

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Debate Over Political Correctness

by

Lawna Hurl

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 1998

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0-612-34892-X

ABSTRACT

Political Correctness is one of the mostly passionately debating topics in universities today, yet an adequate understanding of the term remains elusive. As so many individual issues are placed under the guise of political correctness, unfounded assumptions and allegations are made. Along with the left/right dichotomy so prevalent in discussions concerning political correctness, the ability of the university to serve as an open and able institution that encourages discussion is seriously harmed. The main argument of the thesis is that debates concerning political correctness are futile considering the elastic structure of the terminology and the perceptions of ideological labeling.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was a long lonely summer up in my windowless office on the 7th floor of the Social Sciences building but it could not have been done with the help of friends and family. I would like to begin by thanking my family, who although often wondered what good a Master of Arts was always encouraged me nonetheless. Thankfully this encouragement was both verbal and financial. Don't worry dad, law school may come yet. Don't worry mom, if law school doesn't come up something else will. Not that either of you have ever worried about me. I thank you both for everything.

The friends that I have made in the Department, from fellow grad students to administrative staff made it easy to drag myself into the office every day. Without them this entire process would have been much more difficult. I want to especially thank Amy Nugent for the flowers. As well, I must specifically thank the head, and only member remaining member in good standing of the Official Stress Relief Committee, Jodi McCulley.

Throughout my university experience there have been several influential people, without whom, I would not have stumbled onto this path. Specifically I would like to recognize Dr. Edmund Auger at the University of Alberta for turning me onto the importance of language in our society.

Also, Dr. Conal Condren at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia who was instrumental in my seeking of a graduate degree as well as my appreciation of how language can play games with our minds.

An extra huge expression of gratitude goes out to Dr. Lisa Young who understood what I was going through and beautifully walked the line between criticism and construction. Dr. Young will make an excellent supervisor for many students in the years to come.

Finally, my supervisor, Dr. Barry Cooper has given me a new found appreciation for what it means to aspire to be a scholar as well as the attainment of a liberal education. I must also thank him for agreeing with my assertions of how smart I am. Dr. Cooper, you once said that you like students with confidence but I was free to be confident because I knew that you believed in my abilities.

This is dedicated to Ted Percival who taught me at a young age about work ethic and truth. I miss you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
Epigraph.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND IDEOLOGY.....	41
CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AS POLICY.....	74
CHAPTER FOUR: DEBATING PAST EACH OTHER.....	106
CONCLUSION.....	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	147

The highest result of education is
tolerance.

Hellen Keller, *Optimism*, 1903

Introduction

A mere ten years ago the acronym of PC would have stood for personal computer to many in North America, but today PC stands for Political Correctness, one of the hottest topics of debate in the 1990s. It is not uncommon to hear discussions concerning the politically correct or politically incorrect way of doing things or of conducting oneself from word choice in the classroom to defensive strategies in football. The controversies surrounding PC have been given widespread attention in the media and concern a variety of subjects, quite often affecting the university and the state of higher education. The ensuing debate appears to incite an abstract ideological polarization, with the "Cultural Left" as proponents of political correctness while the "New Right" argues for its disintegration.¹ Yet, much of the critical response concerning PC is not abstract, but rather rooted in anecdotal evidence suggesting that the policies and procedures that have resulted from PC are an assault on freedom and common sense. However, both the abstract ideals and the specific examples are important aspects in understanding political correctness. The problem is that the two sides of this debate are not operating on the same level; one is rooted in abstract ideas, the other in concrete examples. It is this unexplored dynamic of PC as

¹ These ideological labels will be analyzed in further detail

both theory and practice that will be examined in this thesis.

The term 'Political Correctness' has graced the headlines and pages of our newspapers and magazines, there is a television show called *Politically Incorrect* and the perception presented by the media is that almost everyone is willing either to *conform* to the ideals of PC or symbolically *defy* them. Regardless of whether one thinks of PC in a derogatory fashion or in a way that views it as espousing values and issues to which society should adhere, there are significant issues that require exploration within the debate itself. Based on media coverage alone, PC would appear to be a relatively simple concept, yet another dichotomy between the left and the right. This time the struggle is between the New Right and the Cultural Left, leading some to argue that theories of worldwide value change, predominantly post-materialism, lie at the root of the current issues.² Then again, perhaps the entire debate is simply indicative of the never-ending struggle between the way things are and an idealistic vision of how some people want them to be. In any case, it is essential to develop an understanding of political correctness, both as a concept and in terms of the current PC wars, because it occupies the minds of so many, from the passionate speeches

below in order to give them a more precise meaning.

² Post-materialism and Ronald Inglehart's theory of worldwide value change will be analyzed at length in Chapter 2.

of influential political figures to the conversations of the average people.

Because political correctness is so controversial and is often erroneously reduced to two categories, for and against, it is essential to analyze its intricacies. Moreover, so much is supposedly said and done in the name of, or in opposition to, political correctness, understanding what the arguments are and how they relate to each other will facilitate overall comprehension of what PC means to society and to higher education. The vast majority of writing on political correctness chooses a side, puts forth its arguments and rests its case. As important a contribution as that is, it does not reveal how the debate itself is progressing and why it is has maintained such a passionate level of preoccupation among so many. By showing that the two sides of the debate are talking essentially a different language, this thesis will bring together aspects of both sides that are potentially compatible in some ways, but are not presented that way in the context of the PC debates. In short, we will use the PC arguments as data and evidence and then subject them to analysis in order to bring out aspects of each side that may be harmonized.

The use of the term political correctness can be problematic for all involved. As the current usage of the phrase is predominantly derogatory, many of those who feel that they are designated as being "Politically Correct" resent the implications of the term. In part, because the

current understanding of the term is often described as nothing more than a politically based construct of the New Right, the very use of the term implies an acceptance that PC exists. Those on the Cultural Left, and others who might be considered PC could very well prefer to call their actions egalitarian or as being devoted to working against racism and sexism. In contrast, those on the New Right often reject the presumption that if they are not politically correct then they are necessarily sexist and racist. Notwithstanding the polemical context, a common terminology has been employed extensively by both sides of the debate. Furthermore, as vocal critic of the New Right, Valerie L. Scatamburlo, argues "...to dismiss PC as a myth or to treat it as a red herring created by the Right ignores an important set of questions and simultaneously closes off the possibility of exploring them."³ Thus, the Cultural Left may not embrace the label and its connotations, but it usually responds to PC critics not by debunking the term but rather attacking the arguments and discussing other contributing factors. In any case, both sides use the term as a point of departure to discuss the varying issues associated with it. In this thesis the term political correctness will be used to describe a phenomenon that encompasses varying ideas and theories, to be discussed in

³ Valerie L. Scatamburlo, *Soldiers of Misfortune: The New Right's Culture War and the Politics of Political Correctness*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 13.

detail below. Even so, it must be borne in mind that for many, the term itself is extremely polemical.

One of the primary focuses of this thesis is to argue that the symbolism of political correctness is extremely complex, and thus can easily be manipulated and used in an antagonistic fashion in the PC debates. Yet, it is not the political maneuvers that interest us here but rather the fluidity of the term. Political correctness has been portrayed as an ideological indicator, a personal belief system and a policy that has been detrimental to freedom, academic and otherwise. But what is it really? How can it be all these things simultaneously? Chapter 1 provides an exploratory definition of political correctness, including the origins of the term and indicates the importance of the university context in the PC debates.

Once the background and context is established, Chapter 2 explores the ideological dimensions of political correctness. There are two points to be made here. First, it is important to understand the use of political labels and the left/right political spectrum, specifically the implications and assumptions brought forth by such terminology. Second, we discuss individual values, beliefs and attitudes that are considered an integral part of what PC is supposed to be. This kind of personal ideology can range from personal word choice to political support for a medley of social issues. The possibility that political correctness is part of a worldwide shift in values on the

individual level in theories such as post-materialism is also considered. The third chapter shifts the focus to policy and to be policy oriented action either allegedly inspired by, or criticized as, political correctness. This examination will disclose those aspects of political correctness that are most often elaborated on as well as developing the distinction between PC as theory and PC as practice.

Then, in Chapter 4, on the basis of the foregoing considerations, we compare and contrast these dimensions of PC in order to indicate in detail that the two sides of the PC debate are missing each other's points, which in turn results in confusion and unfounded allegations that are detrimental to the university. This analysis also considers the most significant causes of miscommunication and briefly discusses overarching consequences.

It is important to reiterate at this stage that this thesis is exclusively exploring the dynamics of the PC debate and not attempting to determine who is right and who is wrong, or who is winning or losing the debate. In fact, the arguments presented below show that there is no simple right and wrong when it comes to political correctness. Both the complexities of the concept itself and the arguments put forth by both sides illustrate that PC cannot be judged or understood as a blanket theory, explaining everything to everyone. Furthermore, it would serve no purpose in the context of this thesis to pass judgment on

the debate and attempt to declare a winner. Scores of books and articles have been written from all ideological viewpoints. They are often repetitive and rarely contribute an original idea or example. Of course, when analyzing a topic as controversial as political correctness, it is difficult to refrain from expressing an opinion, but once again this is not the intention of this thesis. At all times, the greatest effort is made to avoid statements or assumptions that would favour arguments or ideological leanings from either side. Given the premise of the overarching argument being that the entire debate is operating on different levels, it seems only right to treat the two sides as fairly as possible. It is the style and the argumentation that are being considered, not the valuation of arguments themselves.

Before embarking on the study of these dynamics it is necessary to detail extensively the background and context in which this debate is occurring. Political correctness is notoriously difficult to define. Considerable effort therefore must be devoted not only to grasping the implications of the term but also to discovering where it came from and why it has become so controversial in the 1990s. We begin therefore with a clarification of the background to the influential factors and issues connected to the PC debate.

Chapter 1

Although many people may feel comfortable using the expression political correctness in conversation, they would be hard pressed to provide a concise definition of what it is. PC has enveloped such an enormous umbrella of individual debates and issues that it is difficult to include them all in a single complete definition. Although the terminology is complicated it is still a contemporary topic that has been able to incite fierce debate and malicious allegations. Thus, this chapter will attempt a thorough definition as well as a discussion of the consequences of such a definition. A chronology of the term 'political correctness' and an analysis of why PC is a product of the late twentieth century follows this initial account.

It is not uncommon for those who write about political correctness to begin by refuting the definition of the central term. In fact, some maintain that, "The term is so inexact, so freighted polemically, that it should be retired forthwith."¹ Even so, a useful start would proceed along the following lines: PC refers to, "...a web of interconnected, though not mutually dependent, ideological beliefs that have challenged the traditional nature of the university as well as traditional curriculum, standards of

¹ Morris Dickstein, "Correcting PC," in *Our Country, Our Culture: The Politics of Political Correctness*, ed. Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips (Boston: Partisan Review Press, 1994), 42.

excellence, and views about truth and justice, and the objectivity of knowledge, while accentuating our cultural, gender, class, and racial differences in the name of campus diversity."² Generally then, we begin with the view that PC can be commonly understood as an attempt to actualize the ideals customary in social movements such as feminism and multiculturalism, which includes a challenge to the current societal structure.³ However, many would immediately dismiss this definition as it implies a degree of organization to PC. In contrast they argue that, "Merely to utter one's disdain about the persistence of social injustice invites the label of PC and the contempt of liberals and conservatives alike."⁴ Furthermore, such a definition of PC erroneously assumes that everything under its wing is compatible. In other words, umbrella-like definitions of PC erroneously equate the goals of the feminist movements with those of postmodern theorists who question our current understanding of objectivity and truth. Although the common thread among PC related issues might be contesting the hegemony of a dominant culture, it is not hard to recognize difficulties in trying to say that racism and sexism, for example, are the same thing and can be criticized or confronted in the same way. For others this

² Francis J. Beckwith and Michael E. Bauman ed. *Are You Politically Correct?: Debating America's Cultural Standards*, (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1993), 9.

³ Although this definition limits PC within the university, and that is the context that will be used in this thesis, many of the issues that relate to PC deal with larger challenges to society in general.

definition would also be incomplete without mentioning specific policies such as affirmative action, as well as the importance that political maneuvering plays in the PC debates. In fact, many claim that PC issues involve ideologically motivated financial support and radical politics more than legitimate concerns and arguments.

The topic of political correctness has been taken up enthusiastically by the mass media, resulting in not only an oversimplified understanding of the situation but also a distorted concentration on money and power rather than arguments. Some maintain that the entire debate has been, "...shaped by a confluence of factors: the media's institutional biases, the elite status and class affinity of its owners, editors, and reporters, the marginalization of oppositional discourse, and the right's substantial financial resources and corresponding political influence."⁴ For example, it has often been noted that many critics of PC, such as Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball and Dinesh D'Souza received significant financial support from the conservative *John M. Olin Foundation* for their publications. In fact, the National Association of Scholars (NAS), considered to be one of the first major efforts in organizing right-wing faculties in universities across the United States, is credited with starting a 'trend' of serving as "...a conduit

⁴ Scatamburlo, 9.

⁵ Jim Neilson, "The Great PC Scare," in *PC Wars*, ed. Jeffrey Williams (New York: Routledge, 1995), 70-71.

for corporate funding of selected academics."⁶ The financial influence exerted by corporations such as Coors, Mobil, Smith-Richardson, Earhart and Scaife, includes student newspapers, such as the notoriously conservative *Dartmouth Review*, *Prospect* and *Campus Report*.⁷ Furthermore, the New Right is often described as ruthless in their influence on the media and the portrayal of 'PC Thought Police' or the leftist tyrannical control of academic freedom.⁸ In the early 1990s, both *Maclean's* and *Newsweek* featured cover stories concerning political correctness, and the overall perspective of the coverage was predominantly anti-PC and did not offer a balanced coverage of the issues.⁹ Nevertheless, the financial source or political motivation of arguments in a debate does not automatically negate the importance of legitimate concerns being discussed.

On the opposing side, members of the Cultural Left are often accused of using the security of tenured positions at universities to further their political aims as well as to

⁶ Sara Diamond, "The Funding of the NAS," in *Beyond PC: Towards a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1992) 89.

⁷ Ibid., 89. More information on the financial contributions of corporations to conservative causes can be found in Wilson John K. *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

⁸ Todd Giltin, "The Demonization of Political Correctness," *Dissent*, (Fall 1995): 494.

⁹ For example, in *Newsweek*, seven pages and two separate articles concentrated on how academic freedom is being suppressed at universities by the so-called repressive tactics of feminists and multiculturalists, while a single insert consisting of two half pages gave a primarily biographical profile of Duke English professor Stanley Fish, briefly outlining his argument to 'Love the PC Canon'.

stifle academic freedom. Popular examples of this criticism include Vince Sarich at the University of California at Berkeley and Philippe Rushton at the University of Western Ontario. Both Sarich and Rushton engage in controversial scientific research concerning race comparisons between individuals of varying ancestry and both are severely criticized not only on the basis of their scientific theories but also and more predominantly on the fact that they even pursue such topics.¹⁰ The majority of the criticism comes from students and other professors, including many geneticists. One particular critic of Sarich is his colleague Nancy Scheper-Hughes, who maintains that not only are Sarich's scientific methods non-existent but that he uses his classes to put forth his version of biological racism. Those who support Sarich maintain that his critics are preventing him from doing legitimate research and using their positions in universities to play political games and to try and have Sarich fired.¹¹ Indeed, there were demands by many that the two be dismissed from their tenured positions and that their entire area of research be prohibited.¹² Although the mass media and many

¹⁰ Although it is likely that the scientific methodologies of the two researchers in question were thoroughly scrutinized, it is not our concern to consider scientific arguments here.

¹¹ Paul Selvin, "The Raging Bull of Berkeley," *Science*, Vol. 251, (January 25, 1991): 370-371.

¹² For more details on Vince Sarich see Paul Selvin, "The Raging Bull of Berkeley," *Science*, Vol. 251, (January 25, 1991). For details on Philippe Rushton see David Bercuson et al. *Petrified Campus: The Crisis in Canada's Universities*, (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1997). In the end neither professor was dismissed.

involved in the controversy have chosen to focus on these and other extreme and controversial aspects of PC, it is not necessary to do the same here. Examples of power politics and financial contributions are separate areas that do not alter our intention to explore the dynamics of the debate and focus on the pure ideas concerning political correctness.

Once again, it is noted that many on the Cultural Left reject the very notion of political correctness existing anywhere but in the eyes of the New Right. Even though many maintain that, PC has, "...never existed as a unified manifesto of ideas, viewpoints, or ideological presuppositions."¹³; this does not alter the extensive use of the term by both sides, including the Cultural Left. Assessing financial sources, people in positions of power and political motivations is significant in some contexts; however, it does not negate the fact that there are legitimate concerns by both sides that deserve consideration. Many of those engaged in the PC debates use terminology of war: they are fighting the PC wars on the *battleground* of the university. If this is the case then, the issues discussed above influence not only the arguments but also the outcome. Yet, these kinds of accusations draw focus away from the substantive issues that require thoughtful discussion. We are not concerned with unearthing

¹³ Scatamburlo, 27.

an absolute right or wrong in PC but are going to examine specific areas of policy or theory that are denied or accepted by those doing the debating, and analyze the arguments or the media fueled perceptions of them. That is, we intend to focus strictly on the largely unexplored dynamic of PC debates as such. The first step is understanding where PC came from and how it has developed into the controversial topic that it has today.

Our current and controversial understanding of PC dates back less than ten years, but the term itself has appeared prior to then and has been reinvented several times throughout its history. The first appearance of the term dates back to an American Supreme Court case in 1793. In *Chishom v. Georgia* the court decided that federal jurisdiction over state related judicial proceedings should be maintained. Thus, upholding the right of a citizen to sue a state. The state of Georgia argued that they were a sovereign state and should be left to attend to their own judicial affairs, thus barring any direct federal interference in cases where the state is involved. Although the decision focused primarily on issues of state sovereignty, Justice James Wilson used the term 'political correct' quite literally when he illustrated his legal point by objecting to those who propose toasts to the United States as opposed to the People of the United States. For Justice Wilson any toast to the United States ought to be to the citizens and not to the states, as it is the people who

represent the 'ultimate sovereignty' of the country. Thus the toast was contradictory or as he indicated, "This is not politically correct."¹⁴ This decision was later overturned by the passage of the Eleventh Amendment and the terminology forgotten for over a century.

Ironically, the widespread return of the phrase came in the 1930s and 1940s from the members of hard-line left. It is thought that the specific terminology of having correct and incorrect ideas may have come from translations of Mao Tse-tung's writings, specifically *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. The use of the word 'correct' was used extensively in the translations of Mao, including a 1957 speech entitled, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People". This speech was translated in 1966 and widely distributed and often quoted among the left.¹⁵ But if the term itself came from Mao Tse-tung the meaning evolved from a way to describe those who obediently towed the party line, to those who were naively mistaking reality and blindly following party leaders without question.

This was particularly true of Stalinists who originally used the term to categorize texts as being politically correct if they adhered to a party line that supported the Stalinist version of the proletarian revolution.¹⁶ During

¹⁴ as quoted in James E. Pfander, "Were the Framers of the Constitution PC?" *Constitutional Commentary*, v. 11:1 Winter, (1994): 14.

¹⁵ Ruth Perry, "A Short History of the Term Politically Correct," in *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*. ed. Patricia Aufderheide, (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1992), 72, 73.

¹⁶ Michael Keefer, *Lunar Perspectives: Field Notes from the Culture Wars*,

World War II, as socialists and members of the Communist Party in the United States debated the Hitler-Stalin Pact, disagreement arose as to whether or not Stalin should be supported in allying with Germany. For some, the fact that the Soviet position was 'correct' for no other reason than it coming from Stalin, was considered ridiculous and "...a betrayal of European Jewry as well as of socialist ideals."¹⁷ This lead to, "...the term 'politically correct' being used disparagingly to refer to someone whose loyalty to the CP line overrode compassion and led to bad politics."¹⁸ It was used fervently by socialists during this time in an effort to separate themselves from communists. In fact, those on the left employed political correctness with good humour and "...took pride in thinking for themselves."¹⁹

Through the 1960s and 1970s, the term began to move beyond usage confined exclusively to traditional economic leftist movements to those of feminism and multiculturalism as well as being applied to academic discourse and practice. Many feminist and African-American leaders used the term as "... a form of ironic self-reproach, to be 'politically correct' was to succumb to dogmatism, humourlessness and self-righteousness."²⁰ For example, a 1970s feminist might jokingly refer to her red lipstick and indicate that she

(Anansi Press, 1996), 28.

