

What the f**k?

Free speech is constrained in America



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As a writer, journalist, free thinker and human being there are few laws I appreciate more than unrestricted freedom of speech.

I cannot even imagine living in a world in which I would not be allowed to voice my opinion or hear what others have to say.

To me, the First Amendment of the Constitution is one of the most important pieces of legislation on the planet, and it should serve as a guideline for every other country.

I marveled at this document long before I ever set foot in this country. The United States, to me, was the epitome of freedom.

Then I came here and saw it was not so.

See, this column is about shit and f**k and about naked people on television. Not that the readers of this paper, which is protected by the First Amendment, would ever know because they will never get to see this column as I am writing it.

I'm looking at Webster's Dictionary and guess what? "F**k" is a word in the English language.

So why can't I use it? To me, not being allowed to use a word is a restriction of my freedom of speech and expression.

It does not have to be this way. "Shit," just like any other word, is just a string of letters which have been given a meaning.

Yet, apart from meaning, every word also has a certain charge or power. "Poop" has less power than "crap," which in return is harmless compared to "shit." Still, they all have the same meaning.

A good example for the power of words is the terms that are used for various groups in society.

My first English teacher was an old lady who was totally out of touch with new developments in the language. She taught me in fifth grade that the politically correct term for African Americans was "negroes."

To me, the word had no power or charge whatsoever because it only described a person with dark skin. So what?

Obviously, people here feel differently about the word "negro," which is obvious to everyone who was on campus for the Hilder incident.

I am now aware of the charge and power of these expressions, but in all honesty, to me they are only words and their power is the result of people making a big deal of them.

I used to work in a child care center, and the worst word the kids knew was something like "stupid."

So any time one child called another a "stupidhead," the kids

went nuts. Five years down the road, they will not even blink at "stupid" because it will no longer have power.

So, why do we all get excited over "f**k?" Even other words such as "ass" and "damn" are muted out of movies to protect our fragile minds from such bad language.

To me, it is extremely amusing to watch a show on the USA network or TBS in which somebody is brutally murdered but you can't hear the dialogue because an actor said "shit."

Let's move on to an even more exciting topic: Nudity! Let me bold print this so people read my column. **NUDITY!!!**

In Europe, nudity on television is no big thing. It is on any time of the day, in soap operas, commercials and even in the news.

It is a natural part of humanity and nobody makes a big deal out of it. I have never heard of a movement which is trying to ban naked people from TV screens, papers or news magazines.

Here, nudity is a big deal. Twenty-year-old college students get excited when they can catch a glimpse of an uncovered breast on Showtime or HBO, and even the cover of Cosmopolitan gets hearts to beat faster.

Some might argue this is because of the beauty of the female body, but I believe it is because watching naked people is, to Americans, like eating forbidden fruit. It is like witnessing something you are not supposed to see because it is taboo.

Banning nudity from television is absurd. How much can viewing naked people washing their hair corrupt society? Some think it would be the downfall of morals in this country.

I believe the opposite is true. By banning these images and words from our screens and papers, we create a prudish society which is unable to progress.

I am not saying that naked people or cursing are our future, but becoming more open-minded as a society probably is.

Maybe we will be able to better understand the message if we do not just look at the words, and sometimes maybe we have to use powerful words to be heard.

I remember an incident in the German House of Representatives a few years ago. Joschka Fischer, member of the Green Party, spoke to the assembly and addressed the Speaker of the House with these words: "Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, you are an asshole."

To me, "poopiehead" would not have cut it in this

situation. Mr. Fischer used the appropriate word at the right time to express himself as politely as possible without watering down the content of his statement.

To me, it is an example of what free speech is all about.

To be able to say what is on one's mind in any place and at any time is true freedom of expression.

We need more of it.



MATT HANEY/DN

Don't give up

Actor, figure skater provide lessons in perseverance



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Live your dreams.

Be yourself.

And keep trying. No matter how long it takes.

It's a good thing Avery Brooks and Tonia Kwiatkowski took this advice to heart while they were struggling to get noticed.

But who are Brooks and Kwiatkowski, and why should we care?

Brooks is well known to Star Trek aficionados everywhere as Captain Benjamin Sisko, leader of "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine."

Brooks, before becoming known as the first African American man to successfully lead a Star Trek series, was a featured player in "Spenser: For Hire" and its spinoff, "A Man Called Hawk."

Kwiatkowski, on the other hand, is fairly obscure. Kwiatkowski is a 26-year-old American figure skater who has known much pain and heartbreak in her career. Until April 4, Kwiatkowski was known more for the competitions she blew rather than those in which she succeeded.

What do these two wildly diverse individuals have in common?

Believe it or not, a college education. They have endured much pain and hardship, as Brooks struggled for years to become known as an African American actor and

Kwiatkowski, as previously mentioned, has toiled on the fringes of her sport for over 20 years.

They share an unbreakable, rock-solid will that has refused to quit. Refused to stop. Which has continued to persevere.

