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## Disidentifications Revisited: Queer(y)ing Intercultural Communication Theory

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*In this theoretical essay, we revisit Muñoz's (1999) highly influential theory of disidentifications to explore the potentiality of queer (of color) identities, performances, and politics in intercultural communication processes. We seek to interrogate the fluid and complex nuances of (dis)identifications with hegemonic relations of power, oppression, and privilege through our narratives as queer transnational/migrant men of color. By arguing that sexuality, sex/gender, and body function as significant facets of overall identity, we move forward to discuss larger implications of disidentifications to communication theory.*

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[W]e are at the crossroads of exciting growth and tremendous re-imaginings and possibilities for intercultural communication studies (Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzeweicka, 2009, p. 32).

Queer theory is interested in remapping the terrain of gender, identity, and cultural studies. In engaging the proliferation of queer theory, gays, lesbians, and those aware of the entangled implications of these issues are negotiating queer identity within heterosexual spheres. More specifically, queer theory becomes a form of academic activism (Alexander, 2008, p. 108).

Unspoken and unwritten dominations of heteronormativity remain as a major site of knowledge production in communication theory. As Chávez (2013a) argued, "all queer scholars, and especially those whose research reflects lesbian, trans, or queer of color themes, continues to report lukewarm reception of their work in communication journals" (p. 83). The U.S. American capitalistic heteronormative circulations of power recurrently patrol and protect the boundaries of intercultural communication theory. Topics and concerns relating to lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer

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(LGBTQ) people, and especially LGBTQ people of color, are overlooked (e.g., Chávez, 2013a; Yep, 2013). Interrogations relating to the simultaneous functions of intersectionality—that is, “critical hermeneutics that register copresence of sexuality, race, class, gender, and other identity differentials as particular components that exist simultaneously with one another” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 99)—are frequently missing from the field (Chávez, 2012). There remain for intercultural communication scholars to further “contest the notion of ‘culture’ as unproblematically shared” (Moon, 1996, p. 75). Therefore, we hold that analyzing the fluidity and complexity of culture and communication from *multiple* perspectives of the “Other” are extremely relevant today (e.g., Alexander, 2010; Calafell & Moreman, 2010; Moon, 1996; Yep, 2013).

In this theoretical essay, we argue to follow Chávez’s (2013a) call for queer intercultural communication studies. As transnational/migrant cisgendered men of color (one is gay Asian/Japanese; another is same-gender-loving Black/Ghanaian) who study both the queer and the intercultural, we observe that the body of literature considered as the “mainstream” intercultural communication scholarship has not adequately articulated the fluidity and complexity of sexuality, sex/gender, and body. The well-regarded studies such as the effect of processes of cross-cultural adaption (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 2001), inter/cultural identities and negotiation (e.g., Collier, 1998; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Hecht, 1993; Jackson, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999), and practices of belonging (e.g., Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2002; Kinefuchi, 2010; Shome & Hegde, 2002) have not paid careful and nuanced attentions to our fluid and complex processes and practices of sexuality, sex/gender, and body. At the same time, the queer (or nonheteronormative) scholarships theorizing about intersectionality (e.g., Alexander, 2010; Carrillo Rowe, 2008; Chávez, 2013b; Moreman & McIntosh, 2010; Morrissey, 2013; Yep, 2013) have been underrecognized as the “mainstream” intercultural communication theory. In this context, we advocate the necessity of queer(y)ing intercultural communication theory further.

To do so, we begin this theoretical essay by reviewing the emergence of queer (of color) studies in the discipline of communication. Then, we revisit Muñoz’s (1999) highly influential theory of *disidentifications* to explore the potentiality of queer (of color) identities, performances, and politics. From this perspective, we define what we mean by intercultural communication. To exemplify our definition, we present our narratives about knowing, being, and acting as queer transnational/migrant men of color. More specifically, we explicate, our racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed nuances of (dis)identifications with hegemonic relations of power, oppression, and privilege. By arguing that sexuality, sex, gender, and body function as significant facets of our overall identity, we maintain that our bodies underlie multiple intersectional borders to construct a sense of belonging, or create a connecting point of relationship between the self and the social, cultural, political, and historical. In so doing, we move forward to discuss larger implications of *disidentification* to rearticulate and reimagine possibilities for queer(y)ing intercultural communication “as a dynamic and changing process” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 66).