¹⁷ Herbert Kohl, "The Politically Correct Bypass: Multiculturalism and the Public Schools," *Social Policy*, Summer (1991): 32.

¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹ Richard Feldstein, *Political Correctness: A Response from the Cultural Left*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.

liked it even if it was not politically correct. During this time period scholarly use of the term became more popular, although application of the term remained leftist, both with regards to economic and to social issues.²¹ For many on the left, it was common to begin a critical judgment of a fellow leftist with the phrase, 'their attitudes may be politically correct but...'. In other words, there was, "...no objection to the attitudes of the person [being judged], but that those attitudes were not enough to qualify that person."²² This kind of judgment made it possible for two people on the same end of the ideological spectrum to distance themselves on certain areas or espouse different values concerning their purpose in the university environment.

Almost again forgotten throughout the 1980s, the term resurfaced toward the end of the decade. This time it was reintroduced by neo-conservatives describing political correctness as a hostile movement and establishing a derogatory understanding of the term.²³ This new usage transformed both the meaning and impact of political correctness. Suddenly, PC was, "...indeed a truly

²⁰ Keefer, 28.

²¹ These distinctions and others are discussed at length in Chapter 2.

²² Eugene Goodheart, "PC or not PC," in *Our Country, Our Culture: The Politics of Political Correctness*, ed. Edith Krueizweil and William Phillips, (New York: Partisan Review Press, 1994), 51. It is also noted that this kind of qualification is common in feminism. "I am not a feminist but..."

²³ The ideological implications of saying that 'neo-conservatives' reintroduced the concept will be addressed further in Chapter 2. However, both the return of the term and its meaning are the responsibility of neo-conservative critics.

totalitarian concept" including, "...intimidation, character assassination, hounding of 'resisters' and 'reactionaries', denial of discourse and freedom of thought and speech" and is now often referred to as the New McCarthyism of the Left.²⁴

An important characteristic of the debate is that the response to neo-conservative critics by the Cultural Left was slow and is still not as organized an argument as the New Right. As Jeffrey Williams opens his edited collection entitled *PC Wars*, he explains,

At first, I thought it would go away. Like last week's news. ...I thought all of this (PC) would prompt a round of alternately outraged, thoughtful and depressing editorials (and perhaps an episode of 20-20) about the state of education, today's youth, the decline of family values, and the three Rs, and then be over. To paraphrase the story of Chicken Little, the clouds would clear, the sky would still be there, and the universities would carry on.²⁵

Williams was mistaken. It appears that the Cultural Left was forced to enter the debate in order to respond to the New Right. As we have seen previously, it has been argued that the New Right is simply better organized and better funded and thus able to produce an illusion of what political correctness is. Yet once again, this is not our focus here and does not adversely affect the legitimate concerns on both sides. It seems at first that the Left had

²⁴ Peter Drucker, "Political Correctness and American Academe," *Society*, (January/February 1998): 380.

²⁵ Jeffrey Williams, ed. *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1.

decided to not even dignify the argument with a response. Notwithstanding the fact that the Left was slow out of the starting blocks in this debate, we will consider issues and ideas raised by both sides.

Nevertheless, there remains the question as to why the critics and the controversy arrived on the political scene in the early 1990s. Is there really tyrannical thought control by the left? If so, where did it come from? And what circumstances lead to the particular flare in this debate towards the end of the twentieth century? In order to understand the question of "why now?", it is essential consider the turbulent history of the 1960s social protest movements as well as their lingering effects on following generations and their culmination in the current debate.

Although many politically correct ideals and theories were born at a time of great social and cultural change in North America, a large part of the current criticism focuses on both the participants of mass social protests of the sixties and the following generation that, although not physically present, have fallen under the influence of the supposed radicals and their PC spell. As Mark Kingwell submitted to Canadians in the *Globe and Mail*, "The PC Police are not new, despite all the recent furor about them. In fact, the political orthodoxy they represent, like so much of what today passes for the cutting edge on North American

campuses, is of 1960s vintage."²⁶ In his publication, *Tenured Radicals*, Roger Kimball describes PC proponents as those who protested on the streets in the 1960s and then proceeded to enter the universities when the protesting was done, only to close the door of freedom behind them and establish the system that they desired. He goes on to say that, "...the men and women who are paid to introduce students to the great works and ideas of our civilization have by and large remained true to the emancipationist ideology of the sixties."²⁷ For Kimball, it is this internalization of the radical vision of the 1960s that has lead to the decline of higher education. Therefore it can be argued that part of the timing of the emergence of this issue is simply a result of the twenty years it took for the radical student protesters of the 1960s to establish themselves within the institutions where they were once students. And now, according to Kimball, "...the university is supplying many of those erstwhile radicals with handsome paychecks, a pleasant working environment, and lifetime job security..."²⁸ Yet, it is not only the former student radical protesters that remain influenced by the 1960s.

It is sometimes maintained that those who criticize PC still harbour regret and distaste for the activities of two decades ago and that they are currently engaged in attacking

²⁶ Mark Kingwell, "Enter the Campus Thought Police," *Globe & Mail*, April 15, 1991, A18.

²⁷ Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics has Corrupted Higher*

now what they were unable or unwilling to attack then. Those who opposed the radicalized 60s include former hard-line leftists who were discouraged by the extent and rapidity of change and shifted certain social aspects of their political position to the right. This is also indicative of the split between the old 'economic' left and the new 'cultural' left.²⁹ Thus, the new left/right debate focuses on social aspects rather than economics, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. Regardless, it is often argued that, "Right-wing neo-conservatives, who despise poststructuralist, postmodernist, and multiculturalist scholars, have constituted their identity in reaction to the youth movement of the 1960s."³⁰ Although others would refute this idea, instead arguing that the current identity of the Right in North America has been specifically plotted throughout this century.³¹ Yet, for the most part, the basic premise is that the participants in the current debate surrounding political correctness were either protesting or resisting thirty some years ago, and that they have since exerted their influence so heavily on the next generation that everyone has been forced to choose a definitive viewpoint. Nonetheless, the seeds of political correctness did not remain dormant throughout the 70s and early 1980s.

Education, (New York: Harper & Row, 1990): xiv.

²⁸ Ibid., xiv.

²⁹ Feldstein, 7.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ For a more detailed account see Scatamburlo, Valerie. Chapter 1.

Each aspect of political correctness from womens' and minority rights to postmodern discourse has evolved in its unique way. However, in many areas the path followed is similar enough to demonstrate a chronology that helps to explain how the issue of political correctness emerged so strongly in 1990. As discussed earlier, the 1960s saw turbulent social protests, quite often large, but highly unorganized on the streets of North America. Although successful in many regards, street protests eventually evolved into organizations. For example, perhaps the best known feminist organization in the world, the National Organization for Women (NOW), was established on June 30, 1966 in Washington D.C.³² Canada followed suit in 1972 with the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), which originally consisted of 32 women's groups dissatisfied with the policies of the federal government regarding women's issues. By 1988, it had grown into Canada's largest feminist lobby group comprising over 570 member groups.³³

The American National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed in New York in 1909, and it was originally forced to contend with brutalities such as lynchings and other forms of racial violence. As such violence began to decline in the early 1930s attention

³² National Organization for Women Website, "The History of the National Organization for Women" [National Organization for Women] [cited June 18, 1998]; available from: <http://www.now.org.history/history.html>.

³³ Lorraine Greaves, "Reorganizing the National Action Committee on the Status of Women 1986-1988," in *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada*, ed. Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock,

shifted to economic discrimination in social programs such as the New Deal and discrimination in the military. But by the late 1950s and early 1960s the concentration moved to civil liberties and street protests. Ninetenn fifty-five saw the Montgomery Bus Boycott, when a black woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man. For the NAACP the decade of the 1960s had been one of, "...non-violent social revolution [that] had transformed American society."³⁴ In fact, laws passed during these turbulent years lead directly to African Americans being able to enter into institutions and areas of society not yet, or only marginally open to blacks in America. The Civil Rights Act of 1960 and 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Rights Act of 1968 all created an environment whereby minorities could technically no longer be discriminated against.³⁵ Thus, the 1960s and 1970s saw the beginning of the institutionalization of the African-American movement.

Not only did organizations develop and work to lead and organize varying social movements, but it has been argued that the individual philosophies of the movements themselves have since worked their way into social institutions, ranging from the church to the military. Therefore, some maintain that in the 1980s the public image of social

(Toronto:James Lorimer and Company, Publishers, 1991), 101-102.
³⁴ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "What You Should Know About the NAACP" [NAACP Online] [June 23, 1998] available

movements, specifically feminism, had changed. "Over the last decade the consciousness-raising functions of street politics and pressure groups activity have been succeeded by a process of what might be termed unobtrusive mobilization inside institutions."³⁶ This new kind of political activism includes the physical presence of those from groups who had historically absent in social institutions as well as the advent of varying organizations that support such movements, including interest groups to small volunteer associations.

One of the most significant results of this evolution of politicization throughout the sixties and seventies has been the implementation of policies, predominantly in the early 1980s, that have followed legislation in an attempt to reflect the goals of these social movements. The Canadian Human Rights Commission, for example, came out with a general policy regarding sexual harassment in 1983. The policy at University of Calgary was also passed in 1983 with revised versions passing in 1987 and 1990. Although laws concerning employment equity were passed primarily in the 1960s, it was not until the early eighties that specific policies concerning affirmative action surfaced.³⁷ In June 1983, the Canadian Federal Public service began to establish

from <http://www.naACP.org/about/factsheet.htm>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, "Feminism Within American Institutions," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society*, vol. 16, no.1, (1990): 27.

³⁷ These laws include the American Equal Pay Act of 1963, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, amended in 1972. In Canada federal and provincial human rights legislation includes employment equity.

quantitative hiring goals for women, natives and the handicapped. Employment equity projects were implemented in four separate government departments by 1983.³⁸ Employment equity policies are still a topic of great controversy into the 1990s and they will be discussed further in the thesis.

During this time period, there was also a revolution in academia itself, known as postmodernism. Born out of European linguistic theory in the 1960s, postmodernism theorizes that rational truth is a myth and there is no way to establish a fair and just way of ordering society. Thus early postmodernists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida argued that all text and language is a matter of social construction whereby the societal factors influencing the author are more important than the text itself.³⁹ One of the most significant characteristics of postmodernism is that it challenges the domination of traditional Western rational thought. It also concerns the way in which the world is being understood. "In fact, in a postmodern view, different realities are no more than different stories about things that we construct for ourselves both personally and culturally and then live within."⁴⁰ Postmodernism became an extremely fashionable approach in many departments in

³⁸ These departments were: Employment and Immigration Canada, the Secretary of State Department, the Treasury Board and the Treasury Board Secretariat. Conrad Winn, "Affirmative action for women: more than a simple case of justice," *Canadian Public Administration*, Volume 28, no.1 Spring, (1995), 27.

³⁹ Peter Emberly, *Zero Tolerance: Hot Button Politics in Canada's Universities*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, (1996), 103-104.

⁴⁰ Joseph Natoli, *A Primer to Postmodernity*, (Malden: Blackwell, 1997),

universities from the humanities and social sciences into less likely areas such as architecture.⁴¹

Naturally, as the presence of those sympathetic to social movements and challenges to traditional rationality grew, so did the criticism of both the organizations and the movements they represent. Furthermore, it becomes increasingly apparent that many of the controversial issues and changes as well as the ensuing critical commentary occurs in the context of the university.

Thus, as the 1980s came to a close, a number of now well known critics and criticisms surfaced. In 1987 Allan Bloom chose to condemn sharply what he felt were disastrous consequences to the feminist movement in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*. Apparently intended to focus primarily on the state of higher education in America, Bloom spent considerable time discussing "the feminist project" and its detrimental affects on the family, female modesty and the high price that men suffer as a result of feminism. Bloom also criticized blacks in the post civil rights movement era. According to Bloom, in the 1960s, the tone changed from rights for human beings to rights for blacks because they are blacks. Bloom argued that, "...the [American] Constitution does not promise respect for blacks,

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⁴¹ There are also arguments that Postmodernism has resulted in a society that is plagued with value relativism, whereby no one feels that there is any truth and that the search for truth in general is in vein. However, this thesis will concentrate strictly on the theory of postmodernism itself and its relation to the university.

whites, yellows, Catholics, Protestants, or Jews. It guarantees the protection of the rights of individual human beings. This has not proved to be enough, however, to what is perhaps by now a majority of Americans."⁴² What Bloom criticized is the proliferation of 'identity politics' whereby some claim a person is judged by their status (i.e., woman, lesbian, African-American) rather than as a human being or citizen. Others argue that this kind of identity politics moves away from trying to solve the problems but chooses to concentrate on the past. In other words, a movement such as multiculturalism, "...has focused on blacks, gays, and women more as victims than as agents; it is concerned more with exposing ideology than with achieving practical results."⁴³

In a similar vein, Roger Kimball states that radical feminism, "...seeks to subordinate literature to ideology by instituting a fundamental change in the way literary works are read and taught."⁴⁴ He goes on to say that, "...feminism has provided a kind of blueprint for special interests that wish to appropriate the curriculum to achieve political goals." and that, "...the dominant voice in the humanities departments of many of our best colleges and universities" is women's studies."⁴⁵ Kimball also criticizes the

⁴² Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 33-34.

⁴³ Dickstein, 45.

⁴⁴ Kimball, 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19. Note: The quotes are directly from the sources listed but the line of discussion is from Susan Faludi, *BACKLASH: The Undeclared*

postmodern trend in universities. According to Kimball postmodernism has taken over university departments from English to architecture and all becoming a victim of, "...opaque and ideologically charged academicization."⁴⁶

As the critics were describing the varying aspects of the phenomenon that was apparently contributing to the decline of higher education, it was lumped together under the label of 'political correctness'. Even though it is said to come from the Cultural Left, there is no doubt that the invention of PC as a concept developed out of criticisms from the New Right. This assertion is rarely challenged by the New Right. Rather, their claim is that they merely put a name to something that has been in existence since the 1960s. In other words, according to the New Right, even though the term political correctness did not materialize until the late 1980s, the phenomenon itself has existed since the 1960s. As many of these criticisms centre around education, the topic leads into the university environment and questions concerning the capacity or desire of universities to take on a political role in higher education and what that role can and should be. The university will be discussed in detail below.

Obviously, this discussion has not provided comprehensive explanations and definitions of all areas included in the area of PC. Furthermore, the above examples

do not fully explain why political correctness has developed into the passionately debated topic that it has. Each individual movement has different issues and events on which to draw. However, these examples do illustrate part of the reason that the 1990s have become the decade to be politically correct or politically incorrect. It is apparent when considering movements such as feminism and specific policies such as sexual harassment that the timing fits our argument. To summarize this chronology: The 1960s were a time of great social upheaval in North America. Mass street protests were born out of new social movements concerning the rights of minorities and women as well as theories that challenged the dominant culture and way of thinking. As this turbulent decade drew to a close, many of the movements became embodied in organizations meant to continue where the demonstrations had left off. Legislation during this time period as well as specialised organizations and the increased participation of minorities and women in arenas where they were previously absent, led to the development of specific policies in the early 1980s. These policies, ranging from sexual harassment to affirmative action, and other challenges to the dominant structure induced criticism. It is this criticism that sparked the debate as it is now understood and has enveloped all the

⁴⁶ Kimball, 116.

above issues into the all-encompassing term of political correctness.

This combination of the 1960s social movements and their subsequent rapid institutionalization has created a situation whereby an illusion of a dichotomy has evolved. Yet, it would be naive to claim the entire situation is nothing more than a conflict between those who favour change versus those who would like to maintain the status quo. It is often argued that the extensive success in realizing many of the goals of the 1960s protesters has made it difficult for many to adapt. Simultaneously, others are concerned with the rapidity of such changes and with the long and short term consequences of such ideals. Yet, the place of the university in society throughout this period of time has contributed to not only the timing of the debate but its contextual battleground.

By far the most significant institution in the entire PC debate is the university. Part of the success of the turbulent 60s protests is a result of the fact that the environment of universities encouraged/es a wide variety of expression while also providing for the organizational structure to carry out political activism from massive demonstrations to small scale poster campaigns. Furthermore, the administrative abilities of universities to establish and enforce policies made them an ideal place to be for those who were searching and hoping for rapid change to substantial social problems. Also, the university is meant

to create an environment whereby argument and persuasion are intended to flourish and to triumph over allegedly 'trivial' matters, such as utility and personal interest. Where else would a debate with the intensity and passion of that of political correctness succeed, but a place where argument was intended to occur? Thus, many believe that, "The university must be seen as the intellectual guardian of an entire civilization."⁴⁷ It must also decide what kind of civilization to guard. As Dinesh D'Souza rightly points out, "Universities are a microcosm of society. But they are more than a reflection or mirror; they are a leading indicator."⁴⁸ This role of universities in the protest movements of the 1960s and the subsequent entry of some of those who participated into the university setting, coupled with the ability of universities to impose policy, and the already damaged relationship that intellectuals have with the public, all contribute to the importance of understanding the role of the academy in the PC debate.

In the context of the PC debate and the purpose of the university, the following questions seem to have become central: What is the role of the university? Is it an agent of social reproduction of a social or political elite or rather is it destined to play a role in the fundamental

⁴⁷ Brigitte Berger, "Multiculturalism and the Modern University," in *Our Country, Our Culture: The Politics of Political Correctness*, ed. Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips. (New York: Partisan Review Press, (1994), 19.

⁴⁸ Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 14.

social transformation of the students that enter it thus aiming at the higher goal of transforming society? In other words, critics think that those who follow a curriculum of PC are fundamentally changing students when they should be reproducing and reinforcing societal norms instead. Others believe that it is their duty to use the university to transform society and not simply to reproduce it. The ability of the university to choose between these possibilities, as well as not being restricted to them, serves well as the battleground of the PC wars.⁴⁹

Current calls for changes to the traditional university structure were born in the same decade as the social movements that produced the seeds of political correctness. In the early 1960s, Columbia professor Lionel Trilling began to remark an alteration in how faculty interacted with each other as a group and how they were deciding to teach their students. According to Trilling, the feeling of a common purpose among university faculty to work and think collectively about liberal education and how it affects young minds began to disintegrate. "Trilling noticed in his younger colleagues an eagerness for 'pressing upon [their students] the solid substance and the multitudinous precisions of [their]...particular discipline,' as opposed

⁴⁹ There is, of course, an argument that the university, unlike other social institutions, is devoted to the disinterested pursuit of truth. We will ignore this position, not because it is without merit and may even be a practical element in the lives of many scholars in university, but because it is a marginal element in our consideration of the PC debate.

to a disinterested commitment to cultivate their students' gifts for thinking critically about all ideas, including those held dear to the teacher."⁵⁰ This is different from the time period following the Second World War and during the rise of the Cold War, when there was a consensus that liberal education was "...a kind of inoculation against barbarism." whereby American institutions were nothing more than, "...instruments of education toward citizenship."⁵¹ This conception fell apart throughout the 1960s, as did the idea of a legitimate, singular *American* identity.

The resulting pedagogic confusion has left an ensuing debate concerning the function of education as well as having provided a justification for an escape into ideological enclaves. In other words, some argue that liberal education has been widely replaced by identity politics. This puts the possibility of open argumentation in danger in an environment whereby disagreeing with someone is impossible "...without implicitly slamming their plethora of 'isms'."⁵² It has become extremely important to be able to identify yourself and others with preset labels that separate everyone into specific groups. A celebration of separatism has largely replaced the commonality of Western

⁵⁰ Andrew Delbanco, "The Politics of Separatism." in *Our Country, Our Culture: The Politics of Political Correctness*, ed. Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips, (Boston: Partisan Review Press, 1994), 36. Delbanco is referring to an essay of Trilling's published posthumously from a lecture he had given in 1974.

⁵¹ Ibid., 37.

⁵² Anne Bains, "Negative ID: feminism and multiculturalism are under fire from the new right but destructive victim politics are an awfully

culture and this separatism has transferred to the university.

