

**Political Correctness and Group Composition:
A Research Agenda**

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Abstract

We investigate the anti-bias norm, “political correctness” (PC), and explore the consequences of the PC norm for group processes and group performance. We begin by defining the term PC as it is used in public discourse and distinguish the PC norm from the related anti-bias norm of color blindness. We suggest that the PC norm may play a unique role in reducing a critical type of uncertainty that would otherwise constrain performance, in particular, group creativity and decision making, in diverse work groups. We then explore the controversial argument that being politically incorrect can actually promote freedom of expression. Finally, we conclude by reflecting on the costs of the PC norm and why the PC norm may remain prevalent in work groups for some time to come.

On February 3, 2010, President Obama's then Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, apologized to members of the disabilities rights community for a comment he made in a closed door meeting in August of 2009. In that meeting, Emanuel referred to some liberal activists as "f***ing retarded." When Emanuel's comments were reported in the *Wall Street Journal* in late January 2010, reactions were swift and abundant (Muskal, 2010). The Special Olympics organization used the opportunity to highlight its "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign asking people to pledge to "...support the elimination of the derogatory use of the r-word from everyday speech and promote the acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities." In contrast, conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh also weighed-in, commenting that, "Our *politically correct* society is acting like some giant insult has taken place by calling a bunch of people who *are* retards, retards" [emphasis added] (Nagra, 2010).

Beyond the obvious political undertones, these contrasting reactions are provocative and revealing because they point to the presence of societal anti-bias norms about the expression of prejudice in words and behavior; prejudice that could as easily have centered on race, sex, age or other attributes that are ascribed and immutable. It is particularly notable that of the two offensive words used in the example – both of which are clearly unbecoming of a senior member of the President's administration - only the "R-word" but not the universally offensive "F-word," received scrutiny.

As the Emanuel incident above illustrates, people often find it difficult to strike a balance between being sensitive to differences – in this case, toward people who have intellectual disabilities - and being overly sensitive to the point of exaggerating the censoring of words, actions, and their meaning. This dilemma is captured by the term, "political correctness," or "PC," the focus of this paper, which connotes the positive intention of being sensitive to different

others but also the negative elements of overly deliberate actions that can overshoot the goal and potentially even inhibit people from speaking and acting freely around different others (Batty, 2004; Berman, 1992).

We begin by defining the term political correctness and exploring the pervasiveness of the term in public discourse. We then distinguish the PC norm from the related anti-bias norm of color blindness. We suggest that the PC norm may play a unique role in reducing a critical type of uncertainty that would otherwise constrain performance, in particular, group creativity and decision making, in diverse work groups. We then explore the controversial argument that being politically incorrect can actually promote freedom of expression. Finally, we conclude with reflections on the costs of the PC norm and why the PC norm may remain prevalent in work groups for some time to come.

Defining The Political Correctness Norm

Anti-bias norms are defined as norms that compel people to avoid words and actions that might be offensive to various demographic groups (e.g., Crandall et al, 2002). These norms represent attempts to reduce prejudice, the appearance of prejudice, or the negative evaluation of a group or an individual on the basis of their identity group membership (e.g., Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006).

Political correctness is a particular type of anti-bias norm that we define as a norm that sets expectations for people to censor words, thoughts, and actions that might be offensive to various identity groups and instead promote words, thoughts, and actions that include, or will not offend, the broadest array of relevant identity groups (Batty, 2004; Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Ochs, 1993). Examples of recent politically correct labels include replacing the terms “husband” or “wife” with “partner” to show sensitivity to same-sex couples, or replacing the term “Merry

Christmas” with “Happy Holidays” to avoid excluding people who embrace faiths other than Christianity. There is some evidence that the use of the term “politically correct” began to decline in the mid-1990’s (Lakoff, 2001) but it has increased again, appearing 4362 times in 2010 in major U.S. newspapers, compared to 3300 in 2009 (Lexis-Nexis, 2009, 2010), and even less often in the rest of the 2000’s.