We acknowledge that the sharing of personal narrative has not been a common method of communication theorizing. More precisely, the sharing of personal narrative as knowledge building has been marginalized in the discipline of communication. At the same time, Yep (2013) encouraged that “intercultural communication research must create new spaces for ‘other bodies’ to articulate their embodied experiences and to speak as subjects rather than objects of knowledge” (p. 124). By adapting Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) notion of “theories in the flesh,” we seek to demonstrate the potentiality of personal narrative as a method to expand the boundaries of communication theory building. As Madison (1993) suggested, “Theories in the flesh means that cultural, geopolitical, and economic circumferences of our lives engender particular experiences and epistemologies that provide philosophies about reality different from those available to other groups” (pp. 213–214). We maintain that minoritarians utilize their own embodied re/articulations of who they are and where they come from in order to understand their marginalized experiences. Particularly for queers of color whose gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized lives do not reflect majoritarian experiences, lived narratives and stories serve as the root of knowing, acting, and being. Thus, we approach the sharing of personal narrative as a performative method of knowledge production to bring marginalized/minoritarian experiences to the fore. Chávez (2009b) echoed this line of thinking by saying the following: “Through the sharing of stories from lives that teach lessons or offer insight about the way the world works, narratives work to build theory literally from flesh and blood experience” (p. 168). Therefore, we share our personal narratives to theorize “how ways of knowing are viewed both as discursively mediated and as historically situated and materially conditioned” (Johnson, 2001, p. 3).

### **Queer (of color) communication studies**

The intellectual and political movement of queer theory has radically transformed ways of knowing about sexuality, sex/gender, and body in the discipline of communication (e.g., Johnson, 2001; Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003). Queer theory problematizes the homo/heterosexual binary definition that stabilizes and naturalizes heterosexuality (e.g., Sedgwick, 1990; Yep et al., 2003). Queer theory calls expected values, beliefs, and relations into question. By challenging a normative body of knowledge, queer theory uncovers hegemonic circulations of power and offers potential sites of resistance and new/alternative ways of knowing, being, and acting (Yep, 2013). However, a mainstream body of queer communication scholarships has mostly addressed the needs of nonheteronormative knowing, being, and acting that are relevant to White, U.S. American, and middle-class people (e.g., Chávez, 2013a; Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thompson, 2014; Johnson, 2001). The intersectional modes of sexuality, sex/gender, and body across multiple sociopolitical, economic, and historical positionings remain understudied (Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005).

The on-going criticisms against queer theory illustrate its failure to address culturally specific texts of knowledge(s) embedded in the material realities of non-White

American middle-class LGBTQ people (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Eguchi et al., 2014; Johnson, 2001; Lee, 2003; Muñoz, 1999). As queer theory emphasizes selfhood, individual agency, and experience, it fails to locate the significances of relationships, communal ties, and collective resistance for LGBTQ people of color (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Johnson, 2001). The “raced” and “classed” labels have functioned as a material vehicle for LGBTQ people of color to promote sites of resistance against the control, surveillance, and discipline of White capitalistic heteronormative patriarchal institutions (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004; McCune, 2014; Snorton, 2014). LGBTQ people of color have strategically developed intellectual, aesthetic, and political forms of intersectional identity performance to navigate interlocking oppressions such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism (e.g., Johnson, 2001; Muñoz, 1999). As Cohen (1999) reinforced, “Queer theorizing that calls for elimination of fixed categories seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one’s survival” (p. 450). There remain intellectual spaces for most queer theorists to call into question their White privilege.

To interrupt the *Whiteness* of mainstream queer theory, E. P. Johnson (2001) proposed *quare* (the African American vernacular of queer) *studies*. As he wrote, “‘Quare’ offers a way to critique stable notions of identity, and at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledges” (2001, p. 3). *Quare studies* engages in a culturally specific interrogation of sexual and racial knowledge(s) that discursively, historically, and materially condition and permeate the construction of LGBTQ (of color) identities, performances, and politics. *Quare studies* intend to unpack the material and symbolic effects of hegemonic power forces across negotiations and practices of minoritarian identifications. To embrace Johnson’s (2001) theorizing of *quare studies*, Lee (2003) introduced *kauer* (the Mandarin pronunciation of queer) theory by emphasizing transnational turns of sexuality, sex/gender, race, class, and body. She explored Taiwanese/Chinese local texts of languages, thoughts, and behaviors concerning sexuality and sex/gender to critique the global circulations of mainstream queer theory and gay liberation movement as a default of knowledge(s) within specific geopolitical and historical contexts. This political turn of queer theory reinforces that the radical inquiry of queer (of color) knowing, being, acting within and beyond the Western capitalistic heteropatriarchal relations of power remains necessary (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Eng, 2010; Ferguson, 2004).

In recent years, queer (of color) communication scholarship (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Chávez, 2013b; Eguchi et al., 2014; McCune, 2014; Moreman & McIntosh, 2010; Snorton, 2014) has been increasing. However, multiple junctures and on-going interplays between the queer and the intercultural remain unpacked (Chávez, 2013a). Yep (2013) reinforced the necessity of queers (of color) intervention at the current juncture of critical intercultural communication studies by following Calafell and Moreman (2010)’s statement that “the body [is] a site of knowledge” (p. 414). The White capitalistic heteropatriarchal relations of power have always already constructed and marginalized queers (of color) as *other bodies* (Alexander, 2005). A body of knowledge(s) embedded in the *material facts of other bodies* requires careful

reading and translation (Chávez, 2009a). Thus, we maintain that examining others' ways of knowing, being, and acting potentially creates new/alternative intellectual spaces of articulating and imagining intercultural communication.

