

Thesis Statement:

I attended a family dinner with my partner and several members of her family. My partner's aunt made racist remarks about immigrants when she said, "Immigrants bring their violence into our country, and if they want to come here, they need to conform to our societal expectations and not bring their violence with them". I used to believe I was justified in vocally opposing this family member's position and views at the expense of creating conflict between myself and members of her family, but now I no longer do.

Supporting Statement:

By vocally and publicly contesting this family's member's comments, I am doing so for selfish reasons. Essentially, I want to prove to myself that I can stand up to people who make racist or inappropriate comments when no one else will. It is not for "the greater good", rather, an attempt to validate my own opinions about myself and to prove to myself and others that I have integrity. In doing so, I knowingly will not change her racist perceptions of immigrants. Furthermore, I will likely create a conflict between myself and other family members and possibly ruin the occasion all together. Other family members appear uncomfortable and opposed to this individual's comments as well, therefore there is already mutual agreement among most members of the dinner. If I speak up every time an offensive comment is made, people will be overly cautious around me and feel I am easily offended, sensitive or will not take what I say seriously because they will think "There goes Armin again!" thereby, fracturing my relationship with family members anyway.

Opposition:

In contemporary society, moderate voices, that is, voices which provide balanced, moderate and open-minded dialogue pertaining to social matters, are being drowned out by extreme voices (both extremely for and against immigration and immigrants in our communities). By openly contesting these points of views, you are facilitating the reclamation of moderate voices in the context of immigrant stereotypes among those who attend the dinner. This will facilitate more balanced and open-minded dialogue and inspire likeminded individuals present at the dinner to address these views in other factions of their life as they come up. Speaking up will also be very gratifying and it will make you feel sense of satisfaction about yourself because you stood up for what you stood up for your beliefs. You need to practice courage. If you are unwilling to take a stand in the perfectly safe environment of a dinner table, you most likely will not be able to take a stand in a more threatening environment. Lastly, if you don't speak up you would experience cognitive dissonance or inner conflict because you are not living up to your values of being courageous and just, which can negatively impact your self-concept.

Response:

While empowering moderate voices at this dinner and beyond are objectively important, it is predicated on the fact that everyone attending the dinner believes that circulating moderate voices is equally as important as I do. If dinner attendees do in fact have moderate views, they may be uncomfortable if less moderate views make others at the table uncomfortable. Supporting moderate voices may be more beneficial in public spaces where a single person does not feel victimized. Lastly, it is also paternalistic to assume that other peoples need to express their views openly. It is acknowledged, however, that not speaking up represents a missed opportunity to practice courage. At the expense of practicing courage, this does provide an opportunity to empathize and to foster an open and non-judgemental space with this family member who may view the world differently from others at the table. This is a different form of courage; by not speaking up to preserve a family relationship is courageous and represents another way of internally perceiving honour. It is also acknowledged, that it is always easier to abide by simple rules to avoid cognitive conflict such as, being honest, and speaking out for what is right. However, social situations are not universally similar, but rather, inherently unique. Simple rules may not necessarily do more good than harm; for example, if my partner buys me a sweater for Christmas that I do not like, I will tell her I think it looks great, even though I know it is a lie. Had I followed simple rules of always being honest and vocalizing it, that may have upset her and ruined Christmas Day.

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SPPH 527 – Mini Essay Final

Resolution and Conclusion:

There are some personal sacrifices by not speaking up against the views of this family member at this dinner. There are certainly reasons to voice opposing opinions based on empowering moderate voices, practicing courage and avoiding cognitive dissonance if the context is appropriate. However, speaking up at the dinner may create more harm than benefit, even with intentions that hope to empower individual voices and reaffirm personal qualities deemed as honourable and courageous. In this case, preserving a happy family get-together over self-righteousness seems like the best option.