Classy and Fabulous: Tannen vs. Wolf

Famous French Fashion designer/businesswomen Coco Chanel once said, “A girl should be two things: classy and fabulous.” It is this very argument, the idea that women should be perceived in one way and one way only, that has led to the fight for feminism today. In both Deborah Tannen’s “Wears Jump Suit. Sensible Shoes. Uses Husband’s Last Name” and Naomi Wolf’s “The Beauty Myth” readers are introduced to similar arguments addressing feministic topics. Tannen argues that women’s ongoing fight to pick an outfit, wear makeup, and style their hair effortlessly escorts them into the “marked” category whereas for men, the ability to simplify that process allows for smooth sailing into the “unmarked” category. Wolf too argues that women have been blinded by the idolized idea of the “beauty myth” which has led to ongoing problems in regard to health, money, and the way women are perceived. In both pieces, it is the use of strong textual evidence and credible outside sources that promote the struggles that women endure in both everyday life and through adapting to social norms. However, while Tannen is fighting for a broader topic, Wolf is writing to inform the public on an ongoing struggle.

The “marked” vs. “unmarked” category is a continues battle between the male and female gender. Today, the terms “marked” and “unmarked” go a long way and according to Tannen, it is said that women tend to get the shorter end of the stick when deciding between the two. While women have to “make decisions about hair, clothing,
makeup, [and], accessories, each [of which carry a] meaning”, men are able to brush their teeth, throw on a suit, and call it a day (1). The difference between the two is what Tannen emphasizes when claiming the “marked” and “unmarked” categories. The “marked” and “unmarked” barriers don’t stop at physical appearance. Linguistics also take part in establishing who falls where. Tannen introduces Ralph Fasold who goes on to explain “that ‘he’ means ‘he or she’, and that ‘she’ is used only if the referent is specifically female” (2). This linguistic barrier only furthers Tannen’s claim in which the woman has less significance than the man therefore can be placed in the “marked” category. Tannen once more uses Fasold to further her claim. He introduces a scientific aspect in which “there is no species [in the world] that produce only males” (3). Due to the fact that women are necessary for reproduction, Fasold’s argument goes hand in hand with Tannen’s argument and the placement of women in the “marked” category yet again. It is Tannen’s ability to incorporate outside sources and develop strong textual evidence that allows readers to easily grasp her topic of discussion; the “marked” vs “unmarked” categories.

Similarly, Wolf argues that the “beauty myth” is a battle that rages on and haunts women through adulthood. According to Wolf, it is history to blame, for “every generation since about 1830 has had to fight its version of the beauty myth” (11). Although that serves as a very broad statement, it is the use of specific historical evidence that Wolf uses to further her claim. Like history itself, it’s the specific time periods such as the sexual revolution which are to blame. Wolf goes on to explain that it is the sexual revolution which “promoted the discovery of female sexuality” and “which for the first time in history artificially [linked] “beauty” directly and explicitly to sexuality” (11).
is this time in history that changed what “a normal woman” is. Women were now forced to adapt to the social norms and in turn change who they really are to appeal to those around them. Like Tannen, Wolf introduces a scientific aspect in which she addresses Charles Darwin and his famous natural selection. Originally used to prove evolution and survival of the fittest, it is Darwin himself who is “unconvinced by his own explanation that ‘beauty’ resulted from a ‘sexual selection’” and that “for women to compete through ‘beauty’ is a reversal of the way in which natural selection affects [everyone else]” (12-13). Wolf’s ability to use not only numerous historical examples but a worldwide phenomenon to support her idea makes for better understanding and credibility when reading.

Although both pieces use both textual evidence and outside sources, it is Wolf who is able to make a broader impact on society. While Tannen is emphasizing the idea that “there is no unmarked women”, Wolf is fighting to educate the public about a problem that has changed the way women are perceived in today’s society (Tannen 2). Whether it be Charles Darwin and natural selection or the sexual revolution, Wolf is able to address the fact that “beauty is [now] a currency” and like “any economy it is determined by politics” (Wolf 12). Unlike Wolf, Tannen’s piece contains strong examples however, is more opinion oriented. For example, “I felt sad to think that we women didn’t have the freedom to be unmarked that the men sitting next to us had” (Tannen 3). It is the use of words such as “I” and “we” that tend to draw away from the factual evidence throughout the article. It is Wolf’s use of countless in depth historical evidence rather than just a few solid examples that gives her the upper hand in effectiveness and credibility.
With both pieces addressing similar topics, it is the use of strong textual evidence and credible outside sources that draw the two together. Although one addresses a broader topic, both Tannen and Wolf have the same essential goal; equality in today’s society for women as a whole. Unfortunately, in today’s world women are forced to agree with Ms. Chanel in order to not be looked at like an outsider. The idea that “A girl should be two things: classy and fabulous” is what pushes women closer to gender stereotypes then away from who they really.
Works Cited
