

Arizona State University Reflection

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Lisa was staring at the exhibit when I approached her and our discussion began. We scooted around the usual topics of discussion surrounding the abortion issue. She was acknowledging many of the points I was making, but I could tell that she was having a hard time reconciling these points with the views that she had long held in her head.

She kept saying that she had never really thought much about it before and I told her, “Well, it’s a good thing that we are talking about it now because it seems like an important issue if human beings are involved.” There were many pauses in our conversation where she was just staring at the brochure that I was holding opened to the page of the development of a human being, thinking about what I was asking her. I could tell that she understood what I was saying, but she was still unable to commit to a side.

I asked her, “What would it take to make you take one side or the other?” Lisa responded, “I would have to be in that situation and be pregnant and know how it feels.” I then tried to explain to her that she could still know what is right and wrong without ever having been in a situation where she had to make that choice, yet my abstract reasoning fell on deaf ears, so I tried something else. “What are some issues that you are passionate about?” I asked her.

She responded, “Well, I’m liberal on a lot of issues.”

“Pick one of those issues”, I countered.

Quickly she said, “Okay, well, gay marriage. I don’t like what Bush is doing with that and I think homosexuals deserve respect.”

I saw an opportunity to illustrate: “Okay, so you are passionate about this. Have you ever been involved in a gay marriage?”

She quickly answered, “No, but some of my friends are gay and lesbian.”

I gently pressed home the application: “Right, I can see that you care about people and that is why you take this position on this issue. In the same way, this is why I care about the abortion issue: because it involves the treatment of human beings.”

She was thinking about this and looking up at the exhibit. There was a long pause. I wasn’t quite sure what was going on in her head and I did not know if anything I was saying was making sense to her. So when she finally spoke, what she said surprised me:

“I guess I can relate to it in some way since I’m Jewish.” Not realizing that Lisa was looking at the panel that compared abortion to genocide, I asked her to clarify what she meant and she said, “Well, the Holocaust”.

“Oh definitely,” I said, feeling a wee bit on the slow side, but more so feeling horribly insensitive for not making that connection right away. The wheels in her head were still turning

and she glanced at her watch knowing that she was already late to class. “I just haven’t really thought about it before,” she said again.

“Well, then I’m so glad we got a chance to discuss it.” I gave her the exhibit brochure and told her she could keep it. In closing she said she would think about it, and Lisa went off to class with a lot on her mind.

One of the biggest things that struck me this time on campus was the importance of making a personal connection in conversation. When I was talking with Lisa, I was saying the right things, but nothing was really getting through to her until we started touching some things that were closer to home.

It is simple to have all of the sound bites waiting in the wings until someone says a key phrase that would trigger its use. I don’t mean to diminish the value of this approach because it *is* very effective. However, in addition to this, there is also an element to each conversation that *cannot* be rehearsed and is different with each person.

It takes attentiveness to each individual, and for me it also takes achieving a certain comfort level with each person so that we can simply be two people having a casual conversation. Rather than trying to show a rehearsed love toward an individual through the friendly, pre-packaged responses (love already included!), it is important to simply *let* love be real and not forced.

It is as simple as realizing that I don’t need to rely on the love that is portrayed through some of the packaged responses because I already have these genuine feelings toward people! I so enjoyed and cared about many of the people with whom I spoke and I just hope that I was able to convey this to each person successfully.