

Political Correctness Beliefs, Threatened Identities, and Social Attitudes

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Two studies were conducted to assess the relationship between perceptions of political correctness (PC), threatened identities, and social attitudes. The first study focussed on 121 undergraduate students. As predicted, differences in beliefs about PC were found between members of social groups based on gender ideology and sexual orientation. Support also was found for the attitudinal hypothesis that more conservative views (e.g. right-wing authoritarianism, modern prejudice) would be associated with a belief in a PC movement and endorsement of a PC crusader stereotype. A second study conducted with 53 faculty members as respondents provided further support for the attitudinal hypothesis. In addition, it was found that faculty members tend to have more clearly integrated views about PC than students. The notion of political correctness is discussed in terms of group memberships (e.g. gender ideology), social attitudes, and as an issue that is worthy of social psychological analysis.

KEYWORDS censorship, political psychology, social identity, stereotyping

political correctness – ‘the avoidance of forms of expression or action that exclude, marginalize or insult certain racial, cultural, or other groups’ (Oxford dictionary p. 774.)

– ‘used by neo-conservatives to invalidate the left and present the left as “witch hunters” to cover up their own hegemonic family values’ (anonymous student, Study 1)

– ‘don’t say or write (or think I suppose) anything that could be considered offensive by any definable group except white males’ (anonymous faculty member, Study 2)

activities on university campuses (see Collins, 1992; Neilson, 1995; Whitney & Wartella, 1992). As a result of reports in popular magazines such as *Newsweek* (Adler, 1990), *Time* (Henry, 1991) and *The Atlantic Monthly* (D’Souza, 1991a), the term ‘political correctness’ became associated with members of a variety of groups that have

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IN THE EARLY 1990s, the North American media gave considerable attention to the notion of ‘political correctness’ and linked it to

been striving for social change (anti-racist groups, feminists, gay and lesbian activists, etc.). Concurrent with this magazine coverage was the publication of popular books denouncing political correctness by Kimball (1990) and D'Souza (1991b). While many have argued that the PC 'movement' is a myth (e.g. O'Keefe, 1992) that is largely a creation of the media (see Collins, 1992; Whitney & Wartella, 1992), the terms 'political correctness' or PC quickly became part of the popular vernacular. In fact, PC was the subject of a commencement address by President Bush at the University of Michigan in 1991 where he stated that 'political extremists roam the land, abusing the privilege of free speech, setting citizens against one another on the basis of their class or race' (Dowd, 1991, p.32). Given that the PC debate is often framed in terms of groups in conflict based on differing social ideologies it might be expected that 'political correctness' would be a popular topic of study within social psychology.

In fact, although PC has been discussed and debated by a number of academics within and outside of North America (see Feldstein, 1997; Friedman & Narveson, 1995; Gitlin, 1995), there is remarkably little empirical research on PC in social psychology. We find analyses of PC by scholars from the fields of communication, literature, sociology, political science, philosophy, economics and the humanities – many of which have been published in special issues or sections of journals such as the *Journal of Communication* ('Symposium,' 1992) and the *Partisan Review* ('Politics,' 1993), or in edited books (e.g. Dunant, 1994; Williams, 1995). More recently we find a similar debate on PC in special issues or sections of psychological journals such as *Ethics and Behavior* (see J. M. Jones, 1994; von Hippel, 1994), the *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* (see Takooshian & Rieber, 1996) and *Canadian Psychology* (see Gauthier, 1997).

One social psychological study of PC was conducted by Barker (1994). She operationalized PC as a normative behavior that involved adopting a left-leaning stance on a controversial topic in public but a more conservative stance in private. Barker presented a list of 10 controversial

topics to students and asked them to indicate their positions on those topics in either a private (anonymous) or public (individually identifiable) condition. She found support for her hypothesis for only 2 of the 10 topics she examined. Students were more liberal (i.e. PC) in their positions on ethnic jokes and women's right to abortion when in the public condition compared to students in the private condition. A second study on political ideology and censorship by Suedfeld, Steel, and Schmidt (1994) did not address PC directly, but the authors did suggest that their modified Attitudes Toward Censorship Questionnaire could be referred to as the Politically Correct Censorship Questionnaire. There were three findings of note in the Suedfeld et al. study: women had more favorable attitudes toward censorship than men, supporters of a left wing political party had more favorable attitudes than supporters of a right wing party, and students who scored higher on authoritarianism, traditional family values, and conservatism were more likely to endorse a more favourable position on censorship.

The aim of this article is to develop a more textured social psychological analysis of PC, from the perspective of intergroup relations and attitude research.

The two sides of the PC debate

In their analysis of media coverage of the PC debate, Whitney and Wartella (1992) observed that the 'movement began to be presented by late 1990 as a movement to forward a Left/liberal agenda on university campuses which marginalized mainstream, white, male-dominant rule in favour of minority, multicultural, feminist subcultural groups' (p. 85) – in short, the PC debate potentially involves intergroup conflict. There are also stereotypical and polarized presentations of both sides of the debate. Eaton (1992) observes – 'The "politically correct" (PC) are convinced that the "politically incorrect" (Non-PC) seek only to retain the racism and sexism that characterize some of society. Conservatives are convinced that the liberal opposition is so committed to race and gender

equity that it is willing to sacrifice fundamental American principles, including individual liberty and fairness' (p. 26). It is clear that such an analysis focusses on individuals who are adopting extreme or polarized positions.

'Politically correct' has become an umbrella term that can be applied to members of a variety of groups that are often associated with the left end of the political spectrum. For example, Kimball (1993) puts under his umbrella 'radical multiculturalism, gender studies, Afrocentrism, wacko feminism' (p. 568). In his analysis of the PC debate, Platt (1992) observes that this debate has focussed not only on multiculturalism and Afrocentrism, but also on 'feminism, Marxism, deconstruction and postmodernism, gay and lesbian studies, social and labor history, cultural studies, critical literary theory, bilingualism' (p. 124). The PC, therefore, are seen by some as belonging to a superordinate social category encompassing individuals from a heterogeneous array of groups expressing views about different social issues. In addition, these individuals are usually portrayed as very extreme in their positions.

On the other side of the PC debate, the anti-PC usually are described as coming from the right side of the political ideology spectrum. Platt (1992) has observed that the attack against PC comes from a variety of individuals, such as critics of affirmative action and traditional literary scholars. N. Jones (1994) sees the anti-PC as falling into two groups – reactionaries who employ 'name calling, stereotypes, caricatures, generalization, hyperbole, reductionism, anecdote and misrepresentation' (pp. 388–389) and conservatives who acknowledge prejudice, but who feel threatened by certain calls for social change.