With critics focusing on the university, the original intentions and the societal roles of institutions of higher education are also being debated. The traditional understanding of the university, or what is sometimes labeled the Western rationalist tradition, maintains two central ideas, "One is that truth exists independent of human perceptions of it. The second is that in seeking truth, the personal characteristics of the seeker are irrelevant."⁵³ These foundations have been rocked by theories such as postmodernism that question the very possibility of objectivity under any circumstances. The charge is that, "...all knowledge is political, gendered, and ethnocentric, and that all pursuits reflect the social values and status of the seekers. There is no external objective reality."⁵⁴ Theoretical debates regarding these arguments have been raging now in universities for years. Although debate and discussion is essential to higher learning, there have been other consequences to the university environment.

In the context of PC debates the prevailing definition, or at least the historically dominant one, is that

easy target," *This Magazine*, V.29n (1) (July, 1995): 40-43.

⁵³ Patricia M. Marchak, *Racism, Sexism and the University: The Political Science Affair at the University of British Columbia*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

"...universities are institutions of social reproduction."⁵⁵ This permits not only the replication of the social order but its legitimization. In other words, wider social acceptance of ideas and theories arrives only after finding their way into the institutions whose role is to teach the next generation. This may partially explain why the 1960s street protesters moved their social movements into the institutions, from confronting the military over the Vietnam war to employment in the university, where they had a good chance at long term success. The theory is that in order for substantial alteration of society to take place it must seep into institutions, especially the universities, where newer generations realize such changes. As the new social movements that originated in the 1960s moved from the streets into traditional societal fixtures, the role of the university has evolved. However, this institutionalization has called into question what the university is actually accomplishing and what it should be called on to do.

Instead of legitimizing the status quo and slowly accumulating cultural fluctuations that are acceptable to larger society, there are those who feel the role of the university should be fundamentally political. Such a transformationist view holds that the entire PC debate has missed the point by focusing on whether or not PC exists and what the major issues happened to be. The major concern,

⁵⁵ Keefer., 21.

according to this view, should be that, "...the mission of higher education should indeed be political - that the goal should be, not the pursuit of 'objective' truth, but nothing less than the fundamental transformation of society."⁵⁶ In fact, certain arguments make no pretensions about their ultimate desire to change society. Although no one expects such changes to occur overnight, the small steps gained through both the theory and practice of what has been deemed political correctness are intended to lead to a larger goal. As Richard Ohmann delicately states, "...we work in whatever small ways we can toward the end of capitalist patriarchy: not just canon reform or deconstruction... but the transformation of society."⁵⁷ However, the consequences of the transformationist theory appear to play directly into the hands of PC critics.

If the university is going to be used as an agent of social transformation then it will be necessary to control it through policy. In fact, some argue that, "For the transformationist, rebuffing charges of political correctness is only a tactical manoeuvre; the strategic design is control over the universities themselves."⁵⁸ If this is true, and the ulterior motive of PC is to commandeer the university for the purpose of ensuring authoritative

⁵⁶ Martin Jerry L., "The University as Agent of Social Transformation: The Postmodern Argument Considered." in *Imperiled Academy*, edited by Howard Dickman, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. 1993), 203.

⁵⁷ Richard Ohmann, "On 'PC' and Related Matters," in *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, edited by Jeffrey Williams, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.

command over the social beings that are produced by the university, the very idea of the liberal education based on critical thinking is lost. Yet, this would erroneously assume that all transformationists adhere wholeheartedly to PC. As well, universities put themselves at dire risk under these circumstances to become nothing more than, "...supermarkets of social services."⁵⁹ Indeed John Fekete insists that political correctness is, "...not just a cultural style but a transformation" in the classrooms of universities all over Canada.⁶⁰ Moreover, an advocate of the transformist view also insists that it is still possible to exchange ideas and pursue the ideals of truth, without compromising broader social goals. In other words, "Traditional social reformers based their ideas for social change on their understanding of truth; the new theorists base their understanding of truth on their ideas for social change."⁶¹

This would seem to be in accord with the relativist version of truth. If there is no larger truth to be found, the development and understanding of truth will spring out of political goals for change, social and otherwise. The critic would quickly counter that the success of this method would effectively end all open debates on important social issues. Once society has been transformed to the liking of

⁵⁸ Martin, 204.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁰ John Fekete, *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising*, (Montreal: Robert Davies

the transformist, what is to happen? "Instead of the intellectual and moral center of society it was designed to be, it (the university) may become a utility, a glorified junior high school that keeps adolescents off the street or purely a vocational training institution."⁶² If the universities are or intend to remain agents of social reproduction, it would be difficult to discuss and be exposed to ideas that are outside of the existing systems. However, in an effort to transform society as a whole through the university, certain voices are destined to be eventually silenced. The debate surrounding the role of the university does not only address those within the institutions but also how the public views and understands the functioning of higher education within society.

Discussion of the need to transform society is not likely to endear academics to the public. Joan Wallach Scott points out that there has long been a contempt for those in the ivory tower, and that what is most feared about these intellectuals is, "...their critical relationship to society, their insistence on independence, and their freedom from practical restrictions."⁶³ In a world of slashing budgets, pleas of financial justification by universities often fall on deaf ears to criticisms from outside. When

Publishing, 1994), 34.

⁶¹ Martin, 206.

⁶² Drucker, p, 385.

⁶³ Joan Wallach Scott, "The Campaign Against Political Correctness," in *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, edited by Jeffrey Williams, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27.

allegations concerning a thought police are compounded in the media, it is claimed that nothing short of democracy itself is at stake and universities are seen to be on the wrong side of the coin. With this in mind, it then stands to reason that PC critics would take rhetorical advantage of the existence of this sentiment. "In prose that purports to be objective, they have criticized teaching in the academy as pathetically inept, contemporary research methods as pretentious and unimportant, and the tenure system itself as antiquated."⁶⁴ Such proverbial dirty laundry aired by certain intellectuals against others only continues to fuel the idea that a tyrannical minority is running universities that has no interest in truth or even in serious discussion. They hold fast to their ideals and fundamentally look to transform society in their direction. However, the neo-conservatives counter with their own versions of thought control and the supreme power of free thought and speech all in the name of democracy.⁶⁵ Each side of the PC debate is operating under different assumptions, one assumes the primacy of social reproduction and the other of social transformation and this will be shown by their arguments throughout the thesis. However, in the case of political correctness, the common ground is *control* or at the very least significant influence over the university.

⁶⁴ Feldstein, 14.

⁶⁵ Scott, 30.

Having considered what PC is, why it has surfaced in the early 1990s and the context in which is being debated, our focus can now turn to considering the dynamics of PC as an ideology and the how this contributes to the argument of this thesis.

Chapter 2 -PC and Ideology

Ideological labeling in terms of the left/right political continuum has been significant in political discussion for over two centuries. Ideology is a complicated concept, an integral aspect of political study, and it brings with it many assumptions and implications that are critical to understanding the PC debate. As economic issues have been overshadowed by social ones during the last three decades, ideological self-identification and the pinning of labels to people and ideas along the left/right scale has evolved and adapted in the ever changing political climate. This chapter assists in setting up the argument of the thesis by considering two things. Firstly, a detailed history of left/right ideological labeling and its relation to the PC debate is undertaken to contextualize a current understanding of the importance of left and right. This will not only reveal an integral dynamic of the debate but also show how and why the debate itself is understood as a dichotomy between the left and right. Secondly, the chapter shows how PC relates to the evolution of the leftist movement, including theories of post-materialism and world-wide value change. It is this area that contributes directly to the larger argument that one half of the PC debate is grounded in abstract ideologically based conceptions.

It is important to note that our discussion of ideology in this chapter is by no means exhaustive. The intention is

to focus on the left/right aspect of ideology and not coherent bodies of thought such as liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, socialism and the like. Not only does the debate over PC involve a strong tendency to classify ideas along a specific left/right continuum but also the translation of political ideology into political action often dictates the criticisms of PC. As a result of the intensely complex nature of left/right terminology, and of some of the assumptions that undergrid it, it is often used by both sides of the debate as a tool of argumentation that depends on the assumptions of the labels rather than the development of arguments. This is an important part of understanding the nature of the PC debates. For example, to say that those on the 'Left' are naturally and necessarily proponents of political correctness presumes not only a given set of beliefs on varying issues, but also conjecture regarding position on alleged PC policies. Although the capacity to make these assumptions may hold a degree of historical substance, as seen in this chapter, their application to the PC debates confuses understanding and leads to passionate accusation, contributing to the overall intensity of the debate. Not everyone accepts or appreciates ideological political labels and yet they are often tossed around with apparent ease when discussing PC, thus it is necessary to expose their implications on the debate itself and its participants. Even though the consideration of ideology here focuses primarily on its

relation to the PC debates, it is important to trace its history and give it a contextualization in universities at the end of the twentieth century.

If there is but one consistent aspect of the PC debates, it is the ideological labels that both sides often blindly pin on the other. Considering the many assumptions that accompany labels such as left and right, this is convenient for those who prefer to exchange ideological labels rather than discuss actual arguments. Unfortunately, this is a common tactic in the 'PC wars.' In order to gain a clearer picture as to how ideology is used in the PC debates, we will provide a summary outline of the history of the left/right continuum up to and including its impact on political correctness. This includes an examination of current trends in the area of value change, specifically post-materialism, and will enable us to consider whether PC is a characteristic of this kind of purported world-value change. Regardless of using either the left/right or materialist/post-materialist scale, the beliefs and attitudes of individuals are going to influence how they feel about issues such as political correctness. As the debate is regularly referred to in terms of the Cultural Left versus the New Right, the following section will enable us to clarify the assumptions brought with such terminology.¹

¹ It should be noted that not all authors specify 'New Right' and

The political significance of the terms left and right has been studied and debated since their debut in politics more than two centuries ago. Although many political thinkers may agree that a left/right continuum is firmly entrenched throughout the world, few would be able to provide a concise and universally accepted definition of what constitutes left and right. Rather, it is the assumptions that have become associated with the terms that render them so useful in much political debate, including PC. Many people may insist that they do not think in terms of left and right, yet they would be able to identify distinct concepts on such a continuum, even if they did not apply them to themselves as political beings. And for others, the labels are just as easily attached to people, as they are ideas, resulting in rash judgements that everything a person says is rightist or leftist. These characteristics make ideological labels extremely potent in the PC debates.

However, the extent to which an average person actually comprehends these concepts when it comes to these kinds of abstract and theoretical ideas is not always clear. For example, someone may be able to reconcile in their own mind support for increased welfare services and reduced government spending, but these two concepts are invariably on opposing ends of the left/right scale. One would not

'Cultural Left'. Many use only left and right in their discussions and although it may be simpler, left and right is not used in this thesis as these terms are not specific enough to describe what is

expect someone on the right to choose increased welfare over reduced government spending and vice versa, although both potentially desirable to a member of the public who fails to see or understand the practical necessity of choosing between the two. However, a lack of homogeneity in a person's belief system is feasible. Many people are considered fiscal conservatives but more liberal of left-minded in the area of social issues. For example, the Log Cabin Republicans in the United States are an openly gay and lesbian group that support small government and agree with the fiscal policy of the Republican party while obviously working to change the view of many in the party in regard to its stand and approach on issues such as homosexuality. This involves challenging many anti-gay and exclusionary tactics from within the Republican Party while wholeheartedly supporting individual rights over groups' rights.²

This particular example is equally applicable to political correctness. Although PC focuses on social issues, it is conceivable that an economically left-minded individual might be strictly on the right when it comes to feminism and multiculturalism. Indeed, this was the case for many of the traditionally economic hard-line leftists who shifted strongly to the right in the face of emerging

² happening in regards to PC.
² Log Cabin Republicans website, 'About LCR' Log Cabin Republicans
[July 16, 1998] available from <http://www.lcr.org/about.htm>.

social issues in the 1960s.³ It is also possible that one may consider feminism or multiculturalism valid issues, but completely disagree with the postmodern position concerning the objectivity of truth. In other words, the lines defining ideological placement are, at the very least, blurry.

It would also be incorrect to assume that ideas of left and right are the same today as they were a century, or even a decade ago. During the 1950s height of the Cold War in the United States, those considered to be on the left or even a semblance of being sympathetic to it, sometimes had their careers and lives destroyed in an effort to obliterate any sign of a leftist movement. This cannot be equated with today's perception of the left as those who concentrate on issues of minority, gender and the environment and are no longer widely considered as legitimate threats to national security. Regardless, the terms left/right remain inherently associated with politics. In other words, "The left or right label is above all part of one's political vocabulary, of one's political education, of one's social adjustment."⁴ This begs the question as to whether such a scale is a fundamental part of politics, and related debates such as with PC, or whether it only confuses and distorts political realities. In this light it is questionable if

³ For further discussion of this phenomenon see: Valerie L. Scatamburlo, *Soldiers of Misfortune: The New Right's Culture War and the Politics of Political Correctness*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 42-47.

the left or right even demand a specific definition. For example, Jean Laponce, in his study of the left and right indicates that, "At no point in the following chapters do I impose my own definition, my own perception, my own 'vision' of what is left and what is right."⁵ And yet, he goes on to conduct an in-depth empirical analysis of the concepts surrounding the left/right topography. From this perspective perhaps it is fair to say that the only aspect of this concept that is certain, is its intense complexity derived from historical simplicity.

From simplistic, yet practical, beginnings in revolutionary France, the concepts of left and right have evolved into complex political and social realities upon which volumes of information have been produced. The decision to sit on the right or left side of the French king in 1789, which displayed the position on the issue of whether or not the king should have the constitutional legality to a legislative veto, signified the entry of left and right into government oriented terminology. During the tumultuous times of the French revolution the terms left and right held a greater semblance of neutrality than terms charged with regional or ideological identity such as Jacobins or Bretons. Furthermore, as each representative was supposed to represent the entire nation, any implication

⁴ Asher Arian and Michael Shamir, "The Primarily Political Functions of the Left-Right Continuum," *Comparative Politics* 15:2 (1983): 140.

⁵ Jean Laponce, *Left and Right: The Topography of Political Perceptions*,

of a regional or factional bias was unacceptable.⁶ This kind of political language in the left/right context spread around the world primarily through the terminology associated with parliamentary democracy and the emergence of socialism.

Up until the mid-twentieth century, political parties, specifically in continental Europe, often incorporated the terms right and left into party names. For example, the German Center party of 1870, the Swedish *Right* party, formed in 1910 and the *Right* Party of Luxembourg created in 1914, employed the actual terminology of left/right into their party labels. By the 1970s it was more common to utilize the terms left and right as qualifiers to party sections such as the French Left Radicals or the Norwegian Socialist Left. Many parties began to abandon the practice of using left and right in their party names due to various connotations that were automatically assumed by electorates. But even as the phrases left and right disappeared from the party names, the implications remained. Religious or conservative oriented parties found themselves designated to the right, while coalitions and socialist parties ended up on the left. Although Lenin and other early communists and socialists tried to refuse the terminology that placed them as leftists, it was their opposition to the dominant forces, already considered to be the right, that gave them no choice

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 9.

but the left. Thus, the global emergence of socialism finally diffused the concept of left and right to Russia, China and the United States.⁷

This initial understanding of left and right has not been entirely maintained in the PC debate. In particular, the original understanding of the left during the rise of communism in Russia and China was predominantly economic. The focus was on world wide proletarian revolution and class, not issues concerning civil or gender oriented rights. Thus, today it is more common to hear about the New Right and the New or Cultural Left. Once again, the 1960s social movements played an important role. As protesters demonstrated against racial and sexist inequalities, their identity was formed in opposition to the "conservative" or existing order, understood to be the right. In other words, social movements did not seek out the leftist label because of its largely economic connotations, and in this way a "New Left" was formed, also known as the Cultural Left. It is this latter identification that has become associated so strongly with political correctness. As aspects of the Cultural Left grew and became more institutionalized, opposition also grew, and this opposition became known as the New Right. It is important to note that the 'New Right' did exist prior to its opposition to the Cultural Left. In fact, some argue that opposition to political correctness is

⁷ Ibid., 45-49.

nothing more than a strategic tactic in the continuing development of a North American conservative movement. Of course, the conservative movement exists as more than just an opposition to the left, but it is in this way that they are defined in the PC debates. Furthermore, the New Right has not distinguished itself from its economic past to the extent that the Cultural Left has. Rather, the New Right has been extensively critical of universities and government in areas of education spending. It has been argued that during the 1970s, those on the Right blamed widespread economic recession on what they considered a deteriorated education that young Americans were receiving from universities that had been scourged by the events of the 1960s.⁸ Regardless, the issues of PC are predominantly social issues. Even though the labels themselves have had a great degree of fluidity over time, there is a stability of the left/right scale that has remained remarkably intact and continues to be employed in issues of political identity.

The continued dominance of the left/right continuum is rooted in its stability, argues Jean Laponce: "The introduction of left/right to the language of politics had the effect of casting politics in terms of a stable, obvious, universal contrast already rich in symbolic associations."⁹ Furthermore, the left/right dimension

⁷ Ibid., 49-54.

⁸ Scatambrulo, 47.

⁹ Laponce, 68.

translates with relative ease from a simple opposing duality, into the possibility of a continuous spectrum. When such a unidimensional and linear scale is developed, a third element, the centre, emerges as part compromise and part escape from the trappings of the two extremes. The facility of such a model is also embedded in the tendency to visualize the opposing relationships horizontally, lending support to the concept of unidimensional spatiality.¹⁰ However, these positive characteristics of left/right do not translate into any form of simple, determinable or universally acceptable definitions.

Based on his empirical work, Laponce identified what he considered to be the most stable elements of the left/right understandings. Using political, economic, religious and time oriented contrasts he indicated the foundational concepts of understanding left and right.

The stable concepts proposed by Laponce when understanding the assumptions and associations of the left/right:¹¹

	Left	Right
-----	-----	-----
Political contrasts	equalitarian	hierarchical
Economic contrasts	poor	rich
Religious contrasts	free thought	religion
Orientation to time	discontinuity	continuity

However, even such a basic table potentially leads to serious conceptual questions. As Laponce points out, if

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

religion is on the right and equalitarian principles on the left, how would a religious equalitarian movement be achieved and perceived? These two ideas are in direct contradiction if we accept the notion that they are stable elements. In this regard, Laponce argues that the perceptual ideas deny the behavioural actions.

In other words, the actual content of a certain movement is less important than the image that the movement can project on the mass public. This is how the assumptions associated with the labels of left and right come into play. In ideological debates, what people perceive as happening on the left is much more important than what is actually happening. This applies to political correctness. The behaviour of those on either side is overshadowed by the perception of their position and actions. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 1 concerning aspects such as media coverage and financial support for conservative publications supports Laponce's point. For much of the public on the periphery of this debate, it is not usually the arguments that receive extended notice in the media but perceptions based on judgments that fit into the size of a short magazine article or editorial. Even those in the centre of the controversies are following this trend. Many of those who choose to respond to the critics of PC do so by attacking the established perceptions of the debate while

¹¹ reproduced from Ibid., 119.

trying to reveal the behavioural areas. For example, John Williams opens his book *The Myth of Political Correctness* by arguing, "Instead of telling the truth, the forces against political correctness have used exaggeration and distortion to create the mythology of PC, a myth that bears little resemblance to what is really happening on college campuses."¹² In other words, this argument is challenging the apparent perceptions that the New Right has promulgated as opposed to the reality of the situation. Although Laponce's proposition of the perceptual denying the behavioural helps to explain certain contradictions when it comes to the left and right, it does not negate the importance of addressing the concrete aspects of PC. This is yet another reason why it is important to consider what is occurring in the PC debates as opposed to referring strictly to mass media accounts of what PC is supposed to be. Once again, this thesis is not considering the validity of perceptions but rather the ideas and issues at face value.¹³

Not only does perception take precedence over behaviour, but also these perceptions have not remained constant since their introduction in the eighteenth century. During the historical period that the left/right spectrum entered cultures, conservative forces, or the right,

¹² Wilson., 3.

¹³ It continues to be my intention to avoid focuses on external factors, however, the point about the perceptual denying the behavioural is an

strongly dominated both government and society. However, according to Laponce, this has fluctuated significantly over the course of the last two centuries. Political associations, from parties to lobby groups, have developed a certain degree of validity when being associated with the left, resulting in the perception of morally superior underdog. This is an important part of understanding the dynamics of argumentation in the PC debate. In part, the New Right criticizes this supposed automatically applied validity of the leftist perspective. More so than other factors, such as religion, politics necessitates challenge and opposition, "...it seeks 'reequilibrium' through disequilibrium."¹⁴ In fact, the very idea of polar opposites when it comes to government is a leftist notion. Before the existence of parliamentary-style democracies, according to Laponce, the dominance of the right in both governmental and social structure was virtually untouched.¹⁵ The arrival of opposition to this domination not only created the possibility for the left/right scale to flourish but also a David and Goliath image, the left of course, being David.