Although society largely endorses the idea of equal opportunity, concerns have been raised about the political correctness norm as a means for advancing this goal. Despite the widespread value of being unprejudiced and attempts to develop norms that both discourage prejudice and encourage people to use politically correct language in public discourse and everyday conversation (Ely, Meyerson, & Davidson, 2006; Lakoff, 2001; Paluck & Green, 2009; Rynes & Rosen, 1995), there is no shortage of dire predictions about the potential consequences of embracing the political correctness norm, including closed-mindedness (Bloom, 1987), repression (Finn, 1986; Ravitch, 2003), thought control (Kors & Silvergate, 1998), a threat to freedom of speech (R. Bernstein, 1990; D. Bernstein, 2003) and a constraint on academic freedom (Berman, 1992). Tying these critiques together is the fear that political correctness will cause people to not only censor offensive language but also potentially valuable ideas and perspectives in an effort to be sensitive to demographic differences. Before considering the underlying psychology and potential impact of the PC norm on diverse work groups, we differentiate it from the related anti-bias norm of colorblindness.

Distinguishing the PC Norm From Colorblindness

Perhaps the most thoroughly researched anti-bias norm is colorblindness (e.g., Norton et al., 2006). When faced with interaction with people from other races, research has shown that members of the dominant identity group (e.g., Whites in the U.S.) worry primarily that they will

say or do something inappropriate and appear socially incompetent and prejudiced. To avoid this problem they often try to appear colorblind, using the logic that if one appears not to notice race then one cannot possibly be racially prejudiced. Indeed, this logic could be fairly easily expanded to include other demographically based identity groups in which majority and minority status orderings exist.

Colorblind behavior involves avoiding talking about race or even acknowledging racial differences when they exist. People's propensity to engage in colorblind behavior reflects a strong anti-bias norm to avoid appearing racist; so strong that people would rather sacrifice task performance than appear racist. For example, research has shown that Whites feel normative pressure to downplay the accuracy and speed with which they use race to categorize people thereby reducing the chances that they would appear racist to others (e.g. Norton et al., 2006). Further, when working with Black confederates, White participants who avoided using race in identifying features of faces in photographs, even when doing so would increase their efficiency and accuracy in a dyadic task, appeared more unfriendly to observers (e.g., Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008).

While political correctness and colorblindness are related through the motivation to avoid appearing prejudiced, colorblindness implies that one does not acknowledge that differences in race (or, potentially other demographic attributes) exist. In contrast, political correctness includes the ability to mention or consider differences albeit without being offensive. In this sense, the political correctness norm may be less behaviorally constraining than colorblindness. Indeed, Trawalter and Richeson (2008) found that Blacks are less anxious when they are talking about race related topics with Whites than when they are talking about race neutral topics, suggesting that open discussion, rather than avoidance of race may actually make minorities feel less

anxious. Therefore, the possibility that PC might actually facilitate interactions between demographically different people is an intriguing but, as yet, unexamined possibility.

In the next section, we consider when the PC norm is most likely to emerge and why, focusing on the particular vulnerability diverse groups have to structurally reproduced norms.

The Emergence of the PC Norm in Teams

We suggest that the potential to engage in politically correct behavior emerges whenever there are demographic differences in a group. These differences can emerge from societal level stratification (e.g., Nishii & Mayer, 2009) or from localized norms and status orderings in a group (e.g., Spataro, 2005), as we discuss below.

PC as a Structurally Reproduced Norm

Though a person's sex and race may have some relevance for their potential work contributions, other characteristics - such as their education, functional background, and past work experience - likely have more bearing on the group's work by virtue of their relevance in a work context. But, according to expectations states theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Ridgeway, 1991) immutable characteristics such as sex and race become associated with perceptions of work-related competence when status beliefs associated with these characteristics are imported from the broader societal context and are "structurally reproduced" in the group. As a result, certain identity groups within society—such as racial minorities and women—are traditionally treated as lower status at work (Alderfer & Thomas, 1988). When these status beliefs are legitimated by members of the work group, they bias interpersonal expectations and interactions at work such that higher status group members are favored (Nishii & Mayer, 2009). Discounting people's capabilities based on identity category membership both reduces productivity and also impairs personal well-being (e.g., Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997; Steele, 1997).