When reading the literature on PC, we find that stereotypic images have been drawn on both the left and right sides of the debate. In order to gain a social psychological understanding of the PC controversy, the current studies focussed on the two broad PC stereotypes that can be identified in the PC rhetoric – the 'PC crusader' and the 'PC basher'. Because the focus of the studies is on stereotypic images of individuals adopting extreme positions, the

labels PC crusader and PC basher were seen as more appropriate than the more subdued 'pro-PC' and 'anti-PC' labels. These later labels also imply more of an attitudinal perspective than a stereotypic representation. PC crusader and PC basher stereotypes, however, are not traditional in the sense of having a profile of traits associated with each type of person. Rather, our focus is on beliefs in the popular representations of the PC crusader or the PC basher. For example, to what extent do individuals believe that history books are being rewritten by PC advocates (the PC crusader) or that intolerant right-wingers are leading the attack against PC (the PC basher)? Of greater importance, however, is a psychological understanding of the potential basis of such beliefs. This paper examines the beliefs in PC representations from the perspective of group membership and social identity, as well as from an attitude and value perspective.

Theoretical framework

From a social identity perspective (e.g. Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we argue that the PC discourse will make salient certain social categories and potentially threaten the identity of individuals who belong to such groups. On the one hand are individuals who may feel threatened by the perceived demands or claims that are being made by individuals who come from traditionally disadvantaged groups. An example would be the white male who feels threatened by a demand for affirmative action. On the other hand are individuals from groups that have been fighting for equality and social change – they may feel threatened by what they perceive as a right-wing backlash. An example here would be a gay activist who feels threatened by pressures from the moral majority to remove homosexual teachers from the classroom. In both cases the threat is to a group with which the individual identifies and it is based on a challenge to the rights and/or privileges of that group. Social identity theorists have linked the perception of threat to identity to a number of psychological processes. Spears, Doosje, and Ellemers (1997) for example, found that under conditions of threat, high

group identifiers displayed greater self-stereotyping. Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (1997) found that under conditions of threat more prototypical group members engaged in increased ingroup bias. Grant (1992, 1993) also demonstrated that threatening a group identity led to increased intergroup differentiation. In the current study, the concept of intergroup threat is neither manipulated or measured. Rather, the concept of threat is seen as implicit within the PC debate. The lines are clearly drawn within this debate; the PC crusader is portrayed as a person who threatens values such as individualism and freedom of speech, whereas the PC basher is painted as an individual who threatens things such as representativeness and equality. Both sides are seen as threatening the values and goals of the other, a form of threat that has been labeled symbolic threat (see Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Turkaspa, 1998).

In the current studies it was predicted that *identification with social categories that are associated with different sides of the PC debate will lead to a differential endorsement of PC representations*. More specifically, it is predicted that individuals who identify themselves as feminists, gays/lesbians, or Blacks, are respectively more likely to believe in the PC basher stereotype and less likely to believe in the PC crusader stereotype than individuals who identify themselves as traditional women, heterosexuals, and/or Whites. A strong belief in either the PC basher stereotype or the PC crusader stereotype implies that an individual believes that a certain class of people is threatening the ideologies of one of his/her ingroups. The endorsement of either of these stereotypes is an acceptance of a polarized view of a group of individuals and the adoption of such a polarized view is one of the essential features of intergroup differentiation.

It should be noted that the line of reasoning adopted here differs in an important way from some of the past research looking at threat to identity and intergroup information processing (Jetten et al., 1997; Spears et al., 1997). The current studies simply examine self-categorization within a general category (e.g. feminist or traditional woman) whereas past research has

examined strength of identification with the ingroup using an individual difference measure. Also, we cannot equate endorsement of the PC crusader stereotype by feminists, for example, to ingroup identification or self-stereotyping. The PC crusader stereotype is a characterization of extremist PC types in a mythical PC movement and one that a feminist (or gay/lesbian, or Black) would not want to identify with. Similarly, we cannot equate endorsement of the PC basher stereotype to ingroup identification for traditional women, heterosexuals, and or Whites. Spears et al.'s (1997) idea of increased self-stereotyping in the face of threat is not one that could be tested here, because the stereotypes examined here are derogatory and they represent extreme ideological constructions of outgroups that are not endorsed by ingroups.

In the current studies, the predicted stronger endorsement of the PC basher stereotype by members of 'minority' groups compared to the stronger endorsement of the PC crusader stereotype by members of 'majority' groups is more akin to a form of defensive outgroup stereotyping because it homogenizes the opposition in the face of a potential outgroup threat. This prediction is in line with the outgroup homogeneity effect (e.g. Linville, Brewer, & Mackie, 1998; Linville & Jones, 1980), which has been shown to increase under conditions of external intergroup threat (Rothgerber, 1997). Endorsement of one of the PC stereotypes, therefore, may serve an intergroup differentiation function.

An individual difference perspective is adopted for the second set of predictions for the current studies. These are derived from the attitude and prejudice literature. The PC debate has been framed in the context of social ideologies and values such as individualism and equality and these in turn have been linked to individual difference variables associated with racism and sexism (see Pratto, 1999). It can be argued that PC bashing can represent a contemporary form of racism and/or sexism. For example, one of the items from the modern racism scale (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981) is that 'Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights'. Similarly, one of

the items in a measure of neosexism is that 'Women shouldn't push themselves where they are not wanted' (Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Jolie, 1995). These statements exemplify one of the criticisms that have been directed at PC – that individuals from certain groups are going too far in their demands for equality and representation. In addition to contemporary measures of racism and sexism, a number of other individual difference variables have been linked to social and political ideologies; among these we have right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1988), social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), the protestant work ethic and egalitarianism (Katz & Hass, 1988). Some of these measures were examined in the current studies.

We expect that individuals high in RWA would be more likely to believe in the representation of the PC crusader because authoritarians are inclined to submit to the rules and conventions that are sanctioned by conventional authorities. Many of the grievances that are expressed by 'minority' groups (e.g. gays and lesbians) challenge convention and RWAs are therefore more likely to buy into the representation of the PC crusader as an individual who is undermining traditional norms and values. Some research has already shown some support for the relationship between RWA and PC representations. Peterson, Doty, and Winter (1993) found that RWA correlated significantly with attitudes toward a number of social issues, including 'diversity in the university' which is part of the rhetoric of PC. Although PC has been described as the 'McCarthyism of the left' (Radosh, 1993), there is unfortunately no suitable measure of left-wing authoritarianism (see Altemeyer, 1988) that could be linked to a belief in the 'PC basher' stereotype.

We would also expect individuals holding more conservative ideologies to be more likely to accept the popular representations of the PC crusader. Individuals who strongly subscribe to the protestant work ethic and a meritocracy ideology should feel threatened by individuals who are perceived to violate these ideologies in their demands for representation. Support for this general idea was found by Katz

and Hass (1988) who found a relationship between a protestant ethic and anti-Black attitudes, and Biernat, Vescio, Theno, and Crandall (1996) who demonstrated that the protestant ethic value was predictive of modern racism. In terms of the meritocracy ideology, Bobocel, Son-Hing, Davey, Stanley, and Zanna (1998) found that a belief in meritocracy was related to opposition to an affirmative action policy involving preferential treatment, another social issue that has been discussed in the context of PC.