Thus, it is important to note that an overarching aspect of the New Right's criticism of the Cultural Left in general, focuses on its alleged power in society and especially in the universities. The viewpoint that

¹⁴ important one in understanding the power of ideology.

¹⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵ Ibid., 44, 206.

universities are being controlled by those on the Left has been a very powerful aspect of the New Right's argument. In trying to show that the Cultural Left has taken over and is tyrannically controlling everyone and everything it can, looks to portray the New Right as the new David, while the Cultural Left is the new Goliath. The extent to which this is an intentional tactic on the part of the New Right is not the purpose of this thesis. Yet it is important to note the spin that ideological labeling can acquire. It is these misconceptions that lead to much of the confusion in the PC debates. There are serious theoretical jumps from criticizing certain policies to accusing the Cultural Left of tyrannical thought control. Furthermore, arguing that the New Right is explicitly racist based on its opposition to affirmative action is problematic. Both sides are guilty of substituting perceptions for arguments and that is exactly what is avoided in this thesis.

The left/right scale has admirably served the purpose of simplifying complex political realities. Although by no means accurate, there are few who would be completely unable to identify themselves along such a continuum, though perhaps some would be willing. Its global diffusion has made cross cultural studies possible and revealing about both the similarities and differences between societies. Yet, any perceived simplicity quickly becomes complexity as theories based on the left/right are developed. The left/right continuum has served as an essential foundation

to the way we think about politics, society and ourselves. Perhaps more importantly, it has served as a way to continue to study these questions with a degree of consistency and understanding. However, rather than restricting themselves to the left/right scale, there are some theorists who use empirical research in an effort to move beyond empirical data and challenge the very notion of left/right. One explanation for this challenge to the left/right scale is the prevalence of significant cultural and societal changes, ranging from civil rights to postmodernism and including political correctness. These changes, and the results of these changes, are leading some scholars to question the validity of employing a left/right scale, claiming that it does more conceptual harm than good when seeking clarity of subject. The concepts of left and right evolved from specific political situations and have solidified their broad stature during a time when the political landscape was much different than it is today. Are the concepts of left and right fluid enough to adapt to rapid social change or is it necessary to implement a new process of considering values and belief systems? For example, the left adapted and evolved into the New or Cultural Left in the 1960s as the focus shifted from economics to social issues. But perhaps an entirely new system of identification would make definition and understanding easier. Perhaps the most significant challenge to left/right scale has been undertaken by Ronald Inglehart, who has developed a new

polarization, this time between what he calls Materialism and Post-Materialism. And according to Inglehart, political correctness in one aspect of the world-wide value change phenomenon of post-materialism.¹⁶

Inglehart's, *The Silent Revolution*, advances the theory that publics in Western societies are in the process of moving away from material-based concerns to quality-of-life concerns. Accordingly, these alterations are occurring partly through the effects of globalisation, or "system level" transformations, that are having an impact on individuals and inducing change. Eventually, these same individuals are looking to translate their new experiences into a larger societal realm and produce system level consequences, resulting in what Inglehart refers to as world-wide value change.¹⁷ The study essentially argues that any individual value change will have an effect on the significance of a person's political skills within the particular political structure of a given country.

Inglehart goes on to identify several source variables at the system level that have contributed to this 'massive change', all of which are associated with the process widely known as modernization. First, the productive capacities made possible by the spread of technology as well as changes

¹⁶It is certain that Inglehart mentions PC only rarely as a specific concept. However, many of his arguments concerning post-materialism parallel those of the rise of PC. Furthermore, our intention is only to place PC within the framework of post-materialism and not to compare the two.

¹⁷ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton

in the occupational structure of a country have created an environment where individual people aspire to goals centred more around a quality of life rather than on material goals. For example, it is quite common to have a television set, it is not necessary to work long and hard to maintain small material advances. It would follow, then, that focus on profits and corporate loyalty is eroding. Furthermore, rising income levels and the expansion of education have made it possible for larger numbers of people to be exposed to varying possibilities in both politics and values. These possibilities are further enhanced by an overwhelming presence of mass communication. This free flow of information allows for a new kind of highly informed political citizen. Whether the information is controlled or manipulated is secondary to the point that everyone has access to it, even if they choose to ignore it.

All these changes on the individual level led Inglehart to identify an array of potential consequences. In the face of the changes noted above, political parties and institutions find themselves in the compromising position of trying simultaneously to please the new and the old, in a context that does not usually directly concern national security. Moreover, the new political scene of potentially highly informed individuals is interested in participating in new ways and not necessarily by means of existing parties

and organizations. Inglehart also argues that the concept of class is declining as an important indicator of voting behaviour. Thus, the level of support and sense of legitimacy for government and traditional institutions is declining. People have less confidence in the way the political system is currently constructed and thus, political participation has moved away from traditional group activities such as political parties and unions, turning more to direct and specific actions, made possible by, and promoted through, increased education. In other words, according to Inglehart, many more people are *capable* of participating themselves in politics instead of relying on a trusted elite to act on their behalf.¹⁸ Issues of political correctness can be highly personalized, inciting individual political acts rather than waiting for government response to highly volatile issues.

Inglehart does not specifically attack the left and right as the concepts that he is challenging because he is suggesting an alternative framework to the old left/right standard. Yet, his choice to replace the left/right still depends on the contextualization and utility of a political continuum as versatile as the left/right has historically proven to be. Moreover, the major weakness of the left/right spectrum is perhaps it's static nature. In contrast, Inglehart argues his polarization is more dynamic.

¹⁸ Ibid., 12-16.

When envisioning the left/right continuum, most people would imagine themselves securely fixed somewhere along the line. There is always the possibility that a specific issue may not align itself with the overall value judgment, although it is rare to expect a major variance, especially in adult life. However, Inglehart associates his thesis with an overall process of change, or as he puts it, "a transformation of basic world views".¹⁹ Inglehart then develops the two extremes of his new polarization as 'Materialist' and 'Post-Materialist'. Those on the Materialist side tend to desire both economic and political order and stability, whereas on the opposing end, the Post-Materialist will choose to focus on values associated with individual freedoms and quality of life.²⁰

Inglehart also found that those who tended more easily to transcend national boundaries were more often Post-Materialist.²¹ This assertion is tied into cultural globalisation. Thus, the post-materialist would feel more tolerant of other cultures as well as accepting and appreciating other cultures. This kind of relative tolerance can lead to an assumption that all cultures are of value and should not be judged on Western criteria. This aspect, although not absent from the left/right spectrum, is much more apparent in the post-materialism than it would be

¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

²⁰ Ibid., 29.

²¹ Ibid., 58.

of the ideological left. The advent of a post-industrial society merits, in Inglehart's view, an entirely new system with which to label, describe and most of all explain phenomenon, specifically the belief systems of mass publics and the possibilities of predicting their political behaviour.

Another important aspect of Post-Materialist theory is age. Inglehart found that the cleavage was strong along the generational line. Contributing factors include the absence of total war and the prosperity experienced during the lives of younger generations. The scarcity theory dictates that being raised in a relatively affluent environment lessens concentration on more immediate needs, such as food, clothing and shelter, creating a tendency to focus on quality of life issues.

For younger, economically secure groups, new items were at the top of the agenda. Efforts to fight the dehumanizing tendencies inherent in Industrial society took high priority; it was a fight against hierarchical relationships on both the domestic scene and in international politics.²²

As a direct consequence of the above, Inglehart notes that there has been a Materialist reaction that calls for a return to how things were before, also following along generational lines. In other words, there is a flow back and forth between the two extremes of Inglehart's polarization. This is important, because according to

²² Ibid., 286.

Inglehart, traditional empirical information such as vote and income, is being joined with 'subjective' areas such as behaviour, attitude and values. Thus indicators that hope to tap attitudinal kinds of data are integral for measuring value change.²³ Values are, after all, for survey data collectors, quite subjective. Inglehart bases his Materialist/Post-Materialist structure on very specific concepts that form his hypotheses. Perhaps, however, he is simply be giving new names to old labels. Is there a world-wide change in values occurring of which political correctness is a part? Or are we simply finding new ways to play out the left/right debates?

Post-war security also clarifies Inglehart's image of the post-materialist. Those who experienced the devastation of World War II are being outnumbered by those born into a world of relative peace and prosperity. Some would argue that it is largely those born after World War II who participated in the social movements of the 1960s. The possibility of becoming suddenly destitute as the result of war is virtually unknown to them, resulting in a confidence that there is more to life than material stability. In such an environment, traditional values and societal structures are constantly being challenged.²⁴ This is the case with political correctness. Inglehart would argue that people today are currently at liberty to protest subtler points of

²³ Ibid., 12.

racism and sexism because they do not fear their immediate survival or that of their family. Without a serious threat or even the memory of major war people concentrate on more socially oriented issues.

This argument may be applicable in the central areas of political correctness, Canada and the United States, however, it is difficult to place it in the context of countries that still endure war and hardship. In fact, it would be safe to say that political correctness is primarily a North American phenomenon.²⁴ Although discussed in Australia and England, poor countries that are occupied more with general infrastructure and feeding their populations, do not engage in significant debates about political correctness. PC is only one characteristic of post-materialism, yet it would seem that an argument outlining world-wide value change would have to include large parts of the world itself. Early work by Inglehart focused largely on Western European countries, but his latest effort, a 1997 publication entitled, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies*, expands to include Asian and Eastern European countries.

This time including countries as diverse as India and Mexico to study his major thesis of post-materialism Inglehart has also been able to integrate a time-series

²⁴ Ibid., 7-11.

²⁵ In fact, political correctness in Western European countries such as Germany is often argued to focus on integration rather than diversity

analysis over a period of twenty years. The major difference in this work is that Inglehart touches on concepts of Postmodernism in order to justify his hypothesis theoretically. Inglehart maintains that the advantage of his work is that he considers the importance of political, economic and cultural factors simultaneously. He points out that Marx considered the economic, while Weber focused on the cultural, and their singular concentrations is the weakness of both.²⁶ However, Inglehart does stay true to his base hypotheses of scarcity and socialization. Whether this work will be seen to respond to earlier criticisms by attempting to broaden the concepts involved or simply to raise many more seemingly unanswerable questions depends on the extent to which one gives credence to post-materialism.

Although Inglehart may never exert the broad and long term influence of a Marx or Weber, many of his theories are extremely useful. No one could expect to uproot easily or quickly the left and right after two centuries of history and understanding. However, nothing lasts forever, and the reign of left/right may well be reaching an end, and if not an end, then a major transformation. If we remember that support for Post-Materialism occurs at its highest levels within the younger generations, perhaps it is only a matter of time before such quality of life attitudes overtake and

and therefore does not apply to our central definition PC in North America.

²⁶ Ibid., 8-9.

usurp even the universal, deeply traditional, new and old, left and right.

This possibility is clarified by considering political correctness specifically and the impact of ideological measurement. The previous domination of economic factors on the placement of an individual on an ideological scale is being slowly combined with, or perhaps replaced by, social issues, such as feminism, environmentalism and minority rights. To what extent can these complex ideas fit into the indices of belief systems? The left/right scale reveals information based on already established concepts, whereas the post-materialist/materialist argument looks to integrate social issues as explanatory factors in understanding values and value change.

Since the late 1880s and Marx's depiction of political conflict revolving around the ownership of the means of production, social scientists have focused their attention on economics in the discussion of ideology. The understandings of left and right have also adhered to this economic characteristic.²⁷ Certainly earlier works on belief systems and understanding politics tended to concentrate on questions of social class and government, as well as using a respondent sample made up almost exclusively of white,

²⁷ Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 236, 256.

middle-class males.²⁸ Although women and racial minorities have had many political rights, such as the vote, for decades, it was not until the turbulence of the 1960s that broader rights-based social movements were born. During this time, the complexities of issues surrounding feminism and multiculturalism became well known to mainstream political knowledge and opinion. As Inglehart points out,

The Marxist model has lost its appeal in the industrialized world. Its emphasis on economic factors as the driving force of history provides a good first approximation of reality in the early stages of industrialization, but is of diminishing value as scarcity diminishes and new problems emerge.²⁹

These new problems have led to certain changes on the political landscape, including the university. "The emergence of the phenomenon of Political Correctness reflects this transition in the dominant culture within universities: values that were controversial in the 1960s had become the values of the establishment in the 1990s."³⁰ The shift to social issues, apparent in political correctness, and their entrenchment within universities has also put into question the broader ideological scale.

Nevertheless, Ronald Inglehart's theory of post-materialism bases a significant portion of his ideas on the

²⁸ For example, works by Robert Lane and Philip Converse spoke to a limited sample. In fact, Lane's questionnaire in *Political Ideology* focuses on Image of Politics, Participation in Politics, Life History and Experience and Personal Qualities. Although there are seven questions under the heading Social Values, they deal with the vision of a utopian society and what such a society would include.

²⁹ Inglehart, 265

³⁰ Ibid., 142.

emergence of issues that tend to focus on quality of life as opposed to economics.

Economic conflicts are increasingly sharing the stage with new issues that were almost invisible a generation ago: environmental protection, abortion, ethnic conflicts, women's issues, and gay and lesbian emancipation are heated issues today-while the central element of the Marxist prescription, nationalization of industry is almost a forgotten cause.³¹

Inglehart traces the beginnings of these shifts to the student protests of the 1960s, developing in conjunction with Post-Materialist values. Initially it appears that in regards to social issues, the left and post-materialism are essentially equivalent. Inglehart does go on to concede, however, that what is represented in post-materialist values is essentially a New Left that no longer identifies with the traditional left's goals. Therefore, the middle class can reconcile belief in social issues of the Left without needing to consider aspects such as state ownership or worker's rights.³² This current base of support from the middle class towards these new social movements has developed into certain complex tendencies, including political correctness.

The concept of political correctness both encompasses feminist and minority concerns as well as going beyond them. As we have seen when defining PC, that it is a complicated concept that does not fit easily into a static scale.

³¹ Inglehart, 235.

³² Ibid., 246.

However, it is common to consider those on the New or Cultural Left to be in favour of political correctness whereas the opponents and critiques are on the New Right. Granted, it may be relatively consistent that those who support the aspects of new social movements would be of the ideological left, yet it is problematic to assume that these beliefs consistently translate into action, individual or societal. A similar scenario can be put forth regarding the post-materialist theory. It would follow that someone who holds post-materialist values in regards to women and minority rights would be a proponent of political correctness, action plan and all.

The paradoxical aspect of this concept finds itself also in those who insist that it is not hypocritical to be relatively favourable and sympathetic towards women and minorities while simultaneously being opposed to the concept of political correctness. A good example is Dinesh D'Souza's 1991 best-seller, *Illiberal Education*, which contains a neo-conservative critique of political correctness on major campuses throughout the United States in areas ranging from administrative policies to classroom discussions. However, D'Souza points out,

I especially empathize with minority students, who seek to discover principles of equality and justice that go considerably beyond the acquisition of vocational skill. Acutely conscious of America's history of exclusion and prejudice, they know that their past victories have not come without a struggle, and they yearn to find their place in the university

and in society, to discover who they are, individually and as a people.³³

But, D'Souza's empathy does not indicate his agreement with many of the policies and procedures that have been put in place at universities with the intent of including those previously absent from academia. Still, the above appears to be a reasonable statement regarding minorities and their struggles to achieve equality. The book goes on to detail specific cases at American universities from an extremely conservative, right-wing perspective. A counter argument might be that D'Souza's opposition to political correctness necessarily makes him opposed to women and minority rights. While at the same time it does not seem incomprehensible for someone who legitimately supports the goals of the Cultural Left to be dismayed by some of the current undertakings of parts of the movement. Thomas Sowell also complains that, "Those who criticize double standards for minorities are almost certain to be labeled 'racist' while those who criticize double standards for homosexuals will automatically be labeled 'homophobic' and those who criticize double standards for radical feminists will be labeled 'sexist'".³⁴ This ties back to the initial discussion of the contradictory stable elements of ideology presented by Laponce. If indeed plausible that anti-PC and

³³ D'Souza, 23.

³⁴ Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas*, (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 278.

pro women and minority rights can be compatible, then ideology serves only to disrupt and confuse. In this context we are again forced to ask if the strict dichotomy of left versus right or PC versus anti-PC is the best way to describe the current situation.

As the twentieth century comes to a close, many argue that there is a strong shift back to the right side of the ideological scale, which is a definite possibility considering that the left/right scale can accommodate such fluctuation. It is possible for societies or nations and even individuals to shift from the left to the right or vice versa without damaging the integrity of the left/right continuum. However, the post-materialist theory does not permit this kind of pendulum effect when it comes to value change. Rather, Inglehart argues that it is the sheer strength of post-materialist values that has resulted in what many of the left refer to as a backlash.

The rise of militant religious fundamentalism in the United States and of xenophobic movements in Western Europe, represents a reaction against rapid cultural changes that seem to be eroding some of the most basic values and customs of the more traditional and less secure groups in these countries.... They are important phenomena- but they do not represent the wave of the future.³⁵

If Inglehart is correct, the current backlash against feminism, minorities and other issues associated with political correctness may be a passing phenomenon that will

³⁵ Inglehart, 251.

fall to the persuasive power of post-materialist values. Although it is fair to presume that recent social movements will not wilt and die quickly under pressures from the right, it is overly presumptuous to assume the struggle has already been won by the post-materialists and it is simply a matter of time until the right realizes it.

For Inglehart post-materialism is fueling world-wide value change that can be distinguished and should be independent from the left/right scale. Although he admits that for most post-materialists there is a certain degree of gravitation towards the traditionally understood left, Inglehart insists that, "...the rise of Postmaterialism has brought a new perspective into play, one that sometimes runs against established political orthodoxy; it is reshaping the meaning of Left and Right."¹⁶

There are two major themes discussed in this chapter that are pertinent to the argumentation that follows. Firstly, it is important to understand how the dichotomy of left and right functions so that its role in the PC debate can be analyzed. In other words, the ideological implication of so much that encompasses the PC debates is nothing more than misunderstanding based on what has historically meant to be on the left or on the right. Second, it is significant to show that there is potentially more to PC than simply being a movement of the Left.

¹⁶ Ibid., 319.

Rather, as Inglehart has argued, there is a massive shift of values currently taking place through which PC appears to fit rather well. Therefore, it is essential to understand the role that ideology plays in political correctness as well as its limitations and mutations.

Political correctness is a concept that transcends ideological definition while being born from it and destined to return to it. We have seen that PC can be identified as a post-materialist phenomenon, although it is also reasonable to associate it with the conventional left. After all, the thoughts and ideas that have lead to a culture in which respect for minorities and women is not merely a matter of personal belief but also an ideological identification came from the birth of the Cultural Left of the 1960s. But if Bob Dylan was correct in the 1960s when he announced, "the times they are a'changin'" can we continue to universally employ the terminology of the left and right to whatever situations happened to come our way? Or rather, should changes as extensive as the fall of Eastern European communism dictate the use of more precise terminology for ideological explanations?

Whether left/right or post-materialist/materialist, ideological labels are an essential aspect of understanding and studying value-based phenomena, including political correctness. But there is another step in understanding PC that goes beyond personal ideological identification. As Inglehart pointed out, people are more politically educated

than ever before and this results in heightened opportunities for political participation. At some point, political correctness as a personal code of conduct or ideological label is destined to develop into policy initiatives and applicable legislation. It is this activity that is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 PC as Policy

Throughout the evolution of political correctness and its varying themes as a system of individual value judgements, governments and institutions have responded with policies reflecting these changes. Once again, for the purposes of this thesis, the university setting is used as the context in which the argument is illustrated. Policies that are said to have been implemented under the auspice of political correctness are controversial and are most often the source of criticism by the New Right. This chapter will begin by outlining the jump from the ideological subject of last chapter to the role of the state and the advent of what is considered by some to be 'PC inspired' policy. Then it will go on to detail specific procedures that are alleged to be a product of political correctness as well as to consider the controversy that surrounds them. This aspect of PC is generally better known to the public, because specific examples of PC gone awry tend to be covered at length by the mass media. However, the intention is to illustrate the policies and their goals, as well as what may have been lost in the jump from theory to practice, before considering the implications of this on the PC debate itself. Thus, this chapter outlines the principal topics of debate in an effort to establish the conflicting views of PC, not as a system of value judgements but as a series of action oriented policy initiatives.

