizations and opinions that influence listeners in a way that can appear manipulative. I propose that the best way to integrate the strengths of these two dimensions, without neglecting important elements of shock radio is to see its attraction and mobilization as resulting from its expression of emotion. The ideologies, mobilizations, activities, opinions, etc. of shock radio, in all their impulsiveness, so hard to reconcile with ideological roots yet not adequately addressed in a media manipulation perspective – these are resolved if we see shock radio as having the consistency of an expressive type of social movement.

In an expressive social movement, the impetus for action and the attraction of ideas do not originate from manipulation or ideology. Instead, those who are implicated in expressive movements are moved by emotion. This approach permits us to account for what listeners *seek* in their radio listening, namely a discourse and occasionally, mobilizations that correspond to their emotions. Certain ideological elements can be brought in, but on shock radio this tends to be only in a fragmented way which is still secondary to the expressive dimension. Likewise in this view, manipulation may play a role, but only a secondary one, where existing emotions are expressed by another, but also given shape (sometimes ideological) or directed (as with insults, prank calls, tirades, etc). Therefore we can see how this third approach focusing on a more emotional

dimension permits us to retain the strengths of the first two, without falling into the conclusion (problematic, as we have seen) that manipulation or ideology is at work.

In this third view, the political opinions or the claims of the mobilizations that emerge on occasion with shock radio, and the rhetorical techniques used to orchestrate the anger of callers or listeners are not so sociologically significant as the fact that listeners are open to those fragmented opinions or to such manipulations in the first place. This type of collective phenomenon based in emotion and manifesting itself in collective expressions has been theorized by Blumer:

> The characteristic feature of expressive movements is that they *do not seek to change* the institutions of the social order or its objective character. The tension and unrest out of which they emerge are not focused upon some objective of social change that the movement seeks collectively to achieve. Instead they are released in some type of expressive behaviour… (1995, p.77, emphasis added).

Already, we see that in social movement theory, a distinction can be made between movements with goals, such as political movements, and those movements with an expressive character. Let us now turn to a brief discussion of the social movement as a potentially useful concept before concluding this section.

In Diani's (1992) words, "a social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (p.13). We could add to this that they "have their inception in a condition of unrest" (Blumer 1995 p.60). This general description of the social movement brings to light some of the dynamics involved, namely conflict, identity and conditions of unrest (or dissatisfaction). The reader will notice that we are deliberately leaving aside those aspects pertaining to the form and life-cycle of social movements, although these could be interesting considerations for future

research. It should be pointed out, however, that it is possible for a movement without real political goals to defy the categories of life-cycle and form, for lack of a terminal of action.

Blumer (1995) indicates that some social movements arise in different places at the same time, in an uncoordinated way. These social movements have to do with cultural change, whereby social actors "come to form new conceptions of themselves that do not conform to the actual positions that they occupy in their life," a situation which leads them to experience dissatisfaction (Blumer 1995, p.61). Such movements do not develop from a leadership, propaganda or a guiding force, but since they come from the growing dissatisfaction of individuals, they haltingly and in a dispersed way move in the same general direction. An example of this might be the several women who over the course of decades, independently of each other, and motivated by a desire to be treated with dignity, refused to give up their seats to white passengers on the busses of the segregated South.

Arendt (1973) similarly pointed out that a dissonance between one's position in a status hierarchy and one's conception of self relative to other could also lead to the kind of dissatisfaction that gives the individual a taste for social change. For the movements Arendt observed, dissatisfaction was not initiated by changes in ideas and values, but by the actual change in the status of groups relative to each other. Thus for example, she mentions Tocqueville's commentary on the French peasants, whose violent anger toward the aristocracy derived from the fact that this aristocracy's declining political role meant their superiority of status had lost its only justification (Arendt 1973, p.4). Those who experienced a shift in attitudes vis-à-vis the aristocracy resented that they continued to be

treated as inferior, and throughout France, moved to take power from the clergy and aristocracy. We will return to this in our discussion of resentment.

In the case of the French peasants, as in the cases of the workers and women who demanded the right to vote, anger found an outlet in purposeful political action rationally oriented to a goal and resolution. Consider in contrast to this the mass movement. Arendt (1973) points out that those mobilized not toward achieving a goal, but in a collective movement of expression can go so far as to act against their own interests if it satisfies emotional needs for belonging, for sense and meaning in a troubling reality, for some release of frustration. In short then, mass movements emerge from needs not rooted in universalistic democratic ideals like those that grounded the anger of Civil Rights activists, for example.) In place of a political goal is movement itself, so long as that movement satisfies those emotional needs. We shall return to this point in a concrete way below.

Before closing this section, let us clarify our terms. We have already evoked political movements, in which dissatisfaction plays a role among participants, but the general orientation is toward a change in society (Freitag 2002, p.240). These movements appeal to universalistic democratic principles and often a shared national identity. Mass movements in contrast, draw from emotions or needs, while their political goals remain secondary. As movements involving a mass (lacking collective identity and based more in individual drives) rather than the Public (based in Reason), they are consequently more open to manipulations or the imposition of ideologies[12], since their guiding ideals (or goals) are vaguer (see for example, Freitag 2002, pp.245-248). Finally, the concept of a social movement, in contrast to mass and political movements still

[12] See for example, Matt Taibbi's work on the Tea Party.

implies a collective identity, but one with a more particularistic basis, limited to a group, and not seeking to transform society.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The literature review will look into the discourse and audience of shock radio in order to initiate the reader to some recurring and characteristic elements of this type of radio, and to gain a better idea of the levels at which this discourse could appeal to the audience. Before proceeding to the literature review, let us consider the larger social significance of the themes to be dealt with here.

We will see that one of the important themes in the literature is gender, eroticism and feminism. We know that feminism in its ongoing history posed an important political challenge to a structure of male privilege. Part of what makes feminism an important consideration and the opening discussion of this review of the literature is the sheer scale of the transformation brought about with the emergence of feminism: its effects were felt at all levels of society, including work, intimate life, education, power, the family, and so on. The gradual negotiation of these changes happens over the course of history so that, for example, one hundred years after women's suffrage was granted few men remain who would contest what had once been treated as a ridiculous claim. In light of the anti-feminist backlash, it is interesting to read in the literature about the reduction of social issues to individual psychologies on 1960s talk radio, the subsequent emergence of conservative talk radio as part of a political backlash, and the rise of shock radio which seemed to retreat into a world of resentful male talk.

In this respect we must keep in mind that shock radio has a generational dimension to it. It is this generational dimension which gives the response of shock radio to feminism and group claims its character quite apart from the popular talk and conservative radio genres. Between talk radio circa 1965 and shock radio circa 1995 are the established achievements of the political movements advanced by a variety of groups in society and a sea change in the economy. The sons were certainly not born into the same world that the fathers had watched changing before their eyes. This is particularly true for the men of the working class, which during that time suffered a decline in numbers. By the time Generation X was entered the labour force, working class values were part of an order that was rapidly fading: what mattered on the labour market was not loyalty but flexibility, not brawn but cunning.

To make matters worse, many of these working men of Generation X found themselves politically unrepresented. At a time when organizations and entire movements were rising to stake claims and to challenge a system of privilege that had long worked against them, those who neither belonged to a union nor to any historically disadvantaged group had only the rallying cry of individual liberties, or of the individual taxpayer with which they could legitimately counter. One wonders to what extent the libertarian, neoliberal or atomist ideologies[13] draw strength from such identitary roots (for example, Jeff Fillion now throws his weight behind the neoliberal *Réseau Liberté Québec*). In any event, these larger ideologies have lent their legitimating power to an individualism that, we hypothesize, has more to do with exclusion from the new group-based politics than with the arguments of the various individualisms. What the reader

[13] To clarify, we are certainly not denying the very real philosophical character of those atomist arguments that are rooted in the Enlightenment, or the support for neoliberalism based in pure class interests.

must retain is the importance of identity, as opposed to interests or arguments, in understanding the presence of the ideological trappings of shock radio discourse. This identity comes out in a paradoxical fashion when Fillion calls on his select listeners in one breath (*les vrais X*) to resist the elites, then turns around and refers to those same listeners as the ordinary people.

From Zechowski's (2002) Marxist perspective, the exclusion of the working class up to its angry entry into the public dialogue through talk shows was the result of domination. Without denying that workers have been marginalized, we would modify that formulation. In light of the ensemble of the literature looked at here, it appears that the white, working class, able-bodied, heterosexual young male, also did not need to participate in politics in order to defend the system of privileges that already favoured them. It was a system of privileges that only became apparent when it began to decline. What need was there to concern oneself with politics through voting, unions or mobilizing, as long as one's interests were already taken for granted in a stable system permeated by them? Thus, Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) find that most of those who mobilized to save CHOI from closure had never participated in political activities like petitioning or letter-writing before; for many it was their first time voting.

Part 1: Discourse

This first part of the literature review will focus on discourse taken in its broad sense to include all manner of activities that take place by and for the shows. Important elements of shock radio discourse are presented here as clues to the possible appeals of the genre. Among them we include themes around gender, class, generation, group

relations, powerlessness, shock, insult and identity, as well as a reflection on those elements we would expect to find in media products, namely, entertainment, opinion and information. These discussions are supplemented with excerpts from the radio programs as well as prominent authors on the aforementioned themes.

Gender, Eroticism, Feminism

If movements develop in reaction to social problems, the study of a readily-mobilized audience requires an investigation of the problems around which the audience gathers. According to Douglas, (2002) one of the problems dealt with on talk radio is a masculinity troubled by the arrival of feminism. "Talk radio is as much – maybe more – about gender politics at the end of the century than it is about party politics." (Douglas 2002, p.485) Indeed, Stern's radio program is littered with references to sex, has guests performing sex acts, invites audience members to describe or play out sexual activity, and airs sexually explicit contests. Men's self-exposure may involve stunts and "fraternity humour," whereas the sexual content involving women is not limited to a mere comedic device but also serves purposes of gratification and objectification. For example, even before the show was televised women might be asked to strip naked before the eyes of everyone in studio (mostly men), and it is not unusual for female models to orgasm on air. Needless to say, their appearance is subjected to commentary and probing questions by the hosts. This sets the show's sexual content apart from much of the sex that pervades popular culture (Soley 2007; Hahn 1999).

It would be inaccurate to qualify Stern's discourse as misogynistic; there is little to indicate a hatred of women or femininity, even when he attacks the stereotyped

feminine characteristics embodied by prominent women, for example, by the chatty women who host *The View.*[14] Rather, the discourse is marked by antifeminist reaction as were certain other talk-shows since the 1960s, not least of which, Rush Limbaugh's program (Douglas 2002). The difference, Zechowski argues, is that feminism was the imminent threat for the 1960s originators of the male talk genre; it is a given for Stern's generation (2002). It is noteworthy that Stern's program provides "a space away from the rules and norms of mainstream, professional, or institutional discourse" and an alternative to the politically correct man (Douglas 2002; Hahn 1999, p.164). If we accept that contemporary norms and institutions have shifted to recognizing equal rights for men and women with significant changes in practice, then the course of political events has already ended any chance of a return to 1950s-style patriarchy, and Stern's show, like that of similar male-oriented shows[15] is constrained to discursively construct the acceptable man and woman. Thus his show offers, within the confines of free speech, a place where, to paraphrase Susan Douglas, boys can be boys.

As opposed to the 1960s and neoconservative strand of anti-feminist backlash[16], Stern tackles changes to gender norms at the personal, not the political level. The following example from his show will illustrate the point. In this clip, he is chastising TV host Jay Leno for supplicating before his employers, while he applauds another host for being a "real man."

> [Leno is the] first female host of the Tonight Show. First *permanent* female host of the Tonight Show. Cut off his dick, give him one of those new vaginas they

[14] This popular women's television program features middle-aged women and themes addressed to that demographic, and is a favourite target for Stern.
[15] For example, Darnell and Wilson (2006) discuss the discourse of sports talk radio and its individualist approach to gender which delineates acceptable and stereotypical masculine and feminine types. While their study is limited to a textual analysis, it does point out the furnishings of a masculine world of talk.
[16] Susan Faludi provides an American perspective on the massive mediatized and political reaction to feminism and its gains in her book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women.*

> give you when you're a transsexual. [To audio clip of rape scene in the movie, *Deliverance:*] Who's he kidding. Right in the ass, Jay. But you got your job. Good luck. Go be a man now. Yeah, Letterman might be fucking around with women, but at least he's fucking women. Jay doesn't even probably fuck. Letterman's a real man. Goes out and he fucks right in the driveway. Right in the boyfriend's driveway. Takes out his dick and fucks right there. I love that guy. I'm a letterman guy. I'm not even going to hire a hotel room, I'm going to fuck you right in front of your boyfriend. (Stern 2010).

In another instance, we see the direct interaction of the personal and the political, when Stern reacts to news that female porn star Sasha Gray wanted to be on his show to make a political statement against the host's alleged racism:

> I'm here to do a radio show, entertain people, make them laugh; this broad has got some sort of agenda. She's a fucking porn star. She sucks cock for a living, and she's going to sit there and lecture me on why I'm a racist. […] See how the Palestinians treat porn stars. Tell me what it's like to be buried in sand while they throw stones at your head. She's worried about Palestinians; let's see what they do with porno stars over in Palestine. What a genius. I'm going to sit there and listen to this? Please. Just tell me how much cock you can suck and how far you can swallow a hot dog. That's what I want to know. I mean really. How dare you. How *dare* you? Now I'm mad. (Stern cited on Gossipbeast.com)

Aside from its open sexism, the first quote indicates that Stern attaches significance to the individual's performance of gender rather than directly attacking feminist claims on the political plane (the way conservatives have opposed the right to abortion, women in the workplace, etc). As the second quote shows, the political is quite irrelevant to Stern. It is as if every dimension of a once-patriarchal social world that has been transformed by the changes summed up in the feminist aphorism "the personal is political" has been evacuated from the show. The standards of the public sphere and the political cannot compute. In each quote, sex operates as an overarching standard analogous to reason or morality. We will later see that it also represents an alternative form of inclusion.

If Stern's show makes no distinction between the public and private, the same cannot be said of the genders. This fact is significant given the shifting gender roles, the fragmentation of masculine identity and the search for a benchmark. For example, Chuck Palahniuk's vastly popular post-modernist existentialist novel, *Fight Club* depicts the irritation of a generation of young men repulsed by the takeover of masculinity by consumer culture, and attracted to a new expression of masculinity that they could fully possess once again. Popular journalist and writer Guy Garcia (2009) expresses his dismay at what he calls "the decline of men." For him, masculinity is in trouble, with the young men in popular culture being unabashedly androgynous, with the feminization of men, their objectification and their loss of backbone (Garcia 2009, pp.214-215, 222). The author sees this as being a result of men's search for attention in their physical appearance following the loss of their traditional purposes (Garcia 2009, p.216). Faludi (1999) explains that for the American working class of the wartime era, manliness was associated with "collectively creating something tangible that was essential to a larger mission" (p.55).

What this popular literature on the men of Generation X indicates is that hosts like Howard Stern who have clear standards of masculine performance are operating in a cultural setting where men's own sense of masculinity is troubled. The masculine identities these authors describe are no longer the simple and more or less unified masculinities of the erstwhile builders or defenders of the nation; today, there are many masculinities. It is the subjective side of this transition that authors like Garcia (2009) and Faludi (1999) are grappling with in their books. Hence there are two key changes to point out at the level of masculine identity. First, as compared with the past, recognition

of masculine privilege associated with being the builders and defenders of the society we know is fading. And second, the development of new male identities that, rather than building modern consumer society are perceived as being shaped by consumer culture, are symbolic of that decline in privilege. This is one avenue for understanding the contemporary affirmation of manliness in a fictitious underground fight club (Palahniuk), in dangerous stunts (*Jackass,*[17]) or in quasi-pornographic sexuality (Stern).

Class

Zechowski (2002) approaches Howard Stern's show somewhat differently, starting from an overview of the transformation of talk shows since the 1960s. She finds that the normative schism that exists between shock radio's political incorrectness and the standards of plurality in civil society, however hypocritical these standards may appear, has been visible in the products of popular culture since the 1960s, when talk shows actively engaged formerly excluded voices in discussions of social problems. Rather than opening mass media to the possibility of inclusiveness, the discovery of working-class audiences and perspectives during a time of political upheaval revealed that a backlash was taking place. Some programs integrated sensationalism and the "psychologizing of social problems" (Zechowski 2002, p.13). Privileging the host-audience relationship, in which the audience was predominantly white working-class males, they threw aside any bourgeois pretense of mutual respect, equality and rational debate and hosts abused audiences, and both got angry and targeted feminism, welfare recipients and homosexuals. Hosts like Morton Downey Jr. would threaten violence or

[17] Jackass was a home-video-style American TV program which became popular after its debut in 1999. Each episode, the young male hosts attempted various dangerous or disgusting stunts for amusement.

shout down guests and audience members. In this way, Zechowski (2002) traces the origins of hosts like Stern to the social changes of the 1960s. Her argument stresses that it is *the working class* that produces and consumes an angry discourse. For Zechowski, working class anger gave rise to a new type of audience participation, in which anger and abuse were accepted in a period when group politics was being redefined. If Zechowski is correct in stressing the working class dimension of angry talk radio, the question arises: why were men of the working class so profoundly affected by the development of new group politics?

Before moving on, it will be helpful to look at the social context Zechowski describes. During the 1960s, when angry talk radio and television was on the rise in America, the working class was changing: Hobsbawm (1996) points out that the percentage employed in manufacturing began its decline (p.302), the continuous rise of real incomes for the working class ended, and inequality increased (p.407). When angry talk shows were gaining volume, the times of great industrial undertakings like the war effort were not so far from living memory. The men of the working class had built the physical structures of the nation and that process had formed them in return. The working class saw itself as serving a greater purpose: '"The creed of the shipyard will be 'not for us, but for others,'"' said shipyard commander, Emmett E. Sprung in 1951 (Faludi 1999, p.55). After that, the role of working class men as the brawn of the nation would soon be swept aside, but for some, the sense of entitlement among men as builders and defenders remained (Faludi 1999). In this respect, it is interesting to note that the feminist challenge to male privilege gained momentum in the 1960s, at the same moment that the role of men at the forefront of industry showed signs of waning.

For the white working-class American man, these were frustrating times. Hamill's (1969) conversations with lower middle class men in New York City revealed a mushrooming of resentments coupled with feelings of alienation. In the conversations Hamill cites, the working class whites spoke of the situations of welfare recipients, blacks, antiwar protesters and liberal politicians in comparison to their own, and express outrage at the fact that someone was benefiting while they struggled to get by. Most of his interlocutors were furious when he asked their opinion on a black man's call for "'the same rights and opportunities for a decent life that [whites have] taken for granted as an American birth-right'" (Hamill 1969, p.3).

Generation

Observing the mobilization to save CHOI-FM in 2004, Simon Langlois matched the youth of listeners (half of them aged 18 to 35) with the themes, dynamism and music of the station. These young people were very critical of Quebec society, he argued, not because they were disenfranchised, but because they feel they have not had a fair chance on the labour market. For Langlois, some of the appeal of angry radio has to do with this generation's inheritance of new gender norms and perceived privilege for women.

The following citation illustrates the frustration Langlois (2004) is referring to. The speaker is host Stéphan Dupont during a conversation with a libertarian commentator, Joanne Marcotte :

> [Les vieux laissent pas assez de place aux jeunes en politique] qui vivent ces problèmes-là. Qui vont les vivre, eux autres, plus tard. Les gens de 55, 60 ans aujourd'hui, ils manqueront pas de ressources pour les vingt – les dix, quinze, vingt années qui leur restent à vivre, mais ceux qui en ont 35, ils sont peut-être devant le néant pour leurs vieux jours. Alors effectivement on devrait tasser ces gens là. (Dupont le midi, February 24, 2010).

Group Relations on Talk Radio

Leaving aside the reasoned critiques that pit one group's interests against another's, several important examples exist of talk radio's attacks on a large variety of groups. For example, Vincent and Turbide (2004) found that many of André Arthur's arguments targeted organizations as incompetent or immoral; but some comments targeted politicians as, for example, homosexuals (p.126). And Louis Champagne of the Saguenay's KYK Radio X told a local politician that the factory workers of the region would not vote for him because he is gay, asking, "Cout' donc, le Parti québécois, c'est-tu un club de tapettes?" (CBSC 2008).

Statements implying physical violence have also been made. An early case occurred during the 1990 Oka Crisis when Mohawks defied the federal government over a land claim dispute and tensions were rising between native warriors and the Canadian Army. Radio host Simon Bédard suggested the army massacre the natives: "Tu rentres là avec l'armée pis tu nettoies tout ça. Cinquante morts, 100 morts, 125 morts, ça vient de s'éteindre. On enterre ça pis on continue" (Lavoie, Sauvageau and Trudel, 1995).

Similarly, while on CHOI-FM Fillion stated that "we should pull the plug" on a patient at the mental health institute, since the man did not deserve to live and was "un paquet de troubles pour la société." He went on to offer a solution: "Moi je penses que dans le zoo on devrait remplir les chambres pis que un moment donné y'a un switch pis une fois par quatre mois, tu pèses sur le piton pis qu'il sort rien qu'un petit gaz pis tu vas là pis tu ramasses ça dans des sacs" (Fillion in Marcoux et Tremblay 2005, p.74).

In 2012, a video began circulating in which a young welfare recipient openly mocked salaried workers as suckers, saying that even if he could work, he did not want to and could live happily off the money from his government cheque. Carl Monette was among the radio hosts who voiced his outrage, suggesting that after 5 years welfare recipients should be cut off. As for the spike in homelessness that would result, he offered this solution: Castrate the homeless and send them up to the north of Quebec. "Ils feront ce qu'ils voudront, je m'en sacre […] on fait le ménage" (Monette in Jodoin 2012). These fantasized final solutions to perceived social problems that do not directly impact the hosts or audiences sound like Stern's suggestion to fill potholes with the bodies of executed criminals, or more gravely, like Alan Jones' encouragement of "Wog bashing" to "take back" the beach in the lead-up to the Crounulla Beach riots in Australia.

In each case the diatribe targets a group whose rights are perceived as special (treaty rights, social assistance or care). Each case occurs when these interests and rights are thrown into relief against the system of individual rights or the former majority group's interests. This point should be seen in light of the fact that the hosts and audiences are probably not significantly affected in their daily lives by the targets of their ire. It is highly unlikely then that what we are seeing is a clash of individual interests.

Powerlessness and Exclusion from the Public Sphere

It was not just men of the working class who were drawn to shock radio. Zechowski's (2002) focus groups with women who listen to *The Howard Stern Show* bring to light the expected appeal of humour and escapism that "makes going to work a little less stressful" (p.135). The women also explain that the racist, homophobic and

generally politically incorrect slurs heard on the show express what they themselves think but cannot say; for Zechowski, this signals a feeling of powerlessness and resentment arising from the fact that, "[w]orking-class people are, for the most part, absent from the public sphere – they are seen but not heard (except on talk radio)" (Zechowski 2002, p.140).

Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) also found that listeners were detached from the public sphere and most forms of political activity, *except* through the radio host. For example, when they asked mobilized listeners if they had ever participated in other political events besides those related to saving CHOI from closure, 85% said they had not (Marcoux and Tremblay 2005, p.40). Further, many of their respondents reported that they had never voted before listening to CHOI, but under the influence of CHOI, the listeners' participation was higher than average (Marcoux and Tremblay 2005, p.41).

Finally, Douglas (2002) emphasizes the same general trend in the birth of American talk radio, a response to the disappearance of public life, overwork and "the gap people felt between themselves and those who run the country" (p.487). Approaching from a feminist perspective, she associates Stern's program with a larger cultural backlash. Exaggerated masculinity in the form of excessive toughness, loudness and verbal abuse blended with hysteria and chatter, Douglas (2002) finds. It is important to highlight that for Stern's program, unlike Limbaugh's, which Susan Douglas associates it with, this talk rarely results in a call to political action.

This detachment from the normal political life of society, as well as the effective contortions that result are cited by those authors who identify talk and shock radio with populism. In addition, the "gros bon sens," plain talk, anti-elitism, rejection of interest-

politics, identification with "regular people," and a host of other features cited in this paper lend support to this assessment. But just what does populism mean? The term is difficult since it is readily recognized, but not easily conceptualized. Arendt scholar Margaret Canovan has worked toward establishing the respectability of the concept of populism and establishing its connection with democratic society. She rejects attempts to define populism in terms of ideologies or interests, left or right. "Populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to the 'people' against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society" (Canovan 1999, p.3). What we wish to emphasize here is the *anti-* facet of populism.

For Canovan (1981) an important component of populism is the feeling of powerlessness. One perspective holds that populism appeals to those who are "uprooted, split off from any stable community, alienated from their society's institutions, deprived of convictions and inner strength. They crave community, authority and a focus for their diffuse resentments" (Canovan 1981, p.163). A number of elements of talk radio align with this view of populism: plain-talking hosts, a chance to be heard on the call-ins, an absence of restrictions associated with more formal civic discourse, the right (and at times the responsibility) to get angry, a sense of community[18], an interruption of ones isolation, the authority of the host, strong moral lines, etc. (Levin 1987; Boggs and Dirman, 1999). In the sense that its listeners remain isolated and subjugated to the host's authority, talk radio only creates an illusion, or "myth of electronic populism" according to Boggs and Dirman (1999). And the discursive space opened up by shock radio for its excluded audience comes across less as an extension of the public space of a political and

[18] McLuhan saw radio as helping to integrate a tribal, pre-literacy element into the communications landscape. And with a radio for every household and car in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, what communications technology could be closer to the populace?

cultural community than as an inversion of it; to cite Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) commenting on the appropriate naming of Fillion's morning show, it represents a "*monde parallèle*." We shall return to this discussion of populism later. For the moment, we should retain that populism, while it appeals to the authority of "the people" is really about *certain* people mobilized at times by emotion and reacting to the surrounding structures and values that they depict as "elite" (see Canovan 1999.)

Shock

Vulgarity in the form of disregard for the norms of civic discourse on working class talk-shows is intertwined with sex and voyeurism on Howard Stern's show. Soley (2007) found that 71 of 97 segments studied contained sexual content. It is is possible that this amount of sexual content cannot be understood by the cliché that "sex sells". In this respect, the very significant gap between this style and that of other morning programs indicates that the presence of sexual content that obviously shocks the sensibilities of civil society is worth investigating. For example, the French brand of shock radio involved a heavy dose of sexual content, was marketed to youth 15-25 years old and involved a "provocative tone explicitly designed to '*épater le bourgeois*'" (Dauncey and Hare 1999, p.94).

In filling news segments with oddities, having women perform sex acts, holding disturbing contests and interrogating guests about their personal lives, hosts like Stern broadcast privacy. Not only entertaining, but accessible without reference to thought or understanding of the complexity of political and economic issues, *The Howard Stern Show* temporarily severs the listener from the public sphere of civil society by dislocating

itself from social norms, principles and concerns.[19] And there is little doubt that Fillion's imaginatively vile contests also qualified his show for the title of *shock* and not simply *trash.*

Understanding the appeal of deliberate implication in deviance is crucial. Arendt explains that the culture of Europe's front generation, socially atomized by the ruin of the class system and stung by the hypocritical standards of bourgeois morality was inspired by authors like the sexually deviant Marquis de Sade: "They were satisfied with blind partisanship in anything that respectable society had banned, regardless of theory or content" (Arendt 1973, p.331). Unable to fully integrate into society through conventional class politics, yet thoroughly caught up in class and social problems, the mass movements offered to those estranged from the public sphere a way to reject civil society and politics. Looking at elements of the shock discourse that almost systematically violate of the standards of political correctness, it is noteworthy that shock radio maintains a relationship (albeit negative) to the civil society and values it so loudly rejects. In this sense, understanding resentment, which involves at once a rejection *and* an obsession with the object(s) of a frustrated desire may help to clarify the nature of shock radio[20]. We shall return to this later.

The language of shock may cohabit with resentment on some talk radio because the expression of resentment does not graft easily onto formal newscasts and their lack of emotional expressiveness. Chalk (1999) describes the style of Rwandese hate radio

[19] This contempt for politics and the norms of civil society is exemplified in Stern's bid for New York governor on a platform to "restore the death penalty and fill the potholes of New York City streets with the bodies of the executed" or his expressed approval of high profile deviants (Zechowski 2002, p.105.)
[20] It is interesting to note that Levin's (1987) research looking at the opinions expressed on talk radio shows in the 1980s found that the lower middle class callers were concerned with moral decay and incivility (p.16.)

station, *Radio-Télévision Libre Mille-Collines* prior to the 1994 genocide. The station "revolutionized Rwandese radio broadcasting by abandoning the tradition of stiff, formal presentations in favour of more relaxed Western-style "talk radio," punctuated by popular music, dirty jokes, and lots of street slang" (Chalk 1999, p.98).

Insult/Trash

One component of trash radio is insulting and offensive comments directed at public personalities. The situation of trash radio in Quebec City was transformed in part by the intervention of one of its victims, a radio personality named Sophie Chiasson, who sued Fillion for defamation, but she was hardly alone. Stern has also kept a large repertoire of targets for insult which he has drawn on from time to time over the years. In both cases the insults are highly personal, touching on the intimate dimensions of the victim's life. Now insults still play a role on Howard Stern's show, but the lawsuit against Fillion and CHOI's owner have significantly toned down this type of content on the Quebec radio scene[21].

As with the radio hosts' fantasies of extreme "retribution" against various groups like the homeless, Natives, etc., (see section above, "Group Relations on Talk Radio") the insulting content is difficult to understand from the point of view of common sense, given that there is no reason for it. Not only had Chiasson done nothing to deserve Fillion's brutal insults, the scale of the attacks, day after day, is disproportionate to

[21] Today in Quebec, similar insults may be more rare on radio, but they still make their way into popular culture through comedians like Mike Ward (who wished a cancer on a television personality) or Guillaume Wagner (who said, "Marie-Élaine Thibert est tellement laide que ça devrait être déductible d'impôt de la fourrer." Durocher 2012.) Ward has said that he writes his comedy bits better when he's angry and that his humour comes from his rage (Lagacé January 28, 2012.)

anything she could have done. Thus the question is, why such anger towards a person who has done nothing to deserve it?

Information, Entertainment, Opinion

On the surface, talk radio, including shock radio and conservative radio serves the banal purpose of informing, entertaining and stimulating discussion. In fact, on shock radio, information and entertainment often serve as pretexts for opinions and expression. Information, Giroux and Sauvageau (2009) found, may constitute only a sliver of the time devoted to an issue when compared with the time spent on forming opinions around it on shock radio programs. They observed a staggering bias on Quebec's 93.3 FM and CHOI-FM when it came to the coverage of a municipal election. The researchers found that both stations were heavily biased against female candidate, Ann Bourget, citing the fact that she has no car, no kids and lives in cooperative housing despite working as a city councilor which the hosts *guessed* would earn her a salary of $90,000 (Giroux and Sauvageau 2009, p.23). These "guesses" were not verified, since Bourget never appeared on the shows, but the information provided a jumping off point for the formulation of opinions which took the form of "anybody but Bourget[22]" (Giroux and Sauvageau 2009, p.22). This neglect of the actual facts of the matter in favour of opinion, and very negative opinion at that, is significant, especially since the media in Quebec have a

[22] Note that the hosts' bias was not so much in favour of one of the candidates as it was *opposed*. This is consistent with what we know about shock radio, namely, that it is relatively disengaged from politics. This anti- position was found to be present both for CHOI's very popular morning show, hosted by Dominic Maurais and its rival counterpart at 93.3, *Bouchard en Parle* where the host suggested that two candidates join their campaigns in order to prevent a Bourget victory (Sauvageau 2009, p.22.) Further indication of the disengagement of the audience until mobilized and of the negative character of this vote is the relative change in the percentage each candidate received: whereas Bourget had the same level of support on election day as she had three weeks earlier (33%), Labeaume, the new favourite among the *radio poubelles* to prevent a Bourget victory went from 16% to 59% in the polls over the same period to win the mayor's office (Sauvageau 2009, footnote 35.)

responsibility to clearly separate information from commentary (Giroux and Sauvageau 2009, p.7).

We also know from several studies directed by Diane Vincent that hosts do not so much interview their guests and callers as press them using rhetorical techniques. We will not detail the techniques used, but simply mean to point to the kind of manipulation of guests and callers that takes place. At times interviews can resemble interrogation, in which the host lays out tricks and traps to extract confessions and guide conversations to the desired ends.

From its early days, Stern's show also stood out from the mainstream by blurring the lines between news and entertainment, and as with the Quebec City radio hosts, information is usually chosen because it is sensational or open to commentary and humour. For example, "one particularly infamous incident which drew much criticism occurred one day after an Air Florida Flight plunged into the Potomac in 1982 killing several people. In the wake of this tragedy 'Stern tried to call the airline to ask what the one-way fare was from National Airport to the 14th Street Bridge'" (Chestnut 1990, p.13). As Chestnut (1990) points out, "The controversy created by "The Howard Stern Show" and the reactions it elicits, both in support of it and against it, demonstrate a high level of emotional participation on the part of listeners" (p.12).

On shock radio, the line between information, opinion and entertainment is often, and possibly deliberately, blurred. What in one breath comes across as a slew of vicious attacks might be shrugged off as a joke in the next. In their content analysis, Vincent, Turbide and Laforest (2004) observed that a radio host like André Arthur simply plays off his harsh talk as entertainment, but might then affirm that he is right and what he says

is important (p.6). This is an interesting problem, since it characterizes shock radio (but is not exclusive to it), and points to the instrumental role played by information, opinion and even entertainment. On one hand, these serve as the pretexts for sensation, and on the other they allow the host to hide behind a legitimate format of radio.

Identity

At the same time as it violates the norms of civil society, shock radio also offers up a community in which the hosts constitute a familiar circle of friends, Gary, Howard and Robin, whose personal lives are common topics of discussion. Vincent, Turbide and Laforest (2008) describe how the rhetorical idealization of listener identity by Quebec City host Jeff Fillion offers a similar sense of place. Listeners are identified by the host as both ordinary (or normal) white male heterosexuals and as the select few; they are the victims of injustice and exclusion for thinking differently and fighters for popular empowerment. Negatively defined, they are in opposition to the elites and *profiteurs* (see Laforest, Turbide and Vincent 2008b*)*.[23] The rhetoric of the *X* identity is also composed of sanctions and prescriptions determining who is an *X* and who is among the *faux X*. While Fillion depicts the *X* as the ordinary working people excluded from civil society, he also turns that exclusion back on society determining who is in and out based on the characteristics he defines and the loyalty he demands. We should bring some nuance to this point, however. If the host participates in determining who is in and who is out, the audience also involves itself to a varying degree, so that some listeners mobilize and others do not. Those who mobilize and consider themselves die-hard fans are what

[23]Specifically, intellectuals, journalists, politicians on one hand, welfare recipients, minority groups, and residents of the Plateau Mont-Royal on the other. The Plateau is known for having one of the highest concentrations of artists in Canada, symbolic of Quebec's cultural scene, and for Fillion, of the *profiteur*.

Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) refer to as the *groupe porteur* or the core group that carries the mobilizations, participating in events, calling in and so forth.

Another kind of difference is celebrated on shock radio in the form of extreme individuality. On Stern's show, this includes prostitutes, porn actresses, a stuttering reporter for the show, the severely handicapped, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, etc. Unfortunately, there is little mention of this peculiarity in the literature on shock radio, and the topic does invite further research. However, Zechowski (2002) does point to the importance of this fascination with difference along the lines of working class humour and inclusion/exclusion. On CHOI-FM or on Radio Pirate, there is a similar fascination with guests and callers who stand out. If it is true that these guests say something about the inclusion/exclusion of shock radio, then it is worth mentioning that their inclusion on the shows comes off as a mockery of politically correct inclusion. As with the working class, Zechowski (2002) points out that the civil society that claims to be accepting of difference in fact refuses to have these same bizarre people in the public eye[24]. But unlike with civil society, these guests are not included in any political sense. They appear on the shows as radically *individually* different, as social oddities and not as belonging to or affirming any group identity.

Mobilizations

Mobilization for The Howard Stern Show often involves rallies or events, promotion (plugging) of products, books, movies, albums, shows and services. (Stern is generally credited with making the Snapple brand a household name). He also makes it

[24] For instance, one featured guest on the Howard Stern Show, Stuttering John, asks celebrities humiliating or insulting questions often sparking them to anger.

clear which ones he dislikes. As a sign of his influence, line-ups for Stern movie premiers or book sales have at times set records. Along with influencing consumer choices, Stern has voiced his support or approval for politicians like George Pataki or Bill Clinton. He supported George W. Bush for his tough stance after the September 11 attacks, and later turned on him for his positions on media regulation. But Stern's show has also involved the participation of fans. In-studio contests, pranks, phone-ins, fan roundtables aired after the show, and listener-submitted material, all constitute listener contributions. For example, when Dr. Laura Schlessinger[25], one of Stern's rival talk show hosts, decided to make the move to satellite radio his fans picked up on his irritation and called in to her show en masse with sarcastic comments, callouts, etc.

A significant number of radio hosts who have used their microphone for mobilization means the list is long in terms of mobilizations in Quebec City. The involvement of *la radio poubelle* in the promotion of political candidates like Claude Roy,[26] who was selected to run as an independent representing the Cols Rouges by a contest held on 93.3 FM, or Sylvain Légaré[27] (Radio X) or Régis Labaume[28] who enjoyed significant media bias in his favour (and attacks on his opponents) from 93.3 and Radio X. The *Enquête Scorpion* to break up a juvenile prostitution ring and bring its clientele and pimps to justice, the actions to save CHOI-FM, the activities of the *Rassemblement des Cols Rouges*, the *Réseau Liberté Québec* have all drawn on the support of Quebec

[25] Schlessinger's show is a good example of the difference between moralizing talk radio and shock. Even if her comments are also offensive, her advice show still maintains a prevalent concern with morals, setting it apart from the style of hosts like Stern.
[26] The *Rassemblement des Cols Rouges* (RCR) was founded in Quebec City to protest government spending. Roy was to run as the RCR candidate in Quebec's provincial elections of 2012, but soon quit after heavy criticism over his comments with respect to immigration. He had said that Quebec needs more Asian and fewer Arab immigrants, citing that the province does not need more taxi drivers (Gagnon 2012.)
[27] Lessard, Denis. "Vanier : la victoire de la haine." La Presse. September 21, 2004.
[28] Giroux, Daniel and Florian Sauvageau. "Radio parlée, élections et démocratie." Cahier médias, no. 18. Centre d'études sur les médias. September 2009.

City's *radio poubelle* for its publicity and backing, and of course its audiences. And as with Stern's show, the same type of listener participation has played a role on Quebec City's radio in a variety of ways.

It is worth noting that there is a spectrum of forms of audience mobilization. Trash radio may involve itself directly with political candidates or help fuel political movements (although there is less research to indicate this with respect to Stern), it may operate at the level of consumption, but alternatively, mobilization may be completely apolitical as in the case of contests. Let us leave aside the promotion and attacking of political candidates for a moment, since this is common to political talk radio as well. Listener support for actions like *Enquête Scorpion* and the *Rassemblement des Cols Rouges* have in common the expression of anger, which at times reaches excess. In Quebec City the importance of trash radio in getting the word out is formidable. Out of 31 people sampled at the 2012 *J'ai ma pelle bleue* fundraiser for the City's new multifunctional amphitheatre, which many saw as a step toward bringing an NHL team back to Quebec, 20 had heard of the event through either 93.3 FM or CHOI-FM[29].

With this in mind, the fact that activities for fans such as pranks, contests and challenges are less political raises the question of what motivates them. With hosts like Jeff Fillion, Marto Napoli or Howard Stern, some challenges and contests for fans involve what would normally be considered public humiliation. For Zechowski, the humiliation of the working class is expressed on shock radio through its sexual content.

[29] It may be worth mentioning that since 2012 bumper stickers could be seen in the area of Quebec City referring to a Facebook page with hundreds of members, *Toutes des Folles* where a host of misogynistic comments could be read. The *radio poubelle* was not far from sight, with one of the members being shock jock Marto Napoli. Whether it is connected with a music video put online with CHOI-FM's Stéphan Dupont, Jeff Fillion and Bob Bissonette the year before entitled, "*Y sont toutes folles"* is open to question, but even as a coincidence, the expression of an identical sentiment in the same time and place is telling.

In one contest, male guests on Stern's show come into studio to expose themselves and find out who has the smallest penis; in his early days, Fillion challenged participants to eat used tampons or drink semen; and Marto Napoli occasionally has a guest onstage during his live shows to pull down his pants and be shot with a potato to the cheers of the audience. Marto's audience members interviewed after one such show said they liked the simple, unpretentious humour. One male audience member replied that what he likes is the "tire-patates [potato cannon.] Ces conneries là, ben c'est tout le temps le fun […] Des niaiseries comme ça – tout le monde le pense mais personne le fait" (Martineau 2009). And another young man explained, "t'as le choix d'être *trash* prétentieux ou t'as le choix d'être *trash* simple. C'est Québec, on est simple. On est simple. On sait qui on est […] on sait ce que l'on vaut mais on se prend pas au sérieux *that's it*" (Martineau 2009). This example of the shock style of humour and the audience's reactions come across as a mockery of seriousness itself. Note also that the gross or painful stunts cited here are all geared toward men (see above, Gender, Eroticism, Feminism).

Unlike political talk radio, shock radio encompasses mobilizations with varying degrees of political relevance. In other words some are highly political, some are practically anti-political. This represents an important problem for anyone studying shock radio, and is surely responsible for much of the confusion as to its nature. Given the disparate types of mobilizations, the question is to know how these different mobilizations are reflected in the audience. How can we account for what appears to be an attempt at serious political engagement one day and anti-political entertainment the next? Should we conclude from this that the form of radio we are studying is a collage of

political and shock audiences and discourses? Is mobilization of one type merely incidental to the other? Or is there a lens through which the diverse mobilizations and discourses can be understood as a unity?

Part 2: Audience Profile

The literature on the content of shock radio has highlighted, among others, themes of class, gender, generation and belonging. That these themes should be present comes as little surprise when the audience characteristics are examined. Over the course of this section we will sketch a profile of the audience. Because this genre has been confused with the conservative talk radio genre – wrongly, but understandably given the aggressive discourse and male-predominance of both of the audiences – we will work to distinguish between the two. We will also provide some context for interpreting the data.

Before turning to the results, it is important to point out their use and limitations. These data pertain to whole audiences, so as to include people who may listen for a variety of reasons. They are useful in that they can help us locate the audience in society, identify patterns, find similarities with social tendencies, etc. The data are not meant to serve as the basis for conclusions about trends in society; instead, the convergence of a certain class, gender and generation, suggest social currents that might help us understand the phenomenon. In other words, the data on radio listeners indicate themes that invite inquiry at the level of the individual listeners.

Features of the Audience

At the summit of his popularity, about 70% of Stern's listeners were men, and 74% were aged 25-54 (Feldman, J.A. 2004, p.38). Of that age group, the average household income exceeded $75,000 (Colford in Nemeth 2001). But the show's move to satellite radio brought important changes. For one, it can it be heard anywhere in the world, but listeners must have a satellite radio receiver and now pay 15 dollars monthly to listen live. Data from 2009 indicate that since the transition to satellite radio, 79% of Stern's listeners are men. They remain high income earners, with the bulk of listeners having a household income between $50,000 and 150,000 per year. The most significant age group for Stern listeners is 35-44, which accounts for 41% of listeners (Arbitron ratings).

Data from 2003 (during Fillion's time and before the mobilization to save CHOI-FM) indicate that 66% of listeners were men, 37% were aged 25-34, and nearly 80% fell between the ages of 18 and 44. Most of the mobilized listeners earned under $60,000 (Marcoux and Tremblay 2005). These men of Generation X suffer from a particularly precarious economic position, having fairly low levels of education and relatively insecure jobs (Langlois 2004). Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) found that only 30% of the mobilized CHOI-FM listeners they interviewed were covered by a union, compared with the provincial average of 41%; the majority worked in the lower echelons of the private sector (71%); and 66% earned under $40,000.

A Neoconservative Audience?

Some have portrayed Quebec City's *radio poubelle* as putting forward a line of argumentation to at long last denounce the burden of debt, of caring for the Baby-

Boomers, and of supporting a welfare state that does nothing for them. After all, were listeners not standing up in defense of constitutional rights and freedoms[30]? For that matter, it is not unusual for American commentators to idealize American shock radio as championing free speech and resisting phony broadcasting[31]. Put simply, this argument sees shock radio as contributing its own, more or less consistent and valid social critique.

In their research into Jeff Fillion's audience, authors Marcoux and Tremblay (2004) found that mobilized listeners responded to interview questions with the same opinions they heard on air that same day. In fact their answers were so prompt and so literally translated from the radio hosts as to reproduce the same contradictions (Marcoux and Tremblay 2005). Even more baffling was their indifference to politics up until Fillion's call to save CHOI-FM, at which point no effort was spared.

Fragments of populist ideology crop up on shock radio in the form of repeated attacks on elites, intellectuals, women and minorities, and in the praise of neoliberalism and the so-called American way. That conservatism as an entrenched worldview differs from the ideological collage produced by shock radio becomes evident when one considers the most aggressive conservative on American radio, Rush Limbaugh. Research suggests that Limbaugh's devoted listeners (the largest radio audience in America) gather under a single ideology. A positive correlation exists between listening to Limbaugh's radio program and the political involvement of conservative listeners (Barker 1998). Indeed, listeners generally share a common conservative perspective and are well-informed on public affairs (Bennett 2009). According to a PEW research paper, 80% of Rush Limbaugh listeners identify as conservative, as compared with 35% in the

[30] Frédéric Têtu, a philosophy professor was among those that championed this argument at one time.
[31] See for example James Sullivan (2005).

American population; and 49% of his audience is over 50 years old (PEW 2008). The stable and predictable ideological underpinning of conservative talk radio and its older audience are sufficiently out of step with the unstable impulsivity, shocking content and young audience of shock radio to indicate that they are not identical phenomena[32].

The moralistic interventionism of conservative populism also sets it apart. For example, the moral outrage of the Tea Party results in calls for legal intervention on social issues like abortion or gay marriage (Jones and Cox 2010). Although the resentment of shock radio *also* arises in the former privileged majority[33] and although both the Tea Party and shock radio may both express resentment at relative status decline (or fear of it), the anger of shock radio does not lead to calls for tighter controls on lifestyles – rather than calling for conformism, hosts like Stern revel in individual difference, deviance and shocked moral sensibilities.

The Audiences in Comparison[34]

The majority of listeners in both the Quebec City and Stern audiences are male, but Stern's audience is overwhelmingly male. Data from 2008 (four years after the mobilization to save CHOI) show that the proportion of men in the audience has

[32] Let me acknowledge that parallels between shock radio and conservative talk radio may exist along the lines of a backlash and of incivility, as Douglas (2002) has argued (it was on his radio show conservative Rush Limbaugh spoke of Feminazis, called a pro-choice lawyer "a slut," mocked Michael J. Fox's Parkinson's spasms, etc.) And conversely, trash radio on both sides of the border has here and there picked up the odd thread of libertarian, "fiscal-conservative" and individualist ideology.

[33] Here again, we see a demographic gap: Tea Partiers tend to be older, and are concentrated in the American South and Midwest. Jones and Cox (2010) explain: "On nearly all basic demographic characteristics, there are no significant differences between Americans who identify with the Tea Party and those who identify with the Christian conservative movement."

[34] All data for the Howard Stern Show audience are taken from the 2009 Arbitron ratings results. Data for the CHOI audience is taken from the 2008 BBM ratings.

decreased to 59.5%, compared with 66% in 2004. But since that time, the proportion of listeners aged 25-34 is mostly unchanged at 39%.

Listeners by Gender			
Sex	**Stern Listeners**	**CHOI-FM Morning Listeners (6:00-10:00am)**	**CHOI-FM Listeners Over All Broadcast Hours**
Male	79	65	59.5
Female	21	35	40.5

Note that the largest group of Stern listeners is 35-44, and the second largest is 25-34. For CHOI-FM the largest group is 25-34, with the second largest being 35-44. This 20-year age range corresponds roughly to the age of Generation X, or those born from the early 1960s to the early 1980s.

Age of Stern Listeners by Gender			
Age	Male	Female	Overall
18-24	2	5	3
25-34	31	23	29
35-44	40	45	41
45-54	21	19	21
55+	6	7	6

Age of CHOI-FM Listeners by Gender[35]			
Age	Male 18+	Female 18+	Overall
12-17	-	-	7
18-24	11	10	10
25-34	40	46	39
35-44	23	20	20
45-54	18	12	14
55+	9	12	9

[35] Note that the "Overall" audience includes adolescent listeners.

For both audiences, the percentage of self-employed is higher than the national averages. Whereas 9.2% of those living in Quebec City were self-employed in 2009, 16% of the CHOI audience was self-employed. Likewise a larger proportion of Stern's national audience owns a small business (18% compared with the American average of 11%).

With the data for the CHOI audience in particular we also see a high proportion of male listeners fall under the categories of "labourer/service worker" (construction, factory workers, sales clerks, taxi drivers, etc). and "skilled/trades" (carpenters, truck drivers, etc).

Comparing the two audiences, we see important differences. The CHOI audience member is less likely to have a high salary and more likely to have an average or low salary. Few Howard Stern listeners earn household incomes below $50,000, and the majority of those who responded reported having a household income over $100,000. In contrast, only 50% the CHOI-FM audience earned more than $75,000. A larger proportion of the CHOI audience earns a lower income, with 20% earning below $50,000 as compared with only 9% of the Howard Stern audience.

Small Business Ownership, Stern Listeners	
Employment	**Overall**
Yes	75
Small Business Owner	18
No	7

Type of Work, Stern Listeners	
Management Position	**Overall**
Yes	46
No	52
Sometimes	2

Income Group, Stern Listeners	
Household Income	**Overall**
Less than $50,000	9
50,000-99,999	36
100,000-149,999	29
150,000-199,999	14
200,000+	13

Type of Occupation, CHOI-FM Listeners			
Occupation	**Male Listeners (18+)**	**Female Listeners (18+)**	**Overall**
No Answer	-	-	-
Labourer/Service	18	9	15
Farming/Fisheries	1	-	-
Skilled/Tradesperson	19	10	14
Technical worker	14	7	11
Clerical, Artistic, Recreational worker	6	20	11
Sales	9	1	5
Middle Manager	4	2	3
Self-employed/ Owner/ Contractor/ Manager/ Professional	19	15	16
Not Applicable	9	35	24

Income Group, CHOI-FM Listeners	
Household Income	**Overall**
No reply	5
Less than 30,000	6
30,000-49,000	14

50,000-74,000	25
75,000+	50

As well as generally earning higher incomes, a larger proportion of the Howard Stern audience has some post secondary education. Among the CHOI-FM listeners, we find that men are more likely to have ended their studies at the high school or CEGEP level.

Although 16.4% of Quebec City's male population aged 25-44 has only high school education, that number is 21% among CHOI listeners. Likewise, 28% of Quebec City's 25-44 year old men have a university degree compared with 23% of CHOI's male listeners. Here it should be noted that an important difference exists when we split the audience by gender: whereas 37% of female listeners had completed university studies, that number was only 23% for male listeners.

Education Level, Stern Listeners	
Education	**Overall**
Less than 12th Grade	1
High School Grad or GED	17
Some College	23
College Graduate/Bachelor's	39
Grad/Post-Grad	19

Education Level, CHOI-FM Listeners			
Education	**Male Listeners (18+)**	**Female Listeners (18+)**	**Overall (weighted average)**
None (No High School)	11	8	10
High School completed	21	12	17
Some College	13	13	13

College completed	23	19	21
Some University	9	10	9
University completed+	23	37	29

Highest level of education attained (Quebec City Region)[36]						
Age Group		**No Secondary**	**DES**	**Métier (trade)**	**College Degree**	**University diploma**
25-34		7.3	14.0	19.6	25.0	34.0
	Men	9	16.4	23.6	22.7	28.3
	Women	5.5	11.7	15.6	27.3	39.9
35-44		8.6	16.6	22.0	22.6	30.3
	Men	9.5	16.4	25.7	20.2	28.2
	Women	7.7	16.9	18.3	24.8	32.3

These data indicate an important set of differences between the audiences of CHOI-FM and Howard Stern. Stern's audience is *generally* more male, slightly older, better paid and more highly educated. Yet both audiences are mostly male, with a concentration of listeners in their 30s. A higher proportion of both audiences is self-employed compared with the general population and in the CHOI audience those with lower middle class jobs make up an important portion of the listening audience.

Context

In Quebec, Generation X grew into the transformation of gender roles and changing intimate relationships (Gauthier 1992). Also during the 1980s in Quebec, the precariousness of work, lower levels of unionization, high rates of unemployment among university graduates, combined with greater demands on young people – to gain education and work experience, to balance work and studies – left those born during the 1960s and 1970s to adapt to a new economic and social setting from the start of their

[36] *Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (2010).*

adult life (Gauthier 1992; Fleury 2008). Gauthier argues that the changes described help explain that generation's tendency to shun social movements and political organizations, especially when the Baby Boomer generation and its vision continues to dominate Quebec politics (1992).

Despite having a smaller listening population than the city's most popular station, adult contemporary music station *Rouge FM*, (142,100 versus 173,000 listeners), CHOI has the largest market share in the city, picking up the greatest proportion of the city's total hours of radio listening in the BBM ratings. Thus despite shifting its format away from music and significantly softening its content since the time of Fillion, the show maintains an important place in the city's media landscape.

As far as the Stern audience's loyalty is concerned, the SIRIUS website boasts that 57% of his listeners describe themselves as extremely loyal, 93% consider themselves loyal, 52% say they are more likely to try a product the host mentions (Howard Stern Ad Network).

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

Turning from the literature review, let us attempt to formulate a theory appropriate to the various characteristics of shock radio's discourse and audience that we have seen until now. Group belonging comes up in the discourse of shock radio, but is also reflected in the audience profiles, where we can observe that listeners share roughly similar socioeconomic characteristics, placing them in a sort of social group, but one without a political dimension (by this we mean that no political groups represent Generation X, men or the non-unionized working class, for example). These

observations point toward the rich possibilities of an approach to shock radio as a kind of movement. The reader will recall that movements involve the conflicts of groups in society. It is also apparent that as a social movement, shock radio would not have clear goals that it pursues at the political level. Thus we will look to the work of Hannah Arendt who theorized this type of mass movement.

The Elements of Shock Radio in a Social Movement Perspective

We will begin by recomposing the elements described by the authors treating shock radio in order to grasp the unity of the phenomenon from the social movement perspective.

If shock radio represents a social movement, then its most basic element is the emotion that fuels it at the level of the individual. To this emotional aspect we can connect the relative status declines, (and the corresponding inclination to resentment), described above at the levels of gender, class and social group generally. It is noteworthy that the changes in the standings of the genders and groups in society were initiated around the 1960s, but acquired a specific flavour with Generation X. Hence these elements converged on a given generation of men in a particular way.

Generation, like other types of identity in society, is often associated with a particular attitude or spirit, and in this sense, it is comparable to gender and other group associations. But generation is unlike them in the important sense that generations do not generally follow patterns of rise and decline in the same way as, for example, ethnic groups do relative to each other. It may be more appropriate then to speak of the *character* of Generation X, born as it was into a world that had not yet adapted to a harsh

economic reality, high divorce rates, the retreat of authority, etc. As a result, many have called Generation X a "sacrificed generation." This aspect of the audience then we see as a possible source of anger, but not of resentment in the strict sociological sense in which we are using it here.

Now the radio we have described, as opposed to those movements engaged in social struggle through the normal means of action, public opinion, electoral politics, and so on, has no objectives that can translate into the terms of politics as usual. These listeners are outside of the political sphere from the outset since they have no legitimate organization representing them, and are typically outsiders to politics in any case. Here again, class exclusion plays a role, as Zechowski (2002) has pointed out. The point is that this group, relatively powerless and excluded as it is, and appealed to by the populist rejection of elites and their values, finds its frustrations have no conduit in political action. This powerlessness and exclusion thus helps us to understand why resentment, frustration and anger manifest themselves in an expressive movement, rather than one oriented to bringing about changes.

