

Taking the Bi out of Invisibility: Advocating for the Bisexual Community Through Consciousness-Raising

Madeleine Field

Department of Communication Studies, College of Fine Arts and Communication, Texas State University

Background

The Speech

Misty Gedlinske's "Bisexuality: The Invisible Letter B" (2019) is an empowering speech that legitimizes the bisexual experience and raises awareness of the injustices faced by bisexual individuals. She discusses her experiences as a bisexual woman and provides scientific research highlighting the challenges faced by the bisexual community, both of which are vitally important for the progression of bisexual and LGBTQ+ advocacy as a whole.

About TED Talks

The TED talk platform offers a unique, modernized way of engaging with others and allows for people to find communities of like-minded people who share similar interests. TED talks also allow for information to circulate in an accessible manner and can enable individuals to learn more about their identity or the identities of others.

About Rhetorical Advocacy

A rhetorical analysis can provide a deeper insight into the historical, contextual, and persuasive elements surrounding a text or other forms of creative work. Rhetorical advocacy utilizes language and persuasion to either construct or deconstruct viewpoints and societal norms.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to further advocate for the bisexual identity and analyze how communities and advocacy groups can form through a digital medium. Given that the bisexual community is often marginalized and harshly criticized in both heterosexual and queer spaces, it is imperative to educate the general public on these experiences and help deconstruct these beliefs that exist in our culture.

Research Goals

The goals of this study were to analyze Gedlinske's speech through the rhetorical lens of consciousness-raising and to determine how advocacy functions in the digital age we live in today.

Method

Consciousness-Raising

The theoretical framework used to analyze this text is consciousness-raising, which involves the practice of using personal experience and/or knowledge to bring awareness to an oppressed group (Sowards & Renegar, 2004) so that they can critically evaluate their perspectives and develop arguments and strategies for education, resistance, and liberation (Dubriwny, 2005).

Ties to Second and Third Wave Feminism

While consciousness-raising was not invented by feminists, the practice was heavily utilized in the second and third wave to connect with other women. This provided women with the agency they needed to form a resistance and enact change (Dubriwny, 2005; Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

Findings

Bisexual Research

- Bisexual people are often considered too queer for straight spaces, and not queer enough for queer spaces.
- Bisexual people are often mislabeled as gay, lesbian, or straight in medical research which can have significant health consequences (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012).
- Bisexual people are less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to healthcare professionals (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012).
- Bisexual women face partner violence at 30% higher rates than lesbian or straight women do (Whitfield et al., 2021).
- Bisexual people experience thoughts or attempts of suicide at significantly higher rates than gay, lesbian, and straight people and are at a greater risk for developing substance abuse issues (Mereish, 2017).
- Bisexual people deal with distrust within the LGBTQ+ community and among heterosexual people, which contributes to feelings of isolation and loneliness (See & Hunt, 2011).

Consciousness-Raising

- This form of activism can help reduce feelings of isolation by showing bisexual people that they are not alone in this experience and that there is nothing wrong with their sexual orientation.
- Consciousness-raising can help reduce the rates of depression, substance abuse, and anxiety that bisexual people experience at higher rates than other sexual identities (Gledlinske, 2019; Mereish, 2017).
- Consciousness-raising can also help change the inadequate attention they receive both in medical literature and practice (Charron et al., 2014; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012).
- Due to the accessibility of technology, consciousness-raising can be even more effective in society today as information is not limited to those who hear it first-hand.

Social Implications

Important to LGBTQ+ Issues

- Consciousness-raising can create a space for bisexual people to share their personal experiences and form a community that validates and supports them.
- Consciousness-raising can encourage bisexual people to disclose their sexual identities to healthcare professionals, which will enable them to receive adequate and personalized medical attention (Charron et al., 2014; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012).
- Consciousness-raising can assist in changing the insufficient medical research on bisexual people, (Charron et al., 2014; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012).
- Consciousness-raising can help individuals challenge the structures that oppress them; in this case, the oppressor is the puritanical, conservative, sexist, and patriarchal society that heavily rely on the harsh, inflexible rules of marriage, family, and gender roles (Mathers et al., 2018).

Value of Study

By engaging in the collective rhetorical practice of consciousness-raising, the bisexual identity will have the ability to be just as "visible" as other sexual identities, thereby taking the "bi" out of invisibility.

By bringing awareness to the struggles bisexual people experience and providing a community of people who recognize and validate their identity, bisexual people may gain more self-acceptance and feel more comfortable sharing their sexual identity with their friends, partners, and health care professionals.

Reference



TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

The rising STAR of Texas

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM