

From the RVC:

I received a letter the other day from a Mensa member who was quite upset with one particular characteristic of the member's local Mensa group, so much so that this person had given serious consideration to dropping out of Mensa altogether. The problem is that the Local Secretary of the group, a very conscientious Mensa officer who works very hard to promote activities and keep the group lively, is nonetheless unknowingly discouraging participation due to strongly held views on certain controversial subjects, which the LocSec apparently brings up regularly and then treats with contempt any who dare to disagree.

In society at large, it is an unwritten rule of polite conversation that three subjects must always be avoided: sex, politics, and religion. In Mensa, on the other hand, it sometimes seems that we talk of little else. It is admirable, I think, to be able to discuss these "land-mine" subjects while still maintaining our intellectual integrity and mutual respect for each other's opinions. However, therein lies a trap awaiting the unwary, one that can do serious damage to a Mensa group. It consists of a particular mind-set that is sufficiently common among Mensans to be a topic of occasional discussion at meetings of Mensa leaders.

A former Chair of American Mensa described the thought process something like this: "I'm smart, therefore I'm right; you're smart, therefore you know I'm right; therefore if you disagree with me you must be doing it maliciously just to make trouble." This is a particularly invidious attitude, and very easy for Mensans to lapse into, because we mostly grew up knowing ourselves to be the smartest person in any gathering.

However, opinions on sex, politics, and religion in particular are formed by so many factors besides intelligence that two equally bright people may easily find themselves on diametrically opposite sides of any of these issues. We owe it to our fellow Mensa members to remind ourselves periodically that the people we are talking to have demonstrated a mental acuity equal to our own, and therefore cannot be casually dismissed as "clearly wrong" no matter how outrageous their views may seem. So please, when associating with your fellow Mensans, try to smile and be cordial even to those whose opinions unaccountably differ from yours.

That's all for now, folks - I'm off to Fort Worth for the Annual Gathering and the Annual Business Meeting, plus a meeting of the American Mensa Committee. I'll be back next month with the results.

Roger Durham