Corresponding to powerlessness and exclusion is the concept of *ressentiment* manifested in the shock dimension of shock radio discourse. This is exclusion turned back on society in the form of defiance of those norms – norms of inclusiveness, no less – that have reshaped values, speech and power along the lines of multiculturalism, of sensitivity to difference and political correctness. Likewise, the discursive manifestation of resentment comes out in the particularly bitter form of personal insults and fantasies of violence.

As with all movements, expressive movements have to be able to frame their actions in terms that those on the outside view as legitimate[37]. What expressive content there is, however, is attached to the legitimate categories of talk radio (information, entertainment, opinion) and in the last instance, protected by claims to free speech, equal rights, individualism or the interests of the taxpayers. These opinions can, Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) discovered, shift constantly both on the air and among listeners (p.45). Opinions in turn find their pretext in the news and entertainment information of the day, which often serves a merely instrumental purpose. This was true for the case documented by Giroux and Sauvageau (2009) in which news reporting was only a pretext for attacking a candidate for municipal office. Now what it is essential for the reader to retain is that these shows blending news, humour and commentary in a pell-mell fashion, can only confuse those who approach the genre as an outgrowth of ideology or as manipulating listeners, because as Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) found, there is no unity to the opinions in terms of interests or even ideologies. But if we think of shock radio as primarily expressive, then the confused ideological elements and interests begin to make sense.

Resentment

The authors covered in the literature review lay out the main elements of shock radio discourse. We have thus been able to distinguish, in broad strokes, forms of populist talkback radio, conservative radio and shock radio. These distinctions are based on the more political nature of conservative radio and the significant generation gap between the audiences. Anger is prominent on much of this radio, but as with populism,

[37] This is certainly not to say that all content on shock radio is meant to express resentment.

there are different kinds of anger. Given the audience and discourse of shock radio, and in light of the social context, it is consistent with the literature on the topic to treat this form of anger as resentment. Shock radio then appears to fit within the spectrum of movements associated with majority group resentment.

To approach populism as a social movement, it is necessary to understand "the feelings which moved people" (Minogue 1969, p.197). In the context of shock radio, understanding those feelings required that we retrace the experiences of the audience from which they originate. Thus, a better knowledge of resentment, especially as the impetus of certain movements or mobilizations will link up the experience of shock listeners with the peculiarities of the radio style they are drawn to.

Dudas (2005) provides a description of what a movement driven by resentment resembles. He argues that majority group frustrations arising from economic and political sources can be directed at minorities the moment that the minority makes rights assertions perceived to negatively affect the majority group. Therefore, when Native Americans asserted their treaty fishing rights in Washington, a grassroots reaction of non-Native Americans sprang to prominence, harnessing generalized frustrations at the decline of the industry. Although the decline of industry was due to ecological degradation and rooted in policy failures, the grassroots organizations targeting Native fishing claims gained popular support. Accusing Natives of claiming special rights and jeopardizing the American ways of life and American values of equal rights, the civic group turned general frustrations into targeted resentment. Rights talk was a powerful rhetorical tool to mobilize and amplify popular reaction, generate sympathy and

legitimacy for a cause among the general population, and lend cohesion to the mobilized group (Dudas 2005).

Scheler (1961) recognized that resentment is intimately tied up with these feelings of entitlement. The contingent structure of hierarchical relations in modern states promising equality but permitting class, power or status inequalities can be a source of frustration and feelings of injustice in a way that caste societies with their fixed relations largely avoid, he argues. Resentment stemming from dramatic hierarchical changes was particularly rife in Weimar Germany. With the growth of cartels, monopolies and industrial empires, the older middle classes were increasingly threatened with disappearance or dissolution into the proletariat (Berghahn 1987, pp.111-112). Eliminating the assured statuses of the groups of the old order, modernity threw each individual back on his own resources, so that those groups in society that assured their status through parties and unions as the workers did, or were reserved a place in the state function, as the Jews had been, became the object of resentment: those who appeared to benefit while others lost out (see Arendt 1973, p.37).

For Levin (1987), talkback radio expresses working class fears of the dramatic cultural changes following from the 1960s: "The fear and loathing of homosexuality and alternative lifestyles evoke more venom on talk radio than the welfare state or any other issue" (p.63). Majority group anxieties may also derive from economic factors, as Berlet (2011) points out with Tea Party activists who are "scared they may be kicked down the socioeconomic ladder next" (p.12). Hence, the research will ask whether the shock audiences experience these majority group anxieties at vanishing entitlements.

Burrin (2004) and Scheler (1961) in their seminal texts point out the importance of understanding powerlessness as a component of resentment. The literature review also indicated that powerlessness plays an important part in populist movements. Indeed, one of Levin's (1987) concepts in his discussion of talk radio is "proletarian despair" or the feeling among the disillusioned lower middle class that they are powerless[38].

Chapter 5: Hypothesis

The shock radio audience stands at the juncture of the frustrations of generation, class and masculinity. Following the 1960s' cultural transitions, minorities and women were granted political group statuses, while white male privilege was being challenged. Important economic changes were taking place at that time as well in the form of deindustrialization, flexibilization and the new neoliberal paradigm gaining traction, with consequent changes to the experience of working life (see for example Hobsbawm 1996; also Sennett 1998). We expect to find that the feelings of resentment on shock radio correspond to the experiences of the audience as belonging to a class, gender and generation that has seen its status decline relative to that of other groups in society.

[38] An interesting concept to consider is *Ressentiment.* Unlike resentment, *Ressentiment* is a more philosophical and historical concept. In his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (1956) argued that when the values a person or group strives for become unattainable, those values may be inverted. In this case, perhaps a group seeking inclusion in the public sphere is frustrated, and creates its own alternative sphere governed by opposite standards of discourse; or the lower middle class which in one generation once called in complaints of moral degeneration on the open-line radio shows now revels in it; or the former majority white male group whose special privileges have been taken away at the moment when other groups' rights are being recognized *as group rights* suddenly begin decrying them as unfair privileges or special rights.

Chapter 6: Methodology

We began our investigation with a polemic around the best way to approach a phenomenon whose elements pose serious challenges to understanding. Out of this polemic, we proposed that major contradictions could be overcome when shock radio is seen as a social movement. In any social movement it should be possible to distinguish a unifying tendency behind the various mobilizations, assertions, etc., of the movement. Furthermore, it should be possible to draw parallels between the movement and those changes in society that give rise to it and sustain it. These can be seen at the level of the individuals that constitute the movement, as well as in the traits of the movement itself. From a methodological point of view, these parallels are only suggestive, but they are essential in order to move toward a global view of the phenomenon. In this sense, the present study, in its consideration of various features of shock radio has a modest ambition, simply to propose a possible foundation for future research.

In the first part of this paper, we looked at the discourse of shock radio, and other forms of talk radio. Proceeding from our research question, we wanted to narrow down the themes being dealt with on these shows in order to learn what patterns exist. We then wanted to see if and how these themes could be thrown into relief by the characteristics of the audience that is attracted to them. For example, we found that gender is a prominent theme on shock radio, and that men constitute a significant portion of the audience. We have been able, in this process, to draw parallels between the themes in the discourse and social situation of the audiences on one hand, and larger currents, like the decline of the working class or the disadvantage of Generation X.

If we are to ascertain the internal coherence and sociological relevance of this approach, we will need to verify the extent to which we are correct in emphasizing the

aspects that we have been focusing on. Hence the research will explore the various themes which, after a review of the literature, could point out pertinent components of the phenomenon (gender, generation, class, etc). We want to know if and how these themes are reflected in the statements of at least some of the listeners. There are two objectives here. Ideally we will be able to see, even in the small sample used here, the interaction of the various themes and thus get a better idea of the significance of the elements of shock radio, to weigh them and see how they tie in. But we also want to learn if this social movement perspective is fruitful, and if it synthesizes the various conflicting elements of shock radio. In the research, this means verifying whether there is an internal consistency to the respondents' statements along the lines hypothesized by the study, namely, along the lines of the expression of resentment and anger.

Our research will test this approach, in which shock radio would constitute an expressive social movement whose actors have generated and gather around a certain form of discourse and mobilization. If we are correct in treating this phenomenon as a movement driven by resentment and frustration, then we should be able to identify several key elements at the level of the interviews.

1. Relative status decline: the sense that one's situation is declining or stagnating relative to the status of others;
2. Feelings of powerlessness, or the feeling that one cannot reverse one's fate;
3. A sense that the reversal in fortunes is unjust;
4. Anger at the reversal, often directed at those whose fortunes are improving relative to one's own.

We know that movements can arise in different places at the same time, where the same conditions exist. This highlights one of the advantages of a comparative study,

since we can see whether men undergoing the same status decline in different places are attracted to the same discourse.

A small qualitative sample like the one used here is of course limited to looking at the subjects' own understandings of their choice of radio, their experiences and actions, etc. The research thus leaves aside a serious verification of the structure of the phenomenon against the structures of mass movements. But the interviews and questionnaire take a small step toward verifying this approach, at least at the level of the social actor, and can help point the way for future research.

Movements involve mobilization, which can range from action with a view to political goals, to a change in the general tendencies of action; they develop along the lines of, and rely on, a shared identity; they arise from the shared dissatisfaction of the mobilized. Therefore we can, in this research, partially evaluate the method and theory of an approach to shock radio as a social movement based on interviews with the listeners. If we continue along these lines, we can identify the roots of what we are tentatively calling a social movement. And because the research engages with the audience, we can also evaluate if we are correct in hypothesizing that the roots of the movement are emotional rather than ideological or rational.

Ideally, research approaching shock radio as a social movement could take a look at the audience and discourse together in the moment of mobilization. In this respect, the research of Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) sets the standard, since it draws on both the audience responses *and* the radio discourse to point out the mobilized listeners' immediate copying of the hosts' opinions. Also, if we are interested in learning the connection between feelings of resentment and mobilization, their research involved

those listeners who were necessarily mobilized (at least to the extent that they had purchased bumper-stickers or merchandise identifying them with the cause of saving CHOI-FM). Being able to zero-in on this mobilized portion of the audience would constitute a strength for the research proposed here[39]. We could add, since we are trying to determine what role, if any, resentment plays in the audience's attraction to shock radio, that ideal research could include a control group in order to have a point of reference by which to compare the form and extent of resentment expressed among shock radio listeners; after all, without such a point of reference, we have no evidence that these listeners are any more resentful than the rest of the population.

The Comparison of Shock Radio Audiences

A key influence for the present study is the authoritative work by Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which on a vaster scale treats an object that poses methodological challenges similar to those in the present study. Namely, the author is confronted with a form of mass movement that appears to have no end but movement itself, and whose ideologies, mobilizations and discourses therefore fly in the face of common sense. Arendt's approach involved identifying the components of the phenomenon, tracing their historical development and convergence, and drawing comparisons. This permitted her to avoid certain pitfalls of relying on received ideas about power and interests to understand something that was radically new and defied expectations.

[39] However, the present research is not entirely disadvantaged in this respect. By including those respondents who listen without being mobilized and who may even listen with a critical ear, we can leave the door open to a more nuanced portrait of the audience.

Likewise, we have tried to break down shock radio to constituent parts by relying on the work of preceding authors on the subject. In doing so, the work of Marcoux and Tremblay (2005) has served as a guide, since it establishes clear trends distinguishing the audience under study, and draws parallels with larger social currents. Following Arendt's (1973) example in which she compared the ideologically distinct Stalinist and Nazi forms of totalitarianism, we have thus tried to lay out the elements of shock radio using two cases. A word should be said about the justification for using these cases and the purpose of such a comparison.

This study relies on a comparison of the discourse and audience of both Howard Stern and Jeff Fillion, and even of the more toned down Quebec City hosts that followed after. As with the ideal-type of totalitarianism that Arendt deals with or of populism as approached by Canovan, we can, in the absence of a formal definition, recognize shock radio above the particularities that distinguish one host or audience from another. The cases brought together in this research demonstrate differences between the discourses of each show, (and also that the programming offered by Stern or by the Quebec City hosts has varied over time). And differences were reflected at the level of audience profiles, in which one audience was more male, better paid and better educated. But we have found that important parallels exist in the discourse and audience of the two cases, which sets them closer to each other and apart from more mainstream radio. On this basis, we propose to treat the two audiences as participating in a common phenomenon so as to better grasp the phenomenon of shock radio itself in the particularity which we posit, sets it apart from other forms of talk radio.

Research Design

We have found that shock radio contains themes in its discourse that can be interpreted as expressions of resentment. One of the objects of the present research is to know whether and in what way resentment is corresponds to the audience's experience. A qualitative study was used to answer this question. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the audiences of both The Howard Stern Show and the Quebec City audiences of: *Maurais Live* and *Dupont le Midi* on CHOI and Jeff Fillion on CHOI or *Radio Pirate*. Also included were candidates who listen to *Bouchard en Parle* on 93.3 FM. These were chosen because of mobilizations associated with the hosts or content that has given the show a reputation as "radio poubelle" in the media.

The population under study is the fan base of these radio programs aged over 18 and listening for more than one year. The number of respondents in the end was 25

Respondents were contacted using social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and fan forums. I also used "classifieds" websites to promote the interview and respondents were contacted in person. Potential candidates were sent a brief invitation informing them that the purpose of the survey was to know a bit about themselves, their listening habits and why they listen. When possible I met with candidates for face-to-face interviews, but some interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype.

The interview package includes a questionnaire to measure listening habits and the types of mobilization, and to gather socioeconomic data. The interview itself inquires in greater detail into the attitudes and experiences of the audience along the lines of class, generation, and gender and group privilege presented above. These can be found in appendices A and B.

Let us note, before proceeding, that certain eligible candidates (those who said they listened to one of the radio stations or hosts we are interested in) did not agree to do the interview, and some of them were even reluctant to talk about their listening off the record. This may have impacted the results, considering that those who refuse the interview may be part of a core audience which we expect would be more or less distrustful of academics.

The questionnaire included questions pertaining to occupation, education, working hours, salary, union membership, etc. in order to establish the respondents' socioeconomic situation. Levels of political activity were also questioned, for example, voting, signing petitions, demonstrating, etc. And levels of involvement with the radio shows and the activities associated with them were also looked at: visiting websites, attending rallies or participating in contests and pranks for the shows. This way it was possible to identify who listens, their level of involvement with the show and their levels of political involvement.

The interview was designed to allow leeway for probing questions or precision where necessary. Listeners answered questions about the appeal of the show, (why they listen and what they like about the show, what parts of it they like or don't like) and spoke about the specific content that they found appealing (entertainment, news, opinions). To address the argument that trash radio could be seen as media manipulation, it was important that respondents had a chance to say what, if anything, they did not like about the shows, or would change about them. Another set of questions pertained to the working experiences of listeners. The interview looked at the degree of satisfaction the listeners found in their work, what it was like when they first started working, etc.

Respondents also gave their opinion on the fact that the shows they listen to are sometimes the object of complaints by those offended by the content. They were asked to speak about the fairness of the society they live in, whether some people are privileged over others and if so, who. What we wanted to learn was how the listeners see themselves in relation to other people and groups in society.

Chapter 7: Results

Part 1: Listener Opinions

In this section, the results of the interviews are presented as they relate to the hypothesis. Because this research asks if and in what way shock radio can be characterized as a social movement driven by resentment, we look at elements like listener mobilization, expressions of resentment, and views on politics. We also look at a common perception among listeners that the talk on shock radio is more honest or more frank than mainstream talk shows. Finally, we will look at how the listeners relate to the standard appeals of all talk shows, namely, entertainment, information and opinion, which will add some nuance to the results.

Mobilization

We have proposed to approach shock radio as a social movement with the particularity that, unlike those movements driven by political goals, this type of movement appears to have an emotional motor. Before turning to the audience's emotional involvement with the shows, we want to demonstrate how shock radio can be

viewed as a social movement. To do this, we will highlight the kinds of mobilization that listeners could be involved in.

Looking at the type of activities the listeners engaged in with regard to the shows, we can distinguish two types of listener mobilization corresponding to two levels of engagement. On one hand many of the listeners visit websites, buy products or talk to others about websites and products. On the other, a more restricted group might go further and attend rallies, events and so forth. It is one thing for a listener to check a website from the comfort of home; it is another to participate in petitions, letter writing, demonstrations, events, etc. To illustrate, everyone interviewed said they vote, but only seven of them, who were critical of shock radio or who consume other media sources, took an interest in or mobilized for political causes (through activities other than voting).

It is again important to point out that not all listeners will be attracted to these programs for the same reasons or be mobilized to the same degree. Some will be part of Marcoux and Tremblay's *groupe porteur* while others will simply tune in for information or entertainment without wanting to call in or participate in events and activities.

Resentment

Listeners were asked if they thought some groups were privileged in society or received special treatment. The results were mixed, with the responses of those interviewed ranging from strong resentment to no anger at all. Among the resentful, there were several targets, many of which were accounted for in the interview, but some of which were not. Here we want to point out two orders of observation: first, which groups are the targets of resentment; and second, what are the patterns of resentment. By

this latter, we mean the terms in which resentment is framed, the feelings of injustice respondents express, the ways they view the situation of their class and status group relative to others in society, etc.

To begin with we will consider those responses pertaining to gender and feminism. We expected to find that there would be resentment in both audiences around feminism, but also expected that we would not find misogyny. These expectations were confirmed.

So how did the men interviewed see the status relationship between the genders? When asked whether men are privileged in society, one respondent, Benoit answered that he thinks the opposite is true:

> Non, ben, par des programmes premièrement c'est le contraire. Si tu vas travailler chez Hydro-Québec, t'es une femme t'as plus de… ben tu vas être engagé. Si t'es un homme il faut que tu passes tes preuves pour être engagé. On a pas de quotas, ben, j'en connais aucune entreprise qui a des quotas pour engager des hommes, mais j'en connais plein qui en ont pour engager des femmes. Fait que je sais pas pourquoi les femmes seraient moins avantagé, là.

Christian also recognized that men and women had different standings in society, namely, in terms of the work done by each, being a construction worker he pointed out, he had to be able to carry very heavy loads. He felt that this difference in terms of occupation was normal given the different capacities of each. But he took issue with the present form of the representation of women's interests: "sans abolir les offices [pour la condition féminine] ça devrait changer. L'inégalité ce n'est plus ce qu'il était il y a trente ans." In the same way, Corey's anger was levelled at women's groups which he saw as advancing their own interests at the expense of society or ordinary people, (for example, he complained that the women on The View have an agenda, that women's groups are ruining the country, etc). Note that for these respondents, the problem is with programs

seen as advantaging women over and above gender equality. When asked if women and men should be treated equally, there was not a single respondent who said they should not, but there were several who felt that the interests of women and women's groups were represented to the point of preference.