Demographically different members come to the work group with variations in social category memberships which are reinforced by work experiences that correspond to those categories (e.g., Wharton & Baron, 1987). Thus, a central challenge for diverse work groups is to ensure that identity group memberships are at once validated but also do not constrain members from developing a salient work group identity. This is a concern because functional antagonism exists between the salience of different categories such that when demographic categories are salient, work group membership as a social category is not and vice versa (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998). Further, diverse work groups develop more individualistic than cooperative norms (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). Individualistic norms may have the effect of limiting subsequent interaction among members and, in so doing, also the evolution of existing norms and the perception that the group shares goals (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). More likely, however, diverse groups may be less likely to deliberately develop norms and may instead simply be subject to broader cultural norms (e.g., treating different others according to stereotypes). In a context of either a lack of any shared norms specific to a particular work group, or the shared norm being one that dictates individualism, members are less likely to adhere to and enforce shared norms in diverse work groups, limiting the strength and abundance of the shared norms that can develop because of the salience of identity group membership (Chatman, 2010).

Taken together, we suggest that diverse groups will develop fewer shared norms and the norms that do emerge will more likely arise from structurally reproduced societal level norms relevant to diversity such as individualism or maintaining identity group stereotypes (e.g., Chatman & Flynn, 2001), rather than from locally relevant norms such as those regarding the task at hand. This is relevant for our discussion of the PC norm for two reasons. First, if diverse

groups have a generally lower base rate of developing shared norms, it follows that the PC norm is simply less likely to emerge naturally within diverse groups. Second, if the PC norm does, by chance, emerge or, more likely, is imposed on a diverse group (e.g., by an organization), it will influence diverse groups differently than homogeneous groups. Specifically, because of its relevance to the demographic differences that may hinder the group's ability to form their own norms, the PC norm may serve as a bridge or a "gateway norm." In other words, the PC norm may enable diverse groups to form additional shared norms by providing specific guidance early in a group's life on how to interact with different others in ways that are more productive than keeping to themselves (individualism) or ignoring differences (being colorblind). The PC norm may increase the frequency of respectful behavior such as positive deferrals (e.g., Chatman et al., 2008) and being more open to the positive value of demographic differences for the group and its performance.

Uncertainty Reduction: The Psychological Underpinnings of the PC Norm

Clearly, if fewer norms are shared within a group, members will be less able to predict how the group and individuals within it are likely to behave (Chatman & Barsade, 1995). This will cause uncertainty among members about what is expected in the group. According to uncertainty reduction theory, when strangers meet, they are primarily concerned with increasing the predictability of their partners' and their own behavior in the interaction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty refers to a person's subjective sense of the number of alternative predictions available when thinking about a partner's future behavior or the number of alternative explanations available when thinking about a partner's past behavior (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Bradac, 2001). The experience of subjective uncertainty is typically aversive and is often associated with feelings ranging from unease to anxiety and fear (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Members of diverse groups likely experience significant social uncertainty as a result of the typical group-based evaluation apprehension (Bray & Sugarman, 1980; Mullen, Johnson & Salas, 1991), but also from the added anxiety of interacting with demographically different others whose identity group is unfamiliar to them based on lack of contact in a stratified society (e.g., McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). In contrast to homogeneous group members, members of demographically diverse groups typically do not begin with a foundation of shared norms and values due to differences in their socialization and past experiences (Chatman, 2010; Pfeffer, 1983).

