

# A prryhic victory analysis



**ASSIGN  
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ENGL 2, MWF 12: 10 Jordan Morgan November 9, 2012 " A Pyrrhic Victory"

Analysis For years there has been the never-ending controversial issue regarding condom being distributed within the United States high schools. January 8, 1994, Anna Quindlen publishes her article, " A Pyrrhic Victory," in the New York Times, where she states that not allowing condoms to be distributed in high schools is self-defeating, harmful to students, and inconvenient for parents.

Quindlen attempts to persuade readers, but is not completely successful. Quindlen provides a rhetorical example that is intended to demonstrate a need for condom distribution within the schools. She, then, introduces Dr. Cohall as an authority figure and explains that the opt-out idea, from the previous example, is likely to be used. Quindlen provides raw numbers about sexually transmitted diseases and gives specific examples that are intended to demonstrate that parents are not adequately teaching their children.

Furthermore, she claims that many of her opponents live in Fantasyland and then provides a specific example that is intended to demonstrate this. Finally, Quindlen claims that condoms are not the real issue, but deeper parent-child difficulties are. Quindlen was aiming for a specific reaction from the reader. Her main goal is to persuade the reader enough that they will end up viewing her opinion on condom distribution as if it were their own. Because her article reaches out to readers of all ages, she is hoping that it would move her readers into taking action upon this issue.

She wants students in high school to starting demanding that their schools provide them with condoms, and she hopes that those who are faculty at schools stand up and start distributing them. As a result of her article,

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Quindlen is hoping to make a difference just by publishing her article. In the very first sentence of Quindlen's article she says, " Pop quiz. " By using this statement she is identifying roles. In school, the teacher is the person who would give a pop quiz after teaching something. So by saying this she creates a subject position that makes her the teacher, and the readers are the students.

By stating this phrase she is assigning the responsibilities of the teacher and student. Quindlen, as the teacher, has the right to teach that condom distribution is the right thing to do, while the readers are expected to just intake this information as if there are no other options. She provides a scenario of a high school boy who was denied a condom from the school nurse and in result, he got a sexually transmitted disease. After this scenario, she provides a multiple choice question that implies that there is only one correct answer, hers.

Although Quindlen has identified who the student and teacher are, her tool fails because students, quite frequently, despise their teachers. By immediately springing a pop quiz on the reader, she has irritated the readers by making them emotionally inferior to her. This tool is inefficient because Quindlen blindsides her readers with unexpected emotion. Quindlen introduces Dr. Cohall, a pediatrician into her article where she refers to him as a " champion of condom distribution. " Just because Dr. Cohall is a pediatrician does not make him a champion of condom distribution, let alone a champion at all.

Pediatricians work with young children who are not sexually active, therefore sexually transmitted diseases would not be present and there would be no

reason to be distributing condoms in that profession. Dr. Cohall later states that there were one hundred and fifty cases of sexually transmitted diseases within the three high school clinics that he put on in 1992. Quindlen rephrases Cohall's statement and writes it as "150 cases" to purposely catch the readers' attention and to make them react as if that is a large number of cases. Also, these cases could possibly be a repeated case for the same person.

For example, one student can have five cases, another could have three, and so forth. This number misrepresents how many students are reporting sexually transmitted diseases. Also, Dr. Cohall does not state the total number of students at each of the three schools. There could be two hundred students and one hundred and fifty cases could have a sexually transmitted disease, or there could be one hundred and fifty cases out of two thousand students. The total number is not explained which weakens her argument. She also represents the number of cases combined within three schools, which means that each school has approximately fifty cases.

That does not sound nearly as outstanding as what she stated. Dr. Cohall is simply providing raw numbers, which leaves a lot of uncertainty. If Dr. Cohall had reported his numbers as a general population he would have a much higher authority. Therefore, Dr. Cohall has little credibility and is not much of a resource for Quindlen. Quindlen refers to Dr. Cohall, again, and tells the story of what happened to a girl whose mother found out that she is sexually active. According to the teenage girl, her mother found her birth control pills, seized her by the throat and said, "I brought you into this world; I can take you out of it. After this threat, the girl squeezed out of her mother's grip and

jumped out her window to escape her mother and in result, broke her leg. Quindlen uses this story as an example of her idea of parent-child sex talks. This example is not logical. The reason the girl was trying to escape her mother in the first place is because she feared for her life, so it would make no sense for her to turn around and risk her life by jumping out of the window. Again, this source is not credible. The typical parent approaches this subject in a very sensitive matter and avoids attacking their child.

Due to the fact that her source is not credible and her example is too extreme, Quindlen's argument is flawed and ineffective. Quindlen explains the problems she has with ABC Network because they have removed the commercials about condoms during primetime television. ABC complained that condoms were too inappropriate for family-oriented television, when in fact, the condom commercials were mild and informative. Quindlen provides an analogy between condom commercials and the primetime television show Roseanne. She states that the show is much more candid about sexual activity than the condom commercials.

Roseanne shows the indiscrete sexual relationship between her and her husband. Roseanne's sister, Jackie, is known on the show for having one night stands and being openly lesbian. Quindlen claims that ABC is being hypocritical in the sense that they are showing Roseanne on the, so-called, family-oriented network during primetime, but refuses to show mild condom commercials. Quindlen makes an efficient argument by stating that children are left more curious about sex after watching Roseanne than they would be after seeing a condom commercial.

This analogy does support and strengthen her argument in her article. In her article, Quindlen shows a persona of superiority and sarcasm. She clearly proves in the first paragraph that she feels the reader is ignorant and that she, being superior, must teach the reader the correct way to think. Quindlen is only weakening her argument by implying that her readers need to be taught what to think. Quindlen is showing her sarcasm by say things, such as “ Don’t you just love those mother-daughter sex talks? ” not only to entertain readers, but to also entertain herself.

Her persona comes across as arrogant when she uses sarcasm in certain situations. For example, a girl throwing herself out of a window should be a tragic event, but Quindlen is sarcastic about it which makes it seem as though she is not taking it seriously. Sarcasm, used correctly, can be effective, but in this case, it was facetious. When talking about serious matters such as sexually transmitted diseases and condoms, readers are stuck questioning Quindlen’s egocentric persona instead of focusing on the matter at hand.

In her New York Times article, “ A Pyrrhic Victory,” Anna Quindlen takes her stand on condom distribution in high schools throughout the United States. She claims that we are harming students by not distributing condoms in schools, and that it shouldn’t be the parents’ responsibility because they are too ignorant to handle the situation. Her attempt to persuade the reader of her beliefs is flawed and ineffective. She starts the article by providing a subject position that creates emotions within the reader against Quindlen personally. Her statistics from Dr.

Cohall are incomplete and her reference to the girl in the story involves a source that is not credible. On the other hand, she does provide a strong analogy about Roseanne and condom commercials, but it is not strong enough to compensate for the rest of the weaknesses throughout the article. Finally, Quindlen's persona of sarcasm and superiority harms her argument by creating questions and doubt within the reader. Quindlen fails to convince readers that condom distribution is essential, and irritates the reader by pointing out their incompetence.