The Real Reason Many People Recoil From Political Correctness

Scrolling through Twitter recently, I came across a person questioning why so many are opposed to "political correctness." The tweet conflated the dreaded PC with being polite and having respect and compassion, and expressed confusion as to why so many people were opposed to the concept.

Strangely enough, I absolutely agreed. That is to say, I agreed with the principle behind the tweet; *of course* we shouldn't be opposed to good manners.

Why, then, are so many of us afraid of political correctness? Ultimately, it isn't good manners and mutual respect that people are defensive against, but rather the necessity to do so.

Political correctness doesn't refer to frequent use of "please" and "thank you," but to vague, constantly changing rules of acceptable behaviors. Adherence to these rules is mandatory, and dissenters are faced with online vitriol, discipline at work, loss of a job, or even a [visit from the police](#) (if you're unlucky enough to live in certain European nations).

This is what people are opposed to. Not that they can't say offensive things, not that they can't be deliberately rude or obnoxious, but that any mistake or slip could result in such sharp repercussions.

Moreover, the ambiguity around what is or isn't politically correct can be tricky to keep up with. Terms that until recently were perfectly acceptable are now considered grossly offensive to some. And rules change rapidly, seemingly without

explanation.

For instance, in [a recent article](#) of mine, I explained why the new politically correct guidelines for Netflix employees border on parody. Adhering to these rules would exceed normal manners and politeness, yet *not* doing so would result in harsh comeuppance.

The point I'm trying to make here is that opposition to political correctness does not stem from some innate desire to offend, but from the authoritative requirement *not* to do so. Fear of the consequences, rather than opposition to rationale of manners, forms the crux of disagreement with political correctness.

This fear is something that legal and social philosophers have been measuring for quite a while through something called "[the chilling effect](#)." This phenomenon considers the self-censorship of individuals who are afraid of penalization.

English poet John Milton, in a speech to the English Parliament, [discussed this effect](#):

> *"For to distrust the judgement and the honesty of one who hath but a common repute in learning and never yet offended, as not to count him fit to print his mind without a tutor or examiner, lest he should drop a schism or something of corruption, is the greatest displeasure and indignity to a free and knowing spirit that can be put upon him."*

In this quote, Milton discusses how one may feel fear of expressing a rational, inoffensive opinion for fear of the "displeasure and indignity" which may follow a slip-up. It is this same fear upon which the modern opposition to political correctness stems.

True free speech does not require the enforcement of manners and inoffense. Rather, we must trust people to manage their own speech and the speech of their peers, in a way that does not create the atmosphere of fear and self-censorship in which

we currently exist.

To be anti-PC is therefore not to be against manners or mutual respect, but to be for self-determined speech without the threat of social ostracization … or worse.

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