

With the impending war and recent divisions of opinion because of growing opposition to the war, unexpected circumstances have arisen concerning my strong peace stance. As peace rallies are growing in number and frequency, pro-war people are becoming more defensive of their beliefs and the rift between peace mongers and war mongers is growing. This is happening with a friend of mine, whom I have known for three years. I am strongly opposed to war and what the armed forces represents. My friend Josh is not only for the war but he is joining the Marines in May. While we still communicate and are on friendly terms this difference between us is straining and I fear will bring our friendship to its demise. Are some differences between people so great that it can hinder friendship and open communication?

There are myriad features of my problem, the biggest being that this situation with Josh is creating tension and general conflict within myself. The most obvious form of conflict is that I feel very strongly for peace and Josh feels very strongly for war so I am wondering whether this difference is so great that we do not have enough in common to remain good friends. The other tensions are created because it takes me a while to form good friends because of trust, so when I have a good friend I essentially know their personality. Because of this I have never had to deal with a situation where someone I considered a good friend suddenly disagreed with me about something of fundamental importance. The other reason this situation with Josh joining the Marines is creating tension in me is that I have many conflicting emotions. I am angry that he supports the war, I am worried he will get hurt in Iraq or wherever he is sent, and I am mostly confused because I have never dealt with a situation like this before.

Differences can and many times create tension because people feel more comfortable around people who appear to be like them whether in physical appearance, thoughts, or beliefs. This is the core of my problem with Josh. I don't feel comfortable with a friend that has such a

contradictory view to my own. Jake Lamar writes, “It is far easier sometimes to be with one’s own kind, with people who don’t need explanations...And while I had always liked to believe there was little difference between my relationships with white kids and black kids, I was becoming more aware of the special dimension of intimacy I shared with my friends of color”(Lamar 83-84). Perhaps this is the true problem I am facing: It is easier to have friends of similar belief, so I don’t want to confront the challenge of having a friend with a completely different belief than my own.

An additional feature critical to my problem of difference dividing a friendship is my inability to accept his opinion. This is at the core of the problem because if I could accept his belligerent mindset it would not be troubling me. I respect that he is joining the Marines because many people who support the war would not enlist, but I do not know if I respect his pro-war opinion. In order to respect and accept another opinion one must understand why another thinks in a way contradictory to your own. There are many beliefs I don’t hold myself but I accept because I understand the rationale behind them, like the death penalty. I don’t support it but I understand why people do. But I cannot understand why people want war except out of rage for 9/11, because the reasons the government is giving for war seems insanely dishonest to me.

The flipside of the argument coin is that part of the problem is that Josh isn’t accepting my opinion either and he seems more insulting about it. Josh writes in an email, “Well I think the problem with today’s youth (mainly you and your likes)...” and “Josh , your non-peacenik friend.” There are many negative connotations in these short phrases. Calling me a ‘peacenik’ is an insult from the Vietnam era, and saying that I have a problem is likewise insulting because I don’t believe I have a problem. Josh’s somewhat insulting tone is only making me more defensive of my belief thus making understanding between us more difficult.

In lieu of possible misunderstandings with communication Deborah Tannen writes, “If he seems angry, one assumes he intended to show anger. If he seems pushy, or resistant, one

assumes that he is a pushy or unfriendly person.”(Tannen 210). Tannen describes how tone, pitch, and style of speech help communicate the meaning of something beyond the simple definitions of words. But if the communication is written as in an email then this meaning is completely lost and open to the interpretation of the reader. This might be what transpired with Josh and I. While I think he is being insulting he may have been jesting, but I misunderstood him, making interpretation of his meaning much different.

The third tier to my problem of difference between Josh and me is that my self-identity has been jarred by this incident. I considered myself open-minded, accepting, and peaceful, but this situation with Josh makes me realize I am not open minded, accepting, or peaceful, but angry and reacting in a typical fashion. This is another source of conflict for me because it is revealing I am not who I thought I was which is shocking, disappointing, and confusing.

Discussing identity and its importance, Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “. . .one person metamorphoses into another in a world where people fly through the air, heal from mortal wounds. I am playing with my self, I am playing with the world’s soul, . . .I change myself, I change the world”(Anzaldúa 92). This is related to the idea that though I thought I was peaceful and trying to be helpful towards the greater community, in actuality I react to difference like everyone else does. But If I can fundamentally change myself to be the person I want to be then I can help change the world because I can show people love and understanding instead of anger and unacceptance.

My situation with Josh revolves around conflicting emotions, issues I am having with self identity, and a failure to respect and accept his opinion which I fear may cause damage to our communication and friendship. I find the solution very difficult. In order for this difference to be overcome to salvage friendship I must view Josh’s essence as a person as something separate and removed from his opinions which may change over time. I must appreciate him as a person not as what he believes, which may be difficult.