Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application

Fourth Edition

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Chapter 28
Muted Group Theory

Chapter Overview

- MGT at a Glance

- Introduction

- Origins of MGT

- Makeup of Muted Groups

- Assumptions of MGT

- Process of Silencing

- Strategies of Resistance

- Integration and Critique

MGT at a Glance

- Language serves its creators better than those in other, muted groups
- Experiences of the creators are named clearly in language
- Muted groups appear less articulate
- Muted groups create their own language to compensate

Introduction

- Language systems influence and limit ability to represent experiences

- Language is limited in its ability to serve all members equally

- MGT questions status quo and provides solutions

Origins of Muted Group Theory

- Theory originators are Edwin & Shirley Ardener (1975)
  - Groups at the top of a social hierarchy determine the communication system
  - Women's experiences were studied by talking to men

Origins of Muted Group Theory

- Ardener illustrated the process of muting
  - Dominant group's language is a result of their worldview and experiences
  - Muted group translates into the dominant group's language
  - Articulations of the muted group are broken and less clear

Origins of Muted Group Theory

- The English language names concepts important to men, not women (Taylor & Hardman, 2000)

- Female nurses have difficulty assuming authority due to stereotypes (Callan, 1978)

- Differences in language experiences of mothers giving birth (Sterk, 1999)

Makeup of Muted Groups

- Most research focuses on females as a muted group

- Application to any nondominant group

- Distinction between sex and gender

Assumptions of MGT

- Gender-based differences in perception
    - Men and women have different experiences
    - Rooted in the division of labor
    - Men and women perceive the world differently
    - Second shift

Assumptions of MGT

- Dominance of men's systems of perception
  - Men dominate politics
  - Men's systems of perception are dominant
  - Women's experiences are unnamed or difficult to express

Assumptions of MGT

- Women's translation processes
  - To participate in society, women transform their models to the male system of expression
  - Storytelling
  - "Sexual harassment" and "date rape"

The Process of Silencing

- Ridicule
- Ritual
- Control
  - Men as Gatekeepers
- Harassment

Strategies of Resistance

- Strategies to change the status quo
  - Name the strategies of silencing
  - Reclaim, elevate, and celebrate "trivial" discourse
  - Create a more representative language

Integration

- Communication traditions
  - Semiotic
  - Critical

- Communication context
  - Cultural

- Approach to knowing
  - Critical

Evaluating MGT

- Utility
  - Relies on essentialism
  - Exaggerates women's mutedness

- Heurism and Test of Time
  - Assumptions are not empirically validated and may be dated