

Mr. Slater

W131 Comp/H

26 September 2012

Yell for Awareness In a Diverse Society

The Center of Disease and Control estimates that there are 1.2 million people living with HIV infection in the United States today. More than half a million, in the United States, have died since the epidemic started (“HIV in the United States: At a Glance”). On August 19, 1992 in Houston, TX, Mary Fisher was looking forward to the future health of the nation, when she stepped up onto the podium at the Republican National Convention. Realizing that she might not survive her HIV positive condition, she spoke out concerning the silence of the Republican Party’s stance on AIDS awareness, in an attempt to prevent more harm. In order to convince her audience how important her cause is she drove home the points: that no one is safe, that silence hurts and that the epidemic is rapidly spreading worldwide. In “A whisper of AIDs”, Mary Fisher appears before the assembly of Republicans and intentionally uses many literary approaches to turn the whispers of AIDS into a yell for awareness.

By using a video before her speech, Mary Fisher automatically makes the audience connect to her story and listen. Her video contains the shortened version of how she contracted AIDS and many pictures of her family. The audience was visibly moved by the involvement of her family and the visual life struggle that it portrays. The pre-speech video sets the mood to somber and sympathetic, which allows Mrs. Fisher start proving her point right away. It encourages people to make a swift connection and have compassion towards the speaker by setting up the background and context before the speech. Two other things that Fisher uses are

her appearance and personal experience to capture the audience's attention before she even utters a word.

Fisher's personal experience and appearance gives her credibility and makes the audience more sympathetic towards her and her message. The audience sees a white, blonde, high-class mother on the stage and realizes she does not match the typical stereotypes that society puts on HIV positive people: gay, African and/or promiscuous.

"I am one with a black infant struggling with tubes in a Philadelphia hospital... I am one with the lonely gay man sheltering a flickering candle from the cold wind of his family's rejection." (Fisher)

By breaking that stereotype, Mary Fisher opens up the door to an 'if this happened to her, then it can happen to anyone' situation, which makes people reconsider their feelings towards a certain subject. She wore a blue and white simple, conservative dress. Blue evokes stable and calm, conservative feelings and aids in easy communication, while white is meant to depict a pure and wholesome vibe. Her dress was chosen to portray Mrs. Fisher as a sweet, conservative, republican, common mother. She also wore a ribbon, outwardly displaying her AID's awareness support. Her positive image greatly appealed to the predominantly conservative, Christian audience, therefore opening a door for them to listen intently and respect her as a person. By capturing the audience's attention with her video, experience and appearance, she opened their ears to hear her message intended for them and their children.

Children, the audience's and her own, are referenced quite a bit in order to make the listeners realize that AID's affects everyone and to cut deep into their hearts. Fisher plays on an extremely strong emotion, the love for a child, in order to make her point matter more to people. "If you do not see this killer stalking your children, look again" and "it is our task to seek safety

for our children, not in quite denial, but in effective action” are two effective, emotional phrases that orated in the speech (Fisher). By illustrating that AID’s will reach out and affect their children, Fisher sufficiently engages the audience on a deeper, personal level. These phrases pack a punch to her point that AID’s awareness is important for future generations to continue, encouraging the audience to act. Mary Fisher addresses her own children by saying:

“To my children, I make this pledge: I will not give in, Zachary, because I draw my courage from you. Your silly giggle gives me hope; your gentle prayers give me strength; and you, my child, give me the reason to say to America, "You are at risk." And I will not rest, Max, until I have done all I can to make your world safe. I will seek a place where intimacy is not the prelude to suffering. I will not hurry to leave you, my children, but when I go, I pray that you will not suffer shame on my account.” (Fisher)

In this public pledge, Fisher makes it clear that she is spreading awareness for her children and it illustrates the strong bound between her and her child. It is an emotional appeal to the audience portraying that she is just a mother scared for her children and expressing that they should be also. By her example, she is trying to push the point that everyone needs to increase the noise of AIDS to make the entire nation aware of the disease and what it does to families. This method of using children to appeal to the audience and create a personal response greatly affects the success and rhetoric of her speech.