Clarification is required when discussing the idea of policy that has been *inspired* by PC. Of course, there is no such thing as policy directly inspired by a cohesive movement of political correctness. As seen earlier, PC did not exist, in the form that is currently understood, until the criticisms of the New Right. Moreover, PC does not function as a lobby group or even a consistently applied set of beliefs that could constitute influence significant enough to affect anything as far reaching as legislation. Furthermore, there are many who are on the Cultural Left in regards to their values and beliefs but who do not necessarily feel that any policies, or at least the policies that are in place are the best solution. Nevertheless, the majority of the explicit criticism from the New Right, that has defined what political correctness is, has centred on policies ranging from affirmative action to challenges to the Western literary canon. The New Right has argued that these policies are a result of vast and far-reaching influence by the Cultural Left, which has lead to infringements on basic human rights and freedoms.

It is on the grounds of combating racism and sexism that the Cultural Left has chosen to defend many policies, or more commonly the philosophies behind them. In other words, much of the response to the New Right does not take issue with the terminology of 'PC inspired policies' as much as with the actual arguments. Although it is reasonable to presume that many of the policy initiatives associated with

political correctness would have a certain degree of commonality, it is nowhere assumed in this thesis that PC effectively organized all the issues that are of concern by the New Right and put them forth in a unified manner. However, it is correct to point out that much of the influence of what is called 'PC inspired policy' is a product of 1960s social movements, their many variations and the Cultural Left. This chapter discusses the policies themselves, where they came from and how they are applied. Chapter 4 deals with the confrontation of the two sides of the debate in all areas discussed, including policy.

It is not surprising that many political or social movements reach a stage whereby evolution to specific legislation and/or policy must be realised. It is said that the Cultural Left often looks to government or administrative intervention in many of these areas. Until this point, political correctness has been largely identified as an aspect of post-materialism or the Cultural Left, following in the tradition of the social movements born in the 1960s. Nonetheless, one cannot negate the role of the state. As discussed earlier, economic components and relations with the state have typically driven the left/right scale. A person on the left would adhere to state intervention in the economy whereas members of the right would advocate a more laissez-faire, small government style of economic regime. These associations appear, at first, applicable to the example of political correctness,

although without the economic aspect. It would be presumed that someone who advocates the policies associated with political correctness almost necessarily looks to the state to intervene and establish laws and other regulations in order to achieve desired results. The opposing view argues that it is not the role of the state to ensure equality of outcome and that society should be left to function independent from policy that legislates behaviour and individual decision-making.

We saw earlier that the origins of the left and right in politics had to do with legislative veto by the king in eighteenth century France and not in economic debate. With this in mind, one might argue that the constant feature of ideology appears to be the role of the state, which is not restricted to economics. Whether legislative veto, economic policy or political correctness, one of the basic arguments is over whether or not the state, or other authoritative bodies, should be a participant, and if so, what kind. Therefore, political correctness appears to be consistent with other areas of left/right ideological debate in focusing on the role of the state, thus potentially making PC just as much an ideology as socialism or capitalism, only without emphasis on the economics. However, this argument provides a static impression of what state intervention is, whereas Inglehart argues that the type of state intervention is evolving, in part because of occurrences such as political correctness.

At first glance, it may seem that advocacy for state intervention died along with Russian communism in 1989. In advanced industrial societies, this demise is coupled with the current emphasis on individuality and decentralization, moving towards less hierarchical institutions.¹ This is apparent in the privatization trend of state-owned companies. Public support for the dissolution of government control over the economy is widespread and fueled not only by the fall of communism but by distaste for bureaucratic structures. Furthermore, the subordinate role of the individual to the state is rapidly deteriorating. As Inglehart points out, "We have seen evidence of the declining strength of traditional cultural norms that helped maintain the family and ensure the reproduction of society, and declining acceptance of the authority of hierarchical institutions, both political and nonpolitical."² However, it is extremely important to note that this *does not* mean a return to the traditional capitalism of the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The role of the state is changing but not disappearing. Instead of maintaining a paternal hold on its citizens, "...we find indications of *rising* emphasis on society's responsibilities to the individual, and a tendency to blame society, rather than the individual, for social problems such as poverty."³ This is consistent

¹Ibid., . 315.

²Ibid., 315.

³Ibid., 315.

with the ideology of PC. Instead of relying on individuals to act responsibly in the face of racism and sexism, the state is called upon to attempt to regulate and ensure individual and group rights. In other words, "There has been rising emphasis on individual *rights* and entitlements, coupled with a declining emphasis on individual *responsibility*."⁴ Not only has the role of the state moved away from economics, the very nature of its role is in the process of being altered.

Our earlier consideration of the left/right and post-materialist/materialist scales dealt with government intervention as one aspect of understanding the new social movements; but can one equate a politically correct identity based on values and beliefs to policy initiatives? In other words, how does a person's individual beliefs in areas of social importance, such as racism and sexism, translate or reconcile with policies and legislation that concern how society is regulated? It is apparent that political correctness is originally inspired primarily by the concepts of equality and liberalism. However, there is a decided difference between liberal democratic equality of opportunity and the image of moving the goal posts or leveling the playing field to yield equality of outcome. Many of the critiques of political correctness argue that it goes far beyond belief in equality or affirmation of womens'

⁴Ibid., 315.

and minority rights, into the sacrifice of free speech and academic freedom, a virtual tyranny of the Cultural Left. In other words, the argument maintains that when certain people get certain advantages based on gender or ethnicity it is unfair to everyone else, regardless of other societal factors.⁵ Unfortunately, this line of argument makes an unrealistic assumption that all people are born with the same level of opportunity to achieve their goals.

Furthermore, there is a possible contradiction between how a person feels and how a society behaves. For example, if someone supports full equality for women and minorities, how is that presumably desirable goal achieved? Is simply having the vote enough? Of course, many argue that the right to vote for all citizens has not translated into an equal society. Yet when a society decides to focus on the equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity, are other peoples' rights jeopardized? And if they are, is this a reasonable sacrifice to make in an effort to establish a truly equal society? And who determines what is 'reasonable'? Employment quotas, for example, are intended to promote equal representation in the work force, but this means that equality of opportunity for others is sacrificed. This is also a contributing factor to the recent backlash against many of these policies. Although many critics maintain that they are not personally against rights for

⁵ Of course, arguments concerning affirmative action are complex and are

women and minorities, they do disagree with their promotion through specific 'affirmative action' policies, resulting in unfavourable political consequences. This argument is apparent in many of the controversial policies discussed in the context of PC.

Based on prominent books and articles that have defined the subject, the majority of the PC debate appears to be reducible to four major categories: hate speech versus free speech, the destruction or transformation of a Western canon of literature and ideas, the controversies surrounding groups that were at one time said to be oppressed (predominantly women, ethnic minorities and homosexuals), and finally the question of the relativity or objectivity of truth. Although these categories do not encompass all PC-related issues, they do cover the major theoretical and practical concerns. There are some who have humorized PC by playing with so-called PC terminology. For example, alphabeticism means "The widespread and arbitrary privileging of persons, institutions, and nations whose names begin with letters that come early in the alphabet, and the oppression of those whose names do not."⁶ Or kingdomism as the "discrimination against flora or minerals by fauna."⁷ However, this thesis restricts itself to the serious issues concerning PC. Many of these questions occur in other areas

analyzed in further detail later in the thesis.

⁶ Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf, *The Official Dictionary of the Politically Correct*, (New York: Villard Books, 1995), 5.

of government and society, but we will be restricting our consideration as much as possible to the university context.

The implementation of speech codes at some university campuses was intended to prohibit language that would create an environment that would make some groups, such as women, minorities and gays, feel more comfortable. In other words, the goal was to make academic institutions more inclusive for those whose presence on campuses is relatively recent. As the Ontario Women's Directorate argues, "Language can both reflect and shape the way people are treated in our society. It can be used to open doors when it is gender inclusive, or to create barriers when it is not."⁸ But, campus speech codes are intended to do more than merely include, they also are meant to protect certain groups from what is considered to be harassment, resulting in a 'chilly climate.' This is because, "Speech, in short, is never and could not be an independent value, but is always asserted against a background of some assumed conception of the good to which it must yield in the event of conflict."⁹ In other words, an academic community regulates speech because, "...every right and freedom herein granted can be trumped if its exercise is found to be in conflict with the principles

⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁸ Ontario Women's Directorate. "Words that Count Women Out/In" Second Edition, Preface, (no year)

⁹ Fish, Stanley. "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing, Too," in *Debating PC: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, ed. Paul Berman (New York: Delta, 1992), 233.

that underwrite the society."¹⁰ Thus, it is argued that in a context where everyone is supposed to be equal, equality yields to individual freedoms, such as the freedom to express racist slurs.

As universities are clearly an environment where individual expression is intended to flourish, there have been many incidents that have been cited as examples for needing campus speech codes. For example, Catherine MacKinnon cites the following occurrences:

"... 'Death Nigger' was found scratched on a woman's door at Purdue. Elsewhere, 'A mind is a terrible thing to waste -especially on a nigger' was left on a blackboard. Still elsewhere a fraternity elected a 'Jewish American Princess.' Another fraternity held a 'slave auction' at which white pledges in blackface performed skits parroting Black entertainers. 'Death to all Arabs!! Die Islamic scumbags!' was found scrawled on a university wall."¹¹

The seriousness of these and other examples as well as the right of people to express them if they so desire is at the heart of the debate surrounding PC that will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. For now, it is important to understand that MacKinnon challenges the notion that words are simply words and cannot also be understood as action. She argues that words such as 'not guilty' and 'I do', "...are not seen as saying anything (although they do) but as doing something."¹² On another front, Stanley Fish argues

¹⁰ Ibid., 234.

¹¹ Catherine MacKinnon, *Only Words*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 53.

¹² Ibid., 13.

that, "talk is produced with the goal of trying to move the world in one direction rather than another"¹³ and thus it is the value embodied in speech that makes it so potent. For if freedom of speech was necessarily the supreme value to which all others ceded than it would not make any difference what was said from one person to the next. In other words, speech would not "matter in the sense that no one gave a damn but just liked to hear talk."¹⁴ Obviously, talk is intended to communicate something and thus, according to these arguments, should be restricted in certain cases.

The University of California at Berkeley has such a code that prohibits what it refers to as 'fighting words' that are defined as, "personally abusive epithets which, when directly addressed to an ordinary person, are, in the context used and as a matter of common knowledge, inherently likely to provoke a violent reaction whether or not they actually do so."¹⁵ In the Berkeley policy fighting words, "...include but are not limited to, derogatory references to race, ethnicity religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or other personal characteristics."¹⁶ Universities all over North America have speech codes from Michigan State, University of Texas at Austin to Indiana University. The University of Lethbridge has what it calls an 'Inclusive Language Policy' whereby, "Inclusive language

¹³ Fish., 237.

¹⁴ Fish., 237.

¹⁵ Kate Culver, "Costing out free speech," *Quill*, (October, 1993): 18.

may be defined as language which does not discriminate among characteristics of gender, age, race or ethnicity, religion or minority."¹⁷ The policy goes on to encourage how to use language in the academic environment. The terminology of 'fighting words' originates from *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*, a 1942 American Supreme Court decision, wherein it was decided that such 'fighting words' are not protected by the First Amendment of the American constitution. Thus, giving exception to a person's First Amendment right to free speech, if such words incited violence. Therefore, university speech codes are meant to fall under the same level of seriousness, with the rules in place before the words are spoken as opposed to a court case following a specific incident.¹⁸

It is often pointed out that regulation of speech is not a new phenomenon and certainly not new to the university.

Students have been disciplined for their speech since colleges were first founded, and legitimate limits are frequently placed on words. Individuals can be sued for libel and slander. They can be prosecuted for fraud, harassing phone calls, and threats, all of which are crimes of words, not actions.¹⁹

Furthermore, the cases that are penalized under speech code policies are not intended to restrict academic opinion.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷ Jay Dobson (ed.) *University of Lethbridge 1998-1999 Calender*. Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Press, 1998, 63.

¹⁸ Marilyn Friedman and Jan Narveson, *Political Correctness: For and Against*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1995), 3.

¹⁹ Wilson, J., 91.

Rather it regulates speech deemed to be explicitly offensive in some context. For example, for the brief time that the University of Wisconsin enforced a speech code, complaints came from students calling others "fucking bitch" and "fat-ass nigger" and not from unpopular opinions expressed in the classroom.²⁰ Although these expressions may blur the line between simply being rude and 'fighting words', the point is that they are not intended to silence opinions expressed by students in the context of learning.

The original intent of speech codes was to, "...create a climate in the universities that is welcoming to previously marginalized groups, one needs to institutionalize certain sorts of speech codes, aiming to rid the university of language and linguistic behaviour that demeans or silences such groups and thereby continues to enforce the marginalization against which they are struggling."²¹ Freedom of speech is not a divine right that lets anyone say anything at any time. As Gordon Baldwin of the University of Wisconsin Law School points out, "Freedom has limits. Racial epithets reflect the freedom of the speaker, but they impinge on the freedom of others."²² This has been shown in the American courts whereby, "The First Amendment appears to stand as a formidable barrier to campus rules prohibiting disparaging speech,...,during the past

²⁰ Friedman. p. 4.

²¹ Fred Wilson, "In Defence of Speech Codes," *Interchange*, Vol. 27/2 125-159, (1996): 125.

century, the courts have carved out or tolerated dozens of 'exceptions; to free speech."²² Even many of those against speech codes would normally concede the point that freedom is limitless under no circumstances.

Speech code policies are an example of the desire to combat such things as sexism and racism at universities. Policies developed during the last few decades are by no means the first time that speech has been restricted by societal institutions, such as universities. Yet they are far from unproblematic, even for their supporters. For example, if the codes are intended to make the university an inclusive environment, minorities that express their views in a way that violates the speech codes are also guilty. Furthermore, speech codes may satisfy those who value the preeminence of equality, but may trouble those of an extreme libertarian nature. The focus here is that speech codes are the practice of theories that look towards alleviating what some have deemed inequalities on university campuses. As Chapter 4 illustrates, the conflict between the policy and the theory fuel the PC debates, as does the disagreement over the Western literary canon.

The word canon comes from the Greek *kanon*, and was originally used to describe rules and laws having to do with the church. More recently it has been understood as the

²² Gordon Baldwin, "Costing out Free speech," *Quill* (October 1993): 18.

²³ Richard Delgado, "Regulation of Hate Speech May be Necessary to Guarantee Equal Protection to All Citizens," *The Chronicle of Higher*

Roman Catholic Church's name for the accepted list of authentic books of the Bible also referring to religious rules or decrees.²⁴ Presently and in the academy, it is understood as, "...the unofficial, shifting, yet generally recognized body of great works that have stood the test of time and are acknowledged to be central to a complete liberal arts education."²⁵ The traditional Western literary canon is often thought of as being comprised unfairly of works written by white, European, males long since deceased. This exclusion is said to be of ideological and political nature and thus it is argued that it is time to open up the canon to better reflect a multicultural society. Those that look to alter the current canon maintain that it is not possible for the traditional works by white males to speak to a large variety of people. The argument further maintains that as the ethnic face of student population changes so should the content of the canon. In other words, the assumed universality of the traditional canon in a complete liberal arts education is an error. In some areas, it is argued that, the focus is shifting to consider more who the author is and where they are coming from rather than assuming a neutrality of texts that have been held in the highest esteem in academia.

Education, (September 18, 1991): B2.

²⁴ C.T. Onions ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 141.

²⁵ Kimball. p, 1.

The initiatives that have been taken that look to revising the Western literary canon are intended to expand the list of those works currently found in the curriculum of major universities across North America. As student populations at universities contain more women and minorities than ever before, some claim that it is necessary to uncover works from, "...the neglect and secondariness to which for all kinds of political and ideological reasons they had previously been condemned."²⁶ In an effort to realize the goals of multiculturalism, "To reform core curriculums, to account for the comparable eloquence of the African, the Asian and the Middle Eastern traditions, is to begin to prepare our students for their roles as citizens of a world culture, educated through a truly human notion of 'the humanities'."²⁷ Thus, canon reform is a practice that looks to realize what have been primarily abstract ideas of multiculturalism and what an equal society should be like.

Two popular examples when discussing possible omissions from the past include Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. French feminist Elisabeth Burgo-Debray edited a book based on her biographical discussions with illiterate Guatemalan woman of indigenous ancestry named Rigoberta Menchu. Published in

²⁶ Edward W. Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," in *Debating PC: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, ed. Paul Berman, (New York: Delta, 1992), 185.

²⁷ Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Whose Canon is it Anyway?" in *Debating PC: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. ed. Paul Berman, (New York: Delta, 1992), 199.

1983, the story of Rigoberta Menchu details her childhood in Guatemala, the kidnapping, torture and killing of her father, mother and brother by the Guatemalan army and her subsequent path to becoming an international peace activist. Menchu's family was involved in rebellion against landowners, whose often brutal tactics left the peasants desolate. The story of Rigoberta Menchu and her subsequent career as an activist for peace has gained her international recognition. In 1992 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.²⁸ *I, Rigoberta Menchu* is one of the many texts added to the curriculum of 'Culture, Ideas and Values' (CIV) by Stanford University, with the intention of exposing students to cultures and stories foreign to them, in this case that of a Guatemalan peasant women.

On March 31, 1988, after months of intense and passionate debate, the Stanford Faculty Senate, by a vote of 39 to 4, decided to replace the obligatory Western civilization course with a new set of required courses, under the title 'Culture, Ideas and Values' (CIV). The changes at Stanford stirred a political debate in universities across North America. Yet, this was not the first time that Stanford had altered its required courses. Towards the end of the 1960s the traditional 'History of Western Civilization', in place since the 1930s, was dropped with no required course replacing it. By 1980 a new

²⁸ Wilson, J., 70-71 and Freidman, 15.

requirement entitled 'Western Culture' was implemented, but by the middle of the decade Stanford noted that, "...significant numbers of students now complain about the narrow conception of the tracks in the regular course evaluations."²⁹ On the original petition that outlined the possibility of altering the required civilization course, it was stated that, "while requiring few changes in existing tracks, [it] allows for courses that examine other cultures on a fully equal basis with that of Europe and courses that fully recognize the multicultural character of the United States. Until now such tracks have been excluded from the program."³⁰ The intention of challenging the canon is to expand it and not to discredit or destroy Western culture.

Challengers to this literary tradition also point out that the very idea of a canon is that it is always changing and transforming itself to reflect historical changes. There is no reason to expect that continued additions and deletions should not occur. In the past, it has been argued, as seen above, that works have been defiantly ignored by conservative forces because they were different voices, not of lower quality but simply different. Furthermore, any new additions to the canon are intended simply to broaden the horizons of Western civilization and not to obliterate them. In fact, this is illustrated clearly in the case of Stanford. It turns out that all

²⁹ "Reports and Documents on Standord," *Minerva*, Autumn 1989): 262.

eight of the potential CIV tracks available to students include the Bible, Freud, Shakespeare, Aristotle and Augustine. Another six possible course choices include Plato, Machiavelli and Aquinas.³¹ In the case of Northwestern University, six plays by Shakespeare are required in eight separate courses, another eight courses required at least two plays by the writer.³² All five sessions of introductory English offered by the English Department at the University of Calgary include a play by Shakespeare, the only author that appears in more than one section.³³ There is also an entire course dedicated to the English playwright, English 202: *Shakespeare*. There are also courses on *Women's Literary Tradition*, *Topics in Aboriginal Literatures* as well as *Canadian Literature*.³⁴ Not only is the inclusion of minority and feminist works necessary, but so is a revised critical approach to the existing books of the canon. In other words, "One no longer assumes that they are the source of all that is noble and good;"³⁵ Through this argument, the attempt is to establish a curriculum that is balanced between traditionalists and multiculturalists views. This trend calls for not only a consideration of previously overlooked works but also new

³⁰ Ibid., 281.

³¹ Wilson, J., 65.

³² Gitlin., 490.

³³ Reading lists for the various sections were obtained from the Department of English, University of Calgary, courses for Fall 1998.

³⁴ Shirley A. Onn ed. *University of Calgary 1998-1999 Calender*, (Calgary, University of Calgary Press: 1998), 341-342.