Respondents did not express misogyny as such, which would have been conceivable, given the *Toutes Des Folles* phenomenon in Quebec and the Howard Stern Show's uneven treatment of the genders. Even Corey did not express dislike of women or make any statements about "how women are," in spite of his obvious anger at women's groups. Two of the younger respondents, Eddie and Dennis were in fact sympathetic of the plight of women in a man's world, and indicated that as white men, they could not know what discrimination and sexism are like. Even Danny, a CHOI and *Radio Pirate* listener, who had mobilized on numerous occasions, to march, call in, purchase products, etc., when asked if men are privileged, simply answered "légèrement." And most respondents had no spontaneous opinions to share on the topic. Thus in the interviews, gender was far from a single common theme that could be pinned down in the opinions of respondents. Where resentment was present, it did not take the form of hatred of women, or a desire to reverse gender equalization, but of frustration at the level of *group interests*. This is essential to retain.

The topic of welfare, on the other hand came up often in the interviews. It was often framed in terms of unfairness. Here again, Danny had a nuanced position relative to the others, stating, "je suis pas contre à ce qu'il ait un système de redistribution, mais je suis vraiment contre la façon qu'il est géré présentement." He described himself as being for American-style capitalism, where those who work make money, but when

asked if some get more than they deserve, he described a case where redistribution makes sense: “la femme qui a trois enfants, monoparentale, elle vit sous la seuil de la pauvreté parce-qu’il faut qu’elle s’occupe de ses trois enfants, je suis pour qu’on partage des richesses de nos impôts.” Similarly, Frank, who identified himself as coming from a poor family, situated himself politically at a slightly center-left position, was critical of Republican-style conservatism, was “for unions” and

> For welfare programs when it’s needed, in other words, I don’t want some lazy, dumb fuck just to be taking a monthly check and buying cigarettes and beer and not doing anything to improve himself or herself. But if they fall into this where all of a sudden they’ve lost their job, they’ve got two or three kids, they need some money, I say help them.

Corey felt that most people do try to succeed through work and without relying on government aid. He was also understanding of the fact that some people get “beat down in life” and “sometimes you’ve gotta do what you’ve gotta do to pay the bills,” although he also stated, “there’s probably some idiots out there who would be pleased to have a free ride and do nothing all day, but I’ve always tried to improve myself.”

Unlike those respondents who imagined scenarios where a person should be given social assistance, Arnaud, an André Arthur listener, was not particularly sympathetic with those on welfare, and felt that we should cut off those who are fit to work. Kevin believed in succeeding by one’s own virtues and felt that it was important to work hard and be honest; he was bothered to see that there were some people who lived in what he considered luxury on government assistance.

Benoit expressed his exasperation at having to support those on welfare through his taxes. He saw the free market as offering the solution, so that large corporations like WalMart could perform this same integrative function by offering low-level jobs with

flexible schedules to the "less valiant" who would otherwise end up on welfare: "tsé, il y en a qui sont sur le B.S.[40] pis ils vont arriver avec 600 piasses par mois pis on monte à quelqu'un qui dit 'ben moi, je suis pas trop vaillant, je veux travailler 3 jours semaine.' Mais au moins c'est pas nous autres qui paient." In the cases cited here, the respondents were annoyed at having to support, in a collective effort (namely, through taxes), those who did not work to support themselves. This applies also to Normand's criticism of the student protesters calling for free education in Quebec. He compared his own efforts with the collective claims to free education being made by protesters: "J'ai sacrifié 6 mois de ma vie pis je me suis endetté pour aller à l'école pour avoir un salaire. Mais les gens d'aujourd'hui voient pas ça de même. Eux autres ils voient ça comme un droit acquis." We will return to this in the conclusion.

For several respondents, frustration was associated with immigration or immigrants. In a short excerpt we hear Corey laying out an arrangement of minorities, Mexicans, illegal aliens; Whites and responsible people; and the government and irresponsible people who run world. The question asked was, are there some people who receive special treatment?:

> Well yeah, minorities. Not that I'm racist, but just, let's call a spade a spade. Cut out all the – if Mexicans want to have a million kids, make them pay for the kids. Why should we have to do it? We're letting illegal aliens come over here every day and have a million kids and the government pays for it so, after a while, I don't know, like white people or people that try to be responsible are few and far between so they get screwed over and the world's just run by irresponsible jack-offs.

This quote from Corey contains two elements we should point out. First, we have an arrangement of the government, the minority that takes advantage, and the responsible

[40] Social welfare.

who get screwed in the process, all argued from the point of view of the taxpayer. And second, we see that sense of injustice (responsible people get screwed) and powerlessness (the world is run by the irresponsible) that characterize resentment.

But there is likely more at work than mere frustration with deductions from one's paycheck. In the following excerpt, we see with Normand that the issue does not relate to material possessions or wealth; rather what upset him is a different kind of perceived privilege:

> Je les trouves [les immigrés] un 'ti peu trop privilégiés, là, dépendamment de lesquels, là, il y en a qu'ils sont ben correct, pis c'est sur que c'est pas toute la gang, c'est une partie d'eux autres qui font que ça défait toute l'image de toute eux autres. Ben c'est comme nous autres les québécois, on a notre 'tite gang de colons qui défait toute notre image à toute les autres qui sont corrects. C'est un peu la même affaire. Mais moi ce qui me fait chier c'est de voir le gouvernement trop plier à leurs affaires. Ils décident de venir icitte ils vont venir sous nos règles. Moi si je m'en vais dans son pays le gouvernement plieront pas pour moi la bas, il va falloir que je le fasses sous son règle, ben, qu'ils fassent la même affaire icitte. Notre gouvernement, ils ont pas d'colonne.

As with Corey, the argument is framed in the justifiable terms of "when in Rome, do as the Romans." And here again, the interviewee sees the government as bending over backwards for the demands of those immigrants who ruin the image of all the others. What stands out is the perception of *privileged* immigrants, in a situation where immigrants face clear disadvantages particularly on the labour market.

Kevin mentioned several elements of interest. He felt that there were people who were taking advantage of the system and living in luxury. Here again, the people the interviewee sees as being advantaged are those who are generally recognized as facing significant disadvantages, welfare recipients and immigrants. And again, his frustration

is that of the taxpayer, who pays into a system that gives privilege – to the point of luxury – to a certain group in society.

> Interviewer: Do you find in California people generally get what they deserve, or do you find some people are privileged or advantaged?
>
> Respondent: I think you gotta work for what you have. What gets me upset is when you see people that are not born here driving nice cars or dressing well or living good, it seems like they're taking advantage of the system. If that makes sense.
>
> I: And how do they take advantage of the system?
>
> R: Well you know they collect from the welfare system and they're not working, you know the money they take from our taxes pays for their luxury.
>
> I: What kind of people are living like that?
>
> R: I think pretty much every race. You know, Mexicans, Armenians, Chinese, I think everybody does it.
>
> I: And would you say its more people from outside the State? A while ago you said it's people not from here.
>
> R: Well usually just people who come from around the world, like Mexico. I don't know if they work the system, but they sure now how to get by.

Thus several respondents depicted the same type of dramatis personae composed of ordinary and responsible people (usually taxpayers, among whom they count themselves), of a group that takes advantage, and of a system or a government that allows these abuses. Hence we can identify anger toward the government and resentment toward other groups that are taking advantage. The different type of anger directed at the government versus the resentment aimed at these "privileged" groups, will be taken up again in the conclusion.

Respondents were asked to give their opinions first on what they thought unions contribute to society, then the same question vis-à-vis large corporations. Particularly in

the case of Quebec City's *radio poubelle*, unions have often been an object of attack (interestingly, given the non-unionized working class audience), while capitalism and big business are often viewed with reverence (again interesting, since popular outrage at times targets large corporations).

There was no outrage expressed toward big business among the Quebec City audience; some mentioned corporations in a negative context (lobbying, treatment of workers or the environment), but these were always in the context of a generally positive reaction. Younger respondents like Dennis and Eddie, were critical of big business, but not to the point of anger.

On the other hand, unions were often a target for both audiences. Normand found that the city workers union was costing taxpayers, demanding more and more, "tant qu'à moi il y aurait pas de syndicats. Ça sert à quoi un syndicat?" and, "les contribuables ne veulent plus payer, parce qu'on n'a plus les moyens de payer[41]." Like several others, he found that when they had started out, unions were important to protect workers, but had become unnecessary and burdensome. Dislike of unions often focused on reasons like Normand's (they cost their members and bring little or no benefit in return), and Magalie's complaint about the power and influence they wield ("avant c'était necessaire pour protéger les travailleurs, mais ils sont rendu un gouvernement dans le gouvernement.") Like Corey, Magalie distrusted big unions and big business by the same populist token of their hidden agendas and large size. Some of these respondents disliked unions while being enthusiastic about big business despite being equally disconnected from both. This may offer a clue to the appeal of individualist ideologies

[41] The public sector in Quebec is highly unionized. Additionally, at the time of this interview there were discussions underway between the Quebec City mayor's office and city workers. The costs for taxpayers are often prominent on the city's *radio poubelle* during such negotiations.

for listeners, starting with neoliberalism, especially if we consider the major difference between the union as an institution representing the interests of a social group, and corporations. More will be said on this topic in the conclusion.

Magalie sympathized with the frustrations coming from Sylvain Bouchard's morning show, *Bouchard en parle*, calling the actions of the students during a student strike at the universities and cégeps in the province "extrème," "dégradant" and "choquant.[42]" As a taxpayer, Christian did not feel it was fair to be paying for students and for the "mess" they had created. Normand included the students among those he felt were privileged in the province, "s'ils réussissent à avoir ça là que t'arrives sur le marché de travail ça va faire quoi? Ça va pas marcher, on serait obligé de tout payer pour tout le monde. [Les étudiants vont dire,] « Ah non, on payera pas pour eux autres, eux autres, on veut cet argent là. » C'est ça qui va arriver. C'est vers ça qu'on s'en va. Ça c'est un peu plus tannant[43]." We can see that the terms being used here to denounce the students are quite legitimate: unacceptable public behaviour, the costs of the protests for taxpayers, the impracticality of student claims and their incompatibility with the students' self-serving attitude. References to the legitimating terms of the public good were common when listeners criticized the claims being made by groups.

On the topic of the student protests, Normand went on to say:

> Comme moi dans ma job, la Marois vient de fermer le Plan Nord là, ben nous autres, dans ma domaine c'est 50 gars qui travaillent plus là bas. Y'en aurait 50 camions qui travaillent là-bas, là même plus que ça, c'est 100 gars, parce que c'est 2 gars par camion. C'est 100 gars qui ont plus de job à cause de ça. Les

[42] During the student protests and in the months that followed, Sylvain Bouchard, along with other radio hosts in the city, criticized, not only the students, but police and politicians for being too soft on the protesters.

[43] Normand looked at the students' claims for free education in comparison with his own professional training which he had paid for himself. "J'ai sacrifié 6 mois de ma vie pis je me suis endetté pour aller à l'école pour avoir un salaire. Mais les gens d'aujourd'hui voient pas ça de même. Eux autres ils voient ça comme un droit acquis. On à le droit à ça donnez nous le."

> étudiants ils veulent tout avoir gratuit c'est ben beau, mais c'est qui qui va payer pour la gratuité? C'est nous autres. Fait que, c'est qui qui va payer pour la gratuité? Moi je travail pas, je peux pas en payer.

This is one of the most telling excerpts from the interviews since the respondent is situating his class in comparison with another social group – a group which he feels is receiving special treatment from the government. To clarify, what is significant is the fact that Normand is laying out, in unequivocal terms, the relative status decline that characterizes resentment. Normand's grievance is with a group whose actions directly affect his status group.

The Baby Boomer generation did not figure into the groups that our respondents felt frustration or resentment towards. Some respondents said that that was a good generation (Corey), and one that was fortunate to have favourable conditions on the job market (Benoit), one that was less idealistic or had more realistic expectations (Danny). This mixed attitude toward generation is somewhat surprising, given the anger on that subject coming from Quebec City's hosts in the past. But as we noted above, that respondents are not resentful is to be expected, since generations likely do not relate to each other in the same status terms as other groups in society.

Politics

Perhaps the area where there was the greatest degree of common ground between the opinions of respondents was on the topic of politics. Some positions can be fairly qualified as cynicism, some did not take an interest, and even those who cared about political issues found that they were not well placed to make any difference on those matters. This may suggest an additional, broader appeal of these shock radio shows that

constitute, in the information they present and the often populist opinions they form, a departure from mainstream media.

Dennis for example cared about political *issues* like animal rights and injustice in the finance sector. However his view of politics in its structures was that "overall it's a flawed system. It's a generally corrupt system" and "there are some good people trying to make things happen, but there's overall major forces at play that prevent progress." And Eddie had the impression that he was not knowledgeable enough to be able to make any positive impact on political issues, and felt "like any political cause I'm for ultimately is shot down by something." Note that both respondents took the Howard Stern Show as entertainment, and distanced themselves from the hosts' political stances.

Some respondents from the Quebec City audience found that politicians were not serious enough about their work. For Martin this applied to all levels of governance and all provinces, and Danny said that having done maintenance work at a minister's office, he had seen that politicians are mere functionaries. Benoit found that politics was pretty well decided in advance, so that each region already had its political allegiances. In fact, Benoit and Danny saw CHOI as bringing a different but welcome vision to Quebec City's politics, by helping thwart separation or helping the rise of the ADQ[44]. It is worth noting that both respondents felt that the area of Quebec City stands apart from the rest of the province. For Danny, "je penses que si CHOI aurait pas apporté c't coté là, [plus de droite] j'ai l'impréssion Québec serait comme Montréal." And Benoit felt, "on est comme à part, on dirait. Je sais pas si c'est à cause de CHOI, là." For these listeners, *radio poubelle* represents an interruption of political business as usual: it shakes things up.

[44] The defunct Action Démocratique was a provincial center-right party with populist inclinations.

Among certain Generation X respondents, the feeling was that people take politics too seriously. Boris, Kevin and Adam all admitted that they were not particularly interested in political issues or activities, even if they mentioned political opinions or ideologies of one kind or another. But there was some disillusionment also. Boris tries to avoid political discussions and expressed his exasperation with politics and those who care too much about it:

> I'm not going to try to convince somebody to think a certain way. And I get pretty upset when I hear that people who are running for president or who in Congress are trying to talk for every single American just to further their own cause. Everyone is interested in their own cause. Do you think the guy in Washington is really thinking about gay marriage? Does it really boil his blood to the point he can't sleep? He comes home at the end of the day takes his tie off, like "what a tough day today I tried to convince a million people that this was bad." I just think that it's all an act and it's gotten completely out of control.

Even if it is not a source of resentment for him, Boris was upset with the introduction of these personal (in this case, religious) interests into politics, like when he says, "*Everyone is interested in their own cause*." In addition, there is some distrust in his comments, since he sees politics as having become an act, as out of control and is upset with politicians falsely claiming to speak for all Americans.

Similarly, Corey felt that politics had been taken over by group agendas, money and religion, at the expense of individuals. "I just think things have gotten too big. Politicians don't need to get involved in all these problems; just fix the economy, keep the country safe and have cheap gas, whatever. I mean abortion issues and all these other issues? I mean that's a personal issue they shouldn't be involved in that." Frank was also upset at the Christian conservative agenda which was bloating politics with the concerns of personal faith, for example, by attempting to place limits on Howard Stern's right to free speech.

What is interesting here is that behind these statements is the feeling that the everyman's interests are being squeezed out by bigger, more anonymous interests of a particular section of the population: the rich, religion, unions, women's groups, etc. These interests relate to the introduction of the personal (for example, the religious as opposed to individualist perspective on the abortion issue) into politics. The expansion of politics to absorb these identitary concerns is an important element and will be treated in the conclusion. For the moment, we should distinguish two aspects of the problem with political representation. First, there is the sense that other groups are gaining representation while the interests of ordinary people are left aside (relative status decline). And secondly, the respondents felt that there was little they could do about this or any other political problem for that matter since larger forces were always at work (powerlessness).

Community/Identity

From the interviews, it appears that Stern's show provides a sense of community. Hahn (1999) pointed to community as being an important characteristic of the content of the show. Listeners are invited to sit in on an intimate discussion among friends, Gary, Robin, Fred and Howard. Some respondents complained that high profile guests had become more prominent, or that early episodes were being rerun. For them, if there was an improvement to bring to the show, it would be to have more of the original hosts, the occasional caller or person off the street, and the Wack Packers[45].

[45] The Wack Pack refers to a cast of repeating guests including a drunk dwarf, a stutterer, a Klansman, etc. They are brought in as a comedic device.

Interestingly, the sense of community or complicity that was documented when Fillion was hosting *Le Monde Parallèle*, was not present even among those who listened to him when he was on terrestrial radio. And none of the respondents who listened to CHOI referred to themselves as an "*X*". It was as though the fans who had once mobilized for CHOI were now taking their distance from the station. It is worth noting that the station and its hosts have stopped referring to listeners as "les X" at every commercial break and several times per show as they did during the time of *Le monde parallèle de Jeff Fillion*, especially around the mobilization to save CHOI.

Also interesting is the nostalgia for days before celebrity interviews, and the respondents' preference for the "little guys" and Wack Packers. For these listeners, it was as though these celebrities were too successful and mainstream, and therefore too difficult to identify with. This is similar to the dislike that the CHOI listeners expressed toward those radio talk shows in which everyone agrees all the time. The identification with "ordinary people" relates to the feeling among the audience that these shows are not phoney, and that they express what ordinary people are thinking. Indeed, some respondents went so far as to say they felt they could identify with the host and his experience. This may not be surprising, but it is interesting it helps drive home the point that mainstream programs are fairly disconnected from the listeners' reality. Hence the recurring theme of the "ordinary person" should be taken as significant for our study in a world whose media and politics are perceived as being permeated with special interests and agendas.

Honesty/*Franchise*

It was common to hear respondents speak of the honesty or *franchise* (frankness) of the shows they listen to. Listeners who in one breath said they often disagree with opinions they heard on their programs might also say that they appreciated the honesty of the shows. This is not to say they contradicted themselves; it is possible to disagree while respecting candidness.

As with their reflections on the opinions they were hearing on their shows, listeners tended to compare their programs with other media, pointing out how their radio of preference stands apart from those other shows. For example, Dennis, who admits thinking that "sometimes Howard just doesn't know what he's talking about," appreciated his way of speaking – for him, it was easier for guests to open up to Howard, and easier for listeners to relate,

> because the language is more familiar. It's not […] the opposite of open. Conservative. I find there's an important part of the mainstream media that's conservative. And it just limits the level of relatability you can have with your guest. He's against all that whitewashed news and stuff, and I like that.

Corey also contrasted Stern's straight-talk to the women's television program, The View[46]

> When he was younger he was more of a shock jock. He would say stuff, but I think that now what makes him more shocking is that he'll say things that the regular person thinks and what they want to hear instead of these programs like say The View or something that'll say something that's politically correct and Howard is like, let's call a spade a spade, if you're being fucked you're being fucked. If the little people are being screwed, they're getting screwed, let's not give them any double talk and b.s. people. […] This T.V. show, The View, he'll just say they're all just fuckin' bullshitting. Like Whoopi Goldberg, I think she's an idiot and she kind of has an agenda and knows how to play the game.