Interestingly, uncertainty may be based on different sources for majority or high status versus minority or low status identity groups. For example, men have historically been in the numerical majority as well as generally more powerful than women, especially in work settings (e.g., Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Research has shown that members of the dominant group worry primarily that they will say something inappropriate and appear prejudiced (Chatman, Boisnier, Spataro, Anderson & Berdahl, 2008; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). To avoid this problem, they may try to appear unbiased, which requires cognitive resources (Apfelbaum & Sommers, 2009). Further, interactions between demographically different people typically require a higher degree of self-regulation (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), which can impair task performance by increasing cognitive load (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). And, research has shown that tension increases when individuals attempt to avoid the appearance of prejudice (Norton et al., 2006). Efforts to avoid being perceived as prejudiced, therefore, have contradictory consequences for the quality of interactions in demographically diverse groups.

It is more difficult to identify the source of uncertainty for minority, or low status, group members. This is because significantly more research has focused on the impact of prejudice

toward minority identity group members, not on their response to diversity (e.g., Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Second, significantly more research focuses on how majority, rather than minority, identity group members respond to diversity (see Roberson, Deitch, Brief, & Block, 2003, for a notable exception). This is ironic given the relative regularity with which minority identity group members, such as women or African Americans at work, confront diversity.

Nevertheless, recent research points to some intriguing possibilities. For instance, because they may worry that they will not be respected or viewed by Whites as competent minorities may engage in more impression management tactics to try to be perceived as competent (Bergsieker, Shelton & Richeson, 2010). Conversely, Whites worry that they might appear biased and so their impression management tactics focus on being liked and appearing moral (Bergsieker, et al., 2010). The divergent impression management goals can contribute to the experience of negative affect during cross-race interactions (Bergsieker et al., 2010).

In social interactions, uncertainty is reduced when people can anticipate each other's behaviors and prepare the appropriate response in a timely fashion (Hackman, 1976). For instance, Goffman's (1955) classic research on "facework" suggests that people have a self-image that they do not want damaged or questioned by their group. Consequently, groups develop norms that discourage certain topics of conversation that could cause people to lose face. With such norms in place, group members are assured that their actions will not cause others discomfort and vice-versa.

Political correctness might be understood within the context of such a normative framework. Group members from the majority identity group may benefit from a norm for political correctness since they know that the group expects them to avoid words and actions that may be

offensive to the minority group. This may enable majority identity group members to avoid continuously reevaluating whether such efforts are appropriate, a task that may heighten cognitive load and detract from task performance (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). Conversely, because members of the minority identity group may also anticipate with certainty that those from the majority identity group will make an effort to avoid divisive or offensive words, they will experience less uncertainty while interacting within the group (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel & Kowai-Bell, 2001). Moreover, though implicit individual efforts to censor references to demographic differences may cause members to appear cold and aloof (Norton et al, 2006), this negative attribution may be mitigated if that behavior can instead be attributed to an external expectation as opposed to personal prejudice (Weiner, 1985), or an idiosyncratic response to one individual in particular (Kelly, 1971). In other words, because a PC norm explicitly recognizes differences between people and affords them a language with which to refer to demographic differences, it may make minorities feel acknowledged rather than ignored (Bergsieker et al, 2010). Therefore, we predict the following:

Proposition 1A: Members of demographically diverse groups will experience greater uncertainty than will members of homogeneous groups.

Proposition 1B: The PC norm will moderate the relationship between diversity and uncertainty such that members of diverse groups in which the PC norm is salient will experience less uncertainty than will those in which the PC norm is not salient.

The Effects of the PC Norm on Group Performance

Psychological and organizational research has generated insight about demographically diverse work groups by focusing on work processes (e.g., Chatman & Flynn, 2001; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998) and emerging leadership styles (e.g., Mitchell & Boyle, 2009; Somech,

2006). At a broader level, each of these implicate groups norms which determine regular patterns of behavior and influence members' identification within the group (e.g., Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991; Chatman & Flynn, 2001). Classic research in psychology has shown that social norms are remarkably strong predictors of behavior (e.g., Sherif, 1936). More recently research has linked norms to expressed prejudice, a behavior that is obviously relevant in diverse work groups (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002).

We suggest that focusing on norms is an inherently useful, but perhaps underemphasized approach to understanding how diverse work groups operate and perform. In particular, a demographically diverse group's ability to reap the value of the increased range of available task relevant resources, relative to heterogeneous groups, may depend heavily on the norms it adopts. It is also likely that the norms that will enable diverse work groups to generate constructive interaction and effective performance are distinct from those that would be useful in homogeneous groups because of the differences in their social dynamics.