The general prediction for our individual difference measures was that *individuals who are more likely to believe in the existence of 'PC crusaders' will likely express attitudes that have been linked with prejudiced behavior*. A similar hypothesis was put forward by Platt (1992) who suggested that the PC debate, from an anti-PC perspective, would appeal to 'an ideology of meritocracy and individualism' as well as to a 'deep and revitalized racism' (p. 130). Alternatively, and again from the perspective of ideologies, it was predicted that *individuals who are more likely to believe in the existence of 'PC bashers' will likely express strong egalitarian beliefs*. The value of egalitarianism has been shown to be associated with a positive attitude toward Blacks (Katz & Hass, 1988). There are more specific individual difference hypotheses for each of the studies reported here because different measures were examined in each study.

Study 1

Given that much of the PC debate has taken place on university campuses, students are an ideal sample for research on PC. Data for this study were collected during the 1991–1992 academic year. This was the first academic year to follow the height of the debate in the North American media. The data for this study were collected at a large Canadian university in Toronto. The Canadian media gave considerable attention to the PC debate and Canadians also have considerable exposure to American news sources. Two hypotheses are tested in this study. H1 – Students belonging to 'minority' groups (i.e. feminists, gays/lesbians, Blacks) are

more likely to endorse the PC basher stereotype and less likely to endorse the PC crusader stereotype than individuals belonging to 'majority' groups (i.e. individuals having a traditional gender ideology, heterosexuals, Whites). H2 – Students scoring higher on measures of RWA and traditional beliefs (protestant ethic, meritocracy ideology) are more likely to accept the stereotype of a PC crusader and less likely to endorse the stereotype of the PC basher than students scoring lower on these measures. Students scoring higher on egalitarianism are more likely to support the PC basher stereotype and less likely to accept the PC crusader stereotype.

Method

Participants Undergraduate students (88 females and 33 males, $N = 121$, mean age = 21.5 years) at York University served as participants. To ensure a spread of ideological positions, we not only recruited students from classes for credit, but also from the Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay Alliance and from the Women's Centre. In terms of gender ideology, 23 respondents categorized themselves as traditional, 47 as non-traditional, and 45 as feminists or supporters of feminism. Of the 106 respondents who identified their sexual orientation, 84 were heterosexual and 22 were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Of the respondents who chose to identify with a racial group, 23 were classified as Black (i.e. Black or Afro-Caribbean) and 23 were classified as White (i.e. caucasian, Anglo-Saxon, or White).

Procedure After signing an informed consent form, respondents were given a four-part questionnaire. The first part asked for background information such as age, gender, sexual orientation, racial group identification, and gender ideology identification. The latter variable offered three response options: traditional, non-traditional, and feminist (or supporter of feminism). These categories were not defined for respondents and their self-identifications were based on their personal interpretations. The second part asked respondents in an open-ended format to write what the term political

correctness meant to them. The third part consisted of a series of randomly ordered items from a number of scales described below. All items were answered using a 6-point scale: the first 3 points were strongly, moderately, and slightly disagree and the next 3 points were slightly, moderately, and strongly agree. The final part consisted of 16 items assessing the use of the term PC in language using a 5-point scale (never to always).

Measures An item pool tapping into the stereotypes of the PC crusader and the PC basher was created on the basis of popular accounts from popular Canadian (e.g. *Maclean's*; Fennell, 1991) and American news magazines (e.g. *Time*; Hughes, 1992), as well as pieces from the political left (e.g. Selfa & Maass, 1991). The initial pool of 15 items assessing the PC crusader and PC basher stereotypes was factor analysed and forced into a 2-factor solution in order to ensure that items loaded on their respective factors. One item was dropped because it did not load on the appropriate factor. Another was dropped because of a low item total correlation in the subsequent reliability analysis. Both dropped items were negatively keyed items from the PC basher stereotype. All of the retained items (see Appendix) had factor loadings greater than .50 on their respective factors. Scores for all measures were averaged for each scale. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients are reported with each measure.

Belief in the PC crusader Six items were used to measure an individual's endorsement of the representation of PC advocates as presented in the media. Most of these items describe individuals characterized as having extremist positions ($\alpha = .66$).

Belief in the PC basher Seven items (1 negative) were used to assess an individual's endorsement of the representation of anti-PC advocates as intolerant right-wingers ($\alpha = .80$).

Use of the term PC in language A total of 16 items assessed the extent to which respondents used

the term PC (e.g. I use the term PC when referring to objectionable language or behavior). A high score indicated greater usage of the term PC ($\alpha = .90$).

Right wing authoritarianism (RWA) A total of 16 items (8 negative) were taken from Altemeyer's (1988) scale. Past research with a shortened version of the scale has shown that it is reliable and effective in its predictive value (e.g. Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993). This measure taps into three components of authoritarianism: conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression. A high score indicates greater authoritarianism ($\alpha = .84$).

Protestant ethic This 11-item measure was taken from Katz and Hass (1988). A high score indicates a strong belief in individual achievement, discipline, and hard work ($\alpha = .82$).

Humanitarianism-egalitarianism This 10-item measure was taken from Katz and Hass (1988) and indicates a concern for others, the ideals of social justice, and equality ($\alpha = .75$).

Belief in the meritocracy ideology This 6-item (3 negative) measure was developed by Lalonde, Schuller, and Korn (1992). A higher score indicates the belief that hard work and ability are the primary factors involved in social mobility ($\alpha = .72$).

Results

Group differences¹

Gender ideology Certain group differences were predicted in the perceptions of PC because of potential threats to group identity. A first set of analyses was conducted comparing respondents who self-categorized themselves into one of three different ideology categories: traditional, non-traditional, or feminist/supporter of feminism. The means and one-way between-subjects ANOVA results are presented in Table 1. As predicted, self-identified feminists (and supporters) were less likely to agree with the PC crusader stereotype than both traditional and non-traditional respondents. No differences were found, however, between the groups in terms of their belief in the representation of the PC basher. Self-identified feminists were further observed to score lower on conservative attitude measures (RWA, protestant ethic, and belief in the meritocracy ideology) than either the traditional or non-traditional respondents. Finally, it was found that feminists/supporters of feminism used the term 'political correctness' somewhat more than traditional and non-traditional respondents. It should be added that no gender differences (or interactions with gender) were found on any of the measures.

