

Muted Group Theory: Granting a Voice to the Voiceless Through *Wicked*

Program Notes

This DUO Interpretation has been in competition all year. When creating a thesis, the main goal was to ensure that marginalized voices would finally be heard. At the beginning of the brainstorming process, the thesis was about political polarization. However, once the script came to life and the characters had their own meaning, it was clear to see that this piece could speak for anyone. Each person that watches the performance is able to resonate with the characters because everyone has felt muted at one point in time or another. The inspiration for this piece came from one of the Graduate Assistants of Liberty University's Forensics Speech and Debate Team. Peter suggested this communication theory be the steering wheel for the piece in order for it to drive home the point that each person will be muted at some point in their lives.

Proverbs 31:8-9 guided the research for this program. Jennifer and I believe in the power of sharing other people's stories and speaking up for those who are unable to speak for themselves. Since we are both passionate about being a voice for the voiceless, we knew that this had to be the thesis for our program. Also, since we are both communication majors who love to implement communication theory, we knew the perfect way to incorporate all the things we are passionate about. We chose to utilize Muted Group Theory or MGT as a framework for how individuals in society should go about speaking up for the voiceless respectfully. Although Forensics is a secular realm, it allowed us to implicitly share the Gospel to people who had never heard the Gospel told in that way before. This program allowed us to show Jesus to others without being overbearing. Instead, we were able to point them to Proverbs 31:8-9 when questions from competitors outside of rounds occurred.

Edwin and Shirley Ardener originated MGT in the 1970s. In recent years, the theory has gained recognition in the critical realm because Cheris Kramarae chose to promote feminism within the tenets of the theory. However, for the program, we chose to implement the Ardeners' original definition of the theory. MGT from the Ardeners' perspective says that there are groups in society who are 'muted' solely based on their communication practices (CBE International, 2022). So, individuals outside of the majority must change their communication practices to fit the limited worldview that continues to silence them. If muted individuals find the courage to speak up, then they might be able to change the worldview that silenced them for so long.

There are four tenets to Muted Group Theory. First, identity and reality are socially constructed. Second, that communication is the means for that construction. Third, that members of a muted group must change their communication practices for the chance to be heard. Fourth, resistance and change are possible (CBE International, 2022). Another aspect of MGT that Edwin and Shirley Ardener mention is the term limited perspectives. Limited perspectives are what cause individuals to ignore and marginalize those outside of societal majorities. Jennifer and I realized while writing the program that Christians are a muted group in society. Having the opportunity to compete with this piece opened our eyes to see that our program may be the only glimpse of Christianity that our competitors see.

The thesis of the performance is to remind the audience that even though they may be muted in some scenarios, they may also have a microphone in other circumstances. The goal is to motivate the audience to speak up for what they believe. The performance is empowering as well because it shows the power that comes from speaking on behalf of those who do not have the ability to speak for themselves. This program is a modern take on the play *Wicked* by Winnie Holzman. The main characters in the performance are Dr. Dillamond, Elphaba, the Wizard of

Oz, and Glinda. Throughout the piece, the audience watches as Elphaba finds her voice and the courage to speak for what she is passionate about. The program follows the silencing of Dr. Dillamond and Elphaba's efforts to change the status quo, no matter what it takes. This program is fun to perform and gives the audience a call to action.

DUO Script

Dillamond: Miss Elphaba, as you know, I am the sole Animal on the faculty. The token Goat, as it were. But it wasn't always this way. Oh, dear student, how I wish you could have seen it as it once was with an antelope explaining a sonnet, a snow leopard solving an equation. Don't you see, Miss Elphaba, how our dear Oz is becoming less and less... colorful.

Elphaba: [candid] You can say it. I've always been green. Some call me phosphorescent.

Elphaba: From what I've heard, it all started with the Great Drought.

Dillamond: Exactly. Food grew scarce, people grew hungrier and angrier. And the question became "Whom can we blame?" Do you know what is meant by the term "Scapegoat"? Let me write this out. A scapegoat is...

Elphaba: (shocked) Animals should be seen, not heard. Who is responsible for this?

Dillamond: Oh, Miss Elphaba, don't worry about me, you should go and enjoy your friends during this lunch break.

Elphaba: Actually, I have no friends. Would you like to share my lunch?

Dillamond: Oh, thank you! How kind, but I seem to have lost my appetite.

Elphaba: You shouldn't let statements like that bother you. I mean, I always do, but you shouldn't.

Dillamond: Oh Miss Elphaba, if it were only a matter of words on a chalkboard. But the things one hears these days... dreadful things!

Dillamond: Oh Miss Elphaba, I've heard of a professor from quox who's no longer permitted to teach. And an Owl in Munchkin Rock, Rumors, still, but enough to give pause to anyone with paws.... Something bad is happening.

Elphaba: Something bad, happening in Oz?

Dillamond: Yes, though it's all under the surface, there's something baaaaaaah... Sorry, bad.

