

## The Unrehearsed Rhetoric of AOC

Most well-known speeches are rehearsed numerous times, practice in front of others, and then given to the audience. However, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez delivered a powerful speech in July addressing the “apology” that was given by her colleague Representative Ted Yoho after he verbally attacked her on the steps of Congress. Following the speech, Representative Ocasio-Cortez shared with the public that she did not practice or even write a speech at all, she simply wrote broad topics down in her notebook. Kuypers and King wrote “it also involves a larger conception in that it takes into consideration the impact symbols have on receivers, even if unintended” (ch. 2, pg. 11). Narrowing in on the idea that symbols can have an impact on the audience even when that impact is not necessarily intended is why I chose Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s response to the GOP congressman because of how powerful her speech without writing it out beforehand.

Toward the beginning of her speech, she addresses who this speech is representing which would be every woman in this country because “all of us have had to deal with this in some form, some way, some shape, at some points in our lives” (YouTube: *AOC responds to GOP congressman in fiery speech*, 1:40) which creates a sense of unity among the female audience because it blurs the line between class differences, race, etc. and creates a picture of similarity; us vs them dynamic. By addressing the female audience and relating to them, it is a way to help the audience identify with the speaker sometimes without the audience being aware of it happening, which can ultimately help persuade them (Kuypers and King, ch. 2, pg. 16). To further build the trust between herself and the audience, creating credibility and relatability, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez lists her past experiences that are similar to the average New Yorker or even American. This list includes her job as a server, riding subways, and walking down the streets in New York where she encountered a similar sexist language. A critic may think about why bringing up her past encounters before her position in Congress would be useful for this specific speech addressing her interaction with Yoho. Without explicitly saying it, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is grounding her speech in feminist ideology by sharing her personal experience and beliefs on an issue that directly correlates with a social movement fighting for equality between men and women. Identifying with the feminist movement, explicitly or implicitly, I found that it helped support a lot of the claims being made by the movement. Including when Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said in her speech that these offensive and oppressive statements being made toward women are happening even in Congress, further proves the idea that sexism and the oppression of women are happening systemically.

Addressing the societal impact on the culture of treating women, puts into perspective how male-dominated the current state of society still is. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez specifically addresses the Republican party and how she has been treated by members of that party. Specifically, the President of the United States has called her names and treated her with disrespect. This was interesting because she began her speech very broadly, addressing all women, grabbing the attention of women who may not identify with her specific politics or political party. However, after making her argument on all women have most likely experienced sexism or derogatory commentary from males, she points directly at a group of people that are doing this. This can be seen as a persuasive tactic because she first addressed all women and made her argument then if they have been persuaded, they may second guess the

intentions of some male republicans that are in Congress or running for office or at least spark curiosity to look into this. Then to conclude the speech she addresses the daughters and wives of the men that make these comments. Bringing the issue in the light of someone's family rather than a distant politician that you most likely have never encountered in person, brings an intimacy to the speech because it becomes more personal. Overall, the speech reached millions of people and encouraged many women despite their political preferences. This success can be attributed to her persuasive rhetoric and ability to relate to the audience.

#### Work Cited:

Jim A. Kuypers, Ed. Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action, 2nd Ed

“AOC responds to GOP congressman in fiery speech”, YouTube, Uploaded by ABC News, 23 July 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1sEEhdEhCQ>