In “A whisper of AIDs”, Fisher utilizes comparisons to redirect the audience’s emotions concerning a topic to the issue of AIDS awareness. She uses her dad’s favorite quote from Pastor Niemoellor, sharing his personal experience of ignoring the holocaust while it was occurring. “They came after the Jews, and I was not a Jew, so, I did not protest. They came after the trade unionists, and I was not a trade unionist, so, I did not protest ... Then they came after me, and

there was no one left to protest” (Fisher). This illustrates to the audience that if they ignore HIV and AIDS and later something is affecting them, then other people will turn their heads and avert their eyes. The quote makes the audience personally accountable by saying if people do not act, the tragedy will greatly increase in magnitude. By comparing the holocaust to the HIV epidemic, all of the negative and horrific feelings that go along with the dark time in WWII are transferred to the present AIDS health crisis. This method makes the audience feel guilty and rouses their emotions into action. Another comparison that Fisher employs is “But despite science and research... despite good intentions and bold initiatives, campaign slogans, and hopeful promises, it is -- despite it all -- the epidemic which is winning tonight (Fisher). The comparison to the epidemic and election race makes it seem that the epidemic is not getting enough attention therefore it is ‘winning’ in a negative way. She uses it to say there is no one there to stop the disease from charging through the American people, it has already won. Watching the Convention, people are thinking about the election and the candidates; however, this statement wakes them up to a potential threat that deserves the same amount of attention as the election of the next president of the United States. Fisher even indicates the idea of making AIDS awareness a part of political platforms and the election itself to the Convention. Mainly, she intended to reflect the importance of the election to the cause of awareness. Fisher brilliantly uses these comparisons to make the listeners and viewers realize that AIDS is an extreme problem and it deserves the publicity of a national election, which provokes people to the idea of the importance of spreading awareness to others.

Two more extremely important devices that go hand in hand to emphasize Fisher’s point are repetition and anaphora. Mrs. Fisher uses the repetition of words and phrases to solidify her ideas and points into the mind of the audience. One of the most repeated phrases is “you are at

risk” (Fisher). By reusing this phrase repeatedly, she emphasizes the idea that HIV can affect anyone at any time. Her idea is supported by the fact that she was not at risk for being HIV positive, therefore anyone and everyone is at risk. She is highlighting the notion that people can no longer hide behind stereotypes and statistics because the entire world is in the equation now. In order to show the audience that everyone is in jeopardy, Fisher uses a supportive phrase first then says, “you are at risk” (Fisher). It gives the audience the shock and jolt of fear meant to turn into action. Anaphora gives her sentences emphasis and provokes deep thought. “We have killed each other with our ignorance, our prejudice, and our silence,” emphasizes that the blame is on everyone for the tragedy of the epidemic (Fisher). By repeating ‘our’, Fisher places blame on the entire nation for remaining silent, which is a call for the entire audience to promote AIDS awareness. Fisher speaks with repetition and anaphora in order to dramatize her points to the audience.

“I want your attention, not your applause” (Fisher). Mary Fisher was in Texas on August 19, 1992 for the sole purpose of convincing people to stand up for awareness, which she does through great and powerful rhetoric devices. She appeals to the audiences emotions of fear, love and determination by pushing them to the limit with her personal experiences and examples. Her strong opinions, like an imaginary bee, sting the hearts and minds of the audience to make them realize that the Republican Party needs to stand up and throw “the shroud of silence” into the trash can (Fisher). Fisher’s powerful language and her experience developed the whisper into a combined and serious roar for awareness.

Works Cited

Fisher, Mary. "A Whisper of AIDS." *American Rhetoric: Top 100 Speeches*. Michael E.

Eidenmuller, 19 Aug. 1992. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.

"HIV in the United States: At a Glance." *cdc.gov*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

14 Mar. 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2012.