

ENGL310

Short Rhetorical Analysis One

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In her 1992 speech “A Whisper of AIDS”, Mary Fisher understands the complexity and prejudice surrounding AIDS and those who have contracted it. She is speaking to a conflicting audience divided by their political party and, somehow, must unite them and those listening at home against this growing epidemic. Social activists and politicians today face a similar challenge when persuading the American people; they would do good to understand Fisher’s successful rhetoric. Overall, Fisher is able to make this impossible disease seem a simple and common threat to her audience by establishing AIDS’s own credibility as a disease through logical arguments, acknowledging that it can and will affect the common American family through emotional arguments, and finally formatting her style and delivery to allow for the easiest listening under her speech’s constraints.

The first impossible task Fisher faces is persuading her audience that AIDS is a growing disease that requires the efforts of her audience. Fisher takes a logical approach to this task by first providing staggering statistics to support the alarming growth rate of AIDS. The utilization of “Two hundred-thousand”, “a million more”, “forty million, sixty million, or a hundred million” in back to back sentences in the third paragraph creates a sense of growing urgency with the disease. Additionally, Fisher connects the AIDS epidemic to a historical quote taken from the Holocaust in paragraph eleven. This connection to a historical event that caused such a lasting and horrible impact brings a realistic alarm to Fisher’s cause. Using growing statistics and a connection to a horrible historical event, Fisher successfully persuades her audience that this growing problem has credibility to be a serious and legitimate threat to America.

Now that Fisher has proven the AIDS epidemic is a threat to America, she must prove *all* of America will be affected, not just those commonly associated with the disease. Fisher does this by first excluding any narrative of AIDS being a divided or politically charged subject. Fisher knows that her audience is both Democratic and Republican, so she avoids specifically calling on either party. While she does use a call to action of political parties, she does not blame this rising epidemic on the lack of political action by one specific political party. Instead, she claims it is due to lack of political action by everyone, regardless of political affiliation. This is the first step that Fisher takes in uniting her vast audience.

From here, Fisher then uses distinct arguments to push her audience's emotions. Most notably, she uses the phrases "every segment of American society", "Are you human?", and "It does not care whether you are Democrat or Republican. It does not care whether you are black or white, male or female, gay or straight, young or old." These are short and specific phrases that address the audience's basic identities and are guaranteed to relate to each American. By doing this, Fisher is directly involving each American in her call to action by uniting them against a common evil that does not care about your identity. Through her use of carefully formulated and placed emotional arguments and her exclusion of polarizing discussion, Fisher successfully shows her vast audience that AIDS is a common threat to *all* Americans.

Fisher's last task is to make this "present danger" of AIDS seem as though the American people are able to act against it. Throughout her speech, Fisher acknowledges the AIDS epidemic is a larger-than-life issue that requires immediate attention. While most audiences may be too shocked and scared after learning about it to act against it, Fisher strategically styles her speech to combat against this audience unwillingness. Fisher noticeably uses short and succinct syntax coupled with a calm delivery (as explained in the preface) to allow adequate time for her audience to properly process her message. Additionally, Fisher formulates her speech with constant phrase coupling and repetition. She often gives

three examples in a row; “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 not at risk.” This consistent coupling and repetition of phrases allows her audience to more easily process the vast amount of emotion and information she provides. Because Fisher knew her audience would have listening barriers, she styles and delivers her speech in a way that allows for the audience to better process her message.

Mary Fisher knew she was speaking to a vast and divided audience about a topic in which people already had their polarizing biases. However, Fisher combats her constraints by using logical arguments to establish AIDS’s credibility as an epidemic, acknowledging that it can and will affect all Americans, and formatting her style and delivery to allow for the easiest listening under her constraints. Mary Fisher’s “A Whisper of AIDS” speech is an example for future social activists and politicians to follow, especially in today’s society when we are often faced with a politically charged and divided audience.