Sexual orientation There were a number of differences between heterosexual and gay/lesbian respondents. The means and associated *t* tests

Table 1. Differences between gender ideology groups on the political correctness and attitude measures

	Traditional	Non-traditional	Feminist	<i>F</i>
Belief PC crusader	3.73 _a	3.65 _a	2.93 _b	9.26***
Belief PC basher	3.77	3.90	4.21	1.95
PC in language	1.76	1.58 _a	1.93 _b	3.23*
Right-wing authoritarianism	4.06 _a	3.58 _b	2.61 _c	35.95***
Protestant ethic	4.02 _a	3.81 _a	2.84 _b	25.55***
Belief meritocracy ideology	3.03 _a	3.08 _a	2.30 _b	10.59***
Humanitarianism-egalitarianism	4.76	4.84	4.98	0.92

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Notes. The value range for all scales is 1 to 6. The *ns* associated with each scale vary; the sample size range is 20 to 23 for the traditional group, 39 to 47 for the non-traditional group, and 43 to 45 for the feminist group. The *df* error varies from 99 to 112. Means were contrasted using a Tukey HSD procedure and means having different subscripts are significantly different from each other ($p < .05$).

Table 2. Sexual orientation differences on the political correctness and attitude measures

	Heterosexual	Gay/lesbian	<i>t</i>
Belief PC crusader	3.53	2.73	3.57***
Belief PC basher	3.90	4.42	2.26*
PC in language	1.96	1.97	-0.29
Right-wing authoritarianism	3.45	2.60	4.23***
Protestant ethic	3.63	2.79	4.03***
Belief meritocracy ideology	2.91	2.19	3.33***
Humanitarianism-egalitarianism	4.89	4.99	-0.61

p* < .05; **p* < .001.

Note. The value range for all scales is 1 to 6. The *ns* associated with each scale vary; the sample size range is 76 to 84 for the heterosexual group, and 20 to 22 for the gay/lesbian group. The *df* error varies from 94 to 104.

for these comparisons are presented in Table 2. As predicted, heterosexual respondents were more likely to believe in the stereotype of the PC crusader than gay/lesbian respondents, who in turn had significantly stronger beliefs in the PC basher stereotype scores than the heterosexual respondents. In addition, heterosexual respondents scored higher than gay/lesbian respondents on all of the conservative attitude indicators (RWA, protestant ethic, and belief in meritocracy ideology). It should be noted that the majority of the gay/lesbian respondents also identified themselves as feminists or supporters of feminism (18 of 22) and that the categories of sexual orientation and gender ideology are not independent from each other.

Race The predicted differences between Blacks and Whites on the two PC stereotype

measures were not found. Only one difference emerged between respondents who identified themselves as Black or White. Self-identified White respondents were more likely to use the term PC when speaking (*M* = 2.26) than Black respondents (*M* = 1.50, *t*(43) = 4.15, *p* < .001). It should be noted that the majority of students classified as White, self-identified as feminists (12/22).

PC beliefs and attitudes Correlations between the various attitude measures and the PC stereotype measures are presented in Table 3. Two-tailed probabilities were used to limit Type I errors. The hypothesis that greater support for the representation of the PC crusader would be associated with more conservative political attitudes was clearly supported. Belief in the PC crusader correlated significantly with right-wing

Table 3. Pairwise correlations between political correctness and attitude measures for student sample

	PCC	PCB	PCL	RWA	PE	BMI
Belief PC crusader (PCC)	—					
Belief PC basher (PCB)	-.18	—				
PC in language (PCL)	.03	-.06	—			
Right wing authoritarianism (RWA)	.45***	-.24**	-.14	—		
Protestant ethic (PE)	.39***	-.09	-.10	.68***	—	
Belief meritocracy ideology (BMI)	.35***	-.37***	.02	.58***	.63***	—
Humanitarianism-egalitarianism (HE)	.06	.15	.15	-.24**	-.13	-.25**

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

authoritarianism (RWA; $p < .001$), a protestant ethic ($p < .001$), and a belief in a meritocracy ideology ($p < .001$). Belief in the PC basher was found to correlate negatively with RWA ($p < .01$) and belief in a meritocracy ideology scores ($p < .001$).

The hypothesis that students scoring higher on egalitarianism would be more likely to support the PC basher stereotype and less likely to accept the PC crusader stereotype was not supported. There was a potential restriction of range problem, however, with the measure of egalitarianism. The mean for this measure, 4.88 ($SD = 0.68$), was significantly different from the midpoint of 3.5 on this 6-point scale ($t(120) = 22.32, p < .001$).

Analysis of definitions of PC Responses to the question ‘what does the term political correctness mean to you’ were sorted by two independent raters into one of four definitional categories used to capture the essence of responses: literal, popular, right-wing backlash, and uncodable. Literal definitions focussed on combining the meaning of the two words (e.g. policies that support the good of society, proper way of handling things in a political situation). Popular definitions used media portrayals of PC in their definitions (e.g. not actively promoting that which is racial or discriminatory, vocabulary used not to offend members of marginalized groups); these definitions also included references to notions of equity (e.g. treating all racial and ethnic groups as equals), which is often linked to the PC debate. Right-wing backlash definitions indicated that PC was a construction of the right (e.g. a term which has been co-opted by the right, usually used by conservatives as a form of backlash). Uncodable terms did not fall into any of these three categories. The kappa coefficient for the coding was .76 and all disagreements were resolved between the two raters.

Definitions of PC were asked of only 98 respondents.² Of these, 51 used popular definitions, 24 used literal definitions, and 6 defined it as a right-wing backlash (4 of these 6 respondents were lesbian feminists). Six of the responses were uncodable and 11 respondents

did not provide a definition. ANOVAs were used to compare the responses of the popular, literal, and right-wing backlash groups on all of the primary measures and the Tukey procedure was used to test mean differences ($\alpha = .05$). A consistent pattern of results was found. Responses of the popular and literal groups did not differ, except for the use of the term PC in language, where the popular group ($M = 1.96$) was significantly more likely to use the term than the literal group ($M = 1.48$). On most of the measures, the right-wing backlash group differed significantly from the popular and literal groups; the right-wing backlash group scored lower on belief in the PC crusader ($F(2, 71) = 9.01, p < .001$; $M_s = 1.92$ vs. 3.37 and 3.66), on right-wing authoritarianism ($F(2, 78) = 11.17, p < .001$; $M_s = 1.72$ vs. 3.14 and 3.56), protestant ethic ($F(2, 77) = 5.57, p < .006$; $M_s = 2.78$ vs. 3.57 and 3.57), and belief in a meritocracy ideology ($F(2, 78) = 6.18, p < .004$; $M_s = 1.50$ vs. 2.77 and 2.98) and scored higher on belief in the PC basher ($F(2, 73) = 3.82, p < .03$; $M_s = 5.04$ vs 3.97 and 3.83). Although the assumption of homogeneity was a concern because of the large discrepancies in sample sizes, Levene’s test indicated differences for only three of the measures and the majority of the effects were highly significant. Nonetheless, caution is warranted in the interpretation of this set of results.