Now, we move to revisit a Muñoz's (1999) highly influential theory of disidentifications to reexamine the fluidity and complexity of queer (of color) identities, performances, and politics. Alexander (2008) paid attention to the theory by saying that "disidentification is a practiced positionality and a method that seeks to subvert mainstream constructions of queer identities" (p. 113). Additionally, other queer communication scholars (e.g., Chávez, 2009b; Eguchi & Roberts, 2015; Moreman & McIntosh, 2010; Morrissey, 2013) have paid careful attention to the Muñoz's (1999) theory of disidentifications. Following this trend, we intend to offer additional spaces to envision the theory of disidentifications next.

### Revisiting *disidentifications*

We approach the concept of disidentifications as the performative modes of gender/sex, sexuality, race, class, and body that subvert the White/Western capitalistic hetero-/homonormative distributions of power. As Muñoz (1999) asserted, "*Disidentifications* is meant to offer a lens to elucidate minoritarian politics that is not monocausal or monothematic, one that is calibrated to discern a multiplicity of interlocking identity components and the ways in which they affect the social" (p. 8, emphasis in original). For queers of color, intercultural processes of assimilating into and/or resisting become a site of interlocking identity struggles. Disidentifications illuminate the complex, contested, contradictory, and dynamic natures of intersectional identity border performances within the intersected webs of sociopolitical, economic, and historical contexts. Disidentifications offer a symbolic prism to show varying, complex, and multiple levels of identity border performances, which sometimes work within/against the normative constructions of race/gender/sexuality.

More specifically, we maintain that a theory of disidentifications is a process of highlighting the *material* realities produced by the hegemonic ideology that work for and/or against minoritarian subjects. Muñoz (1999) suggested that "disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy" (p. 25). As exemplified in the circulation of the *Physique Pictorial*, a men's muscle magazine in the 1950's, which depicted scantily clad muscle men in their magazines (Meem, Gibson, & Alexander, 2010). On the one hand, it reified heteronormativity by representing the hegemonic masculine traits and physique. On the other hand, this magazine was very popular among gay men who fetishized the images. Indeed, some scholars have noted its place in the formation of midcentury gay male cultures (Meem et al., 2010). As Muñoz (1999) articulated, "Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning" (p. 31). He continued in the following:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's

universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its working to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (1999, p. 31)

Intercultural performances of disidentifications simultaneously function as neither assimilationist nor separationist agendas for minoritarian subjects navigating multiple interlocking marginalizations. Disidentifications allow minoritarian subjects to utilize the code of majority to empower a marginalized positionality that has been historically constructed as unthinkable or impossible.

A theory of disidentifications is also a discursive and ideological method of developing coalitional possibilities (Chávez, 2009a; Muñoz, 1999). As Muñoz's (1999) reinforced, "the minoritarian subject employs disidentifications as a crucial practice of contesting social subordination through the project of worldmaking" (p. 200). For example, Morrissey (2013) described that a group of undocumented migrant youth formed coalitional possibilities by adapting performances of disidentifications to convey their intentions of national/cultural belongings. They engaged in disidentifying from both destabilizing current citizenship structures and assumptions that they want to assimilate. The undocumented migrant youth crafted letters to President Obama, relying on discursive structures and ideological arguments similar to those that citizens of the United States mostly make. They emphasized the importance of citizenship characterized by declaration of service and their subsequent value to the nation. They also described the complexity of intersectional identities that affect the performance of national values and norms (Muñoz, 1999). In this vein, performances of disidentifications function to politicize and historicize unfamiliar or socially stigmatized identity categories that have led to their marginalization (Chávez, 2009a; Moreman & McIntosh, 2010). Thus, we assert that a theory of disidentifications allows us to carefully examine intersectional border contestations of sexuality, gender/sex, race/ethnicity, class, and body as simultaneous processes of assimilation and resistance.

From this theoretical perspective, we define that intercultural communication is a site of becoming and being saturated with complex, contingent, and contradictory renegotiations of identities, belongings, and power within a hierarchy of difference (Carrillo Rowe, 2010). Particularly for queer transnational/migrant men of color, entering intercultural contexts is navigating shifting power relations such as racism, (hetero)sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia. Thus, we assert that paying attention to processes and practices of disidentifications in intercultural contexts, encounters, and relations creates a space for alternative and additional ways of thinking about the fluidity and complexity of intersectionality for queer people of color.