Brooks is a multitalented actor with credits ranging from the starring role in the Anthony Davis opera "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X," to starring in the Showtime production of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Brooks was the first African American Master's of Fine Arts graduate from Rutgers University, in both acting and directing.

Yet, while trying to break into mainstream show business, Brooks was reduced to trying out for roles which didn't even have names, like "dude in the pink hat" in 1970s "blaxploitation" films.

This would have broken a lesser man's spirit.

Yet Brooks prevailed. Brooks not only has made his name as an actor through "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine," but also has been a professor at Rutgers University for more than 25 years.

The parallel with Kwiatkowski's situation is there, although it isn't obvious.

Kwiatkowski, a Harvard University graduate, has been a figure skater who has never quite made it. Like her better-known contemporary Paul Wylie (also from Harvard), Kwiatkowski has been praised for her artistry on the ice but has never quite broken the technical barrier — the triple jump — that has stumped many skaters before her.

Kwiatkowski turned in the best performance of her long athletic career at the 1998 World Figure Skating Championships in Minneapolis. It was a performance filled with joy, passion, artistry and technique.

And it almost didn't happen

because Kwiatkowski was merely an alternate for the championships. She wasn't supposed to be on the U.S. team. Not at all.

Why? Simple.

Kwiatkowski placed fourth at the 1998 U.S. Olympic Trials/Championships, behind better-known (and much younger) compatriots Michelle Kwan, Tara Lipinski and Nicole Bobek. Kwiatkowski skated extremely well at the U.S. Olympic Trials, but her best wasn't quite enough to dislodge Kwan (17), Lipinski (15) or Bobek (21).

There was talk that even if Kwiatkowski had managed to beat one of those luminaries, she still wouldn't have been placed on the Olympic team, as she had never managed to do well in international competition.

This is because Kwiatkowski failed to get past the preliminary round at the 1994 Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway. That one poor performance branded her as "choke" artist and hurt her chances in any successive international competitions. Figure skating, especially at the elite level, is largely a sport of perception and reputation.

If you don't have the perception of being a great artist or the reputation of being a great technician, you don't have a chance at winning.

But Kwiatkowski didn't let any of this stop her April 4.

Kwiatkowski went out and skated the best program of her career, even eclipsing her fine program at the U.S. Trials/Championships. Kwiatkowski completed four triple jumps well and another one marginally while skating with superior artistry and control.

Kwiatkowski placed sixth at the 1998 Worlds. This doesn't seem like much to our achievement-driven culture, but it is actually quite profound. Kwiatkowski, at 26, proved

that figure skating doesn't have to be a young woman's sport, and that if you are willing to overcome obstacles, you can succeed.

Both Brooks and Kwiatkowski have refused to let life get them down. Even when it looked like they couldn't possibly succeed. Both certainly have known pain and hardship.

Their idea of refusing to give up and refusing to give in also carries over into our personal lives.

Don't we all know people who have refused to give up, despite implacable obstacles? Who have refused to stop, despite disabilities, pain, suffering and problems?

I do.

My best friend, Lika, has defied obstacles all of her life. As an Asian American woman, she has been expected to live her life a certain way.

We all know the stereotypes about Asian Americans. They're all hard-working, hard-studying brains with no social lives or skills to speak of, and no idea of what the real world is outside of their computer, math or engineering textbooks.

Yeah, right.

None of this applies to Lika. Nor does it to most Asian American women, according to Carmen Guevara Neuberger, director of the American College Personnel Association.

Neuberger, quoted in the April 1997 edition of the Southern Illinois University newspaper The Daily Egyptian, said "the stereotype of the industrious, intelligent and unassertive Asian is common, but this misrepresentation is encumbering to Asian Americans."

According to figures in the 1994 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (distributed online at www.inp.risk.su/persons/S.Yu.Taskaev/britanic/usa.html), Asian and Pacific Islanders make up 3.3 per-

cent of the population.

This means most of us have never met Asian Americans. Nor know how to sort fact from fantasy.

This idea was emphatically (and unwittingly) pointed out by Reggie White. White, a defensive end for the Green Bay Packers and an ordained minister, remarked to the Wisconsin State Assembly that "Asians can turn a television into a watch."

(Kind of a surprising comment for White to make, considering he is African American.)

"The model minority image is a liability because the majority of Asian American students, faculty members and administrators do not fit this stereotype. Many Asians are articulate, assertive and aggressive," Neuberger said.

And she should know because Neuberger is of Asian American descent herself. Born in the Philippines, Neuberger worked for more than 30 years to obtain four degrees, raise five children, and become a university professor.

White should have known better than his ill-advised remarks. African Americans, according to the 1994 Encyclopedia Britannica study, make up 10 percent of the U.S. population.

Meanwhile my friend Lika, like White, has fought all her life to be accepted as she is, free of preconceived notions of how she should act. Or who she should be. Or what she wants.

Just as Brooks and Kwiatkowski have fought all their lives to do what they must do, Lika is struggling to do the same thing.

Just as we all are.

We must be individuals, not automatons. We must be free to be who we are, regardless of whether it is commonly accepted or not.

Doesn't that make sense?