In this section, we adopt a normative framework to consider how political correctness may differentially influence diverse as compared to homogeneous work group performance. In the previous sections, we discussed uncertainty reduction as an intermediate mechanism that the PC norm works through in influencing behavior. The PC norm may also influence group performance both directly and through uncertainty reduction. Here, we investigate two specific group performance outcomes that might be impacted by the PC norm: group creativity and group decision making.

Political Correctness and Creativity

Ideally, people can collaborate to generate more creative ideas than any one individual could come up with alone because they have the opportunity to build upon, combine and improve on

the ideas suggested by others (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). In collaboration, the whole might be more creative than the sum of its parts. This logic prompted Osborn (1957) to predict that a well-functioning brainstorming group has the potential to generate more than twice the number of ideas produced by the same number of individuals working alone. Unfortunately, face-to-face brainstorming groups may suffer from a number of problems that make them less effective than a nominal group of individuals who work alone and then combine their ideas (Girotra, Terwiesch, & Ulrich, 2010; Taylor, Berry, & Block, 1958; Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). Process losses stemming from production blocking, evaluation apprehension or free-riding can cause individuals to withhold ideas during brainstorming sessions (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987).

The most obvious prediction about the effect of a PC norm on creative idea expression, especially in light of debates on the subject, would be that being PC should stifle creativity (e.g., Bloom, 1987). If creativity is stimulated by the free expression of alternative viewpoints (Nemeth & Staw, 1989), then it will surely be suppressed in an environment in which people must constrain their behavior to avoid offending other people by, for example, choosing their words carefully, or withholding certain ideas. This prediction is indirectly supported by several recent studies showing that political correctness can have a number of unintended negative consequences. For instance, when people try to appear unprejudiced, they experienced cognitive overload which in turn lowers their task performance (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). And, when Whites try to appear unprejudiced by avoiding the topic of race, their Black interaction partners perceive them to be less friendly, leading demographically different partners to perform poorly on dyadic tasks (Norton, et al, 2006). These findings might imply that, in striving for creativity, organizations should permit people to express themselves in any way that they see fit (Nemeth, Personnaz, Personnaz & Goncalo, 2004), because freedom of expression, and even conflict, is

required for groups to fully explore divergent solutions to a problem (De Dreu & West, 2001; Nemeth, 1986).

Here, we move beyond the relatively straightforward prediction that the PC norm should have a uniformly stifling effect by considering group composition and specifically, the possibility that the PC norm could actually boost idea expression in diverse groups. If majority group members have the opportunity to publicly agree with and support the value of being politically correct, then their concerns that minority group members will think they are prejudiced might also be alleviated (Monin & Miller, 2001; Sommers & Norton, 2006). This may lower the level of anxiety that minority members experience during contact with demographically different group members (Blascovich et al., 2001). The net result of agreeing to be politically correct might be that all the members of demographically diverse groups will feel more open and willing to share ideas with each other than they would be if the norm were unspecified or it emphasized being politically incorrect. In sum, whether political correctness is liberating or constraining may depend on the demographic composition of the group.

Invoking a salient norm to be politically correct may make diverse groups more task-focused and willing to share ideas with each other than they would be if the norm relating to political correctness were left ambiguous or arbitrarily invoked by individuals. Moreover, since people strive to attain certainty and experience it as a positive state (Hogg & Mullin, 1999), subsequent interactions with fellow group members may be imbued with positive affect (Lawler, 2001) and signal to individual members that the group provides a context that is predictable enough to risk the expression of novel solutions (Schwarz & Clore, 2003). Therefore, we predict the following:

Proposition 2: Diverse groups will generate more ideas and more novel ideas when the norm to be politically correct is salient than when it is not salient.

