

## Sensitivity Training

Early this year a book called *The Language Police* by Diane Ravitch came out and, for three months, I could not open a magazine or turn on the radio without reading or hearing praise for it. In it Ms Ravitch, a noted historian, reveals the systematic process of censoring and diluting what children are permitted to learn in school according to sensitivity guidelines laid down by pressure groups on every conceivable political front and administered by sensitivity panels. The panels do not confine their work to new proposals, but attack all math, science, history and literature, brashly rewriting classics with appropriate changes, omissions and deletions when necessary. With no children of my own, I read along engaged but detached until I came to the section which declares that the ultimate goal of every teacher is to advance multiculturalism, with stories of each culture's role, rather than teach the subject at hand. "Every teacher" includes me, but no sweat since great pool and pool players flood the game from every corner of the world. Good thing I'm not a ski instructor searching for a story to relate Egypt's contribution to the sport.

My new role as a bias-aware teacher can be handled easily enough but on our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary I worry about this magazine's future since many of today's students are tomorrow's pool players. More worrisome, *Billiards Digest* reports what happens in pool and what if all the news is not fit to print? If pool really wants mainstream penetration and we can envision the language police worming their way into television—no great leap—we should assemble our own sensitivity panel now to regulate ourselves before it's too late. I have some modest suggestions.

We will have to begin with some of our biggest personalities and their nicknames. Steve Tipton, take note. Irish Invader must go as it suggests Europe's systematic exploitation of native cultures and the Europeans' rapacious appetite for land. The Monk will have to change his name to one that no longer implies higher standing of one religion over others that may not have monks, or over no religion at all. APA co-founder, Larry Hubbard, will, from now on, be known as the Ice Person. We might call Buddy Hall the Rifle Person if weapon references were permissible, but no dice. Black Widow is yesterday's paper for several reasons. "Black" is taboo in any reference to something evil or threatening. "Widow" implies that a woman without a man needs a special name. And the black-widow spider is an image too frightening and upsetting for school-age children. The same goes for "scorpion." Sorry Johnny Archer. In fact, any metaphors comparing people to animals are forbidden so the Knoxville Bear and the Tuscaloosa Squirrel can join their old friend, Cornbread (regional bias) Red in the land of never was. Any reference to magic or fantasy is banned so bye bye Magician. Hurricanes and typhoons made the list of topics to avoid yet tornadoes did not. Still, I don't think Vivian Villareal should take any chances. Just forget names like Texas Belle, China Doll or Kaiser and get used to referring to the great legend as Minnesota Heavy Person.

In my selfless efforts to keep the magazine going for another 25 years I offer the following advice to my coworkers. A picture is still worth a thousand words but be ready for inflation since it's doubtful that many youngsters will have much desire to read in



light of what's available to them. As one of the regulators points out regarding the written word, "It is better to be bland than to be controversial." So, Carla Bonner, this is for you. Any portrayals of men playing sports or using tools (cues?) fall under "activities stereotyping," and must be avoided. Discard all pictures of males expressing anger and you must not show them as messy or unconcerned with their appearance. Maybe you should toss all your pictures of males. Keep photographing the women however since you're encouraged to show women playing sports but please heed the following: "Girls looking neat or wearing dresses must be replaced by girls wearing jeans or shorts, perhaps sporting dirt splotches." So snap away at the WPBA with bonus points for any photos of girls playing (assuming they're dirt splotched) with boys watching. Images of men as active problem solvers and capable leaders are prohibited so you're pretty safe there. Also, "emotional stereotyping" standards forbid any portrayal of men as strong and brave or women as emotional and weepy. It is, however, appropriate to show men as emotional and weepy. You should be okay there too.

Mike Panozzo and Mason King, please note that all references to Christmas, Easter and Hannukah are out. What about the December issue? And there is no allowable way for men to be in a position of higher authority than women. So what are your names doing above Ruth Welte's on the masthead? But take heart gentlemen, (still allowed though "ladies" is not) you are free to do household chores, shop, nurture, act emotional and take sandwiches to your spouses while they repair the roof. Carla, get those pictures. And it is perfectly acceptable for you to find new employment as nurses, secretaries or elementary school teachers, though not as doctors, lawyers or professors.

Literature is especially vulnerable and anything written before 1970 is off limits as either gender or racially biased. So, my hands-down-favorite billiards book, Robert Byrne's *McGoorty*, published in 1972, may slide in under the wire, but only with some editorial help. At first I thought that, as a favor to Bob, I would rewrite the whole book to fit the guidelines but I couldn't get past the opening Author's Note. Bob, you must change, "He was laggard, underweight, beaten down. For the first time in his life Danny McGoorty looked his age and more, with the posture and movements of a very old man." Instead try, "When I saw him again he was healthy, happy and had just finished a ten-mile jog." It is not permissible to describe older people as bent, frail or wrinkled—all "age stereotyping." We want *McGoorty* to remain so keep in mind that accuracy and reality are secondary to the guidelines. As you rewrite the rest of the book please change or omit: dames, broads, drinking, gambling, broken home, unemployment or losing one's job, venereal disease and abortion, as well as cancer and Irish cops (both specifically forbidden). Other passages will require special attention such as McGoorty's assessment of Hoppe shooting left handed. Maybe "self-gratifying, ursine juvenile" will fly, but don't bet on it. Finally, guidelines be damned, I will fight the good fight with you to keep "giggle soup" and "wazzle." Well, I would if it were okay for a male to behave so.

If all this sounds too ridiculous, remember that Kermit The Frog once opened his segment on a TV show about political correctness insisting that the interviewer refer to him as an Amphibian American.

