

Sample essay on a whisper of aids

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Introduction

The reality of HIV/AIDS, the world's third leading cause of death was put in perspective by Mary Fisher-the daughter of a wealthy Republican at the Republican Convention in Houston in 1992. HIV/AIDS is a sexually contracted disease that attacks and paralyzes the human immune system leaving individuals vulnerable to attacks by opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis, malaria and diabetes. The importance of the speech by Mary Fisher is that it changed the political atmosphere and appealed to humanity in the political process that surrounds policy making and funding of HIV/AIDS. Her speech, titled ' A Whisper of AIDS' made use of rhetorical style and infused ethos, logos and pathos.

Ethos

Mary Fisher establishes ethos and the credibility to talk about AIDS-related suffering by virtue of having the HIV virus. She contracted the virus from her second marriage to Brian Campbell in the late eighties. Being the daughter

of a powerful and wealthy republican father accords her the position and connections to speak in a National Republican Convention. Fisher's good family and educational background accords her the space and time to address her concerns, and those of millions of individuals living with HIV/AIDS not only to the Republicans, but to the national government and the world as well. Her effective use of rhetorical appeal and command of language enables her to gain an attentive audience, some of whom are moved to tears, to tell the world about the plight of HIV/AIDS victims. Fisher's immediate audience is composed of Republican delegates at the National Republican Convention in Houston, Texas. The general audience is composed of millions of individuals who watched the speech at home on television, live broadcasts on radio, newspaper readers and individuals who up to this date come across the speech in numerous forms. Fisher establishes ethos by first declaring her HIV status, " I would never have asked to be HIV positive" and creating a rapport with members of the HIV community, " I represent an AIDS community whose members have been reluctantly drafted from every segment of American society." (Fisher, 2). Owing to the misconceptions that prevailed in 1992 about HIV/AIDS, Mary Fisher would have been considered to fall in the demographic of people who are not infected or affected by HIV/AIDS-young, female, white with a good educational background and hailing from a wealthy and powerful family. Fisher establishes ethos by relating to her own position in society and comparing the perceived mindset with the reality on the ground. Her speech seeks to break the prejudice, misconceptions and perceived profiles of individuals who are ' normally' infected with the virus. " because I was not hemophiliac, I was not at risk. Because I was not gay, I was not at risk. Because I did not inject drugs, I was

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not at risk.”(Fisher, 2). Fisher finalizes her rhetorical appeal to ethos by identifying the entire human race as her audience. “ Are you human? Because people with HIV have not entered some alien state of being. They are human.”(Fisher, 2)

Logos

Mary Fisher’s appeal to logos is achieved by the frightening statistics that she drops relating to the HIV/AIDS scourge. “ The reality of AIDS is brutally clear. Two hundred thousand Americans are dead or dying. A million more are infected. Worldwide, forty million, sixty million, or a hundred million infections will be counted in the coming few years.” (Fisher, 2). Fisher’s use of statistics and her previously established ethos as a member of the AIDS community provides logos to the audience. The statistics are meant to shock the audience and put the reality of HIV/AIDS and its impact on society in perspective (Jenkins, 33). The use of sharp statistics was necessary in the speech, considering the context and immediate audience. Fisher understood that she would be dealing with a group of hardliners; Republicans who had already formed opinions and prejudices about the HIV/AIDs scourge in the country. She needed to convince the audience that this was not a disease that was only limited to members of a certain community, certain background or state; the disease could infect any human being. Urgency and a state of peril is created by the rising projections of possible infections that could occur in the nearby future(Jenkins, 33). Mary Fisher’s logic is clear, the war against HIV/AIDS cannot be fought if individuals hide behind stereotypes and prejudices. If this is assumed to be a war for black people, gays, men, or individuals from any racial, religious or political affiliation, the country

bleeds. Fisher raises further urgency and concern by mentioning that the most vulnerable groups that suffer are women and children. “ The rate of infection is increasing fastest among women and children.” (Fisher, 2).

Fisher’s logic is that the war against HIV/AIDS is a matter of national concern, irrespective of political differences.

Pathos

The use of emotional appeal as a rhetorical method is widely applied in Mary Fisher’s speech. Appealing to a crowd of Republicans with radical opinions would be next to impossible were it not for the emotional appeal. Pathos is established in numerous instances across the speech to ensure that the message is driven home. The use of rhetorical questioning, “ Are you human?” seeks to invoke humanity and emotions of the audience (Fisher, 2). The speech asserts that HIV/AIDS victims are do not deserve the mean treatment and prejudice that they suffer. Everybody is created by God equal, and not deserving of cruelty, judgment or isolation. Her call to the Republicans to take a stand against the misfortune suffered by HIV/AIDS victims is compassionate and firm. All through the speech, Mary Fisher takes caution not to exhibit individuals living with the virus as helpless victims. She talks with confidence and pride and is not afraid to reveal her status, especially in the background of a stigmatized and uninformed audience. Her call is not for pity, but compassion from members of the public towards individuals infected with the deadly virus. To the Republican Party, she demands a public stand, a show of justice and integrity in individual roles against a scourge that is ravishing the nation(Jenkins, 33). Further use of pathos is made by mentioning members of her family and thanking them for

the support extended to her all through the tumultuous period. Fisher mentions her parents, siblings and children in a bid to show the Republicans that she is part of an ordinary family. This extends to the knowledge that the disease is not only limited to certain members of society. “ There is no family or community, no race or religion, no place left in America that is safe.”

(Fisher, 2) While acknowledging the immense support that she has received from her family and friends, Fisher notes that not all members of society are as lucky as she is; she recognizes that there may be people out in society who suffer from stigmatization and disownment.

Conclusion

The use of rhetoric in the speech by Mary Fisher is immensely effective. The speech is well worded, timely relevant and targeted to the right audience. Fisher uses a wide array of rhetorical styles, infusing ethos, logos and pathos to ensure that the delivery is adequate and impactful. The effectiveness of the speech may be hard to measure in terms of tangible delivery, but the message is clear. Fisher’s activism extends from the speech to subsequent ventures such as the formation of CARE Fund, artistic expression and social work in communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

Works Cited

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