Discussion

Group differences The first general hypothesis that was tested in this study was that identification with potentially threatened social groups would be associated with a differential endorsement of PC representations. This hypothesis received strong support when categorization was based on sexual orientation and was partially supported for categorizations based on gender ideology. Compared to heterosexuals, students who identified themselves as gay and lesbian were more likely to support the PC basher stereotype and less likely to believe in the PC crusader stereotype. With regard to gender ideology, traditional and non-traditional respondents were more likely to believe in the popular representations of the PC crusader than were self-identified feminists. No dif-

ferences were found, however, between gender ideology groups in terms of beliefs in the representation of the PC basher. Finally, no support for the hypothesis was found when comparing Black to White respondents.

The interpretation for strong effects associated with sexual orientation is that gay and lesbian students represent a group that probably feels quite threatened by a potential backlash brought about by the PC debate. They also may feel more threatened in general, as they are more likely to experience verbal and physical aggression than feminists or Blacks. In social identity theory terms, their status is illegitimate in many ways since they do not have access to the same rights and privileges as heterosexuals (e.g. spousal benefits). Moreover, because of their minority position in terms of number and of power, their sexual orientation is likely to be a central component of their social identity (see Abrams, 1994). Given their threatened position and central identity, members of this group would be likely to pay attention to the PC debate and to have more polarized beliefs associated with this debate. The concurrent identification of gays and lesbians as supporters of feminism would further lead them to be concerned with the PC debate. These arguments seem more applicable to the threatened identity of gays and lesbians, rather than a threatened identity for heterosexuals, because the mean responses of heterosexuals on beliefs in the PC crusader and the PC basher are very close to the midpoint of 3.50 on these measures. Similarly, feminists are more likely to be attentive to and threatened by the PC debate than traditional and non-traditional respondents. While the mean responses for the latter two groups were close to the midpoint for beliefs in the PC crusader and basher, it is the means of feminists that shifted on these measures. It should be added that self-identified traditional and non-traditional respondents did not differ in their conservative ideologies (protestant ethic, meritocracy) and that their interpretations of these gender ideology labels are probably related to gender roles.

The absence of significant differences between Blacks and Whites in their PC beliefs

may be attributable to a number of factors. First and foremost it should be noted that the self-identified Black and White respondents did not differ on any of the attitude and ideology measures (RWA, protestant ethic, meritocracy ideology) in contrast to the gender ideology and sexual orientation groups. This absence of racial group differences suggests that categorization along these lines does not relate to clear ideological differences. Such categorization may also be problematic because racial categorization is one that is relatively foreign to Canadians in the research context. In national surveys and census data, Canadians are often asked questions about ethnicity, but rarely about race. The respondents who could be classified as White on the basis of their racial identification were not representative of White students in general. Only a fifth of the sample identified themselves as belonging to a group that could be classified as White, when the majority of the sample had white skin. Furthermore, the majority of these 'White' students self-identified as feminists. A Canadian study by Patterson, Cameron, and Lalonde (1996) indicated that students who identify themselves as White are more aware of the privilege afforded to them by their skin color than Whites who do not identify themselves as White. In short, the hypothesis of racial identification in relation to PC beliefs probably did not receive a fair assessment in this study and it should be examined in an American setting where it might be easier to test.

Attitudes and ideologies in relation to PC stereotypes The second general prediction of the study was that students who are more likely to believe in the existence of 'PC crusaders' will likely express attitudes and ideologies that have been linked with prejudiced behavior. As expected, right-wing authoritarianism, the protestant ethic, and belief in a meritocracy ideology all correlated significantly and positively with support for the PC crusader stereotype. These results support the idea that the rhetoric surrounding the PC debate in the popular media will have more of an appeal for individuals who are predisposed to have prejudiced

attitudes (Platt, 1992). The finding that attitudes relate to a belief in the PC crusader may be due to the type of information students are most exposed to. Typically, popular media stories about PC focus on particular individuals taking an often extreme position on some type of social issue.

Further in line with our predictions, both RWA and the belief in a meritocracy ideology correlated negatively with support for the PC basher stereotype. It seems reasonable to state that individuals high on RWA and holding strong meritocracy beliefs are *less* likely to believe that PC is some sort of right-wing smear campaign. But can we infer more – is it possible that low scorers are authoritarians of the left? On the basis of extensive research on his scale, Altemeyer (1988) is adamantly opposed to such an interpretation; he argues that low RWA scores are more likely to reflect less conservative or more leftist views, but not authoritarian views. Indirect support for this interpretation of the low RWA comes from Altemeyer's (1981, 1988) work on political party allegiance (for supporters and politicians) in relation to RWA in Canada.

A final observation that can be drawn from this study was that this student sample did not have clearly articulated views about PC. Their definitions were generally quite short and one quarter of the sample used literal definitions. Furthermore, the scale measuring the use of the term in language indicated that the majority of the students rarely used the term. If PC has a strong campus presence, we would expect considerable use of the term. Also, if there was a significant number of leftist PC crusaders on campus, we would expect more than 6 percent of the respondents to define PC as a term that has been co-opted by the right to silence views from the left. The findings suggest that the majority of these students generally did not have well integrated views about PC. While the PC movement was described as quite active on university campuses at the time of this study (e.g. Balch, 1992), a number of others have suggested that this simply is not true (e.g. Wilson, 1995). Our results support the later interpretation. Given that our student sample did not have very well articulated views about

PC, a second study was conducted with a sample for which the PC debate has been much more relevant.

Study 2

This second study focussed on faculty at the same campus as the students in Study 1. The notion of PC has certainly stirred considerable concern and debate among academics and is evidenced by statements from members of organizations such as the National Association of Scholars (NAS) in the USA (e.g. Balch, 1992) and the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS) in Canada (e.g. Furedy, 1993). These groups are concerned with threats to academic freedom and have spoken out against PC. It is of considerable interest, therefore, to assess the meaning of PC for university faculty and the possible underpinnings of this meaning.

Given the restricted nature of a faculty sample, the issue of potential threats to identity could not be examined using the same groups examined in Study 1. It was predicted, however, that some gender differences may be observed in beliefs about PC. Some female faculty may feel threatened by the PC debate and see it as an expression of the further disadvantage experienced by female faculty and graduate students and the continuing 'chilly climate' for women in academe (see Pyke, 1997). Some male faculty members may feel threatened by the affirmative action policy with regard to gender and hiring that exists on the campus where this study was conducted. It is also possible that differences may exist between members of different faculties (Arts vs. Science). The majority of the writing and critique of the PC issue have taken place within academic disciplines that typically fall under the Arts umbrella (e.g. literature, communication) and members of these disciplines may have different representations of PC because of a more varied exposure to these writings (i.e. not restricted to the popular press). Finally, threat may be assessed indirectly by asking faculty members if PC has had an impact on their research and their teaching.

