In an engaging piece, Dan Blatz uses his own experiences to prove that Deborah Tannen’s thoughts, in her article “I’ll Explain It To You,” on relations between men and women are accurate. Blatz replays for his readers a conversation between himself, his male friend, and two young women. In doing so, he comes to the realization that Tannen offers a number of good points about “how men like to dominate a conversation.”

I’m Not Really Like That, Am I?

Once upon a time . . . Who am I kidding? It was yesterday. I was reading the article “I’ll Explain It to You,” by Deborah Tannen. Now I’m a male and I’ll have to admit, I feel like I’ve been persecuted. She claims men can be macho, dominating, and self-centered with a woman during a conversation. I feel this is a horrible stereotype to give us. We don’t really act like that. To prove my point I’ll use a conversation I had with three other people: two girls and another guy. Now this conversation will clearly prove that we (men) aren’t how Tannen describes us in her article.

Before I describe the conversation, I should begin by talking about some of the situations that led up to it. For instance, I came up to the group of people wanting to speak to my friend. He wasn’t doing much of anything, besides sitting on a couch. So I sat down beside him and I started to have a conversation with him. Now I noticed that the two girls, who were sitting on the couch beside him, were attractive so I began to speak a little more openly. This encouraged the girls to join in (my plan was just starting). They became interested in what we were talking about and began to give their opinions on what we were discussing, which leads into the discussion . . .

The topic of this conversation was relationships. When the girls became interested they asked, “What are you guys talking about?” My friend answered, “Women, and how they play with our minds.” Now see, two guys can have a perfectly meaningful conversation without degrading anyone. Of course, I then asked one of them if she would like to play with my mind, but that just got us off track of the conversation. Oh, no! I just proved one of Tannen’s point’s by making a joke. Not only a senseless joke, but a macho joke.

Tannen claims that men tend to tell more jokes than women during conversation. According to the article, telling jokes can be a way of negotiating status (266). The article also claims that because women do not care if they hold center stage in a group, they are less likely to use jokes as a form of getting their audience’s attention. So, I guess by telling my flirtatious joke, I demonstrated how men like to hold control of a conversation. Unfortunately,
thinking back, that is why I made the remark. It helped me get the girls’ attention and because of it I was able to start my story. Speaking about my story, this is where it started.

I began to talk about a situation that happened between myself and a girl I had met from Walsh University. I went on to tell them what I found attractive about her. I also told them how I hoped I had made an impression on her. I gave a whole story on the evolution of our acquaintance: the minor stuff, like how I went to see the play she was in four times, or how I went out with her and some friends after the last showing of the play just to get her attention. Everyone seemed interested in what I was saying. No one asked me to stop the conversation. So I continued to talk, and then some more, and some more after that.

Unfortunately, I proved another part of Tannen’s article. She claims that men tend to set the agenda by offering opinions, suggestions, and information, while women tend to react, offer agreement, or disagreement (263). I spent the first fifteen minutes of the conversation speaking. All the girls seemed to do was slip in comments such as “Oh, how sweet” or “That’s really nice.” All those comments seemed to do was promote me to keep speaking. The guy, on the other hand, kept offering his opinions, such as, “I would call her” and, “Go get her number.” Not only did I dominate this conversation, but my friend got in and tried to take over when it got boring. He began giving examples of his relationships that were similar to the one I was speaking of. The two of us sat there and dominated the whole conversation.

Why didn’t the girls say anything? Well, they began to give me hints. For instance, a guy came over and interrupted the conversation at one point. I was never able to regain one of the girl’s attention because of him. This was a distant sign that it was becoming unbearable. They also tried to gradually change the subject by offering certain experiences that had happened to them. One of the girls began to speak of her ex-boyfriend, while the other one told us how she used to stand boys up when they would ask her on a date. I, on the other hand, was too busy trying to spit my story out. I was waiting to speak instead of listening.

This was another point of Tannen’s I proved. I spent the whole time speaking about me. Boy, was I being self-centered. It was I who wanted to dominate the conversation. She claims that men have a tendency to dominate over the women in a conversation (260). I spent most of the conversation in the dominating position. I guess this is something I have to work on.

Well, I guess men aren’t as perfect as I thought they are. Tannen’s article demonstrates a lot of good points on how men like to dominate a conversation. I would have never been able to see what a macho, dominating, self-centered male I was if it weren’t for Tannen. It would be wise for me if I were to start
becoming more understanding to women, especially during conversation; otherwise, people might not want to sit through it. Unfortunately, there are still a lot of males who prefer to dominate a conversation. They prefer to speak about themselves rather then listen for a change. Most of them don’t even know they act this way. They’re in denial, just as I was at the beginning. It is here they should ask themselves, “I’m not really like that, am I?” Then maybe it will become clear to them that they don’t have to dominate a conversation to make it interesting.

WORKS CITED