



# **Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application**

Fourth Edition

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# Standpoint Theory

## *Chapter Overview*

- ST at a Glance
- Introduction
- Historical Foundations
- Assumptions of ST
- Key Concepts
- Relationship to Communication
- Integration and Critique

# ST at a Glance

- People occupy specific places in the social hierarchy
- Individuals view social situations from specific vantage points
- Vantage points that oppose those in power become standpoints
- All standpoints are partial

# Introduction

- Systems of power shape communication
- Basis of framework is knowledge from the everyday lives of people
- Criticizes the status quo

# Historical Foundations of ST

- Initial conceptualization is based on Hegel's discussions of the standpoints in the master-slave relationship (1807)

# Historical Foundations of ST

- Hartsock combined Hegel's ideas with Marxist Theory
  - Expanded Marx's ideas to include all human activity
  - Critiqued class structure
  - Resulting theory became Feminist Standpoint Theory
- Applied to feminist issues and interactions among other co-cultural groups

# Historical Foundations of ST

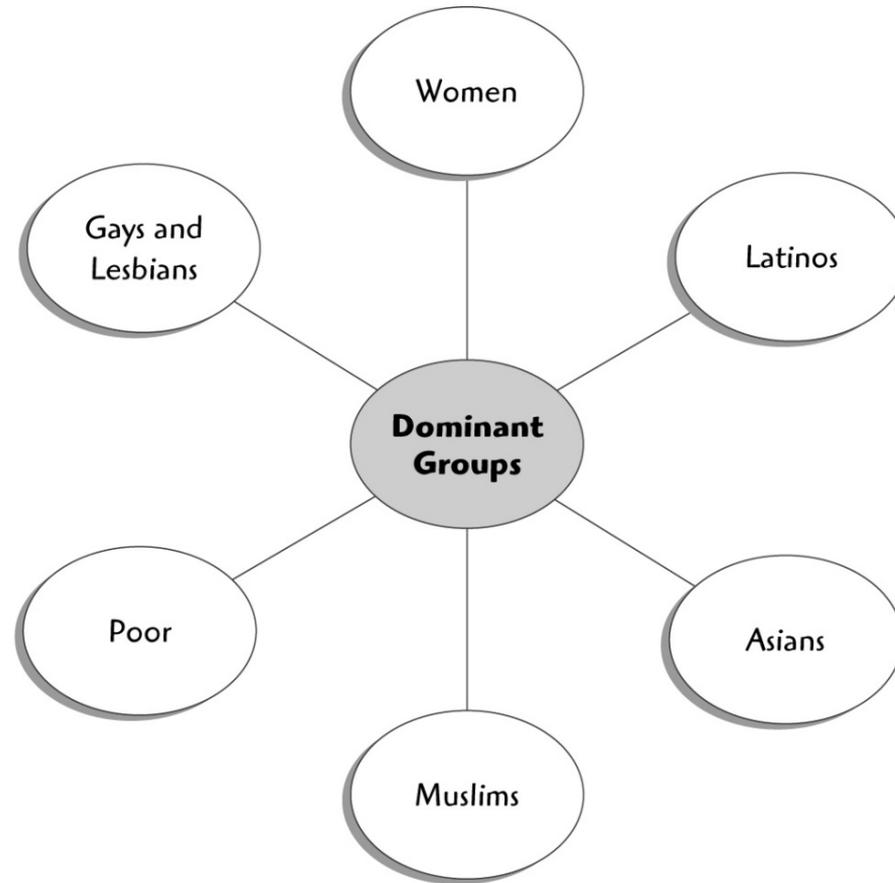


Figure 29.1 Relationships of Multiple Groups in U.S. Society

# Assumptions of ST

- Five assumptions about the nature of social life
  1. Material life structures and limits understandings of social relations
  2. When material life is structured in opposing ways for different groups, the understanding of each will be an inversion of the other

# Assumptions of ST

3. The vision of the ruling group structures the material relations in which all groups are forced to participate
4. The vision available to an oppressed group represents struggle and an achievement
5. The understanding of the oppressed makes visible the inhumanity of existing relations among groups and creates a move toward a better and more just world

# Assumptions of ST

- Four assumptions about knowledge (epistemology)
  1. No knowledge can be truly objective
  2. Women's experiences and perspectives differ from men's producing different communication styles

# Assumptions of ST

3. Examining the distinctive features of women's experiences is worthwhile
4. We can only know women's experiences by paying attention to women's own interpretations of these experiences

# Key Concepts

- **Standpoint** is an achieved position based on a social location that lends an interpretive aspect to a person's life
  - Standpoint and perspective differ
  - Standpoints are partial
  - “Outsider within”

# Key Concepts

- **Situated knowledge** is a notion that suggests that what anyone knows is grounded in context and circumstance

# Key Concepts

- **Sexual division of labor** is the allocation of work on the basis of sex
  - Domestic work viewed as unworthy of wages
  - Feminist standpoint enables women to identify domestic activities as 'work' with 'value'

# Relationship to Communication

- Standpoints and communication are reciprocal
- Communication shapes and transmits standpoints
- Those with a similar standpoint adopt similar communication styles

# Integration

- Communication tradition
  - Critical
- Communication context
  - Cultural
- Approach to knowing
  - Critical

# Evaluating Standpoint Theory

- Utility
  - Relies on essentialism in that it generalizes all members of a group as being similar
  - Organized around the dualisms of subjectivity and objectivity