Further, the PC norm may operate to reduce uncertainty, which may then enable better performance. Evaluation apprehension may be particularly strong in diverse groups due to feelings of uncertainty that are triggered by demographic differences. High levels of uncertainty can lead people to withhold their most novel ideas and instead, produce their dominant response (Camacho & Paulus, 1995; Henchy & Glass, 1968) since anxiety may cause people to rely on well-learned (but typical) associations (Zajonc, 1965). Feeling uncertain may also lead people to simply go along with ideas that have already been introduced rather than introducing potentially controversial ideas (e.g., Phillips, Mannix, Neale, & Gruenfeld, 2004). This apprehension is even more acute in diverse groups since people experience heightened uncertainty regarding how ideas will be evaluated by people who are different from them (Foo, Wong & Ong, 2005). Thus, we predict that,

Proposition 3: Uncertainty reduction will mediate the relationship between the PC norm and group creativity in diverse groups.

Political Correctness and the Quality of Group Decision Making

Reduced uncertainty may facilitate the expression of ideas because people will feel more comfortable sharing ideas in a context that rules out criticism and potentially offensive language. Making group decisions requires a similar willingness to openly share information so that the group can converge on the best or most accurate solution. Members need to cooperate to not only share information but utilize it to reach effective decisions to which members are willing to commit. In this section, we address the possibility that the PC norm increases decision accuracy, in particular.

Decision making groups are often formed because each individual member of the group possesses unique information that can be combined to reach a more accurate decision (Stasser &

Titus, 1985). A robust tradition of research has shown, however, that groups fail to exchange unique knowledge and instead focus on shared knowledge that all members have in common (Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996). This tendency is particularly problematic when a hidden profile exists such that shared information points to a solution that is inferior to the solution that would be reached if everyone shared their unique information (Stasser & Titus, 1985).

A straightforward explanation for the common knowledge effect is that information held by more than one person is statistically more likely to be mentioned during a group discussion (Stewart & Stasser, 1995). Pressure toward unanimity in groups may also cause people to withhold their unique information because sharing it may lead to conflict (Janis, 1982) particularly if the group is already leaning toward one particular point of view (Stasser & Stewart, 1992; Van Swol, Savadori & Sniezek, 2003). When common information is shared during a discussion, it reinforces and legitimizes what the other members of the group already know (Wittenbaum, Hubbell & Zuckerman, 1999). In contrast, a unique piece of information, held by only one person, cannot be verified by another member of the group and is therefore viewed as less reliable (Van Swol et al., 2003). In addition, unique knowledge may cast doubt on a group's already preferred course of action, thus making people reluctant to share information that contradicts the information held by other group members (Schultz-Hardt, Frey, Luthgens, & Moscovici, 2000; Van Swol, et al., 2003).

Existing research has uncovered a number of ways to encourage group members to share unique information during group discussions (see Wittenbaum & Park, 2001; Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996 for extensive reviews). For instance, the composition of the group can be varied by including group members who are familiar with each other and therefore, more comfortable sharing unique information (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams & Neale, 1996) or by ensuring that the

person who holds unique information is not also someone with whom the group is socially tied (Phillips et al., 2004).

As we argued above, one consequence of the PC norm is to reduce uncertainty and evaluation apprehension in diverse groups such that all members of the group feel more comfortable sharing solutions. This is critical to group creativity because it requires the open expression of a wide range of novel ideas. However, it is also critical to group decision making, particularly when critical information is not shared among members and requires coordination to uncover it. Since only one person holds a unique and valuable piece of information, there is no one to verify that the information is accurate or legitimate (Stasser & Titus, 1985). On a convergent task that requires accuracy, there must be some degree of certainty between group members to ensure that unique information is not only shared (despite the fact that it may initially incite conflict) but actually utilized and combined with existing understandings to reach the optimal or correct solution. Without the persistent and open expression of unique information, it can easily be ignored or dismissed; indeed it often is (Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996). The PC norm may make group members comfortable because of the knowledge that no one will say or do anything blatantly offensive may ensure that demographically different people will take information from a dissimilar other and vice versa. We, therefore, predict that,

Proposition 4: A salient PC norm in diverse groups will increase members' willingness to reveal and use unique information which may, in turn, increase decision accuracy.