³⁵ Wilson, J., 87.

approaches brought to those works that have been on the canonical list for decades if not centuries.

The challenge to the Western literary canon, much like campus speech codes, involves action-oriented responses to calls that society needs to be reformed. Serious problems such as racism and sexism, it is said, require more than sympathetic discussion to be solved and these are some of the solutions put forth. Keeping in mind that one of the major goals of this thesis is to distinguish between the theoretical and the practical in an effort to examine the debate itself, it is important to understand that these kinds of challenges to the dominant structure are an extension of the social movements of the 1960s. In other words, it is not hard for people to believe in a society that is equal and does not discriminate against people for any reason, but much more difficult to agree upon how best to accomplish these goals. As the discussion of PC as policy continues, it is essential to remember that Chapter 4 compares and contrasts the arguments based on these examples.

The third aspect of the debate considers questions concerning past oppression and continued exclusion of women and minorities from areas traditionally dominated by white males. This includes both employment practices, more commonly known as affirmative action, and the face of university departments. Establishing new university departments such as women's studies and African-American

studies as well as employment quota practices in university departments are an integral part of policy that is purported to be PC. According to this argument, the desire to eliminate discrimination on all levels is self-evident and through specific policy action these goals can be achieved or at least the dominant structure can begin to be dismantled.

One manner in which the study of women and minorities has been undertaken is by the creation of university departments whose *raison d'être* is to focus on specific groups of people. The supporters of specialised university departments contend that these unique programs are necessary because the current academic structure does not allow for new areas to be explored. In fact, they point out that they are usually poorly funded and struggling, not prestigious independent academic departments. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the very existence of such offshoot programs stems from initial resistance on the part of universities to implement courses that contained alternative perspectives and methodologies. Joan Wallach Scott argues that, "...they [the separate programs] were created in the face of the refusal of departments to include material on these groups in existing courses and in an effort to demonstrate that they were subjects worth studying."³⁶ Moreover, these departments are rarely independent

³⁶ Scott, 34.

financially, and depend on other areas of university administration when it comes to hiring faculty. However, the quasi-successful implementation of such programs at universities all across North America allow for the consideration of material normally overlooked by traditional mainstream academia.

The university not only serves as a provider of services to students in the way of courses, but also employs faculty; as such, they have been affected by policies concerning employment quotas, or specifically affirmative action.¹⁷ An extremely controversial topic, "...affirmative action is one part of an effort to remedy past and present discrimination and is considered essential to assuring that jobs are genuinely and equally accessible to qualified persons, without regard to their sex, racial, or ethnic characteristics."¹⁸ Furthermore, affirmative action entails an entire process and not merely quantitative goals and processes, including systematic training and redesigning corporate structure in a non-discriminatory fashion.¹⁹ The legal debate surrounding affirmative action involves two principles of justice: compensatory and distributive.

¹⁷ It has been noted that affirmative action is sometimes considered a value-loaded term. Critics of such preferential policies often refer to them as reverse discrimination or as compensatory policies. In this context, affirmative action is meant simply to briefly outline the phenomenon itself, and is not intended to attach political labels or judge value.

¹⁸ Kathanne W. Greene, *Affirmative Action and Principles of Justice*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 1.

¹⁹ These elements are part of the Uniform Guideling on Employee Selection by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1978) as detailed in *Affirmative Action and Principles of Justice* by Kathanne W. Greene,

Distributive justice is concerned with an equal distribution of 'right, benefits and burdens' for citizens of a society.⁴⁰ Whereas, compensatory justice centres around "rectifying or compensating for particular wrongs or injustices against individuals by other individuals or their government." Affirmative action is primarily based on compensatory justice. In other words, the argument contends that affirmative action should be extended to include those who have not been specifically discriminated against because discrimination is so rampant and systematic in our society. Thus, it is argued, victims are entitled to a certain degree of compensation in order to return the victim of discrimination to their place prior to the maltreatment or to pay adequate compensation.⁴¹ Of course, affirmative action is extremely complex and many more philosophies and principles can be brought forth in an effort to understand the controversy. Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, it is only necessary to comprehend how affirmative action fits into the larger understanding of political correctness.

In Canada, policies of affirmative action are implemented under the Federal Contractors Program. This program is through the Human Resources Development department and is based on the Employment Equity Act of

(New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 2.

⁴⁰ Although it has been argued (Greene 1989) that affirmative action should be defended using the principles of distributive justice, it is generally understood and accepted that affirmative action is based on principles of compensatory justice.

⁴¹ Greene, 2-3.

1995. The program applies to, "Suppliers of goods and services to the federal government who employ 100 persons or more and who want to bid on contracts of \$200,000."⁴² This includes universities who are required to be certified by the government for the program as well as to undergo compliance reviews in order to ensure implementation. Thus, universities are in a position where affirmative action can appear to be not only a good idea but a good practice.

Affirmative action is perhaps the most potent example of what is described as the multicultural agenda of PC. Once again, much of the theoretical basis of what is considered to be PC, is based on theories of equality and of reshaping society in such a way that it is fair and equal for all its members. Thus, in the past, discrimination, either direct or indirect, resulted in very few if any minorities and women in many areas of the employment market. Certainly there were exceptions: however, affirmative action policies hope to correct the result of centuries of discrimination by compensating members of groups that were discriminated against. Yet, this translation of theories of equality and justice into specific policies is problematic as we shall see in the next chapter. For now it is important to understand the relationship between the theory

⁴² Human Resources Development Canada, "Federal Contractors Program," [Canada Business Service Centres] date posted January 16, 1998, date accessed July 10, 1998 available from <http://www.cbsc.org/alberta/bis/1648.html>.

and the practice as part of our effort to understand the PC debates and its application to universities.

Because the university is an employer, it finds itself in the position of implementing policies that address issues regarding the lack of representation from women and minority groups at their institutions. In 1992, an American survey of full-time faculty showed that 66.5% of faculty were white males in the higher paying positions. White women comprised 21% of faculty, while African Americans of both sexes were only 3.2% and Hispanics of both sexes a mere 1.9%. The study went on to argue that, "The fact that blacks, Hispanics, and women are more likely to be instructors off the tenure track than assistant professors on the tenure track reflects the lack of diversity among the assistant professors hired in the last decade."⁴³ The position seems similar in regards to salary. For example, it has been cited that, "...male professors earn \$7,000 more than women, male associate professors earn \$3,000 more, male assistant professors earn \$3,400 more and male instructors earn \$2,000 more than women."⁴⁴ Thus, it has been suggested that through these policies universities are attempting to realize the abstract ideals of liberalism and equality still lacking in the university context.

⁴³ Wilson J., 139. The survey discussed here first appears in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (November 23, 1994): A16.

⁴⁴ Wilson J., 138.

The final area of political correctness to be considered cannot be said to translate directly into policy, yet there are significant practical consequences to its presence in society and especially in the university. It is the most theoretical and difficult aspect of PC to discuss: postmodern and relativist theories that call into question the objectivity of truth and the valence of different cultures. This idea is related to the desire to have varying groups recognized as belonging to our society, or simply the need for recognition. All ideas and truths should be equally valued, it is said, because, "Postmodernism teaches us that all claims to truth and justice, excellence and merit, are hidden forms of domination."⁴⁵ The postmodern philosophy was born out of continental European linguistic theory and "defines itself in opposition to or as liberation from, 'modernism'".⁴⁶ Specifically, postmodernism challenges characteristics of modernity such as, "universality, freedom, scientific rationality, historical continuity" and deconstructing them to reveal that all truth and calls to fairness are simply myths.⁴⁷ In the context of postmodernism then, value judgements, and indeed most conclusions in general, are relative. "Value relativism is a doctrine that holds that all judgments of value are 'subjective' in the sense that

⁴⁵ Shadia Drury, "Political Correctness and Neoconservative Reaction," *Interchange*, Vol. 27/2, (1996): 164.

⁴⁶ Emberley, 104.

they are relative to the time, culture, or personality of the subject who makes them."⁴⁸ Thus, in truly understanding a text or a culture, it is essential to keep in mind the background and situation of the author and not necessarily the content of the work. This philosophy of tolerance and relativism is said to make it possible to understand cultures and ideas that may not be originally from our Western heritage.

It should be noted that postmodernism and theory in general are topics least discussed by the Cultural Left in the PC debates. Chapter 4 outlines how PC critics detail examples of the way that postmodernism has corrupted higher education, yet it is rarely addressed by the other side. Thus, it is difficult to establish an understanding of how postmodernism fits into the 'pro-PC' side of the debate. Nevertheless, postmodernism has been a popular subject of study, if not a well-known one to those outside of the university, in academia for close to thirty years. Once again, it is understood that many of those who adhere to aspects of postmodern theory may rebuke the designation of being politically correct. Furthermore, there are many intricacies to postmodernism and the theory itself cannot be detailed properly here. Rather, it is necessary to understand that postmodernism serves as a cornerstone of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁸ Patrick Malcolmsen, Richard Myers and Colin O'Connell, *Liberal Education and Value Relativism*, (Lanham: University Press of America

what is currently understood as PC. In other words, if one were to engage in an oversimplified definition of postmodernism as a challenge to the current reliance on Western traditional thought that includes the belief in science as well as an ordered universe, then PC fits into this conception. As PC looks to challenge the current structure of society and particularly higher education, it apparently does so in a way that necessitates abandoning the Western tradition of liberal thought. Postmodernism allows for the open criticism of ideas that were once virtually unquestioned. In other words, postmodernists look to understand philosophies and ideas as indications of what an author believed to be the truth about the society they lived in based on their position in that society. It is this area of postmodernism, deconstruction, that most often comes under attack from anti-PC critics.

Deconstruction is the method that postmodernism employs to expose the inherent subjectivity in all texts. Who the author is and where they come from is the only way truly to understand their work. This approach is said to put a political spin on absolutely everything. However PC proponents maintain that there is a difference between *making* issues political and *revealing* their political nature. To study a text with the author's background in mind does not necessarily reveal a political implication

that was simply waiting to be uncovered. Some assert that if everything is of equal value then there will be no reason or desire for academic inquiry. However, deconstruction does not intend to promote 'political resignation and indifference.' Rather, it leads to valid diversity between social groups that are then left to compete for recognition. In fact, "...part of the multiculturalist agenda involves deconstructing all substantializing views of identity formation; it also involves denouncing any stable, unified, and agreed upon cultural identity as conventionally constituted in a totalizing frame of reference fraught with contradictions."⁴⁹ Thus, it would seem that postmodernism is a theory that intends to pick apart the traditional modern world, revealing that present day society is based on the fact that decision-makers were white European males.

It is the presumption that there is one overriding culture that includes everyone equally that is contradictory and not the desire to reveal the struggles and situations of previously ignored peoples. Such an ideal can result in individuals being understood as no more than a member of a group, which is destined to clash with liberal conceptions of individualism.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there is a difference between the practical and the theoretical.

Although our understanding of light as composed of waves or particles or both simultaneously depends upon the manner in which we observe and interpret it, our

⁴⁹ Feldstein, 129.

⁵⁰ Drury, 165.

theories about light do not alter the ways in which it behaves. Our interpretations of human behaviour and of human culture, on the other hand, are intimately linked to what they describe - and not just because they are themselves instances of human behaviour and human culture. Discourses in this domain either legitimize themselves through their coherence, explanatory power, and persuasive force, or else they fail to: there does not exist any securely 'external' but still relevant realm, untouched by the discourses in question, which could be used to provide a comparably objective verification of their truth or falsity.⁵¹

Thus, by this argument it seems possible to follow a regimen of deconstruction and relativity without abandoning a higher intellectual and cultural goal. The importance of tolerance and subjective truths may dominate theories of postmodernism, but it has not left its proponents paralyzed by possible implications of such a theory. Upon further consideration, it is not hard to find many examples in our society that simultaneously call for individualism and social conformity.⁵² Thus, there is a contradiction between a liberal society that upholds group desires while at other times focusing on individual rights. On the other hand, PC is equally contradictory for wanting to impose the liberal ideals of equality on the individual, based on group identities.

Even though postmodernism does not translate into a policy as decidedly as speech codes or affirmative action, it does have practical consequences that are criticized by

⁵¹ Keefer, 85.

⁵² Drury, 161.

PC critics. In fact, postmodernism epitomizes the debate itself as the struggle between traditional Western thought and the challenge to that hegemony. The practical consequences of postmodernism are not simply a result of discussing the grander theories but rather of the mentality that everything is of equal value. Thus, it is possible to value cultures and traditions with which one may not be familiar. This can extend to valuing all decisions and societal structures of everything, resisting any imperialistic notion that the West has in any way mastered civilization. An environment where everything can be valued and appreciated encourages tolerance of others and acceptance that no one person, race or culture is better than any other. Chapter 4 discusses the potential negative outcomes of the theory. Nevertheless, the theory of postmodernism has translated into beliefs and subsequent action by individuals who believe that it is only fair and proper to value things for what they are and not to judge them because they are different. Thus postmodernism is one of the central areas of the PC debate.

This chapter has outlined the policy initiatives or action oriented aspects of PC that are frequently criticized as PC. In doing so, there has been an attempt to illustrate the how these policies are a result of the theories born out of the 1960s and the advent of the Cultural Left. Each of the examples considered, with the possible exception of postmodernism, are attributable to larger theories of

justice and equality but have significant practical results and consequences. Once again, as it has been the New Right that has largely shaped the debate in regards to the predominant issues, it is important to remember that 'PC inspired' policy as such is a myth. Each of the examples discussed are essentially independent topics that have unique histories and experiences in implementation, yet they have been placed under the PC umbrella. There are certain commonalties among the issues discussed in the chapter, primarily their association with challenging dominant society and culture and multiculturalism. Having looked at both the ideological aspects of PC in Chapter 2 and now analyzing PC as policy here, it is now possible to present the major argument of the thesis in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 - Debating Past Each Other

The last two chapters have illustrated that political correctness is simultaneously a product of abstract ideals rooted in ideology as well as an action-oriented policy. This dual characteristic is not necessarily unique or contradictory on its own. Many concepts have been stretched to encompass aspects that make them difficult to understand and discuss. However, when it comes to the debate concerning political correctness, the dilemma is that these two dynamics are in direct opposition. The majority of the literature concerning the PC debates follows this pattern: The Cultural Left is discussing principles and ideas, often although not always in a postmodern context, while the New Right is focusing almost exclusively on specific examples of consequences of PC inspired policies. This chapter will show how this is occurring and turn to explanations why. Finally, an overview of potential solutions and ways of better understanding the debate is essential. It is certain that the following is not true of all that has ever been said concerning political correctness. However it is such a dominant pattern that it cannot be overlooked.

It would be difficult if not impossible for someone in today's university environment to have no opinion regarding political correctness, or some of its major issues. The exposure in the mass media as well as the implications for scholarly life in many areas has turned PC into a strict dichotomy. Those for political correctness and then those

against. There seems to be little or no middle ground when it comes to having an opinion of political correctness. Regardless of its many facets, the concept of PC has taken on a singular identity for which there are two camps to support: Cultural Left and New Right. Nevertheless, it would seem reasonable that people could easily have varying opinions on different aspects of PC, making such a PC versus anti-PC debate futile. In such a strict dichotomy, a person who would normally identify themselves as being on the Cultural Left, is shelved into the category of pro-PC, feminist, environmentalists and all those who are challenging Western rational order as we know it. Those on the New Right are thus automatically slotted into the group that is said to desire the status quo and even a return to past educational and societal racist practices. However, even if we could strip away the ideological labels for a moment, the problem with the PC debate would remain: the two opposing views are not talking about the same thing.

An excellent example of the predicament of the opposition between the way things ought to be and the way they are pre-dates the PC debate by thirty years. In May 1968 a massive social uprising was orchestrated in France, when students initiated a country-wide crisis that lead to the largest general strike in France's history. The upheaval came as a shock to the country and the world. There was a sense of restlessness throughout French universities after the cumulative effects of several smaller

problems, including men being allowed to visit female dormitories. Then on May 3 at the focal point of French university life, La Sorbonne, several hundred students called a major protest of the suspension of eight student leaders. The demonstration lead to the arrival of the police where upon fighting broke out. Soon, over one thousand students were involved. During the fighting the French public witnessed police clubbing down students in a violent display that shocked the nation. Unions, both educational and labour, declared a general strike for May 13, denouncing the government for its action against the students.¹

The enormous strike soon grew beyond its leaders, and protesters were filled with optimism as to how society should be reorganized for the greater good. However, by May 29 union leaders reached agreement with the government on a variety of social reforms as well as a pay increase and the movement died almost as quickly as it was born. Elections following the strike comfortably reinstated the incumbent government, which appeared to receive substantial support from social groups across the ideological spectrum.² The point most significant to us in this example is the difference between what the students aspired to and what the workers felt was reality. In other words, "the student leaders tended to confuse rhetoric with reality... to the

¹ Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, 268.

² Ibid., 267-272.

striking worker, especially to older ones, it was not so certain that the risk of hunger had been forever eliminated."³ Thus, the students who were prepared for idealistic revolution were left behind by those who may have liked the ideas but were not ready to abandon an ordered civilization and risk the destitution that they had known during World War II. "The younger cohorts of the economically most favored strata showed a net shift in favor of the revolution; the workers (with declining elements of the middle class) rallied behind the forces of the established order."⁴ Although the focus during this time was primarily on economic issues, this example is comparable to PC. It could be presupposed that those on the Cultural Left play the role of the students while the New Right occupies the position of the workers. In other words, the Cultural Left focuses on theory, ideas and rhetoric whereas the New Right concentrates on the present and practical conditions.

This assertion is illustrated nicely by a 1995 publication by, Marilyn Friedman and Jan Narveson entitled *Political Correctness: For and Against*. The premise was that Friedman would write an argument advocating PC while Narveson would independently construct an argument against it and then both would subsequently respond to the others initial argument. While there is no specific ideological

³ Ibid., 282.

⁴ Ibid., 275.

self-identification by either of the authors, it is apparent throughout that Friedman's discussion leans to the left and Narveson's to the right. Although noble in its intention to participate in a "genuine dialogue" that is "honest, open, engaged, and mutually respectful", the final result is indicative of one of the major difficulties when discussing political correctness.⁵ As one reviewer pointed out,

...in many places, one begins to suspect that Friedman and Narveson just aren't talking about the same thing. Friedman's focus appears to be on the plausibility and correctness of some attitudes and aspirations (e.g. antisexism), while Narveson's primary concern is to criticize particular policies (e.g. affirmative action) that allegedly instantiate those attitudes.⁶

This criticism is equally applicable to the entire PC debate. Each side of this debate is talking about something different. Proponents of PC are focusing on a bigger theoretical and intellectual picture. "The goal is to eliminate prejudice, not just of the petty sort, but the grand prejudice that the intellectual tradition of Western Europe occupies the central place in the history of civilization."⁷ In many arguments by the Cultural Left, their priorities of multiculturalism do not focus on the means but the ends. In other words, there is an implication, at times by both sides of the debate, whereby the Cultural Left is not concerned with how it achieves its goals, as long as steps are taken. Whereas those who

⁵ Friedman, vii.

⁶ Susan Dwyer, "Critical Notice of Friedman and Narveson Political Correctness: For and Against," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 27, no. (December 4, 1997), 547.

criticize PC rage against, "recent developments and events...as ideologically motivated assaults on the intellectual and moral substance of our culture."⁸ In other words, the New Right restricts its focus to specific events that have affected society in its pursuit of equality. The New Right criticizes the sacrifices that are accepted by the Cultural Left as wrong and unnecessary. Of course, this often brings the assertion that this is nothing more than overt racism trying to disguise itself as legitimate concern. It is certain that there are two levels on which to consider political correctness: the abstract ideals and the practical policies. The entanglement of action and theory makes it difficult to provide a clear overview of the debate. However, both sides do address similar issues, although on different levels, making it possible to compare the arguments in the debate itself.

When considering the topic of university speech codes, we have already seen how attempts at translating the ideal of a comfortable and equal university environment have resulted in policies. These policies do restrict speech. However, what kind of speech is being restricted and how does it affect the learning environment? As Catherine MacKinnon aptly points out, "The Law of Equality and the law of freedom of speech are on a collision course in this country."⁹ In other words, there is no way to avoid the

⁷ Adler, M., 49.

⁸ Kimball, vii.