As in Study 1, it again was expected from an attitude perspective that more conservative views would be associated with a belief in the PC crusader stereotype.³ In order to test the notion that PC represents some type of left-wing authoritarianism, we included part of the Suedfeld et al.'s (1994) attitude toward censorship measure, which was described by these authors as a 'Politically Correct Censorship Questionnaire'. If this is in fact the case, we would expect a positive correlation between support for censorship and belief in the PC basher stereotype. Finally, given that much of the debate has focussed on issues of free speech and equity, some items were added to assess views on these issues.

Three hypotheses are tested in this study. H1 – Female faculty members are more likely to endorse the PC basher stereotype and less likely to endorse the PC crusader stereotype than male faculty. This is based on the fact that women are in the minority position with respect to numbers and they are more typically found in non-traditional fields of academic inquiry. H2 – Faculty members scoring higher on modern racism and a measure of traditional beliefs (protestant ethic) are more likely to accept the stereotype of a PC crusader and less likely to endorse the stereotype of the PC basher than faculty members scoring lower on these measures. H3 – Faculty members scoring higher on attitudes toward censorship are more likely to endorse the stereotype of the PC basher and less likely to accept the stereotype of a PC crusader than faculty members scoring lower on these measures.

Method

Participants Faculty members at York University (10 females and 43 males, $N = 53$, median age 51 to 55 years) returned questionnaires that had been mailed to a random sample ($N = 100$). The majority of the respondents were in the faculty of either Arts ($N = 19$) or Science ($N = 19$). Most of the respondents (49 of 53) indicated that they read editorials or book reviews dealing with PC and 5 of them indicated that they had written pieces about PC. Four respondents were members of the SAFS.

Procedure Questionnaires were sent by mail in the spring of 1995. The first part of the questionnaire asked for background information such as gender, age, faculty affiliation, and reading/writing about PC. The second part asked respondents to write what the term political correctness meant to them. They were then asked if and how the PC debate affected their research and their teaching practices. The third part consisted of a series of randomly ordered items from a number of scales described below. All items were answered using a 7-point scale: the first 3 points were strongly, moderately, and slightly disagree and the final 3 points were slightly, moderately, and strongly agree. A neutral point of 4 was added after some pilot testing.

Measures The pool of items assessing the PC constructs was modified for this second study. Some items were dropped and new ones were added. Modifications to the scales can be found in the Appendix. As in Study 1, items were positively worded unless indicated otherwise and scores for all measures were averaged for each scale. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients are reported with each measure.

Belief in the PC crusader Eight items were now used to tap support for this stereotype ($\alpha = .80$).

Belief in the PC basher Eight items (1 negative) were now used to measure endorsement of this stereotype ($\alpha = .91$).

Modern prejudice Seven items (3 negative) were taken from an unpublished scale (D. Griffin, personal communication, June 1994) that is similar to the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay et al., 1981), but suitable for a Canadian context. Items refer to 'ethnic/racial groups', 'minority groups', and/or 'visible minorities', rather than to Blacks. All items are listed in the Appendix. A high score indicates greater modern prejudice ($\alpha = .85$).

Protestant ethic The 11-item Katz and Hass (1988) measure was used again ($\alpha = .78$).

Attitude toward censorship Ten items (1 negative) were taken from Suedfeld et al.'s (1994) Revised Attitude toward Censorship Questionnaire (RACQ), which is a modification of a measure developed by Hense and Wright (1992). These 10 items all loaded on the first factor of the principal components analysis conducted by Suedfeld et al., who labeled this factor 'Politically Correct Puritanism'. A high score indicates greater support for the censoring of racist, sexist, and homophobic material ($\alpha = .83$).

Attitude toward equity issues Three items (1 negative) examining affirmative action, spousal benefits for homosexuals, and employment equity were combined such that a high score indicated a more positive attitude ($\alpha = .66$).

Eroding free speech One item asked for agreement with the statement 'freedom of speech is no longer sacrosanct at many academic institutions'.

Results

Group differences

Gender As predicted, male faculty members indicated a greater belief in the PC crusader stereotype ($M = 4.48$) compared to female faculty members ($M = 3.49$, $t(47) = 2.19$, $p < .05$). Contrary to prediction, however, women ($M = 3.81$) did not differ significantly from men ($M = 3.28$) in their ratings of the PC basher stereotype ($t(44) = 1.03$, $p > .10$); women did have a more favorable attitude toward censorship ($M = 3.70$) than men ($M = 2.62$, $t(47) = 3.18$, $p < .01$).

Faculty affiliation Art's faculty members indicated a stronger belief in the PC basher stereotype ($M = 4.06$) compared to Science faculty members ($M = 2.93$, $t(31) = 2.52$, $p < .02$). In addition, Science faculty members scored higher than Arts faculty members on modern prejudice ($M_s = 3.31$ vs. 2.34) and the protestant ethic ($M_s = 4.15$ vs. 3.26) ($t(32) = 2.65$, $p < .02$ and $t(30) = 2.62$, $p < .02$), while faculty of Arts members scored higher on attitudes toward equity ($M = 5.23$) than faculty of Science members ($M = 4.06$, $t(32) = 2.14$, $p < .05$).

Research and teaching Respondents were asked whether PC had any effect on their research and on their teaching. Seven of 49 participants (13%) indicated it had an effect on their research, while 28 of 51 respondents (53%) indicated an effect on their teaching. Compared to faculty reporting no impact of PC on their research, those reporting an effect had a stronger belief in the PC crusader stereotype ($M_s = 5.40$ vs. 4.13 , $t(43) = 2.37$, $p < .03$). Similarly, those reporting an impact on their teaching scored higher on their belief in the PC crusader stereotype ($M_s = 4.71$ vs. 3.78 , $t(45) = 2.61$, $p < .02$) than those reporting no impact. In addition, those reporting an impact on their teaching scored higher on modern prejudice ($M = 3.17$) than those who did not ($M = 2.40$, $t(44) = 2.26$, $p < .03$).

PC beliefs and attitudes Correlations between the attitude and PC measures are presented in Table 4 using two-tailed probabilities for significance. As predicted, the modern prejudice measure correlated significantly with a belief in the PC crusader ($p < .01$), and a lack of endorsement of the PC basher stereotype ($p < .01$). The protestant ethic measure, however, did not correlate significantly with any of the PC measures.

The predicted correlations between the attitude toward censorship and PC beliefs were marginally significant: $r = -.28$ ($p < .06$) for the PC crusader and $r = .25$ ($p = .10$) for the PC basher. Thus, individuals holding a more positive attitude toward censorship tended to be more inclined to believe in the PC basher stereotype and less likely to believe in the PC crusader stereotype.