Political Correctness Norm Strength and Attributions of Bias

We suggested above that a salient norm for political correctness should reduce the uncertainty that may arise during interactions between demographically different people and thereby boost creativity and the quality of group decision making. This is not to say, however,

that the PC norm will cause minorities to assume that the majority is unbiased; it should merely provide guidance about how people are expected to behave toward others. In other words, the group may feel certain about the behavioral expectation to avoid words that may cause offense, but that does not necessarily mean that individual group members privately endorse the value of the norm. There may still be a strong undercurrent of mistrust between demographically different people even when the norm to be politically correct is salient.

For example, research suggests that members of minority races experience attributional ambiguity and are resistant even to positive feedback when they know that an evaluator has knowledge of their race. Specifically, racial minorities who did not believe that their race was valued by majority race professors and teaching assistants were less likely to accept academic feedback as legitimate, regardless of whether it was negative or positive (Mendoza-Denton, Goldman-Flythe, Pietrzak, Downey, & Aceves, 2010). Minority identity group members are also more resistant to the inter-group bias-reducing effects of contact with people from different races (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). This suggests that minority members question the authenticity of majority group members' behaviors toward them.

Ironically, a norm for political correctness may exacerbate a minority group member's perception that the majority is inauthentic since the norm itself becomes a source of attributions for the behavior of the majority even when it is overtly unbiased. This may be particularly true when the PC norm is strong, rather than weak; meaning that everyone agrees in public to follow the norm and there are social sanctions to punish those who do not comply (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996); that is, minority members may believe that majority members are only behaving fairly, making seemingly unbiased decisions, and eschewing offensive language not because they want to, but because the norm dictates that they have to (Overbeck, Tiedens &

Brion, 2006). In fact, it is often when the PC norm is strong that it attracts the most attention because people are reacting against the behavioral constraints that the norm imposes, as in the Rush Limbaugh example at the beginning of this chapter. The PC norm may provide a situational rather than a dispositional attribution for behavior that, unfortunately, fits with minorities' already existing distrust for higher status majority group members' motives (Mendoza-Denton et al, 2010). To dispel this attributional ambiguity, diverse groups would have to observe each other's behavior over an extended period of time in the absence of an explicit PC norm that homogenizes behavior (Rotter, 1980). Therefore, we predict that,

Proposition 5: The stronger the norm for political correctness in diverse groups the more likely minority members will believe that the majority is privately biased toward them.

Political Incorrectness in Homogeneous Groups

Up to this point, we have concentrated on political correctness in diverse groups but there may be situations in which there is a norm to be politically *incorrect* and people are permitted to say things that are offensive to members of other demographic groups. There is no doubt that a norm to be politically incorrect in a diverse group would lead to destructive and intractable conflict. But, there is the possibility that being politically incorrect might have very different consequences in a homogeneous group where there is already a high level of trust derived from shared experiences or socialization among demographically homogeneous members (Pfeffer, 1983). In other words, members of homogenous groups can say offensive things about other demographic groups when they are not members of the immediate group. Although it would be of no practical utility to encourage such a norm, it does emerge and so it is important to consider the potential implications.

Brewer's (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness suggests that individuals' sense of security, self-worth, and self-identity are maximized when they simultaneously satisfy the need for de-individuation through membership with distinct ingroups, *and* their need for distinctiveness by being able to make clear intergroup comparisons against definable and relevant outgroups. A norm for being politically incorrect in homogenous groups may serve this function in at least two ways. First, politically incorrect language may clarify the boundaries between groups so that group members have a clearer view of "who's in" and "who's out." In other words, the use of language that derogates the out-group may also strengthen shared identity (Maass, Ceccarelli & Rudin, 1996). Second, politically incorrect language could be a form of discrimination that might increase self-esteem through out-group denigration (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Individuals may actually feel better about themselves and about their own group having used language that is derogatory to out-group members.

