

Help! How do you define PC?

By Chad Bryant

What does it mean to be Politically Correct? Despite much publicity of the term. I had no idea, so in search of an answer to my query, I went to Catherine Stimson's lecture "On Being Labeled Politically Correct" on Thursday, March 7.

According to Ms. Stimson (Miss or Mrs. is not PC), there are three "demonizations" of PC:

1) It represents all that is bad in higher education. An example might be the loss of free speech. I'm vague on this point. To be honest, I was desperately attempting to find an open seat during this juncture of the lecture.

2) It has become a political weapon against change. This I DO understand. Ultra-conservatives often use the myth of not being labeled PC as a disastrous consequence that will ultimately flood their lives with misery and despair. What they are really afraid of is saying what they know to be offensive and ultimately flooding their lives with misery and despair.

3) It is keeping the institutions of higher education from discussing other, more important, problems. For example, the low rate of literacy in the country and the lack of science and math students that America is producing. This point is a tactic which surfaced in Stimson's lecture several times.

I would like to call it Let's-Find-Subjects-That-Everyone-Agrees-Upon-And-Somehow-Link-It-To-My-Argument.

So, what does Politically Correct mean? As Stimson came to the conclusion of her speech by talking about how
(continued after aside)

(Aside)

PC , or not PC, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The calls and chants of close-minded liberals
Or to take up arms against these PC viewpoints
And by opposing them die. To think — to differ —
And more; and by differ to say we end
The suppression, and the repressed opinions
That never are debated. 'Tis an option
Devoutly to be wished. To think — to differ.
To differ — perchance to offend: ay, there's the rub!
For in differing what offenses may come
When we decide to say what is not right,
Must give us pause.

(continued)

America's common political values,
freedoms and equality "bond us together
by putting us at odds," I realized
that I was not going to find the answer
in this muck of intelligentsia garbage.
So I went to dinner at Proctor.

There, John Rothstein '93 spoke for
the left wing portion of Proctor in call-
ing PC "a slur" for people who have the
decency to respect the cultures, races,
religions and gender of others. He also
gave a glimpse of what an example of
being PC at Middlebury might be.

"I resent being called PC for saying
'women' instead of girls," he said.

And on the right wing, I found Brian
Howie '93. He said that PC is a college

policy of eliminating prejudices such as racism and sexism and is often manifested in hate speech rules that forbid students to say anything that is interpreted as racist or sexist. These rules, commented Howie, often induce the “opposite of what they are trying to accomplish” because repression does not change opinions.

Despite their differences in opinions about being PC, very few Middlebury students with whom I spoke felt oppressed by it. The whole issue of what PC is and how we are affected by it can be summed up, for me, by returning to Stimson's lecture and observing the actions of Professor Pardon Tillinghast, Middlebury's personification of “class.” After almost falling asleep several times during the opening rounds of the lecture, Tillinghast graciously gave his seat to a young woman who had dashed up the stairs in an attempt to make the beginning of the lecture. At first, she refused his offer as she tried to catch her breath, but after much insisting by Tillinghast, she accepted the seat. Tillinghast then quietly left the lecture.

Whether one is PC or not is not the question, and to argue, or give lectures, on the subject is ridiculous. What matters is common courtesy toward other individuals, despite their radical or reactionary views. Professor Tillinghast may have left the lecture, but he probably knows far more than those of us who stayed and listened.