⁹ MacKinnon, 71. MacKinnon is speaking of the United States.

confrontation between the individual right of someone to say whatever they want and the individual right of all citizens to be treated with respect and dignity. Some deem the right to express oneself supercedes treating all people with respect and dignity while others hold the opposite. However, PC critics maintain that the academic atmosphere at a speech code university results in a 'freezing fear' among faculty and students as to what they are allowed to say in the classroom and during academic discussions. As Scatamburlo argues, "...neoconservatives use the complaint that their intellectual freedom is being restricted as a mask for their attempts to exert control over ideas on university campuses and to rid them of disciplines and areas of study which seek to rethink the curriculum and knowledge from perspectives that differ from those offered by a narrow, Western European viewpoint."¹⁰ However, critics disagree and John Furedy argues that there is a velvet totalitarianism occurring in Canada where, "...speech codes seek to govern not just individual utterances, but also the curriculum itself."¹¹ Any attempt at regulating speech in a university setting is sure to trigger both legal and moral reactions. The New Right declares that, it is not the role of Deans and other university administrators to determine what is to be said, and therefore what is to be taught in the classroom. The claim is that the implementation of

¹⁰ Scatamburlo. p, 95.

¹¹ John Furedy, "Academic Freedom Versus the Velvet Totalitarian Culture of Comfort on Current Canadian Campuses: Some Fundamental Terms and

speech codes paralyzes a professor into a fear of not only possibly losing their job, but also being subject to harassment from those on the Cultural Left who happen to disagree with some opinions of that professor. This damages not only the ability of adequate teaching at an institution but also the possibility of professors engaging in potentially important research that may not be 'politically correct'.¹²

In 1993 at the University of New Brunswick, mathematics professor Martin Yaqzan wrote an article for the student paper on the subject of date rape. He wrote, "When a boy invites a girl to his bedroom, especially after meeting her for the first time, she should consider it as an invitation for sexual intercourse" and "If a promiscuous girl becomes a victim of an unwanted sexual experience, she might more reasonably demand payment for her inconvenience or discomfort rather than express moral outrage."¹³ Yaqzan was immediately suspended by UNB and a national debate ensued concerning freedom of speech, tenure and the university. It was argued that universities must distinguish between, "offensive ideas and offensive behaviour."¹⁴ In other words, Yaqzan did not actually date rape anyone and therefore could not be punished for his article. However, others maintained

Distinction," *Interchange*, Vol. 28/4, (1997): 333.

¹² This is applicable to the earlier cases we considered of Vince Sarich and Philippe Rushton.

¹³ As quoted in Emberly, 75-76.

¹⁴ Emberly, 76.

that he should not have the right to say anything regardless of the potential offense or damage to other groups.

In 1989 Sophomore Nina Wu lived in the University of Connecticut dormitories where she allegedly put a sign on her door that read "people who are shot on sight- preppies, bimbos, men without chest hair and homos."¹⁵ Although it is not known if 'men without chest hair' protested her sign, it is certain that the university's gay community did. Under the student behaviour code it is forbidden to post publicly offensive material and thus Wu was brought up on charges for violating this code. As punishment the student was forced to move off campus and not allowed to be physically present in dormitories or cafeterias. Threat of a federal lawsuit pressured the university into allowing Wu to move back on campus in 1990. Whether Wu would have actually harmed any of those named in her sign is secondary to whether she should be allowed to express her opinion. Some would maintain that this is obviously a joke that should be taken as such. Others however would argue that this kind of behaviour is not only insensitive but leads to blatant discrimination and even violence. Either way the entire incident would not have garnered national attention had Wu simply been asked to take the sign down rather than brought up on charges and required to move off campus. There is a grey area between Wu's right to express herself and someone

¹⁵ Adler, 48.

else's right not to be offended or scared by action or speech from another.

The focus on speech codes goes beyond individual rights to the best way of combating racism in society. For example, stringent free speech supporter Nat Hentoff argues that speech codes in any form are a mistake. He cites many examples of students and faculty that, according to Hentoff, have been victimized by speech codes from the hurling of racial slurs to misunderstandings that have been pushed to far. One such example was that of Murray Dolfman, a legal studies lecturer that was working on a sessional basis for University of Pennsylvania in 1985. Dolfman was reportedly an excellent, yet tough professor and students would fight to get into his classes. In a discussion of the Thirteenth Amendment of the American constitution that abolished slavery, Dolfman said that as there were 'ex-slaves' in the class, this law should be known and celebrated. Four black students filed formal complaints against Dolfman's use of the term 'ex-slaves' as inaccurate, as they had never been slaves. Dolfman apologized to the students as well as making a formal public apology, admitting that he should have used the term 'descendents of slaves'. He was also removed from his teaching position and banned from the campus for one year.¹⁶ Hentoff argues that Dolfman was not discriminating against the black students in his class by using the terminology of ex-slaves. In fact, he often

mentioned the fact that he was a Jew and what that meant to his understanding of rights and laws in America. Hentoff continues that it was a grievous error to punish Dolfman for his speech as it was not meant to be offensive in any way and was certainly not discriminatory.

Hentoff also argues that it is wrong for any one to grow up in a bubble that does not expose them to the harsh realities of language. For example, he points out that, "Malcom X used to talk about the need to learn how language works, how to dissect it, how to use it both as a shield and a sword. Above all, he felt, blacks should not be fearful of language. They should not let language intimidate them but rather fight back - when words are used against them - with more powerful words of their own."¹⁷ Moreover, black students are often offended that anyone would assume that they would simply, "pack up [their] books and go home" in the "face of racist speech."¹⁸ Although Hentoff concedes that this point of view may be held by a minority of blacks, he maintains that trying to curb speech pushes racism underground. Rather, a society that hopes to combat racism should encourage free speech so that racism can be dismantled and attacked in the open. For Hentoff, it works to the advantage of the racist that no one can truly openly debate them. The exposure of racism and the 'toughening up' of those who are the recipients of derogatory speech lead

¹⁶ Hentoff, 188-192.

¹⁷ Ibid., 167.

¹⁸ Ibid., 161.

Hentoff to conclude that unrestricted speech is the best solution.

The arguments of Hentoff are persuasive, but the key aspect to this thesis is that the concentration of his argument rests on examples.¹⁹ Indeed, some chapters centre around one single example of an attempt to ban a book or of trying to force a student to read a book. There is not an assumption that Hentoff does not know or understand the theories and reasoning behind university speech codes. In fact, it is certain that he is well versed in the laws and their interpretations regarding free speech. However, in the context of the PC debate, this criticism of speech codes, as well as most others, has rested on the examples of situation that became hostile in some manner and that, in the end, did not reflect the original intentions of equality and speech codes. Regardless of any good intentions, the fact remains that speech codes restrict speech and for some such a sacrifice is too great.

It would be nice if discrimination did not exist and everyone maintained a golden rule of not saying anything at all if they did not have anything nice to say. However, the fact is, people are quite willing to use expressions and terminology that is understandably offensive to individuals or to the groups that they identify with. The concept of equality is like a balloon that floats in the clouds. It is

¹⁹ It is not claimed that the entirety of Hentoff's work has been reviewed, but what has been seen in regards to the debate on speech codes, fits this categorization.

never attainable, and yet it is sought after relentlessly. But when someone catches the balloon and tries to bring it down, it loses air and simply doesn't fly anymore. In other words as soon as you try and make a grand theory like equality into a practical and applicable societal goal it is distorted beyond recognition. However, the same could be said about freedom of speech. It may be a wonderful idea but it will always have its opposition. This brings the entire issue down to a point about context. "Some words of derision hurt; they should be identified as slurs in at least one sense and avoided. Others...are getting a bad rap from the hypersensitive."²⁰ The Cultural Left talks about how great the balloon in the sky is, while the New Right is protesting its lack of air and distortion when pulled down.

The proponents of PC are focusing on mutual respect, welcoming marginalized groups, and overall civility. While on the other hand the PC critics point to specific incidents where faculty and students have become victims of the policies established by those on the Cultural Left. The other side considers speech codes a potentially important step in stamping out marginalisation of minorities in universities. A similar situation pattern of debate emerges when discussing the Western literary canon.

The criticisms surrounding the alteration and expansion of the Western literary canon point to specific works that

²⁰ William Safire, "Linguistically Correct," *New York Times*, (Sunday May 5, 1991): A16.

are purported to be of lower quality yet are being read alongside, or even replacing what are purported to be the greatest philosophical works of all time. It is argued that those who look to systematically replace "Plato with Navaho folktales or Shakespeare with Jacqueline Susann" in universities across North America are being blatantly political in their action. This of course presupposed that the current canonical structure is apolitical. In other words, the accusation is that it is essential for the left to change what students have to read in order to continue their political agendas of cultivating leftist students within the university. The suggestion is that the quality of the work is not as important as whether it espouses feminist, socialist and/or multicultural ideals. Furthermore, it is said that the very inclusion of some texts is only to introduce political points. For example, some have asserted that a discussion of *Madame Bovary* is an ideal starting point for, "...an unlimited field for pronouncements about the baleful condition of women."²¹ However, this is less problematic for those who look to use texts to incite meaningful political discussions. Even if *Madame Bovary* opens the door to a feminist discussion, that does not necessarily mean that it has to be or will be exclusive to feminism or man-hating. In fact, discussions of this work could also turn around class or love. Regardless, the critics are arguing that by putting these

²¹ Kimball, 15.

previously absent works on the curriculum destroys the true purpose of a canon.

Yet, it is important to point out that there is no single authoritative voice that decides the context of the canon. In fact, there is no independent measure of quality that can be applied to all literary works in order to assess their value. For example, the editor in chief of the 1990 Great Books of the Western World, contends that, "Great books are relevant to human problems in every century, not just germane to current twentieth-century problems" and that "A great book requires reading over and over, and had many meanings; a good book need be read no more than once, and need have no more than one meaning."²² In fact, it is easily argued that the ways in which quality is currently determined is an assertion of Western European male hegemony. What one considers quality is assuredly not the same for all, as both a matter of taste and as a tool in the university classroom. Regardless of individual assertions, it is certain that the literary canon is not merely a matter of taste. In fact Scatamburlo argues that, "conservative myth-makers have sought to render the Western canon/tradition's historicity transparent by occluding the fact that it is a socially constructed entity, an invention, an imagined community of sorts, which is imbricated in much broader power differentials. Indeed, deciding which texts

²² Mortimer Adler J., "Multiculturalism, Transculturalism, and the Great Books," in *Beyond PC: Towards a Politics of Understanding*, edited by Patricia Aufderheide, (Saint Paul: Greywolf Press, 1992), 60.

to include and what counts as 'legitimate' knowledge reflects decisions which have been made out of an endless array of possibilities, and such decisions inevitably mirror dominant relations of power and privilege."²³ Moreover, literature is not removed and replaced in a fashionable manner, like yearly fashions, following brief academic trends. Although true that the canon evolves and is constantly changing, these changes normally happen over the course of centuries and not simply by a faculty Senate vote in a university. It would seem only natural that as more women and minorities receive a liberal education, a more representative canon will develop. Yet, is it necessary to force a new and so-called improved version of the *Western* literary canon? It is clear that one could not expect people in cultures where higher education is an anomaly to produce material worthy of world wide study, analysis and admiration. How then, could the canon be anything but Western?

The often cited example illustrating this point was made by Virginia Woolf, indicating how difficult it would be for a woman to succeed as a writer in the sixteenth century. Her focus was on those who were empowered to write, realizing that it was difficult for women writers of centuries past "since few avenues were available to those seeking institutional sanction for their writing."²⁴

²³ Scatamburlo, 80.

²⁴ Feldstein, 163.

Regardless, some women did make it onto the illustrious English literary canon, specifically Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters, but they defied the historical odds. Not until this century have female and minority scholars found their way into a position that enables them to create great works. Through her writings, Woolf implies that each historical period is bound together by a conceptual overview whose only support is a fictional narrative" and "the metanarratives of periodization are fictional because they raise to the level of a macroperspective a dominant fiction that goes unquestioned during a specific historical interval."²⁵ In other words it is not surprising that women are not common canon material, given that power structures shape the canon. Thus in the past, women were excluded by patriarchy and minorities by racism. As sexism and racism are being confronted, it only seems natural that the canon would adapt to the times. As more non-traditional authors achieve canon exposure, it is argued that, they are 'quality works' that deserve to find themselves along side those works that are considered the best ever. Whether or not this is where they want to be is another question.

Setting aside the accusations of purely political motivation and relative quality assessments, the legitimate concern of the New Right is that actions and policies are forcibly changing the face of the canon. In other words, votes such as the one at Stanford to change the required

²⁵ Ibid., 167.

curriculum are forcing through transformations that should occur naturally, over the course of time and good scholarship. It is the specific actions of attempting to alter the canon for political reasons that are objected to. In response the Cultural Left claims that the New Right is simply nostalgic for the past and not realizing that the canon no longer reflects the students it is guiding. As there are no rules regarding the regulation of the canon, they see no problem in expanding it to include works that have been previously overlooked for a variety of reasons. Whether this is subjecting students to poor texts or simply opening their minds is endlessly debatable. Yet, it is apparent that the ideal of establishing a canon and curriculum representative of the student population cannot be applied in a straightforward and universally acceptable manner.

It is important to note that criticism of the canon can imply two different things. The first, as we have seen, is a rejection of altering the curriculum in such a way that works are removed or added simply on the basis of who the author is. The second is that the Western canon is indicative of what the common culture is or should be. In other words, some argue that, "the appeal to an instituted, neutral, universal, common culture not only occludes the structural advantage of those petitioning the discourse of the 'common' but also serves to mask the logic of assimilation and the suppression of difference which

undergirds such a formulation."²⁶ In other words, those who reject expanding the canon understand that even an informal set of works that is instrumental in higher education will jeopardize the historical understanding of culture and higher education. By advocating diversity, not only in the universities, but also through the curriculum, it is pointed out that the singular Western identity is destined to be destroyed. For some, it is exactly this deterioration of a common Western culture that they desire. For others, this destruction is detrimental not only to the Western culture but to the level of quality of higher education itself. A conflict then emerges as to whether it is possible to acquire a worthy liberal arts education if the works studied are not the same as a few decades earlier. Once again, the canon is not a fixed stature of university life. The contents of what will be on the canon in another century could never be predicted. Yet, forcing the canon to change does not necessarily legitimize it.

It would seem apparent that the overarching goal of most who propose the expansion of the Western literary canon is the hope to diversify liberal arts education as it is currently understood. This diversification is consistent with the building of a multicultural society whereby difference is not only tolerated but valued and encouraged. In other words, students are not motivated, in the classroom or in the social life of the university to identify with a

²⁶ Ibid. p, 86.

common culture but to explore their specific 'identity'. Thus, it is argued that a person of a minority should be able to study works on the canon that have been written by someone in their particular group, not only to speak to that person's interests but to give that individual 'self-esteem' in knowing that someone like them created a work that is respected and studied at university. Some question whether it is a university's role to be concerned with the self-esteem of its students. In fact, self-esteem is something that may be developed so early in life that a university education cannot expect to alter it. Furthermore, another counter argument could be that the pride that may come from a minority being represented on the canon is decreased as, some have maintained, that work would be of lower quality than others. As we have seen with the example of speech codes, some minority or female students may be offended by the accusation that their self-esteem may be partially dependent on whether or not they are able to study a book written by a women or a minority. Still, the discussion of quality returns to a question of difference and how to judge quality. Either way, expanding the canon is consistent with speech codes in that the theoretical goal of creating a fair, equal and just multicultural society sometimes conflicts with the practical solutions that have found their way into universities.

With universities filling a dual role of service-providers to students and employers to faculty, issues of

specialised departments and employment discrimination are significant. In the case of curriculum, the New Right reasons that newly created university departments in areas such as women's studies and African American studies are not in the true spirit of disinterested scholarship, instead looking only to politicize students. Roger Kimball asserts that in such a learning atmosphere, "...only radical sentiment receives clear and frank expression."²⁷ Thus, the true nature of a university as being a place where varying opinions can be expressed and debated is eroded. Rather, these departments foster and develop a radical political view that is intended to go far beyond the classroom. The accusation is that feminists, for example, can say and do whatever they please and then retreat to the women's studies program without fear of being challenged from within their department.²⁸ Thus, there is an assumption that in these departments there is a unified point of view that emanates from these scholars that allows them to have a monopoly over their entire area of study. Of course, anyone with even the briefest exposure to feminist or race relations theory knows that there is far more than a single viewpoint in these areas. However, as most of these departments are still relatively small in size, it is conceivable that a dominant notion would emerge. Yet, this is not necessarily different than any other university department that is heavily

²⁷ Kimball. p. 76.

²⁸ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, (New York: Double Day, 1991), 292.

influenced by one set of ideas or another at different periods of time.

Dinesh D'Souza argues that feminist theory classes are detrimental to the academic freedom of students as well as the respectability of knowledge itself. He further argues that women's studies programs are attempting to indoctrinate their students through special language usage such as, (her)story, wimmin and discussion of malestream thought. For D'Souza, this kind of education implies that anyone not taking classes or supporting departments in women's studies or African-American studies is automatically misogynist or racist.²⁹ This attitude puts many liberal minded individuals on the defensive and, according to D'Souza, the most likely result is violent incidents concerning race and gender.³⁰ If it is true that classes in women's studies for example, are doing nothing more than "...encouraging a feminist orthodoxy that sacrifices academic knowledge for feel-good self expression", how can it be beneficial to the academy or to women?³¹ This climate has left feminist scholars in a position of continually justifying their importance. Dinesh D'Souza secretly visited Harvard professor Alice Jardine's feminist theory class in preparation for his book, *Illiberal Education*. By D'Souza's account, Jardine's class "...resembled a political rally", and was overtly Marxist,

²⁹ D'Souza, 211-216.

³⁰ Ibid, 228.

³¹ Wilson, J., 129.

as well as promoting lesbianism.³² As a result of these allegations, Jardine is now "...forced to set an uncomfortable precedent: whenever strangers visit her class, she asks all right-wing reporters to stand up and identify themselves."³³ Not only does this kind of situation prevent a professor from conducting the class in a professional manner and could plausibly make students uncomfortable in a way that does not contribute to their education.

Both situations can be construed as detrimental to academic freedom. On the one hand, if D'Souza is correct and anyone that does not agree with the feminist ideals espoused in the classroom will be labeled a misogynist they will probably think before they speak or may even censor themselves. For many, this solution is not particularly problematic, as any kind of thought, especially of a misogynistic nature should be thought out carefully by the student before they speak. Moreover, no one is forcing them to not say what they think, but if they do choose to express an opinion of some kind they can and should expect to be challenged. On the other hand, a professor who is continually concerned about having her classroom analyzed and broken down for critical right wing publications may not feel free to teach the class in the manner intended. Even if Jardine asks all right-wing reporters to identify themselves that does not guarantee that they will. Yet, the

³² D'Souza, 208.

³³ Feldstein, 26.

solution cannot be to try to limit or exclude those on the other side of the ideological spectrum from being allowed to participate in the class. Rather, all kinds of students should be encouraged to take such a class and present their views and have them challenged by all sides in a calm and reasonable academic discussion and debate.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of political correctness is the debate surrounding affirmative action. Criticized as a practice that unfairly discriminates against white males, in favour of giving jobs to women and/or minorities who are supposedly less qualified. The basis of most criticisms concerning affirmative action argue that good intentions have resulted in bad policy. Some go on to say that, "Affirmative action is a microcosm of the welfare state" and that, "Undaunted, traditional liberals and social democrats continue to advocate new programs on the unspoken assumption that good intentions are enough."³⁴ It is said that attempts to right past wrongs or to attempt a demographic reflection of the population in the workforce is beyond the capabilities of administrative control. "Affirmative-action policies assume not only a level of knowledge that no one has ever possessed but also a degree of control that no one has ever exercised."³⁵ In other words, the charge is that it is impossible for a documented

³⁴ Conrad Winn, "Affirmative action for women: more than a case of simple justice," *Canadian Public Administration*. Volume 28, vol. 1, (Spring 1985): 46.