Views about equity and free speech were significantly related to the PC stereotype measures. A more positive attitude toward equity was related to a weaker belief in the PC crusader ($p < .001$) and a stronger belief in the PC basher ($p < .05$) and the perceived erosion of free speech was associated with a stronger belief in the PC crusader ($p < .001$).

Analysis of definitions of PC Responses to the question 'what does the term political correctness mean to you within an academic setting'

Table 4. Pairwise correlations between political correctness and attitude measures for faculty sample

	PCC	PCB	PE	MP	AE	RACQ
Belief PC crusader (PCC)	—					
Belief PC basher (PCB)	-.49***	—				
Protestant ethic (PE)	.14	-.21	—			
Modern prejudice (MP)	.37**	-.42**	.22	—		
Attitude equity (AE)	-.56***	.36*	.25	-.67***	—	
Attitude towards censorship (RACQ)	-.28	.25	.18	-.22	.06	—
Eroding free speech	.60***	-.25	-.03	.23	-.36*	-.23

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

were sorted by the same raters into three of the definitional categories used in Study 1: popular, right-wing backlash, and uncodable (none of the faculty definitions could be classified as literal). As in Study 1, popular definitions were those that used media portrayals of PC in their definitions (e.g. don't say or write anything that could be considered offensive by any definable group except White males; threat of academic and personal freedom). Right-wing backlash definitions indicated that PC was a form of backlash against minority viewpoints (e.g. feminism) coming from the right (e.g. it is used in a reactionary sense, by those people who resent having to accommodate legitimate concerns raised by non-dominant groups). Uncodable terms did not clearly fall into either of these two categories. The kappa coefficient for the coding was .96 and the single disagreement was resolved between the two raters.

Of the 48 respondents who provided a definition, 33 used popular definitions (69%), 8 defined it in terms of a backlash (17%), and 7 did not clearly fall into either category (15%). All 8 respondents using the backlash definition were in the Arts faculty (4 men and 4 women). Student's *t* tests were used to compare the popular and right-wing backlash definition groups on all of the primary measures. The group adopting the popular definition of PC scored higher than the right-wing backlash group on the belief in the PC crusader stereotype ($M_s = 4.69$ vs. 3.29 , $t(35) = 2.71$, $p < .01$), on modern prejudice ($M_s = 3.05$ vs. 1.96 , $t(35) = 2.18$, $p < .04$), and on the protestant ethic ($M_s = 4.21$ vs. 2.69 , $t(33) = 4.02$, $p < .001$). The

right-wing backlash group scored higher than the popular definition group on the PC basher stereotype ($M_s = 5.65$ vs. 2.94 , $t(33) = 5.62$, $p < .001$) and attitude toward equity ($M_s = 5.67$ vs. 4.21 , $t(35) = 2.29$, $p < .03$).

Discussion

There was only one predicted gender difference that was found and it may be linked to a threat to identity. Male faculty members had a stronger belief in the PC crusader than did female faculty members, and it is possible that these males feel more threatened by the PC debate. This threat, however, cannot be directly linked to issues of affirmative action or freedom of expression, given that there were no gender differences on these measures. The difference in responses between Arts and Science faculty members also are worth noting. It was found that compared to Science faculty members, Arts faculty members had a more favorable attitude toward equity, stronger belief in the PC basher scores, and lower scores on modern prejudice and the protestant ethic. Furthermore, all of the right-wing backlash definitions of PC came from members of the Arts faculty. These results are in line with research by Guimond and his colleagues (Guimond, Bégin, & Palmer, 1989; Guimond & Palmer, 1990) who found that students from different disciplines (administrative studies vs. social sciences) have differential attributions about the causes of poverty. These authors argue that these different views about poverty are partially the result of dominant ideologies in different academic disciplines. Similarly, Sidanius, Pratto, Martin, and

Stallworth (1991) have shown that anti-Black racial attitudes differ between college majors. Our results suggest that the ideologies of faculty members in the Arts and Sciences may in fact be different. Furthermore, it is quite possible that these ideological differences are driving the differential perceptions of the PC debate.

The attitudinal hypothesis that more conservative views would correlate with PC beliefs was strongly supported in the case of the modern prejudice measure. Individuals scoring higher in modern prejudice were more likely to believe in the PC crusader, and less likely to believe in the PC basher. These relationships are not surprising given that issues of race and ethnicity are often associated with the PC debate. The hypothesis was not supported, however, in the case of the protestant ethic measure. The protestant ethic measure had the smallest standard deviation of all measures used in Study 2 ($SD = 1.06$), and the lack of significant correlations may be due in part to a restriction of range problem. It is recalled, however, that the protestant ethic measure was the least consistent predictor of the PC measures used in Study 1. The PC debate involves such a broad range of issues and groups that it may not be possible for respondents to interpret all of them as conflicting with their protestant ethic value.

The predicted correlations between the PC measures and the attitude toward censorship measure were of particular interest, given that Suedfeld et al. (1994) had described this measure (RACQ) as a 'Politically Correct Censorship Questionnaire'. Given this description, one would expect fairly strong correlations between the RACQ and views about PC. In fact, the two correlations were only marginally significant – individuals who had a favorable attitude toward censorship were somewhat less likely to believe in the PC crusader stereotype and somewhat more likely to support the PC basher stereotype. These relatively weak correlations would suggest that while attitudes toward censorship play a small role in a person's construal of the PC debate, it may be premature to equate political correctness to censorship. A final point with regard to the censorship measure was the finding that female

faculty members had a more positive attitude toward censorship than male faculty members; this latter gender effect replicates the findings of Suedfeld et al. (1994).

Finally, given that much of the PC debate has focussed on issues of free speech and equity, it was reasonable to expect the PC measures to correlate with measures relating to these issues. As expected, a more negative attitude toward equity was associated with a stronger belief in the PC crusader stereotype and less support for the PC basher stereotype. Similarly, a stronger perception of eroding free speech in academic institutions correlated positively and strongly with the belief in the PC crusader stereotype, although this correlation was probably somewhat inflated given that one of the stereotype items refers directly to speech censorship.

Another observation that can be drawn from this second study was that faculty had a greater interest and more clearly articulated views about PC than students. More than 90 percent of the faculty sample indicated their interest in the PC debate by reading about it. This interest was reflected in the reliability coefficients of the PC measures which increased from Study 1 to Study 2, suggesting that faculty are more internally consistent in their views about PC. Furthermore, the correlation between the two PC stereotype measures was stronger for faculty than for students.⁴ With faculty, the PC crusader and PC basher stereotype scores correlated very strongly and negatively with each other, as would be expected of individuals who have followed the PC controversy. Finally, the faculty definitions were much longer than the student definitions. Although the passage of time from Study 1 to Study 2 may have permitted the faculty sample to have a more coherent perspective on the PC debate, this finding may simply support Converse's (1964) observation that better educated people have more coherent attitude structures than less educated people. The faculty sample also was a more self-selective sample (the 53% who returned the questionnaires) that was probably more involved in thinking about the PC debate.