Elphaba: Dr. Dillamond, are you alright? Shall I fetch you a glass of water?

Elphaba: So, you're saying that there are animals that have, somehow, forgotten how to speak? But, how is that possible?

Dillamond: If you make it discouraging enough, you can keep anyone silent.

Elphaba: *pause to realize* Doctor Dillamond, if something bad is happening to the Animals then someone has to tell the Wizard... That's why we have a Wizard!

Dillamond: I hope you're right.

Dillamond: This is my last day here at Shiz University. I am no longer permitted to teach.

Elphaba: I've got to do something. They can't just silence him like this!

Dillamond: They are not telling you the whole story! Remember that!

Elphaba: Doctor Dillamond! Well, are you all just going to sit here? [to self] I have to go see the Wizard.

Wizard: I am Oz, the great and terrible! Who are you and why do you seek me?

Elphaba: Uh... Elphaba Thropp your terribleness! They call me the green girl.

Wizard: Oh, Elphaba! Most people expect me to. And you have to give people what they want... Right?

Elphaba: ...right. [moving on] I'm here to alert you that something bad is happening—

Wizard: Please, I already know why you've come.

Elphaba: How?

Wizard: I'm the Wizard of Oz. [aside, sheepish] And I do have the help of my winged monkey servant, Chistery. He helps me keep an eye on things. [moving on] And I'm here to tell you, and all of Oz, that there is no problem.

Elphaba: But-

Wizard: There is no problem, Elphaba, and nothing I can do.

Elphaba: You're lying.

Wizard: I'm not lying. I'm looking at things from a different perspective.

Elphaba: [hisses] Glinda! [Glinda looks over] What is that?

Glinda: They call it a cage. [imitates] This remarkable innovation is actually for the animal's own good.

Elphaba: If this is for this lion cub's own good, then why is he trembling?

Glinda: Oh, you missed the professor saying that one of the benefits of caging a lion cub is that he'll never learn how to speak.

Elphaba: What? Can you imagine a world where Animals are kept in cages and they never speak?

Glinda: I never thought about it. I try not to think too much. It invites stress.

Elphaba: Well, somebody has to do something.

Wizard: I knew you'd be back.

Elphaba: [starting to piece together] Chistery...

Wizard: [nods] Don't he and monkeys like him make perfect spies?

Elphaba: Spies?!

Wizard: You're right, that's a harsh word... how about scouts? That's what they really are. They report any subversive Animal activity.

Elphaba: You have no real power at all, do you? That's why you need silence, and cages, and spies?!

Wizard: Exactly. And that's why I need you. A girl of your talents...! Don't you see? The truth is I'm glad to see you again. It gets pretty lonely around here. And I know you must get lonely too.

Elphaba: You don't know the first thing about me.

Wizard: Oh, but I do. I do know you. Elphaba, aren't you tired? Wouldn't you like someone to take care of you?

Elphaba: You want to take care of me? [pause, thinking] One condition.

Wizard: Yes?

Elphaba: You set those Monkeys free.

Wizard: Wonderful! Done.

Elphaba: Go! Fly! Chistery, you're free, isn't it wonderful?!

(She Makes Her Way To Another "Monkey" Covered By A Sheet).

Wizard: Wait! No! Not that one!

Dillamond: Baaa!

(She Pulls Off The Cover, Revealing Dr. Dillamond).

Elphaba: No! It can't be! Doctor Dillamond, are you alright? It's me, Elphaba. Doctor, can't you speak?

Dillamond: Baaa!

Elphaba: You planned all of this didn't you? Talking about how you can't do anything, how you need cages so they don't learn to speak, how you need spies to help you?

Wizard: We just couldn't keep letting him speak out-

Elphaba: Then we have nothing in common, Wizard. You're all just smoke and mirrors and that's the truth!

Wizard: The truth is not a thing of fact. It's just what everyone agrees on.

Elphaba: It's lying, that's all you ever do! Look, I am nothing like you and I never will be.

Glinda: Elphie, there you are! [pause] Are you alright?

Elphaba: I just wish... I could make the Wizard listen. Maybe if I wasn't unnaturally green-

Glinda: You're not.

Elphaba: Glinda, is it so wrong to want to free the animals? To want to make the Wizard listen?

Glinda: No, but...

Elphaba: Glinda, you don't need to lie to me.

Glinda: It's not lying! It's...uh... It's looking at things from a different perspective... Get all of Oz to see things from a different perspective.

Elphaba: [echoing] A different perspective...

Glinda: [nods] You might not be able to change all of it.

Elphaba: But we won't know until we try.

Link to the Video:

<https://youtu.be/aQYBUqTz1L4>

References

CBE International. (2022, June 15). *Muted Group Theory: A Tool for Hearing Marginalized Voices* - CBE International. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/muted-group-theory-tool-hearing-marginalized-voices/>