³⁵ Thomas Sowell, "Affirmative Action: A Worldwide Disaster," *Commentary*, 86, \ 6, (December 1989), 27.

set of rules to be able to judge individual situations when it comes to employment.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) released "Guidelines for Affirmative Action: Toward Employment Equity" in 1991, wherein the complex nature of such policies was noted. "On the one hand, the inequalities experienced by women, aboriginal people, and visible minorities require strong, even extraordinary, measures to accelerate the pace of progress. On the other hand, there is a risk that such measures could become excessive; they might even lead to reverse discrimination against blameless individuals."³⁶ Many critics maintain that not only is reverse discrimination a possibility but a reality when it comes to hiring practices in universities. The argument continues by asserting that affirmative action is detrimental to the respectability of the university and the academic environment. Thus, it is reasoned that, "such actions appear to have been widely interpreted as a tacit admission on the part of universities that they have discriminated, and continue to discriminate, against women, either overtly or covertly. Such an interpretation has meant that people no longer ask for evidence to support serious claims of immoral and illegal discrimination. It has also meant that comments, which in many other contexts would possibly be considered libelous, are allowed to stand

³⁶ "Guidelines for Affirmative Action Toward Employment Equity" Submitted to The Honourable Elaine Ziemba, Minister of Citizenship for Ontario by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, November 20, 1991,

unquestioned."³⁷ This criticism is extended to the concepts of compensation, moral discrimination and social constructions of gender.

The basic premise when considering these kinds of arguments is the inherent and purportedly false assumptions brought on by theories that support affirmative action. First, it is argued that the idea of compensation for discriminatory practices erroneously assumes that groups and not individuals should benefit from such policies. "What makes compensation an illusion is not only that sufferers are not in fact compensated, or the effects of historic wrongs redressed- or even accurately identified and separated from innumerable other social factors at work simultaneously."³⁸ Thus, it is argued that is wrong to give compensation to individuals solely on the fact that they are a member of a group that was possibly discriminated against at some point in the past. Second, is the moral permissibility of discrimination. It has been argued that discrimination is a normal part of our society from rewarding good performance or punishing bad, to the discriminating between two suitors when looking for a mate. This argument maintains that, "The essential purpose of universities is to generate and propagate knowledge; thus the person who deserves a teaching position within the

Introduction.

³⁷ A.D Irvine, "Jack & Jill & Employment Equity," Working Paper 1 for the University of British Columbia Centre for Applied Ethics, (June 1991), 38.

³⁸ Sowell, 33.

university is the one who is (expected to be) best able to advance knowledge - that is, the most meritorious candidate."³⁹ As a result it is maintained that, "Canadian universities have no requirement to prefer female candidates as such, either on moral grounds or on 'practical' ones."⁴⁰ Finally, those who refute the argument that women are 'socially constructed' in such a way that they find it difficult to compete with men. A prime example is that women lack assertiveness that may lead to discrimination. The counter argument is that virtually everything, from class to race has a socialized perspective and it is futile and dangerous to make any attempts to accommodate social differences. What is seen with all of these criticisms is that the theory does not meet the practice.

Of course, it is not possible to detail the affirmative action controversy adequately in this context. Rather, it serves to further illustrate the thesis. Preferential employment policies have been implemented and supported on the basis of theoretical justifications ranging from social construction of gender to the idea of compensation. Yet, even those who support affirmative action do not necessarily agree with theories that are often employed in their defense. Nevertheless, it is essential to note the pattern that evolves. As with the other cases explored in this chapter, theories that look to combat sexist and racist

³⁹ Brown, Grant. University of Lethbridge. p, 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

enclaves rely on the abstract layer of ideas to support policies. Those opposed point to the specific, sometimes negative, consequences of the policy initiatives and actions themselves. In other words, the argument puts forth that if Person X was robbed in 1950, it does not make sense to compensate Person X's daughter by taking money from the children of the person who robbed Person X in the first place. The emerging theme is that affirmative action is defended by focusing on the good intentions of the theories, while the critics are usually careful to avoid condemnation of the theories and resort to discussion of how affirmative action policies are reportedly detrimental to working environments. Once again, the confrontation is between theory and practice making the debate itself distorted and confusing. Is it possible to agree that discrimination has occurred in the past and should be rectified and yet disagree with affirmative action? Also, can someone claim that they are not racist or sexist and yet refute policy attempts to regulate the situation? For many the answer to both of these questions would be yes, and yet the general impression is that the for and against lines are quite clear. The translation from theory into practice invariably leads to unforeseen difficulties and concerns for all involved. Thus, it is more a matter of whether the sacrifices required in the jump from theory to practice are acceptable.

In order to realize the ideals of developing a gender equal and racially tolerant university environment, those on the Cultural Left have turned to the creation of new departments and employment equity policies. Once again, it is in the spirit of ending alleged scourges such as sexism and racism that these policies are intended. However, the critics maintain that the damage that is done to the non-minority groups does not justify the means of these approaches, returning us to the idea that actual merit is simply moot.

There are no specific policies in place insisting that postmodernism be a part of the university curriculum, although it has been a significant aspect during the last few decades. Critics maintain that it even has a dominant presence in teaching. Most would not argue openly against tolerance for varying views, but critics assert that the problem with the relativistic nature of postmodernism is that it challenges simplistic constructions of what is right and wrong as well as scientific rationality. If there is no truth to be uncovered and philosophy is simply a succession of revelations concerning power structures, it seems improbable that postmodernism and the so-called left-leaning principles of political correctness should be excluded.⁴¹ Yet, it is difficult to argue that there are no socially motivated assumptions by the author, at the very least that these assumptions do not affect or take away from the

overall experience of the work itself. Even if the postmodern deconstructuralists remain exclusively in the domain of theory and philosophy, they are open to further criticisms regarding their contradictory nature. If everything is a relative form of domination, then so is PC. This idea calls for studying everything from a perspective that gives significant weight to the author's background to drawing conclusions based on socio-economic and historical conditions. "Deconstructionism is one of those many fads that promise to make philosophy really easy instead of the hard intellectual labor it actually is."⁴² The lack of ideal truths with a capital T, may in fact lead to a more tolerant consideration of other viewpoints but it renders the entire exercise of political philosophy futile. Can liberal education survive in an environment of postmodernism?

The complexities of postmodern theory and its implications for liberal education cannot be examined at length in this thesis. Obviously, there are many aspects that have been overlooked. However, on a broader scale it does sustain our discussion of the political correctness debate. As some academics focus on the importance of the author's background and socially manipulated assumptions, they also look to highlight the importance of tolerance for other views. Critics are concerned that this course of action will result in apathetic scholarship and a

⁴¹ Drury, 164.

⁴² Friedman., 77.

disinterested, and perhaps unpolitical search for truth. Yet again, there is the opposition between those who are comfortable focusing on the translation of ideals into practice and those that look first to the consequences of idealism and are not comfortable with what they see.

Thus, for almost ten years now the PC debate has been raging, for and against, Cultural Left versus New Right, and theory contra practice. Even if any of the participants have remarked that they are not addressing the issues with the same assumptions as the opposing side, based on what has been shown in this thesis it appears acceptable to ignore this oversight. The Cultural Left has already made the assumption that the ideals that they believe in are necessarily beneficial to society. Their style of argumentation can imply that initial consequences are simply growing pains that may be uncomfortable for some but a necessary and acceptable cost for obtaining higher ideals and a discrimination free society. If some end up suffering from a free speech restriction or compete against a disproportionately large number of minorities or women for a job, then it is the sacrifice that has to be made. Because, the final intended result, namely a world free of discrimination and inequality, is so important, it is worth tolerating distasteful episodes in the present. This is probably not the assumption of all those on the Cultural Left, nor all those that agree in general with the principles of political correctness. However, the way in

which the Cultural Left presents its grounds for supporting PC leads us to the conclusion that it prefers to focus on the abstract concepts, regardless of the consequences.

The exact opposite seems to be true for the New Right. Their focus seems to be almost exclusively on the specific incidents that are simply accepted sacrifices by the Cultural Left. This style focuses on the polemical aspects of any policy implementation. By focusing on the question of whether it is acceptable for anyone at any time to be refused their right to free speech, they prefer not to dwell on where speech codes came from theoretically speaking. The New Right does not openly state that they are against the principles of feminism and multiculturalism. Rather they do not accept the initial assumptions by the Cultural Left that all their ideals are definitively acceptable. It would seem reasonable that someone can be sympathetic to the rights and equality of women without sustaining the entire feminist movement or their actions. Of course the difference between the right to vote and total equality is great. Thus, when not beginning with the same conjecture, the New Right cannot tolerate the sacrifices that occur in the interim. This also gives us a partial explanation as to why the campaign of the New Right has been so successful. It is far easier to identify with specific incidents of wrong-doing than it is to absorb entire philosophies. Regardless, there are legitimate concerns as to where, how and if these sacrifices are to cease. Even the most left of the leftists would

surely admit that a discrimination-free utopia is implausible. Where and when would society decide that it was sufficiently discrimination-free to make policy action unnecessary? Or would those charged with putting into practice the desired policy ever be satisfied if it meant an end to their own jobs?

After careful examination of the examples and context examined above, there are several important conclusions that can be drawn. First, the conceptualization of the debate in terms of the New Right and the Cultural Left is not only confusing and distorting but futile. It is plausible for someone to agree with Nat Hentoff regarding freedom of speech rights, in so much as language can be an excellent defensive tool in the battle of racism, while simultaneously agreeing that the Western literary canon should be expanded. Furthermore, some people may agree with some areas of affirmative action and not even understand the finer details of theories such as postmodernism. Yet, both the New Right and the Cultural Left have pitted themselves into such a battlefield that it sometimes feels, or is said to feel, as if the university is being torn apart. Of course, not everyone would agree that they have been relegated to one side or the other of the PC debate, but it appears to be the extreme viewpoints that are predominant. Most articles and books dealing with the phenomenon of political correctness on both sides choose not to ignore ideological implications,

thus the New Right versus the Cultural Left emerges.⁴³ The thesis has shown that the right and left are entrenched in political correctness and any attempt to tear away these labels would not be a fruitful one. However, this results in a predicament whereby people and situations are judged prematurely based solely on the *perceived* ideological connotations. In other words, it is inaccurate to refer to two sides of the debate when there are many. It would make for a clearer and more reasoned debate if the ideas were judged independently of the ideological continuum.

Secondly, because it is so easy to have differing opinions on different issues, each aspect under the so-called PC umbrella should be considered individually. It is not surprising that such confusion develops when topics as theoretical as postmodernism and as action-oriented as affirmative action are combined. Even though all theories and policies do have consequences, it is not possible properly to judge the translation of theory into practice or even to judge practice on its own when depending on truly unrelated examples. Obviously, significant debate occurs on all fronts of PC, including some that are not mentioned here; however, it is dangerous to assume that a position in one particular area designates a ideological labels thus making presumptions in other areas. Not only is this unfair to both sides, it undermines the possibility of true debate.

⁴³ This is apparent primarily in books and articles that purport to discuss PC and not specific policies such as affirmative action or sexual harassment.

This represents the biggest weakness of this thesis. It is extremely difficult to adequately gauge affirmative action in a few paragraphs. In fact, each of the topics considered could easily be an entire study independent of the term political correctness. However, in order to present the argument that political correctness is inaccurate and superfluous such vast topics had to be covered in minimal space. Thus, both the ideological implications and the convoluted subject matter makes one sometimes wonder how political correctness has survived as an entity of debate.

Even if ideology can be temporarily overlooked, why does it matter if two sides of this debate are talking past each other? The third concern raised by this thesis deals with the importance of understanding this rarely noticed dynamic in the PC debates. It would not be particularly surprising for many to realize that there is a miscommunication going on between the various sides. Notwithstanding the misunderstandings that can occur in passionate argument, PC acts like a loaded gun for both sides and the casualty is the university. In other words, because the allegations leveled are so serious, it is essential to understand how there is misinformation and negative consequences for students and faculty. Maintaining that someone is racist because they used the term ex-slaves in the classroom, when in fact it has been shown that the comment related directly to the subject matter and was nothing more than perhaps insensitive, damages both the

career and reputation of that individual as well as the quality of education. Yet, excluding new voices in curriculum and faculty can only serve to undermine the extensive work done and the success that many social movements have achieved. Thus, there is a crossfire in the PC debates, which injure both sides in the end, and sabotage the entire university environment from the classrooms to the dorm rooms. It is simplistic to say that there is a right and a wrong when it comes to political correctness, rather there are many shades of gray through which answers to serious questions must be discussed, acted upon and answered.

Conclusion

As the twentieth century comes to a close, political correctness shows no signs of disappearing from the spotlight. Rather, given the intensity of the arguments and issues involved, it would seem that some areas are just beginning to be addressed. As speech code and affirmative action policies are being challenged in the courts and postmodernism questioned in the classroom, it seems plausible that the Cultural Left will be in a position where it will need to mount a strong defense against the New Right. It is becoming increasingly difficult to dismiss PC as merely right wing rhetoric or left wing fantasy. Regardless of the extent to which PC involves ideological conflict, it is the perceptions and assumptions that have made the issues so confusing. As PC is used increasingly as a shield and a sword when it comes to such a wide variety of topics, it is imperative that an effort is made to understand the undercurrents of the issues.

Like any war, the so-called PC wars do result in significant damage to the university and seriously victimize both faculty and students. Everyone involved supposedly believes that they are the ones improving and protecting the academic learning environment, while the opposite side is harming it. In the case of political correctness, it is possible that everyone is, at least partially, correct. It is essential to maintain a degree of academic freedom for both students and faculty, particularly in the classroom.

But can that freedom be limitless? It is also extremely important that the university not unnecessarily discriminate against anyone based on characteristics that do not pertain to their overall ability to learn. But, can this be regulated in a way that will not be detrimental to any group involved? These are questions that go beyond the immediate scope of this thesis. However, because it is desirable both to maintain academic freedom and non-discriminatory practices, the lines of this debate quickly blur and disintegrate. Unfortunately, many unsuspecting victims are caught in a crossfire that has seriously damaged the university environment.

Thus, we are left with a debate that spends all its time assigning blame, leaving discussion by the wayside. It is easy to blame the New Right, because they developed the terminology and catapulted PC into the spotlight. It is also easy to blame the Cultural Left for supporting and helping to implement policies intended to battle sexism and racism that on occasion have resulted in, disastrous, if unintended, consequences. Regardless of who one chooses to blame, it is certain that neither side has seriously engaged in direct, calm and productive discussion of political correctness. The reasons are many: it is hard to discuss a concept that is so ambiguous and incites such passionate ideological associations; it is difficult to detach oneself from ideology in order to discuss the theory of the practice of political correctness. Perhaps the biggest problem is that

the theoretical side of PC is so general and the practical side of PC is so particular that virtually all discussion is paralyzed from the start, or perhaps the true objectives of the two groups are mutually exclusive. As a result it is pointless to blame one side or the other for the current situation, nor is it beneficial to continue the debate in its current form.

Although the best solution is probably to 'retire the term forthwith', this is neither a realistic or plausible expectation. The New Right's dedication to the terminology and the course of the PC debates has ensured, if nothing else, a certain longevity to the issues surrounding PC. But if PC is not going to go away, what can be done on campuses across North America that are in the grip of the debate? Even if the terminology is not likely to be retired, the ideological associations should be. This is potentially more difficult than discarding the term PC, because ideology is so persuasive a concept, touching many areas of a person's life, not simply the PC debate. In other words, it is potentially more difficult to shed one's ideological stand than the term PC. Another solution would involve disbanding what is currently understood as PC and dealing with all the issues separately, on their own merits and in terms of their own characteristics. In other words, affirmative action and postmodernism would be considered exclusively as individual issues only and not as being under the PC umbrella. Yet, if this could be done the PC

terminology would be redundant, which, as noted above, is not likely to happen. So we are left with a situation where the terminology surrounding PC is tenacious and unlikely to be discarded easily. Ideological labels that play a significant role in the PC debates seem as entrenched as the terminology itself and unlikely to disappear. The issues involved in political correctness although often considered individually, are thrown into the PC mixture as soon as 'PC' becomes the topic. Thus, a variety of non-compatible issues find themselves in the same argument. It seems unlikely that any of these potential solutions will be realized and thus the university will remain in a state of disarray.

This thesis has shown that the PC debates are unproductive and harmful to the university, yet there are no easy solutions. The arguments are passionate and legitimate concerns range all across the ideological scale and back again. As one side points to anecdotes that have destroyed lives, the other tries to force a changing of the ways in an institution that has often been accused of being unresponsive to change. These two arguments are not compatible for a productive debate. It is a vicious circle of accusations and misunderstandings, whether intentional or in the spirit of the debate, that has left in its wake a path of destruction at universities. The only solution is to dismantle PC and address all concerns and situations as unique. If the issue at hand is the desire to end racism and sexism then it should be addressed at that level and not

through an anecdote. If the problem is because of a professor that has been wrongly accused of racism then that particular issue should be judged and considered independently. Thus, by showing that the participants in the PC debates are not actually debating each other's points, and by considering the damage done to the university, it is hoped that PC will return back into the history books, much like it did after the eighteenth century American Supreme Court decision. Only when PC is gone can the university improve.

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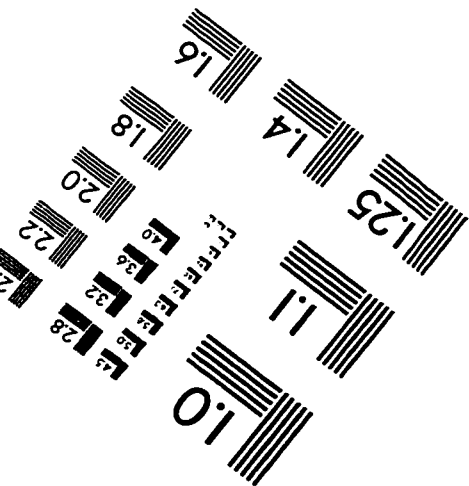
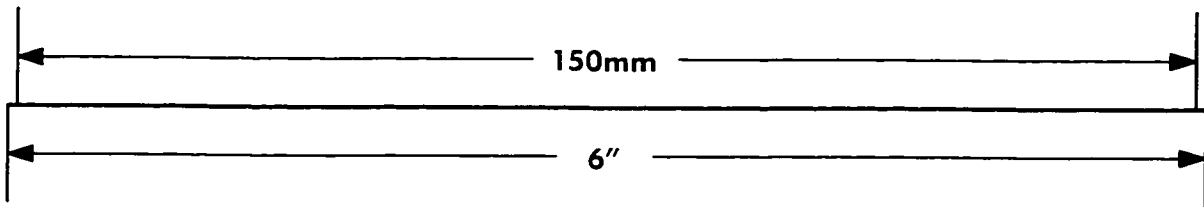
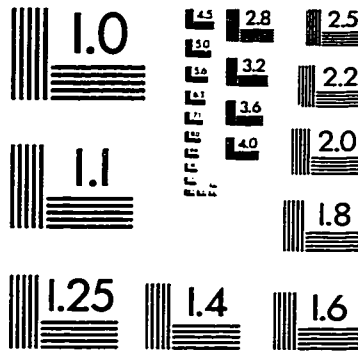
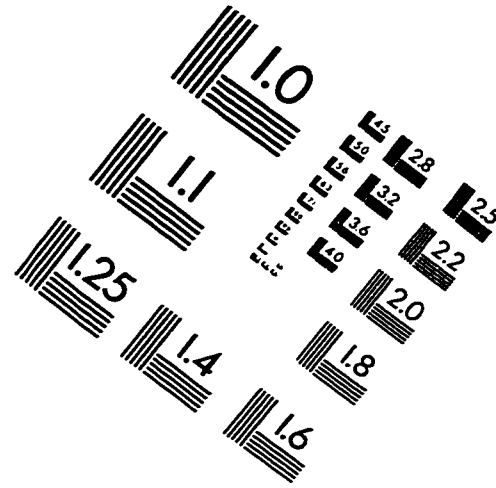
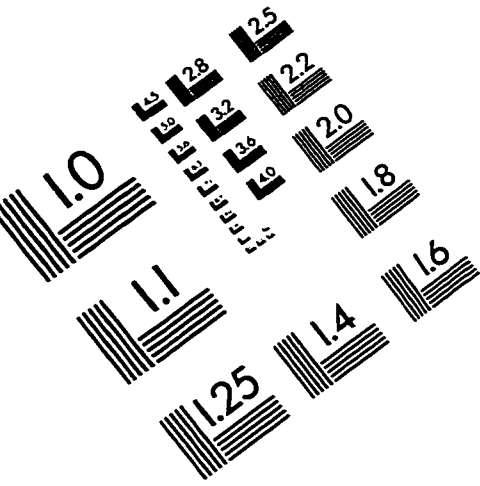
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

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