[46] See above.

Thus as Corey and Dennis point out, there is something appealing about encountering radio that does not "whitewash" reality. On the flipside, Frank contrasted The Howard Stern show with the conservative "agenda." He found that Howard and his team,

> weren't afraid to talk about things that people were thinking or saying. Whereas most of the radio shows you listen to it's just a bunch of, you know, a bunch of bullshit, really, I think. I mean, it's humanly impossible to listen to Rush Limbaugh. Or these people who have these right-wing, far right conservative agendas, in other words, they know what's best for everyone. Well you know they don't always know what's best for everyone. I'll decide what's best for me. And that's why I always liked Howard, because you had that freedom.

Several listeners from the Quebec City stations had complaints about the way news is reported on other stations. There was a feeling that other media were hiding the truth by not addressing the ordinary people. Magalie, who used to listen to André Arthur on CHRC and now listens to Sylvain Bouchard's morning program, finds that 93.3 remains a serious station while still speaking plainly and clearly what she called the "langage de la rue." In contrast she found that, "la vérité est quelque chose qui est souvent déguisé sur les autres postes." When asked why people sometimes complain about what they hear on the radio, Normand replied, "parce-qu'eux autres ils ont pas peur de dire ce que les gens pensent tout bas, pis ils utilisent le langage que n'importe qui utilise. […] Ils parlent devant le micro comme s'ils étaient avec une gang de chums pis ils jasaient." This hearkens back to that characteristic of populism in democracies to "say out loud what people are thinking inside[47]" and to go against "elite" values (Canovan 1999, p.4).

[47] These are actually the words of French ultra-nationalist politician Jean-Marie Le Pen. The standards of discourse in the public sphere or the rules of "political correctness" are quite real and exercise real constraint; one need only think of the many politicians who have had to resign or apologize for comments they have made in violation of these standards. *Col Rouge* candidate Claude Roy (see above) is an excellent example.

For Benoit, CHOI stands out from the phoniness of rival shows like *Les Grandes Gueules* where "Le monde ils vont rire pour pas avoir l'air niaiseux parce qu'ils entendent ça à la radio. Mais t'sais à CHOI ils vont faire des jokes pis c'est plate, les autres riront pas; pis là pour l'encourager ils vont rire de lui pis c'est tout." Boris also saw this as a distinctive feature of Stern's program: "If he takes a phone call and the person is like [imitating a grating voice] 'Hi Howard' you know some people would go, 'Hi, how are you, do you have a question,' but he would be like, 'what is *wrong* with your voice?' He would cut to the chase."

Not only were the trash radio shows seen as more honest and less politically correct than other shows, listeners also found them more candid. In the case of Howard Stern this is hardly surprising given that, apart from being reluctant to discuss his salary, he has made aspects of his own life and the lives of others an open book. Being able to relate seems to be an important factor for these listeners. For example, after he complained about what he considered personal questions that arose in the presidential debates, I asked Corey what he thought about the personal questions that Howard raises on his show: "Howard's doing that for entertainment value. People want to know – we're little people. So it makes these entertainers like people the little people can identify with. […]Asking them about their personal lives brings them down to earth." It would be a mistake to take this contradiction as stupidity on Corey's part. As we will see below, the introduction of the personal (agendas) into politics is one thing, highly problematic in Corey's eyes, and the establishment of a base personal level at which the audience can relate to public personalities is another. Implicit in this, however, is a violation of privacy, which Corey does not seem to object to.

A very significant finding which is highlighted by the general trends in the reception of shock radio shows as being "more honest" is the view among many listeners that these shows do not have hidden agendas. For Corey, this was represented by shows like "The View" and its hosts; for Benoit and Danny, it was the mainstream media in the province that leans left; for Frank it was the right-leaning shows. If these programs were criticized for having particular agendas, it was felt that the shock radio shows these fans listened to spoke to the people.

To sum up, we see a strong general appeal in what the audience views as the honesty of these shock radio shows. It is significant that the audience views them as more honest than other news and commentary programs. Shock radio, they feel, speaks to listeners *as ordinary people* because it does not try to suit the agenda of a group or conform to standards of acceptable discourse. In that vein, respondents said they liked radio that they can relate to, radio that speaks the language of the people. These observations point to a populism of the self-styled ordinary person confronted with the standards of discourse in civil society and the agendas of groups. In this view, the listeners themselves are "ordinary people," who supposedly have no agenda, and whose needs are not considered particular. We will pick up this thread in the conclusion.

Controversial radio content

One of the objects of the present study was to understand what listeners are attracted to in radio that is widely considered offensive and shocking. What do they think of the content that has shocked civil society? Why do they think the public finds it excessive? And what do they think of the fact that others are repelled by the radio they

choose to listen to? Addressing these questions will reveal something about the appeal of shock radio on one hand, and also the listeners' perceptions of the norms that are being flaunted.

For a while, Marto Napoli and Jeff Fillion were among the most aggressive hosts in the Quebec cultural scene. Even now, Marto encourages his fans to send sarcastic posts to celebrities via his Twitter account, while Fillion recently suggested that police need to hit student protesters if they are to stop pickets from happening during the *Printemps Érable,* although he is far more cautious in framing his statements now than he has been in the past. Since leaving CHOI-FM both hosts have taken their distance from the style of radio they used to do which often involved personal attacks. Fillion has said that his radio style on satellite is now political and economic commentary, that he is older and wiser to the "rules of the game." CHOI *Radio X* is on much the same cautious track, as is 93.3 FM even if the shock style of radio still periodically results in complaints. Through his radio program, Howard Stern has also been actively trying to mend fences with the public personalities he has insulted repeatedly in the past. Still, Stern was not pilloried the way Fillion was on *Tout le monde en parle* and in the media generally[48]. In short, even some of the hosts themselves have, to a greater or lesser degree, taken their distance from the shock radio they were doing in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. We shall keep this in mind when considering the audience's own perceptions of this controversial radio.

On this topic then, it is interesting that, when asked if there should be limits to what can be said on air, several of the Quebec City listeners drew the line at personal

[48] This weekly television roundtable is broadcast across Quebec and is immensely popular. A number of prominent guests are received at a time: the hosts and audience roughly correspond to Fillion's "Clique du Plateau," or left-leaning metropolitans.

attacks. Danny did not hesitate to say that he thought it was a good thing that CHOI had given up on personal attacks since Fillion's departure. "Tsé, la Chiassaon, ils ont beau dire que, 'non, non, non,' mais ils ont pas été condamné pour rien, c'est vrai qu'il revenait toujours sur son cas pareil. Je veux dire les attaques personnelles […] t'as beau penser ce que tu veux, mais dis le une fois, mais après ça, t'sais, slaque la pédale." With respect to regulation, he went on to say, "je suis d'accord que la CRTC soit modérateur qui impose certains règles […] Dans ce cas là, [Chiasson] là, ç'a juste été bien, parce-que bon, ç'a pas été fermé mais ç'a mis un peu la pédale sur le brake." With the same metaphor, Normand took his distance from the personal attacks that went too far. Arnaud also felt that, "parfois c'est excessif. Il faut pas attaquer les gens. Comme Fillion, lui c'était trop bas." And Christian found that despite liking CHOI during the time of Arthur and Fillion, "c'était du salissage. Il y a moyen faire de la radio sans faire du salissage." All of these comments pertain to personal attacks. This is significant, since it was on precisely these grounds that CHOI and Fillion were finally stopped in their tracks by Sophie Chiasson. With this in mind we should highlight the fact that none of the listeners mentioned the more *impersonal* verbal attacks or calls to violence aimed at various groups (see above) or the shocking content.

The Stern listeners did not mention being bothered by personal attacks (even though they are common on Stern's show), but some were bothered by content they perceived as raunchy. Adam did not find that what he called, "the lowbrow stuff" added anything to the show: "I don't like some of the more toilet-humour-like stuff. Some of those pranks and things, like a lot of my friends at work love it but I end up changing the channel during those. So certain stuff I get uncomfortable with when it gets extreme."

Dennis on the other hand liked the prank calls, and liked the sense of humour, but found some of the sexual content to be too much: "I mean, it's entertaining, but it just gets really raunchy, really fast, and I would say those are my least favourite moments of the show." He went on to distinguish between the sexual content he enjoyed which might involve people who volunteer to participate, and the type of content that bothers him: "Sometimes he'll push it when he's interviewing people who are kind of square and they're like, easily frazzled and that's just like, kind of bullying."

To reiterate, with the exception of a few specific instances, the audiences had little to say about the content that shocks civil society. The exception being those respondents from the Quebec City audience who, like the hosts they listen to, had "learned their lesson." These respondents thus overlooked other significant aspects of shock radio which express anger and resentment or which violate the standards of civility. This is particularly significant considering that respondents tend to find that this type of radio is more honest and says what people think. We will return to this important point later.

Information

Looking at Howard Stern's radio program as it is, his guests are very often high-profile American celebrities or porn stars. This contrasts with the interviews most often heard on 93.3 FM or Radio X, at least since the departure of Jeff Fillion. Guests interviewed on the Quebec City stations tend more often to be experts, pundits, journalists, political figures, etc. It therefore makes sense that the interview respondents from Howard Stern's audience were more inclined to say that they see his show as entertainment first, while CHOI-FM listeners today more commonly responded that it is

the argumentation, information and opinions that keeps them tuning in. To specify, we expect that some will be attracted to these shows for the information, entertainment and ideas without feeling strongly about the expressive content, but we expect that for a portion of the listening audience information and entertainment will play only an instrumental role, as the vehicle or pretext for expression.

A number of listeners found the information provided on their shows was good. Arnaud, while critical of some of André Arthur's opinions and of his way of launching personal attacks, found that the host was intelligent, well-spoken, cultured and provided very good information. He liked that Arthur was not afraid to attack where others did not, so that he could get to the bottom of the news stories. Other *radio poubelle* listeners, and even those who claimed to be ideologically opposed to it, found that the depth of the interviews was refreshing compared with other radio programs. And Normand liked that the information on CHOI was relevant. He found that "c'est vraiment des sujets importants qu'ils traitent. Bon, les sujets de traffic, bon, oui ils en parlent un peu mais il y a ben des choses plus importantes que le traffic dans le chemin là."

Frank had no problems with the news on the Howard Stern Show, saying that he found it a great, current source: "I think a lot of it they do a really exceptional job presenting it after what really was said and what happened." However other news sources on radio or otherwise, "No, I can't listen to it, because it's all just a way to sell advertising. There's an ad every 5 minutes, there's 10 commercials. Who the fuck's gonna listen to that? I'm not." Corey also found the news and information "is good, and it's pretty much on the spot. Personally I rather get it from Howard Stern and get some valid points than to get it from Glenn Beck or someone who has an agenda."

Yet even Danny, who had participated in mobilizations, contests and other activities associated with his radio programs found that there was as much bias on CHOI as elsewhere, the news tended to repeat, and the quality is "*passable,*" and "meilleur ailleurs qu'à CHOI, t'sais en gros de même, parce-qu'ils ont pas de représentants sur le terrain." As far as information goes, Danny said he liked hearing the host's own experiences, for example, hearing about Fillion's experiences in the United States.

Several ideas should be retained with respect to the findings on shock radio's informing role. First, shock radio does have run-of-the-mill appeals other than the expression of resentment and so not surprisingly part of its audience is not mobilized, but simply tunes in for good interviews. Second, the fact that some take the information, biased as it is, as honest or better than on mainstream news sources, when it clearly distorts (see Giroux and Sauvageau 2009, above) indicates that some listeners are approaching from a warped perspective. Third, this more "honest" information can provide the pretext for introducing opinions, anecdotes and attacks.

Entertainment

Trash radio *as entertainment* is not entirely gone from Quebec City, but to listen to its *radio poubelle*, one notices that the content designed to entertain is more clearly separated and limited now than it once was, when hosts like Napoli and Fillion, and even Arthur were dominating the terrestrial airwaves, and when CHOI was the city's hard rock station. Arnaud, who appreciated André Arthur's intelligence and culture while remaining somewhat critical of certain opinions he heard on the show, found that the host was "amusant," "il nous fait rire, et c'est justement ça qui nous manquait" and as other

respondents would later echo, "on écoutait ça pour savoir ce qu'il allait dire." Normand also found that:

> Avec Marto ils ont repoussé les limites, parfois ils sont allés beaucoup trop loin, mais je veux dire, c'est ça qui manque. Les gars ils s'amusent pis tu vois qu'ils s'amusent dans leur job. C'est plus fun qu'un gars qui est pogné pis tu vois qu'il fait ça pour l'argent. Il aime pas nécessairement sa job, mais il l'fait parce que c'est payant. C'est pas le fun ça. Moi est ce que je vais faire une job parce que c'est payant? Non. Moi je vais me trouver une job que j'aime même si c'est pas payant.

We can understand this in light of another of Normand's comments, that the *côté débile* was missing from CHOI since Jeff Fillion and Marto Napoli had left. What is significant here is the appeal of radio that continuously pushes boundaries.

As with the information on these shows, for our listeners, entertainment has several roles. It is significant for our study that shock radio's brand of humour provides the material and pretext for boundary-pushing, even for attack. But we should also note that it appeals to a broader audience simply through its themes of sexuality, sarcasm, etc., which are typically suited to young men. Fans like Eddie, Boris and Dennis testify to the simple appeal of entertainment. Thus, as indicated by the normal appeal of information provided on shock radio, we want to emphasize that this type of radio is not purely expressive, but blends the normal appeals of entertainment also. In addition we should bear in mind that, especially on Stern's program, entertainment provides the host the pretext for insult, mockery and even harassment, and is the backdrop for challenging the lines that separate the public and private: the fact that these are not seen as problematic by Stern fans is significant in itself[49].

[49] Except among the CHOI listeners when it comes to personal attack. We will return to this curious and significant fact below.

Opinion

Despite the imbalance between Howard Stern's program and the programming on CHOI-FM and 93.3 FM in terms of the importance of entertainment and show-business content, there is significant common ground in the hosts' constant expression of opinions. We are interested in the ways listeners engage with the opinions of the hosts because such opinions are frequently the vehicle for anger. When respondents were asked what they thought of the opinions they heard on the air, the results were mixed.

There were those listeners who could take critical distance from the host's opinions or see the angry commentary as entertaining. But some took the host quite seriously, as did Corey: "I like Howard's opinions. Most of them are pretty on. He says what regular people want." Kevin was also surprisingly uncritical of Stern, saying, "I like his opinions. I think he's pretty much right on with everything he says." Another listener also said he takes Stern's opinions seriously; when asked what he thought about the fact that certain groups, for example, Latinos, have taken issue with Stern's comments, Frank replied, "it's only people who are trying to deny the truth that get into trouble. The truth is where everything is at. If you can't just speak the truth… So he said something about the Latinos, it's probably true. And they're all pissed off."

Among the Quebec City listeners it was generally recognized that hosts like André Arthur, Sylvain Bouchard or Jeff Fillion were dealing in commentary even when they were presenting information. For Benoit,

> C'est une autre opinion. T'sais, je veux dire on va écouter les nouvelles le soir et on va entendre pas mal tout le temps le même discours sur toute. Eux autres, c'est un autre point de vue. Fait que dans le fond ça nous permet de choisir ce qu'on,

> t'sais on va pouvoir se faire notre propre idée en ayant les deux cotés de la médaille, si on veut.

Talking about the opinions on CHOI-FM, Danny says, "Là, ils ont pas toujours raison. Ils sont un peu clown sur les bords, là. Mais en général je suis de cet avis-là, là." And when reflecting on the time when Jeff Fillion was hosting: "Il amenait beaucoup d'argumentation par exemple. T'sais, [Jeff] avait l'expérience d'avoir habité aux Etats-Unis puis des fois il amenait un autre côté de la médaille qui pouvait effectivement m'amener à changer d'avis. Mais j'ai pas toujours été d'accord non plus."

Some respondents enjoyed the combative style of opinionated hosts. Arnaud, a 47 year old taxi driver indicated that he was ambivalent about André Arthur's opinions, tuning in mostly for amusement, but did say that he liked Arthur's political criticism, echoing a phrase sometimes heard on the radio, "il faut que ca brasse." Normand said he liked that the hosts on CHOI are opinionated, and he expressed annoyance at those radio shows where hosts agree all the time. As Danny put it, "Qu'est-ce que j'aime c'est justement les différences d'opinion. Et la difference que ça pousse pas tout dans le même sens comme les émissions de TV et les émissions de radio." One got the sense from listening to the respondents that they liked that the opinions on these shows go against the grain, are treated aggressively or create controversy. These responses indicate that underlying this attraction to a more combative style of opinion radio among certain respondents is a sense of dissatisfaction with the way in which public discourse tends either to overlook what these men see as relevant issues, or to treat important issues with kid gloves. This suggestion gains traction when viewed in light of these same listeners' distrust of politics and dislike for other media.

François was quite critical of the host's bias on the program he listened to, *Maurais Live* on CHOI-FM, and strongly disagreed with much of what he heard. Yet he liked the fact that the program discusses the news in some depth and, like Danny and Benoit, he appreciated the fact that interviews and sound-bytes were longer. It was clear in the case of François as it was for certain other respondents, that the expression of resentment or anger played no significant role in his choice of listening.

A word should be said on the ideological appeals of shock radio. Adam specifically indicated that he found that The Howard Stern Show attacked Christians and conservatives more than other groups, and that his show had lately changed to be more left-leaning. He described himself as being "more centrist in my political views probably. So when [Stern] goes far left some of the time, then I'll probably like say alright, that's a bit extreme of a point." Thus we see that for this listener, ideology is not entirely absent from his reading of Stern's show. Indeed, Stern has taken positions on governors, the death penalty, abortion, media regulation, etc., which at times agree and at other times conflict with the American right-wing. Danny felt the same way about CHOI-FM. He saw Fillion as having raised arguments in support of a point of view alternative to the ambient leftist ideology in Quebec. When I asked him what he thought of the station since Fillion had left, he said "c'est devenu plus *soft*" and "je dirais que point de vue attaque personnelle c'est une bonne chose, mais point de vue idéologique je penses que c'est une mauvaise chose, parce que c'est un peu la seule radio qui nous apportait le côté un peu gauche/droite." Although these listeners were aware of a political dimension in shock radio, their only political activity was voting, even when prompted that petitions, writing to representatives, etc., was political.

To sum up, some respondents took their host's opinions quite seriously, and tended to be those same interviewees who expressed resentment. Some appeared disdainful of the style of commentary on "softer" talk shows, and saw something appealing in the combative and even sarcastic approach of these shows. We have also seen that the opinions advanced on these shows are compatible with the more common expression of ideologies or can be received with a critical ear. Although the results are mixed, they indicate that a portion of the respondents identify with shock radio in its style and content.

