Comparative Analysis

Have you ever read an essay that you 100% agree with? How about an essay that was hard to finish? In Harlon L. Dalton’s “Horatio Alger” essay, Dalton disagrees with Alger’s three-step thesis for being successful. In Susan Wendell’s “The Social Construction of Disability”, Wendell argues that disability is a socially created stigma that needs to be changed by treating those with disabilities as though they don’t have them. Both authors use their essays to argue for what they believe in. Dalton bases his essay over the racial construction within the United States, while Wendell argues hers for more rights for people with disabilities. In their essays Harlon Dalton and Susan Wendell argue for change however, Dalton’s is more effective because he centers his argument around disproving a thesis while Wendell argues to prove her thesis.

In Harlon Dalton’s essay, his main focus is to explain why Horatio Alger’s three-part thesis to success in life is a fantasy. Alger’s believe is “(1) each of us is judged solely on her or his own merits; (2) we each have a fait opportunity to develop those merits; and (3) ultimately, merit will out” (Dalton, 127). Dalton’s main objection to the Alger myth is that it continues to build upon a racial class system by surpassing the profile of race and the social understanding of race in our country. Dalton explains his stance later into the essay which explains why he feels so passionate about the Alger myth,

“In a nutshell, my objection to the Alger myth is that it serves to maintain the racial pecking order. It does so by mentally bypassing the role of race in American society…
The Alger myth encourages people to blink at the many barriers to racial equality (historical, structural, and institutional) that litter the social landscape” (Dalton 132).

This is Dalton’s show-all in his essay. He has been building up to this moment that finally shows why this matters to him. Like Susan Wendell, Dalton calls for change by stating the United States is no longer a place of unlimited potential and that the United States needs to make a series of hard decisions with regards to continuing our nation with the certainty of less (Dalton, 135). Finally, the way Dalton structured his essay presents his argument in a way that it builds and builds until Dalton states his objection to the Alger myth thus keeping the reader intrigued in the essay as he continues to disprove the fantasy.

Susan Wendell presents an argument that disability is socially constructed and the way to get over this is to treat those with disabilities as though they don’t have them at all. Wendell’s two major talking points for change is architectural changes and expansions of communication. These changes “would make it possible for more people with disabilities to participate in all the major aspects of life in a society” (Wendell, 48). These changes are seen as efforts to deconstruct disability and allows people with disabilities to fully participate in life’s activities. Now within her essay there is a few grey areas to her argument. Possibly the biggest is as Wendell is explaining a personal story about the relationship between pace and disability, she explains how at her job (when she wrote this essay) that she could possibly have to work more courses a semester. She continues on to say the changes could force her to go on part-time disability leave which would be disabling to her because she needs the hours in order for her to get by. Here’s where is gets interesting,

“Furthermore”, even if a person is able to keep up with an increased pace of work, any increase in the pace of work will decrease the energy available for other life activities,
which may upset the delicate balance of energy by which a person manages to participate in them and eventually exclude him/her from those activities” (Wendell, 38).

This is significant because what she states here simply flies in the face of what she is arguing for. She argues throughout most of her essay that people with disabilities should not be treated any different than those that aren’t affected by disabilities. Wendell continues explaining how to change the social construction of disability through preventing disability by access to “good public health and safety standards and practices, but also by relatively minor changes in the built environment…” (Wendell, 45). That last phrase in the quote is exactly what she had stated earlier when she mentions architectural changes. Wendell uses this strategy of restating what she has previously said for two reasons. The first is that she is drawing a big picture that she seems to want the reader to see into by remembering what she has previously argued for. Second, it’s almost Wendell’s way of speaking (what she wants) it into existence. The redundancy of these particular words and phrases bring the reader to realize what all she is truly arguing for. This isn’t the only place that Wendell uses this strategy. She does it constantly to refresh the reader on what all she is arguing for. Overall, Wendell, like Dalton, argues for change through awareness. By stating the changes Wendell would like to see over and over the reader can easily be reminded of what all Wendell hopes to accomplish within her essay.

Both authors try to entice the reader into agreeing with what they each have to say. Both essays are arguing for change. However, they go about doing so differently. Wendell argues to prove her point, so people understand what she is trying to say. However, Dalton argues to disprove Horatio Alger’s three-steps-to-success fantasy. Both authors use thoughtful anecdotes to help prove their arguments, however, by using anecdotes to disprove another author’s claim it
proves to be more effective as it draws the reader to keep reading to understand why he/she dissents.

Work Cited
