

Mia-Myline Medina
Old Dominion University
English 211/ CRN 11948
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BAL 1005/1013C

For Those Who Think They Are Safe, Think Again.

Nostalgia for the 1980's often highlights the fashion, music, or movies that truly made the era memorable- such as bold prints, cassette tapes, and the classic film, "Back to the Future". One aspect of the 1980's is not simply remembered for what it was because it is still prevalent to this day. In 1981, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recognized the AIDS epidemic that was going on in the United States (The 80's Timeline, para. 2). The disease ran rampant across the nation for years to come while society so desperately clung to the idea that they were safe from contracting it due to misguided prejudicial reports: the disease is spread through homosexual encounters; the disease is spread through drug abusers. This was not and is not the case. For loving mother and wife, Mary Fisher, this information is far from the truth. Fisher contracted the disease from her husband, Brian Campbell, in 1991 (Reed, para. 10). Unlike so many around her suffering with the same fatal illness, she decided that she would not go quietly into the night. Instead, she decided to take a stand and raise awareness of the auto-immune disease. Mary Fisher, in her impassioned speech at the Republican National Convention Address, had a profound impact on the views that society has towards AIDS by employing the use of repetition and antithesis to emphasize the realities surrounding the disease. Rhetorical use aids Fisher's impact on a generation of people who would not listen.

When an idea is challenged with the facts of its counterpart, the wall that divides both ends of the situation begins to break down, thus shedding light on a topic that may otherwise be

unclear. What Fisher does in her speech that breaks down the wall so effortlessly is her consistent use of antithesis to emphasize fact over fiction. She holds a misconception in front of the viewer in one hand and reveals the truth about that idea in the other. In a powerful moment, Fisher reveals the ugly truth about AIDS that the public refused to accept, “[AIDS] does not care whether you are Democrat or Republican; it does not ask whether you are black or white, male or female, gay or straight, young or old” (Fisher, para. 3). Placing opposites side by side and expressing that none of these characteristics matter in regard to contracting the disease, Fisher is able to tear away the veil of ignorance laying over a fact that is so detrimental to protecting potential victims of AIDS by clarifying that the disease travels indiscriminately. Antithesis is sprinkled heavily into the remainder of the speech as she declares that she may be a wife, a mother, a white woman, and an individual with unconditional family support, but she is one with the African Americans, with the homosexuals, with the children, and with the abandoned (Fisher, para. 4). She links herself to these people not through physical or social characteristics, but through situational characteristics. Her claim opens the minds of the public to the fact that, through every difference imaginable, not a single individual could say that they are completely safe from contracting this disease. Emphasis is not only displayed by the use of antithesis, but also by the use of repetition throughout the entirety of her speech.

In order to truly express the importance of the information relayed to the audience, Fisher repeats a specific word or phrase that resonates with her listeners. The recurrence of the words “because I” in her insightful statement, “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,” allows the listeners to understand the inaccuracy of a damaged cause-and-effect mentality (Fisher, para. 9). The repetitive sentence structure is an effective technique that aids in highlighting the fact

that society strongly stood by the false idea that they were safe and untouchable by AIDS because they did not fit into the checklist criteria of a potential victim. The fact of the matter is, as thoroughly explained by Fisher, there is no criteria for a potential victim. Everyone is at risk. In fact, the only time she distinguishes between two separate groups of people is when she points out individual suffering, “You are HIV positive, but dare not say it. You have lost loved ones, but you dare not whisper the word AIDS. You weep silently. You grieve alone” (Fisher, para. 15). The separation is brief, however, and only stands as a preamble to her claim that it is “we” who should be ashamed; We the ignorant, we the prejudice, and we “who have taught you to live in fear” (Fisher, para. 15). Repeating the word “you” in juxtaposition to the word “we” shifts the responsibility of having shame from the victims to the persecutors. This shift is essential for all who have been effected by AIDS to hear for the reason that it encourages those suffering to not suffer in silence and to stand up for the truth to be spread to every man, woman, and child.

Mary Fisher may not have been able to escape the harsh fate of AIDS due to her own lack of knowledge, but she refused to allow that to be the case for future generations. She took the stand, before everyone in attendance at the Republican Convention and all who were listening at home, to raise awareness that ignorance and misinformation about AIDS is a danger to society. Fisher successfully relayed her most important information through the use of antithesis and anaphora- formatting her words in melodic, sections that left a lasting impression on all who listened and made a huge impact for the AIDS community. Fisher was strong enough to fight for her cause during a time when people simply wanted to cover up the devastation, look away, and pretend it wasn’t happening. Though the disease is still being transmitted from one person to the next decades later, it is due to strong people like Mary Fisher that society is more knowledgeable

about the situations that lead to AIDS. These people tell the world: For those who think they are safe, think again.

Works Cited

Fisher, Mary. "Mary Fisher 1992 Republican National Convention Address." *American Rhetoric Top 100 Speeches*, 19 Aug. 1992.

Reed, Susan. "At Peace with the Past – Vol. 45 No. 5." *PEOPLE.com*, Time Inc, 5 Feb. 1996.

"The 80s Timeline." *National Geographic*, Chook Digital Agency, 10 Apr. 2013.