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Rhetorical Analysis of Emma Watson’s Speech  
‘Gender Equality is Your Issue Too’

Gender inequality has been a persistent issue all over the world for centuries. Although many nations have made great strides to close the gender gap by allowing women to work in men dominated fields and putting an end to belittling stereotypes, gender inequality is still a current societal concern. Emma Watson in her call to action speech “Gender equality is your issue too” makes a note about how we can put an end to gender disparity. This informative speech takes place in the United Nations Headquarters in New York as a special event for the HeForShe campaign. With the help of Watson and other world renounced influencers, gender inequality could be deemed a social issue of the past.

Watson, an accomplished actress, humanitarian, and recent graduate from Brown University was appointed in July 2014 as a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for the ‘HeForShe’ campaign. The inspiring young woman strives to dedicate her efforts towards the empowerment of young women and will serve as an advocate for UN Women’s HeForShe campaign in promoting gender equality. (UN Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson, n.d.).

UN Women is the United Nations’ entity dedicated to setting global standards to achieve gender equality. This organization works hard to accomplish this international goal by partnering with governments and civil societies to design laws, policies, programs, and services that are needed to ensure the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. “No country in the world can yet say they have achieved gender equality” (Watson, 2014). This is an unfortunate statement because, although it is 2019 and women are treated more equal than they ever have before, no country in the whole world can say they have fully accepted the idea that women should be treated the same as men. The United States of America, the most powerful country on Earth, should be more socially developed in this aspect than it currently is.

Although the global gender gap has decreased in the past few decades, it has done so at a glacial pace. Iceland, Norway, and Finland currently have the smallest gender gaps compared to every other country in the world according to the World Economic Forum (WEF). The World Economic Forum conducts an annual Global Gender Gap report on almost all 150 countries on their gender equality. They conduct this report and score each country with a range of criteria including wage equality, the number of women in parliament, and life expectancy for both sexes. A rating of 0.0 is considered the lowest and 1.0 being the highest score possible. Iceland received a score of 0.878 on the Gender Equality Index. Surprisingly, The United States does not even place within the top 20 countries for best gender equality as we received a score of 0.718. Although this is not a bad score per se, it could definitely be improved.

Iceland and its Nordic cousins have been considered some of the most advanced countries for gender equality for a few decades now. But how do they achieve this? Many believe these traits date back to Icelandic Viking times, where the men were away at sea, so the women undertook traditionally male roles. Today, Iceland is known for its equal pay policies, female presence in government, and maternity/ paternity family-friendly policies. Although Iceland has figured out gender equality more so than other nations, they have not reached 100% equality. These sociological advancements are not foreign concepts; they are ideas that could undeniably be applied in American cultures.

Gender inequality is not explicitly aimed at women; it is a concept that can be extended to men as well. While some listeners may interpret her speech as sexist or strictly feminist, Watson encourages men to participate in creating a world where gender equality is the norm. Men are also stigmatized as well. Whether it be through how they express their emotions, their physical appearance, or even their career choices, males often face social stigmas too. “Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong… It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as two opposing sets of ideals” said Watson (Watson, 2014). It is important to note that this is not a one-sided argument; it is a social problem that affects both sexes. Watson believes that to overcome inequality, both men and women need to fight for this right.

In her speech, Emma Watson uses a few Aristotelians appeals to convey her message. The use of logic and reason with a declaration such as this one is imperative. It is essential to give facts and statistics to support your claims. Although Watson does not provide much data, she states “if we do nothing it will take 75 years, or for me to be nearly a hundred before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work. 15.5 million girls will be married in the next 16 years as children. And at current rates, it won’t be until 2086 before all rural African girls will be able to receive a secondary education” (Watson, 2014). This relevant quote appeals to the listener because it conveys the significance of this pressing subject. It also discusses how gender inequality is prevalent in other countries and impacts young women’ education else ware.

In order to make a change in the world, one of the most important things to consider is how you are going to ‘hook’ your audience to accept your idea. Watson’s speech took a primarily pathos direction to convince her listeners to make a difference. In her speech, she points out moments in her life where the young men and women around her began to conform to gender-based assumptions. She knew from a young age that she was a feminist, but this label did not come easily. Watson also talks about how individuals, no matter your gender, should be able to express themselves freely without feeling belittled. Her invitation to step forward and voice your opinion is moving and could persuade people to make a difference.

Emma Watson, as I mentioned earlier, was appointed as a UN Goodwill Ambassador in 2014. Her charismatic character, humanitarian efforts, and passion for making a change in the world give her credibility to become an advocate on this subject. Her beliefs and ideas of feminism since a very young age drive her to make a difference in the world. She is modest in her speech by saying she is unsure how much credibility she really has, but these efforts, along with being a recognizable figurehead, could be very influential especially to young women.

It is essential to analyze the text through these concepts to fully understand what point the author was trying to convey. In this case, the purpose of Emma Watson’s speech for gender equality was to convince and persuade people to make a change. She did so with the usage of Aristotle’s logos, pathos, and ethos appeals. These concepts touch upon the different points of interest within this speech and give the reader a better understanding of the subject at hand.

Although Watson provides an influential pathos appeal to the audience, I believe her speech could have been much stronger with more information in the logos appeal. Providing more data about specific nations’ gender equality (or lack thereof), statistics on how civilizations have been helped with this program already, or even estimates of what the future could hold would have been beneficial to support her claims.

Another logical strategy that was used in this persuasive speech was the use of fallacies. One particular fallacy that Watson used was hasty generalization. A hasty generalization is when an inference is drawn from insufficient evidence. For example, in her speech, Watson said “We don’t often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes, but I can see that that they are and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence. If men don’t have to be aggressive in order to be accepted women won’t feel compelled to be submissive. If men don’t have to control, women won’t have to be controlled” (Watson, 2014). Although it may be a great idea, it is drawn from this insufficient evidence and may not have any truth behind it. Again, I believe this speech would have been a lot stronger had Watson incorporated facts and statistics to support her claims.

Gender equality for men and women worldwide is critical. Emma Watson’s symposium on how to make a difference could prove to be beneficial for anyone who watches or listens to her speech. Although the United States has come a long way to treat women as equal counterparts, it is still not enough. If you believe in equality, you could be the change we need. This call to action speech by this encouraging and influential feminist is very inspiring and offers a brighter look to the future of equality for all.

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