Excursus: Corey

What we have seen so far are snippets of each listener's position on a range of topics in order to highlight key points. This section will provide a sketch of one listener. In light of our literature review and the hypothesis drawn from it, no listener among those interviewed approximated the hypothesized responses across a range of measures as closely as Corey.

One reason why Corey provides a good case study is his high level of involvement. By his early 50s, Corey had been listening daily for twenty years, and said that he tried to listen to every show in its entirety each week. In fact, he even said that he arranged his schedule so that he worked nights, in order to be able to listen to Howard Stern. He called in to the show almost daily, had participated in activities like contests or pranks, events or rallies, had an internet show for Howard Stern fans and had visited websites and purchased products, while encouraging others to do the same. This high level of engagement with the show and its fans had what I have elsewhere called a

"community" dimension: he explained that for him, the show and its fans were like a big family.

Looking at Corey's socioeconomic status, we find further confirmation of our expectations. Student jobs, both blue and white collar, characterize the first part of his life, and although he eventually settled in to a career, he felt he was floating from one meaningless job to the next. He had some post-secondary education, but he was doing unskilled labour, and while he found some fulfillment in his hobby, he indicated that he could not make a living by it and therefore it remained a part-time activity. It was clear that Corey was unhappy with the way his working life had turned out, "I guess I've done a lot of things in life that haven't really worked out. But that was my choice, and… I don't know. I'm just kind of doing the best I can right now." His work he considered satisfactory to the extent that it provided decent pay and a flexible work schedule, but it was far from being his passion. At the time of the interview he had been working at that job for 8 years and was not covered by a union.

Before we proceed we should point out a peculiarity that was especially clear in Corey's responses. A number of his statements were paradoxical. For example, discussing those who receive government aid, he remarked, "there are some people who are just lazy, living off the government. Some of those people are just so beat down in life they're just doing what they can to get by." This is a specific example of a running theme throughout the interview. Time after time, Corey repeated that the little people are being screwed by a range of larger social forces, yet when asked if people generally get what they deserve, he said that they do, that society is forgiving and that one's own actions decide who gets more and who gets less. In these specific cases, there are several

observable themes. On one hand, throughout the interview he expresses anger at the lazy, but then expresses feelings of powerlessness or defeat, as if he realizes that he could at any moment he could find himself, as he put it, "on the soup lines." And while some of his statements reflect individual responsibility, others seem to reflect a kind of fatalism. We will try to sort out these apparent contradictions in the conclusion. The paradoxical or contradictory nature of Corey's argumentation echoes the findings of Marcoux and Tremblay (2005). We shall return to Corey's attitudes, experiences and their possible connection to the discourse of the Howard Stern Show below.

So what did Corey find appealing in the discourse of the shock radio show? We have already seen that the show represented a "family" for one who works alone and that it provided what he considered an honest reflection of the world – one that understood the "little people's" reality. Corey's anger at women's groups, labour unions or minority interest groups also fits with our expectations from the literature review. With respect to welfare recipients, as we saw above, he had mixed feelings, but one of those feelings was unmistakably anger. The same goes again for his attitude toward minorities, like illegal aliens who, in his opinion, were a drain on responsible people. But Corey's anger is not ideologically aligned to the political right in the way that the Tea Partiers', for example, would be. Instead, his upset extended to include the churches and big corporations that "took over" in the 90's.

If there was anything he did not like about the show, it was the turn toward bigger stars at the expense of the more fringe guests and Wack Packers. This is consistent with Corey's identification with the "little people" and his distrust of all things "big:" celebrity, business and groups or individuals of wealth and power. During our interview,

he rationalized away some of this concern: "if [Howard has] got a guest, he's biased toward them, but then you've got to understand, he has a responsibility to bring more listeners to Sirius radio."

Now one question of interest in the literature review is the aspect of shock which in part distinguishes Stern's show from merely angry talk radio. When asked about the sexual content on the show, Corey's response was measured: it is meant to entertain and it does. He had nothing else to say about the shock-character of the show except that "when [Stern] was younger, he was more of a shock jock, but now what makes him more shocking is that he'll say things that the regular person thinks and what they want to hear." This can be understood in connection with Corey's view that the political correctness that takes offense at Stern is a device for advancing group agendas at the expense of regular people.

Let us briefly summarize some important points that have come out of this section of the paper. First, we have been able to observe a general feeling among the listeners that the hosts are more honest, sincere, and independent of the agendas that pervade the larger society. The hosts speak the language of the ordinary people. What is significant here is that the "ordinary person" means the majority group having "no" particular needs (along the lines of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, working conditions, etc.), to speak of – in short, they are the former majority group. There is no special language of political correctness to be applied to them, they have no identity to affirm vis-à-vis other groups in society, and they are not seen as needing special representation for their needs to be heard by the state.

The Stern audience's preference for the Wack Packers over celebrities is interesting also. In a way, the Wack Pack represents the antithesis of the Hollywood star system. If Hollywood is handsome, well-spoken, politically correct, classy, etc., then the Wack Pack is ugly, vulgar, politically-incorrect and immature. Like the preference for Stern's tabloid-style news, our interviews indicate that the Wack Pack represents a rejection of mainstream pretence. For example, Boris and Corey both distrusted the disingenuous celebrities who just use Stern's show for promotion but feel no loyalty to it.

From the portrait of Corey, whose age puts him just between two generations, we find the convergence of the disadvantages anticipated in the hypothesis. He expressed the "proletarian despair" or powerlessness Levin (1987) speaks of; the cynicism commonly associated with Generation X; and resentment toward a large array of groups asserting their "agendas". At the same time his complaints, like those of many respondents maintained a moral focus, and were not indifferent to issues of merit, right and wrong, etc.

It will be useful to link the appeals of shock radio laid out above with the lives of our respondents. Thus we can gain a richer understanding of the phenomenon if we can learn the levels at which the audiences share common experiences or opinions. Thus we will consider the mobilization and working life of our respondents next.

Part 2: Respondents' Profiles

Overview of the Audience

Given the small sample used for this research, it is difficult to identify trends in the audience's characteristics. The results roughly conform to the profiles of the

audiences seen earlier: the sample from the Stern audience is slightly older, more male, better educated and earns a higher salary than the Quebec City audience. The tabulated results can be found in Appendix C. There were interesting commonalities at the level of work in particular. Before turning to these results, we should point out an interesting observation that comes out of the compilation of the listeners' questionnaires. Particularly with the CHOI-FM audience, we notice that the audience clearly divides between those listeners who have been tuning in for less than 5 years and those who can be said to be devoted fans. Those who have been listening for only a short time also tune in for fewer hours per week, are less mobilized, and were generally critical of what they heard on air, sometimes even listening with the purpose of seeing how the other half lives in a manner of speaking.

Work

According to the profile of the audience and the existing literature, understanding the emergence of shock radio in the cases of both the United States and Quebec involves grasping the changes that have affected the working class since the 1960s. Zechowski (2002) accounts for the appeal of Howard Stern's show among women, who might have been the most offended group in society, by pointing out that the women who listen are working class, and she finds that Stern's discourse reaches them at that level. Similarly the Quebec City audience finds it is neither wealthy, nor buttressed by unions or by government aid, but in the same working class. We are interested to know why members of this working class are drawn to shock radio. What aspects of shock radio appeal to

them and at what level? To begin answering this question, the interview looked at the audience's own feelings about their work.

Nearly all the respondents reported that they work, with the exception of a homemaker and an unemployed woman. The first observation in looking at the responses from our interviews is that most participants were in fact very satisfied with their working situation overall. Indeed, many seemed to be doing work they found fulfilling, and were happy to describe the aspects of the job they liked and provide a rundown of the average day. This was true as much for those who were self-employed as for those who were not.

Some were not satisfied with their working situation, like Corey (50), who after saying he had worked jobs in retail, warehouse and custodial work, said, "I don't know, I kind of wish I had stayed in school longer and maybe gotten a bachelor's degree and maybe became a teacher or something, 'cause it seems like I'm going from dead-end job to dead-end job right now." And on the topic of his current line of employment, "it's not very fulfilling, but I mean, it's a job. Probably a lot of people are in that position right now." Eddie felt the same way about his work, and also mentioned that for a time he had jumped "from crappy job to crappy job." The difference was that he had had mixed experiences, some of which he found fulfilling – even if he stated emphatically that he hates working. Both respondents listed off a fragmented work history.

Most respondents did not feel their work situation was precarious. The major exception was Corey, who felt that he was caught between his own bad decisions in his working life and the disadvantage of being a "little person" (or "ordinary person") in the face of a world where power, money and influence are increasingly privileged. Despite his anger at the size of unions and the power they wield, Corey felt that he could have

benefited by starting a career as a teacher and being covered by a union, instead of "going day-by-day, and in ten years, who knows? I might be on the soup lines, you know?" On the other hand, Danny, a machine parts salesman for a small business whose competition included aggressive salespeople from the big companies was very confident and relaxed. Unlike his competitors, he was not paid on commission and had long relationships of trust with his clients, and that, even though his company's products were more expensive. Compared with Corey, he also expressed far less discontent with the social groups and institutions we spoke about.

Frank had studied music since a young age, and had made a career of it as an independent musician. On one hand, he felt he was not threatened by competition, but he was annoyed at upstarts who keep full time jobs and moonlight as musicians. Part of his frustration had to do with the fact that he was still waiting for recognition, "I'd like someone to take an interest in my music and put it in a movie, and I'd like to make a million dollars, you know?" Boris felt a similar annoyance at the fact that big box stores now offered the same services as he, so that clients chose that cheaper, but less professional alternative one year, only to call his small company to redo the job the next. The self-employed respondents were aware of the presence of competitors or the situation of dependence of contract work, but it was not a factor that any of them expressed worries over.

None of the working respondents received government aid, only two belonged to a union (mandatory in their field) and most listeners from both audiences worked a schedule other than 35-40 daytime hours per week. Thus some listeners worked nights or

14 hour days or on a flexible schedule. Many of the workers entered the workforce during the 1980s and 1990s.

Respondents looked for different things in their work, from salary to fulfilment. Several of the Quebec City respondents, who were not self-employed, said they liked having freedom or autonomy in their work.

In these ways, there thus appears to be some convergence between the working life of the lower middle class respondents and the self-employed. It is interesting to note, however, that all five of the self-employed respondents belonged to the Howard Stern audience and of the rest only one was a professional – a doctor; (other workers included a long-haul truck driver, security guard, phone company employee, etc). Almost all the employed Quebec City respondents held lower middle class jobs (for example, two were carpenters, two were truck drivers). This divergence of the two bodies of respondents is also seen at the level of salary, with Stern's audience more likely to occupy higher income categories. Looking at the work their parents did, the Howard Stern audience tended to come from parents with a professional background (teachers, lawyers and doctors), while the Quebec City audience largely came from parents holding a mixed bag of blue collar jobs.

It comes out of a look at the working lives of the shock radio audiences that dissatisfaction with working life does not appear to decisively generate the kind of anger that shock radio channels. Nonetheless, there are patterns among the listeners interviewed along the lines of class or work. The working class of modestly educated and modestly salaried workers without union membership predominated, along with the self-employed. Among these listeners, resentment was more commonly expressed by the

lower middle class workers. The two groups come from a position that can at times be precarious, and certainly obliges the worker to rely on his or her own resources to succeed. Importantly, neither group is traditionally unionized. Both groups find themselves between the large public and corporate sectors on one hand, and below them, the poor or unemployed.

Conclusion

Here we will take stock of the results and what they mean for this approach to shock radio in terms of theory and method. First, we will look at the findings as they pertain to the hypothesis of resentment, moving on from there to discuss alternative explanations of listeners' motives. In addition, the conclusion will weigh the hypothesis of a social movement against these findings. We will close with a discussion of methodology and lessons for future research.

Aspects of Resentment

This section will point to those findings that pertain to the sociological potential of an approach to shock radio that sees the phenomenon as a manifestation of resentment. This section is broken up into subsections based on elements of resentment: status decline, powerlessness and feelings of injustice.

At this point, we are looking for indications from the interviews as to the motivations of listeners in order to know whether it is reasonable to suppose that shock radio expresses the resentment of its listeners. Now several of the statements we are

encountering have traction with standard political concerns for the general welfare of society (for example, as a genuine concern that the public is overly taxed) or with neoliberal ideology. Also, many respondents did not express resentment, but were in fact critical of the content of shock radio. The results presented here focus on those responses that can help us weigh the evidence in terms of the hypothesis. That is to say, if we are dealing with a movement, then what interests us the most is the motivation of the core of mobilized listeners. Thus on one hand the results should be seen as suggestive of certain respondents' attraction to shock radio and on the other, the results in no way presume to speak for the whole audience.

Status Decline

What is significant for our study is the fact that for some listeners, various political groups were the object of their criticism and irritation. By no means did these respondents constitute the majority of those interviewed, but they did represent an important portion. The government and state programs were often criticized in the same breath for participating in the privileging of certain groups.

Those respondents who did complain about groups criticized students, unions, women's groups, welfare recipients, immigrants, illegal aliens, artists and others, as well as the government programs that benefit them, the media that represent them and the politicians that respond to their claims. Out of the 25 respondents, about 8 of them were critical of some of these groups or the programs that help them. Now these criticisms are not necessarily based in status decline; it is possible that they derive from something like neoliberal ideology. But as mentioned above, we wish to present together the various

elements which, taken together, indicate that approaching shock radio as an expression of resentment is promising. We will later look at findings that challenge this approach.

Neoliberalism as an ideology tends to focus on the creation of wealth and the functioning of the economy, but with the exception of Danny, few of our respondents were actually centering their responses on these concerns. Respondents thus complained that they had to pay taxes or union dues for these groups or programs, and not that the programs were bad for the economy. We found that these respondents were comparing their own efforts as individuals or as part of the collective of "ordinary people," with group programs and group exploitation of the system. Thus, front and center in their statements is not an ideological concern with the operations of the capitalist system (again, with the exception of Danny) but the relationship of groups, the government and the ordinary people in which respondents count themselves.

Also, the complaints suggest something other than strict libertarianism, which, when it is honest, is as critical of corporate control of the individual as it is of government or institutional control. It was unions, government, and political groups that seemed to bother the respondents, while corporate influence received passing mention here and there (the exception being Dennis, who was among the more politically concerned). Furthermore, none of the respondents were angry with corporations, and several mentioned them in a positive light. Corporations, it should be pointed out, do not represent group interests in the same way institutions like unions do, (even if they do organize to influence policy and conduct themselves according to the common interests of their administrators and shareholders). For instance, corporate influence has less to do

with universalism, identity, privilege, and so forth, even if we can imagine a lower middle class critique of corporate influence.

As expected we did not find misogyny or racism among the audiences. It was not against equal rights that certain respondents argued, but in the name of equal treatment and against privilege. As we saw in the *Resentment* section, arguments were framed more in terms of the costs for taxpayers (eg: Benoit), pragmatism (eg: Normand) or of morality (eg: Magalie), and so on. This corresponds to the suggestion made above that shock radio discourse does not appear to be racist, sexist, etc. In other words the hosts are not speaking of essential differences, but like other contemporary populisms (for example, the Tea Party or the *Front National* tend to speak of foreigners, illegal immigrants, global competition, etc., but not of races) they remain roughly within the boundaries of acceptable critique[50]. We are not going to insist on this point, but we include it here because it adds nuance while also suggesting parallels with the forms of populism that manifest themselves in the language of "special rights" (see Dudas 2005).

In the responses there were two levels of criticism of group interests. On one hand, some respondents were angry at groups that appear to be pushing their interests into the political domain at the expense of the general public. This is evident in the complaints about tax money going to public sector workers and civil servants (for example, Danny), to free education (Normand), to artists (Benoit), and so on. Such criticisms make implicit reference to democratic universalism and are therefore open to interpretation as something other than resentment. But other findings suggest that some of these complaints framed in terms of legitimacy (taxation, equality, etc.), may in fact

[50] Even if a guest like Dr. Mailloux on CHOI or Klansman and Wack Packer Daniel Carver on the Howard Stern Show still speak in racialized terms, they appear on the shows as curiosities and not as expressing the prejudice of the hosts.

relate to resentment. For example, elsewhere in the interviews, certain respondents express frustration at a direct challenge to their own status. This is what we see, for example, with Benoit, when he complains that men are discriminated against, ("j'en connais aucune entreprise qui a des quotas pour engager des hommes, mais j'en connais plein qui en ont pour engager des femmes,") or with Normand, who saw a clash of interests between the claims of student protesters and people in his line of work.

Powerlessness

As we saw in the *Results* section, the feeling of powerlessness was widespread among the listeners interviewed. Levin's (1987) research into 1980's call-in shows found that the loss of power and public life were at the heart of talk radio from its inception, and subsequent work on talk radio has added weight to his findings. But it is unlikely that powerlessness alone is sufficient to give rise to the kind of radio we are looking at here. Indeed, there were several respondents who said they felt that politics and public life were out of their grasp, were too big or too anonymous to impact, but not all listeners reflected the anger of the shock radio hosts. We have argued, following authors like Scheler (1961), that powerlessness can be a component of resentment (a person who can change her situation is less inclined to be resentful). So how are we to understand the audience's political alienation?

"Politics has gotten too big" was Corey's complaint, but it could have come from a number of other respondents as well. He was upset to see that so many particular interests (or agendas) had swollen the political domain with money and influence so that the little people have no power. In the face of this, respondents like Boris were simply

resigned to looking after themselves and their families. These feelings of political paralysis need not be a source of outrage though, as respondents like Dennis and Eddie were not particularly upset despite complaining about the neglect of causes important to them (animal rights and the environment respectively). But for respondents who had other grievances that can be seen as directly affecting them at the level of status – as workers, men, non-immigrants, etc. – powerlessness was a source of real frustration. As Corey put it, "I can go to Capitol Hill and raise hell, but basically I'm not going to get anywhere because I don't carry any weight to do anything."

We find that respondents like Dennis and Eddie in the Stern audience or François in the Quebec City audience demonstrated an interest in politics and political issues, ostensibly, as citizens. For example, issues like animal rights, the environment, or the sovereignty of Quebec concerned some listeners as political issues without, however, being connected up with shifting status hierarchies and feelings of resentment.

To illustrate, Eddie expressed concern for the environment, but described a kind of political paralysis in the counterargument that certain measures to protect the environment would mean fewer jobs. He felt powerlessness without anger, simply as resignation. His own interests were not caught up in the issue, and this may make the difference. Because where anger *was* connected with the conflicting interests and statuses of groups, we saw frustrated power manifest itself not as resignation, but as anger. Thus Normand, who saw a special interest group (student protesters) as negatively impacting truck drivers like himself who could have had jobs with the Plan Nord ("c'est [100 camionneurs] qui travaillent plus là bas,") felt powerless for the very different reason that he belonged to no kind of group that had leverage with the government. Thus

we have a status decline that Normand felt he and his status group were powerless to stop. He was also angry with the Marois government for closing down the Plan Nord.