Within our categorization of the faculty sample's definitions of PC, the popular view of

PC predominated – themes that were raised in these definitions included academic freedom, gender bias, equity (gender, race, and sexual orientation), language bias, cultural relativism, gay rights, etc. The other category of definitions was the one relating to PC as a form of right-wing backlash. A comparison of the popular and backlash definition groups was telling. In comparison to those using backlash definitions of PC, those who used popular definitions were more likely to believe in the PC crusader stereotype, but not the PC basher stereotype, to have higher modern prejudice and protestant ethic scores, and to have less positive attitudes toward equity issues. Clearly, the different definitional construals of PC are associated with a number of attitudinal differences.

Conclusion

The term PC is now part of popular North American culture and recognized by the Oxford dictionary (Thompson, 1996). It is becoming more common, at least in a North American context, to hear derisive remarks where PC is used as a target label (e.g. he is so politically correct). Social psychologists have studied racism, sexism, and homophobia, but what about ‘PCism?’ A generality such as ‘the politically correct’ may be used to simultaneously dismiss the voices of many individuals from a variety of social groups without naming the source of those voices or the nature of their concerns. It is clear that the notion of PC may be linked to potential threats to identity and the politics of identity (see Sampson, 1993), given the differences associated with sexual orientation and gender ideology on certain PC measures in Study 1. It should be recognized, however, that threat was never directly assessed in the current studies and future research on PC should include an explicit measures of threat. Threat in relation to political correctness can be characterized as a form of symbolic threat (see Stephan et al., 1998), since it is based on perceived value differences between groups. Examples of such values identified in the study with students were the protestant ethic and the meritocracy ideology.

The current studies also provide some preliminary evidence about what may lie behind the PC debate. The idea of a PC crusader is likely to have appeal for individuals who score high on RWA and modern prejudice. It appears, however, that the PC debate may be more popular within academic circles than in society at large. While one of our respondents described PC as ‘a big ado about nothing substantial’, many faculty respondents expressed their concerns, particularly in the impact it had on their teaching. At the very least, it is apparent on the basis of our studies that PC can be examined within modern conceptualizations of racism and sexism (see Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Future research also could focus on PC from the perspective of social dominance theory given that individuals who are high in social dominance orientation will support ideologies and practices that reify group-based dominance (Pratto, 1999). A concern for power and resistance to social change are at the heart of the PC debate.

Finally, the PC debate also could be examined theoretically and empirically from the perspective of conspiracy theories and the attribution of social problems to secret plots⁵ (see Waters, 1997). PC crusaders can be construed as members of an intellectual elite who are conspiring to overthrow the status quo through policies that disadvantage the advantaged, while PC bashers can be seen as the secret defenders of the status quo who are trying to undermine advances that are being made by the disadvantaged. An example of this type of analysis can be found in a study by Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadnax, and Blaine (1999) who found that a belief in US government conspiracy against Blacks was stronger among Black than White students.

Further research can help determine if political correctness is simply an innocent term that is part of the popular vernacular, or an important social issue that is loaded with the stuff of social psychology.

Appendix

Note. Items used the full term ‘political correctness’ rather than the abbreviation PC.

Belief in the PC crusader (* items added in Study 2)

I believe that there are 'PC' crusaders who want to censor people's speech.

I believe that feminists are 'PC' crusaders. (Changed to 'radical' feminists in Study 2.)

History books are being rewritten by 'PC' advocates.

'PC' crusaders roam the land, abusing the privilege of free speech, setting citizens against one another on the basis of their sex and race.

'PC' represents the fascism of the left.

Professors who try to integrate diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum are 'PC' types. (Not in Study 2.)

* 'PC' crusaders support social policies which can often be described as discriminatory against White males.

* On North American campuses, the 'politically correct' are threatening scholarly standards.

* 'PC' crusaders are likely to paint the opponents to their social policies as racists, sexists, or homophobes.

* I believe that academic freedom and scholarship is under attack by 'PC' crusaders.

* The 'politically correct' create an atmosphere in which the free exchange of controversial ideas is impossible.

Belief in the PC basher

'Anti-PC' crusaders seek a world in which freedom of speech has no meaning outside of conformity to their own beliefs.

The goal of the 'Anti-PC' is to suppress sentiments that they do not agree with.

People who believe that their privileged position is being threatened are leading the attack against 'PC'.

'Anti-PC' crusaders support free speech only when it suits their purposes.

The 'anti-PC' campaign is being used to justify the expression of racist and sexist sentiments without fear of impunity. ('Without fear of impunity' not in Study 2.)

People who are constantly putting down 'PC' are trying to preserve the advantaged position of dominant groups.

The goal of the 'anti-PC' campaign is to ensure the freedom of speech for all people. (-) (Item not in Study 2.)

* Intolerant right-wingers are the main opponents to 'PC'.

* People who campaign against 'PC' are afraid of any organized efforts that challenge the status quo.

Modern prejudice

Canada should open its doors to more immigration from the poorer countries. (-)

It is good to live in a country where there are so many ethnic/racial groups. (-)

It is easy to understand the anger of some 'visible minorities' in Canada. (-)

Over the past few years, the government and news media have given more attention to certain minority groups than they deserve. (+)

The government should not make any special effort to help 'minority' cultural groups because they should help themselves. (+)

Certain ethnic minorities are getting much too demanding in their quest for representation. (+)

Discrimination against 'ethnic/racial minorities' is no longer a real problem in Canada. (+)

Notes

1. Group differences could not be examined in a complex ANOVA design (i.e. gender ideology by sexual orientation by race by gender ideology) because of unequal and small sample sizes in many cells of such a design. The analyses, therefore, only focus on the key group factors. Throughout the results of Study 1 and Study 2 the sample sizes and *df* error associated with different group comparisons vary from measure to measure because of missing observations.
2. Definitions of PC were not asked of 23 respondents because of a clerical error: this page had been omitted from the questionnaire.
3. The RWA scale was not used in Study 2 on the basis of feedback from faculty members who looked at the Study 1 measures and thought that some faculty would find the RWA offensive and thus reduce the response rate. The RWA measure was replaced with a modern prejudice measure designed for a Canadian setting. The belief in a meritocracy scale was also dropped given its high correlation with the Protestant ethic measure which was retained.
4. In fact the difference between these correlations was significant ($z = 2.10, p < .04$). This difference

should be interpreted with caution, however, because the items comprising the two PC measures slightly differ from one study to the next.

5. We would like to thank the action editor on this paper, Mike Hogg, for suggesting this perspective.

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