A norm to be politically incorrect might actually stimulate creativity in homogeneous groups. Groups that are demographically homogeneous begin with more shared norms in common than do heterogeneous groups (Chatman & Flynn, 2001) and may therefore assume, based on past experiences, that they are among like-minded people and can speak freely (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991). Homogeneous groups might therefore benefit from a norm for being politically incorrect since they can engage in the kind of free and unconstrained expression of ideas that has been shown to cultivate novel ideas (Nemeth & Staw, 1989) without worrying that the way their ideas are expressed might offend a minority group member (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). This leads to our final prediction,

Proposition 6A: A salient norm for being politically incorrect in demographically homogeneous groups will be associated with clearer group boundaries, stronger group identity and higher self-esteem via out-group derogation.

Proposition 6B: Homogeneous groups in which the norm for being politically incorrect is salient will be more creative than will homogeneous groups in which the norm is not salient or in which the norm to be politically correct is salient.

Conclusions and Implications of the PC Norm in Groups

We examined the underlying psychology and the effects of political correctness on diverse and homogeneous groups. Our analysis suggests that the PC norm does not have a uniformly stifling effect. Instead, by reducing relevant uncertainty, a salient PC norm in diverse groups enables more idea generation. A key mechanism is that minority members are increasingly willing to share ideas in a group in which different members' behavior is more predictable (Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, & Kennedy, 2012). But, adopting the PC norm, or rather, having it imposed, may hinder creativity in homogeneous groups. Further, even in diverse groups, the PC norm may have a negative influence by preventing trust from developing among members who attribute unbiased behavior to the norm rather than to the person enacting it. Managing diverse groups may, therefore, require time sequenced norm management to optimize effort (e.g., Jehn & Mannix, 2001). For example, the PC norm could be imposed on a demographically diverse group until a point at which members feel more familiar with one another and trust each other's motives. At that point, the group may be encouraged to reassess the value of the PC norm, with a particular focus on whether the associated behaviors are augmenting or stifling creative expression.

Our analysis also raises key issues to consider in future research. One question is whether the PC norm applies similarly to a variety of demographic attributes or whether it is specific to certain attributes that reflect key status orderings, such as sex and race. A second question is whether the PC norm is related to or representative of a wider array of anti-bias norms. For example, research assessing whether the norm of egalitarianism has the same impact in diverse work groups would be useful. A fuller assessment of the relationship between norms and group performance would include a longitudinal assessment of the strength of norms in terms of true agreement and intensity, and would generate consistent behavior and peer enforcement of anti-bias behavior in actual work groups. It would also be important to better understand the emergence of the PC norm in various groups and the differences in its adoption and impact on behavior depending on whether it is imposed or evolves spontaneously. Finally, it would be important to consider the PC norm in the context of various types of tasks – those that are and are not related to members' demographic attributes.

One of the most interesting questions regarding political correctness is identifying what the absence of political correctness represents – whether it is a state of neutrality, egalitarianism, color blindness, or political incorrectness? One recent empirical analysis shows no difference between experimental groups primed to be politically incorrect and control groups, suggesting that societal norms may not yet have developed a truly neutral state (Goncalo et al., 2012).

Finally, future research could develop a perspective on how the PC norm unfolds over time in influencing group members. For example, behaving in accordance with the PC norm in one instance or on one of the group's tasks may result in a licensing phenomenon whereby people are much less willing to be sensitive to demographic differences in another instance or on another

task. In this way, the explicit adoption of the PC norm could, ironically, become a force for supporting prejudiced behavior through moral credentialing (Monin & Miller, 2001).

It is clear that the PC norm is complicated: it may affect differently composed groups in different ways, it may have short run benefits and long run costs, and it may enhance some aspects of group performance but constrain others. Indeed, the very term invokes ambivalent interactions. One thing is certain, however: it is a prevalent norm and has and will continue to penetrate groups at work through social reproduction and organizational imposition. Research that can untangle the underlying mechanisms and clarify when and how the PC norm affects groups will continue to provide insight into discrimination and prejudice.

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