When respondents like Corey or Frank deplored the influence of faith groups or women's groups, when Magalie and others complained about the power of unions or the influence of students, or when Normand points to the government's bending before immigrant demands, one gets a sense that these listeners feel that power is turning away from them as ordinary people who do not identify with those demands. These complaints from a segment of the listeners, that groups with specific demands are making their claims at the political level, and that workers (as opposed to students or welfare recipients), ordinary people (as opposed to groups based in particular political statuses), the little guys (as opposed to big money, influence or power), or *les Québécois* (as opposed to immigrants) are neglected by those in power, tend to support to an approach that sees shock radio as a form of populism.

Merit and Feelings of Injustice

Generally listeners believed in merit and individual hard work; the society they live in they saw as a more or less fair playing field in which those who succeed do so on their own merits. At the same time, there were several respondents – sometimes the same ones – who felt that certain groups are privileged, usually through government programs or "the system." Thus the interventions of governments, citizens groups or unions in the course of things were seen as the source of unfair advantages. We see this feeling of injustice in the various complaints about groups who have gained an advantage (Benoit on the quotas for hiring women), who "work the system" in Kevin's words, or who serve

their own interests but challenge the interests of others (Normand's description of the students).

Alternative Explanations

Looking at the results, we have found that the criticisms of respondents did not tend to rely on the typical ideological lines of neoliberalism and libertarianism which usually stem from concerns with the health of the economy and with individual freedom from collective impositions. But there were aspects of ideology present, and a listener like Danny could see his radio station as representing an alternative ideology to what he saw as the prevailing leftist paradigm in Quebec. During the interview, he weighed his responses carefully in terms of his rightist perspective and his own good sense. His responses did not seem to have an irrational, emotional foundation. For example, he was not against programs to help minorities on the job market, but was strongly against imposing hiring quotas. It is important then to keep in mind that those responses in which interviewees were critical of the state or of various groups could be interpreted as either deriving from critical ideologies or from a universalist perspective. At this level, the interpretation of shock radio as expressing resentment is open to challenge.

We should also mention that the interviews revealed that for many listeners, shock radio was simply a source of different news, commentary and amusement. Many of these listeners were critical of what they were hearing. The shocking and sensational style of entertainment on these shows was, for listeners like Eddie and Dennis, simply daring comedy. And for several of the listeners who were critical of CHOI, the show at least provided good alternative information.

As a social movement

This study proposed to approach shock radio as a movement not oriented or moved by the defence of interests or pursuit of goals, but whose form of discourse, action and appeal relate to difficulties with coming to terms with a new order of privilege. We wanted to know if the shows draw their appeal, for a portion of the listening population, from their expression of resentment. This would mean that the appeal of shock radio does not derive simply from novelty or voyeurism or morbid fascination which affects men and women alike (for example most of the readers of the sensationalist *National Inquirer* are women). Nor would it be a piece of American culture and capitalism applied to radio and exported. Instead, if shock radio is a movement, then its development belongs to the societies in which it succeeds. We have tried in the first portion of this thesis to briefly trace the essentials of the phenomenon to their possible historical roots. This has meant, first, uncovering the points where themes in shock radio discourse align with characteristics of the audience; second, connecting those points of contact with larger phenomena in society (decline of the working class, renegotiation of gender identities, emergence of group politics, etc).; and third, at the level of research, looking at the audience's feelings and thoughts with respect to these various aspects of social change.

Now in the research, we found support for a social movement approach at several levels. First, a social movement implies mobilization. We found a portion of mobilized listeners who would participate in events related to their shows (Corey was perhaps the most heavily involved) or be influenced by the host's opinions on political issues, like

Danny for example. These listeners were not the majority of those interviewed, and constitute a mobilized core (corresponding to Marcoux and Tremblay's (2005) "*groupe porteur*"). We also found listeners who called in and participated in contests or purchased products and visited websites while not participating in events and activities. Interestingly, those who did not participate in activities related to these shows tended to be more involved as citizens, and vice versa. The point is that these programs have managed to mobilize those who are not particularly mobilized by political causes.

A second feature of social movements is their development along the lines of identity. Movements arise in reaction to problems shared by people with a common experience in society, and often involve feelings of injustice and resentment (in the sense that one's position in a stratified society is the source of disadvantages perceived as unfair). In the profiles of the interviewees, we saw that they generally belong to the same gender and generation, and tend to be either working class or self-employed. In the interviews we found that those listeners who complained about the claims of groups in society consistently identified themselves as taxpayers, workers, implicitly or explicitly as people "born here" and as ordinary people. Here we see an example of Canovan's (1999) concept of populism, in which there is an appeal to the authority of the people against the elites (irresponsible people who run the world, the government, media, unions, etc). An approach that recognizes the importance of identity can account for the audience's sense that shock radio shows are more honest because they say what ordinary people think, and can shed light on the appeal of radio that focuses on those that polite society refuses to acknowledge and who shock its sensibilities. This could help account for the popularity of the Wack Pack among certain listeners.

Finally, we pointed out in the Methodology section that movements arise in reaction to dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction, we have already proposed, takes the form of resentment. We have also proposed that the status decline at the heart of this dissatisfaction converges with particular force on a certain generation and class, and the situation is made all the more difficult to accept, since there is little that can be done politically. Certain listeners were dissatisfied with politics and government programs helping various groups. They also criticized other media that always present the same discourse or that all move in the same direction, and that seem only to agree amicably. And there was, as we have mentioned, much criticism of the various groups in society making political claims or accessing some kind of unfair benefits at the expense of the public.

The public whom certain listeners see as losing out are "white people or people who try to be responsible," "les Québécois," "les contribuables," "workers," or "ordinary people." Radio hosts who, to paraphrase certain respondents, say what people are thinking, who don't bullshit people, who shake things up and who tell it like it is, are seen as more representative these ordinary people than the mainstream media. Listeners like Corey, Magalie or Frank, to name only a few, saw these shows as honest and as standing out from the mainstream by virtue of having no agenda. This was one of the interesting findings of the research, since, from the perspective of a union leader for example, CHOI-FM must appear to have a very obvious agenda – to discredit unions! And for the women of The View (and several other women's talk shows), Stern must seem to be carrying out a vendetta against them. The fact that many of the same fans who criticize the perceived privilege of various (often historically disadvantaged) groups in society, see

these shows as having no agenda, when in fact they are quite biased and aggressive, is significant.

Before moving on to more methodological considerations, let us sum up. The findings of this study are mixed, with certain listeners clearly taking a critical stance to the radio they listen to. However, an important portion of the audience did feel that the radio they listen to is more honest and reflects opinions that they agree with. Some of these listeners expressed resentment and anger. It is also possible to distinguish populist currents in the audience that *suggest* that important elements of a movement are present.

Methodological Considerations

This research project has several limitations that should be noted. For instance, the fieldwork relied on a small sample of listeners without, however, any mechanism to ensure that the sample approximately represented the audience or that portion of the audience which mobilizes. This can be difficult when no events are happening, but one possibility is to attend events and thus gather contact information from the listeners participating in activities promoted by the shows (such as Howard Stern Show block parties, or events like *J'ai ma pelle bleue*).

For an exploration of the attitudes, motivations and attractions behind shock radio, a qualitative study has important strengths. For example, we have been able to provide a sketch of a listener like Corey, in whom we see a convergence of the various disadvantages associated with class, gender, generation, etc., with the expression of resentment we expected to see. Yet a quantitative study looking at the statistical composition of shock radio audiences could provide a more solid empirical base. For

one, it would make it possible to see how variables interact and could help explain whether the same respondents who express resentment are generally the ones who mobilize, or why some listeners are resentful or mobilized, and others are not. For a comparison, it would permit a replicable controlled comparison on measures of the researcher's own choosing (for example, there is no ratings data on the union membership rates for Stern's audience, and the categories of the Arbitron ratings data for Stern's audience on measures like occupation or income are different from those used by BBM for CHOI-FM and 93,3). Also, a quantitative study would help verify the pertinence of approaching shock radio as a movement by, for example, providing a portrait of the proportion of the audience that participates in mobilizations. It would also make it possible to draw parallels between social currents and the tendencies within the audience.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire for Howard Stern Listeners

Age:

How long have you been listening to the show? ___

Do you listen with others or by yourself?
Self
Others
Both

How many hours do you listen to the show in a week?
Less than 1 – 3
4 – 6
7 or more

What other radio programs do you listen to?
_____
_____
_____

Are you employed?
Yes
No (skip next question)

Where are you employed (company name/self-employed/civil service)
_____

What is the name of your position/what is your occupation?
_____

Which best describes your work schedule?

Shift work

On call
Part time
Rotating
9am-5pm, Full time
Other (Please specify) _____

Do you think you will be working at the same job in 10 years?
Change jobs
Stay at the same job

From your current perspective, would you like to be doing the same work in 10 years?
Yes
No
Don't know

What is the most important thing you look for in an occupation?
_____

How well does your current occupation satisfy these needs?
Very well
Well
Poorly
Very poorly

Which income bracket corresponds to you:
0-10 000
more than 10 000 – 30 000
more than 30 000 – 50 000
More than 50 000

What kind of work did your parents do?
_____

What is the highest level of education you have attained?
High school not completed
High school diploma
Trade school
Undergraduate degree
Graduate degree

Do you belong to a union?

Yes
No (skip next question)

Do you participate in its activities (meetings, events, distributing flyers, etc).
Yes
No

In general, do you think that what unions contribute to society overall is:
Very positive
Somewhat positive
Somewhat negative
Very Negative

Do you take part in any political activities? For example, voting, signing petitions, writing to representatives, etc.
No
Yes (please list:)

_____
_____
_____

In your opinion, would you say the political system serves you:
Well
Somewhat Well
Somewhat Poorly
Poorly

How do you view the quality of your political representatives or politicians in general?
Very favourably
Favourably
Unfavourably
Very unfavourably

Have you ever called in to the Howard Stern Show (even if your call did not get aired?)
Yes
No

Have you ever participated in contests, pranks, or other activities for the Show?

Yes
No

Have you ever participated in group events or rallies organized by or for the show?
Yes
No

Have you ever visited suggested websites, purchased products promoted on the show or been involved in similar promotions?
Yes
No

Have you ever encouraged others to participate in these events or products?
Yes
No

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Schedule: Howard Stern Listeners

Hello, thank you for agreeing to meet with me today.

I will start recording now if that is alright with you.

*Begin recording. Record the project title, researcher's name, date, time and respondent name and interview number.

As I mentioned in the invitation, I am conducting interviews and gathering opinions of listeners of the Howard Stern Show on different topics. The interview should take about 40 minutes but feel free to take as much time as you need. Answer the questions honestly and feel free to ask for clarification at any point if necessary.

You may discontinue your involvement at any point during the interview. You can review your answers at the end. Do you have any questions?

Before we begin, I will read you a brief consent statement and I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree.

*Read consent form, statement of agreement, signature.

Listening
The Show and You
Why did you start listening? Have you been listening consistently since then?

Do you ever pay attention to the opinions you hear on the show? Do you find you generally agree or disagree with the opinions you hear on the show?
[if yes: do you sometimes disagree with what you hear?]
[if yes: what are some examples of things you disagree with? Why?]

In your opinion, what is the main difference between The Howard Stern Show and other programs on radio and television?

Content of the Show
Some people and groups such as women's or minority groups have expressed concern about the content of the show, saying it is offensive and shocking. What do you think about this? Why do you think they are offended? Do you believe they have reason to be? Why/Why not?

What do you like about Howard Stern's radio program? What are your favourite parts of the show? Can you describe them for me? What are your least favourite parts and why?

Is there anything you would change about the show? [*If yes*: Like what? How would you change it? Why?]

How would you describe Howard Stern's radio show to someone who has never heard it before? Would you say it is mainstream? Why/Why not?

What do you think of the quality of the information you hear on the show? To what extent is the show entertainment and to what extent is it reasonable opinion?

[For female respondents: what do you think of the way women are treated on the show?]

Occupation

[The following, if applicable]

Briefly describe your early experiences with finding a job and working.

Briefly describe an average day of work at your current employment [if work does not involve "average days" try, *Describe some of the things you do at work*]

From your current perspective, would you like to continue in the same occupation in 10 years or so, or would you prefer to be doing something else? [why/why not] Would you say your occupation is fulfilling? [If clarification needed: would you say it is stimulating? Is it interesting? Is it enjoyable? Does it draw on your skills?]

Is there a high level of competition in your field? Do you feel that your job is secure enough that you can count on being employed? What makes you say that? [Probes: Why? Why do you think the level of competition is what it is in your field? Has it changed?]

Political activity

Are there any political causes that are important to you? [If so: which ones?] Why? How did you become involved in them? Do you try to keep up to date on these topics? How?

Do you find that what you as an individual think, say and do has an impact on politics? Do you find that politicians represent your interests?

[If they are not involved in political processes: *You said earlier that you do not take part in political processes. What makes you say you are not active*? Probe: *in other words, what is political participation for you*? *How important are these political activities?*]

Views on society

Another group that is politically active is unions. What do you think of unions in general? [probe: What is their place in society? What should it be?] Can you elaborate? Do you think unions have too much power? Explain.

What do you think of large corporations? What is there place in society? Should there be a limit on how much power they can have? Should there be a limit on how much wealth they can have?

Some groups, like artists or academics benefit from government initiatives and financial grants. What do you think of these programs? Should they be encouraged? Why or why not? Are there some programs you would support? Which ones? Why?

Other government or workplace programs try to help, let's say, women, minorities or the disabled in the labour market, and to improve their condition that way. What do you think of these programs? Are they fair? Do they benefit society? Do they benefit the recipients? Please elaborate.

Do you benefit from any of these programs?

[If they find these programs to be flawed: *why do you think they exist*?]

Do you think we live in a society where people get what they deserve? In your opinion, what makes a person deserve more than another? In your experience is that how things work out in practice? How does our society measure merit? Elaborate. Are some people favoured? If so, who? How are they favoured? [*if the system is unfair*: What would make it more fair?] Should people who earn higher salaries be taxed more to redistribute the wealth? Why/why not?

How would you say success is measured in our society? How do you measure success? How successful would you say you are by your own standards? By the standards of society?

What does it take to be successful by that standard?

What kinds of things, if anything, get in the way of success in your experience?

Would you say everyone has about an equal chance to succeed?

General indicators

How would you describe people of your generation? How would you describe the older generations like the Baby Boomers? Do you think both generations had similar opportunities? What is the relationship of your generation to previous generations?

Do you think men are privileged in our society? Why/why not? [If the respondent is a man: Do you find that you as a man are privileged over women?]

Political views
Some say Howard Stern's show is degrading to women. In your opinion, is the show sexist? Why/why not?

What is sexism in your opinion?

Do you think men and women should be equal, for example, have equal rights, salaries, etc.? In your opinion is there equality between men and women? [*if not*: why not?] Are there some feminist claims you disagree with? Please elaborate. What do you think about quotas ensuring a certain number of women are hired at a workplace? Please elaborate.

What is political correctness in your opinion? Why do you think it exists? What role does it play in mainstream society? Is Howard Stern's program politically correct? Please explain. What do you think about that? [If clarification needed: Is the show too politically correct? Does it try too hard to fit the demands of mainstream culture? Do you think the show has become more politically correct since you started listening? How? Please elaborate.]

Some of the events on the show involve sexual content and the interviews often discuss intimate or sexual details that most other radio and television shows don't touch on in the same way. What do you think of this content? Does it appeal to you? Why?

Wrap up
Is there anything I didn't mention that you would like to discuss? Again, thank you for taking a moment for this interview for my Master's at the Sociology Department at Concordia University. Please feel free to contact me at the number or email address I have provided you if you have any concerns or questions, and I will be glad to respond.

Appendix C: Questionnaire Results

The questionnaires were designed for two purposes: first, to situate listeners within the audience, that is, according to how long they have listened, their listening habits and their level of participation in activities related to the radio programs. And second, they sketch an elementary profile of the listeners in socioeconomic terms, that is, according to work, education, etc. With the small sample provided by a qualitative study, these results are intended to help bring the interview results into focus.

Howard Stern Show Audience											
Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	Schedule	Income	Union°	Web *	Phoned	Contests pranks events rallies	Years Listening	Hours/ week¤
M	34	College	Graphic Design (Self employed)	>60 hours/ week	30-50k	No	Y	Y	N	6	12
M	42	BA	Home theatre design and installation (SE)	Flexible	>50k	No	Y	Y	Y	27	>7
M	50	Some college	Security guard	Rotating	10-30k	No	Y	Y	Y	19	12
M	27	BA	Graphic designer (SE)	Variable	10-30k	No	Y	N	N	12	2
M	33	Some graduate	Legal secretary	Full-time (FT)	0-10k	No	Y	N	N	2	1
M	42	Professional Degree	Musician (SE)	4 hours/ night	10-30k	No	Y	Y	N	20	7
M	44	BA	Phone company technician	FT	>50k	No	Y	N	N	25	10
M	35	High school	Painter (SE)	Variable	30-50k	No	Y	Y	N	20	35
M	45	Trade school	Construction worker	FT	>50k	No	Y	N	N	17	5
M	51	Graduate	Physician	FT	>50k	No	Y	N	N	30	10
M	39	Tech training	Interstate truck driver	Nights, 12 to 14 hours	>50k	No	Y	N	Y	7	24

Quebec City Audience											
Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	Schedule	Income	Union	Web	Phoned	Contests pranks events rallies	Years Listening	Hours/ week
M	47	Tech training	Taxi driver	8 to 6	-	N	N	N	N	13	8
M	40	DEP	Lab technician	FT	10-30k	N	Y	Y	Y	~12	40
M	38	DEP	Carpenter	FT	30-50k	Y	Y	N	N	~15	15
M	38	DES	Truck driver	7:30 to 5	30-50k	N	Y	N	Y	15	30
F	35	DES	Unemployed	NA	-	NA	N	N	N	8	10
M	29	BAC	Night auditor	Night, PT	10-30k	N	N	N	N	2	10
M	37	Graduate	Undisclosed	FT	>50k	N	Y	N	N	1	3
F	18	DES	Dance coach	FT	0-10k	N	N	N	N	2	7
M	22	DES	Bank teller	E-W	10-30k	N	N	N	N	4	10
M	20	DES	Student	On call	0-10k	N	N	N	N	3	2
M	21	DEC	Salesperson	Student	10-30k	N	N	N	N	3	2
F	75	University Certificate	Unemployed	NA	-	NA	N	N	N	4	8
M	57	DEP	Carpenter	FT	-	Y	N	Y	N	1	10
M	40	DEP	Local trucker	12 hr day	30-50k	N	Y	Y	Y	13	60

° "Union" refers to union membership.

* "Web": has visited websites under the recommendation of the host.

¤ "Hours/week": Hours of listening per week.