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# HIV/AIDS: Awareness is essential

## Speaker wows crowd with reality of disease

**Alexia Harris**

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"We are HIV positive, and sometimes I cry."

Dressed in all black with black tape covering her mouth as she stared at the audience, students watched Sheryl Lee Ralph experience dealing with HIV/AIDS on stage last night in the Kiva.

Ralph does not have the virus, but performed a one-woman show on how the disease affects the lives of African-American women.

"Sometimes I Cry: The Loves, Lives, and Losses of Women Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS," told the life struggles of six women all affected by the virus or disease who come from different backgrounds and different beliefs systems.

The Kent State chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Epsilon Mu Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta co-sponsored the program in hope that students will spread the word and get tested, said Preston Mitchum, vice president of Kent State's NAACP chapter.

"Sex is more than a couple of pleasurable minutes," Mitchum said. "Guys need to wear condoms and practice safe sex."

Mitchum said the NAACP felt this program was important because the epidemic is affecting the black race at climbing numbers.

During her performance, Ralph said right now is an ugly time in America.

"I remember when (AIDS) was called GRID, or gay related immune-deficiency disease," she said. "Then gay became human."

Ralph told the audience that most people who have HIV - or "the virus" - do not know it until it has broke down their immune system and becomes AIDS, "the disease."

She told stories based upon real women, but fictionalized them to protect their identities.

One of the women, a 24-year-old who Ralph referred to as "Sexaholic," was a video vixen and did not want people to confuse her with being a "hoe."

"I love sex," Ralph said while impersonating the video vixen. "I love to say it, I love to think about it and I love to spell it."

She said sex was her drug and could improve peoples' outlook on life.

"Sex can even improve you skin," she added. "Talk about Proactive!"

"Sexaholic" never told anybody about her HIV status because she didn't know she had it and only got tested to get free tickets to a concert.

After her test came back positive, she bought a gun and tried to kill herself. The gun did not shoot until after she removed it from her mouth, grazing her face instead.

"I now have a permanent scar to remind me of what I almost did that day," she said.

I may be HIV positive, but I still want people to love me, she said.

Ralph said when rapper Eazy-E was in the hospital fighting the virus before he died, he said: "I want my friends and family to know that I don't know how I got the disease, but this AIDS thing is very real and does not discriminate."

Sasha Parker, president of Black United Students and senior magazine journalism major, said she learned a lot from Ralph.

"I learned that the struggle of AIDS is different for each person," she said. "But it's a very emotional process not only for the person affected, but everyone in their lives."

After performing, Ralph told the audience that every time she performs the piece she prays she will reach at least one person and he or she will find their voice.

"I hope you decide to speak up for your sisters, aunties, mothers and motivators," Ralph said. "Speak up for the ones who don't realize they need to be spoken for."

Parker said she will tell someone who could not attend what she learned.

"Hopefully, they will pass that information to someone else," she said.

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