### ***Disidentifications in practice***

To illustrate how a theory of disidentification can be relevant to intercultural communication research, we now share culture-specific and text-specific nuances of how we engage in disidentifications. By showing the sites of our belongings, we intend to

display discursive and material effects of sexuality with particular attention to gender/sex, race/ethnicity, class, and the body in the following:

**Case 1: Discursive and material effects of asianness and queerness**

It was around 8 pm on 27 December 2014 in Tokyo, Japan. I (the first author) was having a couple of drinks with my friend Jack at a gay bar. Jack is an almost 30-year-old Black/African American male English teacher from Chicago, IL. He has lived in Tokyo for about 5 years. While looking at the crowd, I asked Jack if it is easy to find “dates” in Tokyo. He quickly responded, “Yes, it is very easy. Most Japanese guys here [in a queer district] seem to like foreigners.” So, I said to him, “what kinds of guys do you like?” He replied to me, “I am attracted to soft, smooth, and petite types of Japanese men like him [pointing to a man in the bar]. Of course, they gotta be bottoms.” So, I said that “Well, you do not know that soft, smooth, and petite men are bottoms. Everyone isn’t bottom.” He quickly said, “You know that most Japanese guys who like foreigners are bottoms, right? Also, I think most Asian guys are *naturally* bottoms. Even in the States, I meet a bunch of Asians who are bottoms. Lucky for me.” So, I said to him, “Really? Isn’t the top-bottom binary too limited?”

This dialogic moment allows me to rearticulate that I am always already constructed as *feminine* and *exotic* other because of my race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and language in the context of queer intercultural relationality. Whether I am in the United States or Japan, the Western *gay* fantasy about an Asian/Japanese bottom, which I am symbolically and materially expected to play along with, characterize my everyday queer intercultural encounters. By observing the productions of gay pornography, for example, Fung (2005) reinforced the western sexual and cultural ideology about Asian/Japanese men by saying: “The Asian man acts the role of mythologized geisha or ‘the good wife’ in the mail-order bride business” (2015, p. 344). As Han (2006) continued, “Much like the way that women are ‘rewarded’ for playing the feminine role, gay Asian men are ‘rewarded’ by the dominant [the western/U.S. American] gay community for performing their prescribed gender roles” (p. 17). In this historical and ideological context, I must submit to (dis)identify with the feminization and subordination of Asianness/Japaneseness to *smoothly* navigate my queer transnational borderland in-between and in-between Japan and the United States. As Muñoz (1999) reinforced, “Disidentification is the performative recitation of the stereotypical Asian bottom in porn, and the trappings of colonial culture” (p. 90). To do so, I have been shaving my facial and body hair, emphasizing my bodyline with tight clothes, and getting up-to-date haircuts to be smooth and feminine since I moved to the United States in 2001. So, I can present and perform the western/U.S. American gay illusion of Asian male-femininity onto my body to be included within the dominant gay community.

At the same time, I have paradoxically refused becoming and being a younger feminine Asian/Japanese bottom seeking after older masculine White tops. I observe that the White gay cultural construction of Asian men serves as “a subcultural category referencing the racialized fetishes of an older White male for the diminutive and effeminized Asian male” (Lim, 2014, p. 27). However, this master narrative is a

rhetorical manifestation of racism toward Asians that brings the White homonormative hierarchy of masculinities to the fore. I observe that the urban, youthful, and masculine constructions of White men are repeatedly materialized as attractive and desirable across gay districts such as New York's Chelsea, Washington DC's 17th street area, and San Francisco's Castro. Most representations of gay men are White. Simultaneously this White gay normativity makes other queer men of color, including myself, less attractive and desirable. To shift this representational hierarchy, I have been actively questioning the power of White gay normativity through my everyday intercultural encounters with Western/U.S. American men.

Of course, my queer Asian/Japanese acts of questioning race and racism have rarely been welcome by White men. In October 2011 in Denver, Colorado, for example, I went to eat sushi with "David" in early 30's whom I met in X Bar. Eating dinner, he asked me what kinds of men I have been with. So, I mentioned to him that I have had long-term relationships with three non-White men. He said, "I am asking you about types of men. Race does not have to do with it. Why does race matter?" So, I explained my perspective on how race matters in the dominant gay community and potentially cultivates shared experiences among non-White queers. David unhappily responded to me that "I do not think that people really care about race as much as before. Don't be so negative." His comment was a reminder how I have been repeatedly marked as "aggressive," "bitchy," and "troubling" when I called out race and racism in White gay America. Once when I open my mouth, I am clearly no longer a (queer) model minority. Because I am not quiet, submissive, and passive, I fail to perform the complete version of Asian male-femininity for the Western/U.S. American homonormative gaze. So, I have looked for *temporal* spaces that I can "break free of" the White gay normative sexual ideology. Accordingly, I have shifted to desire the western/U.S. American men of color. Muñoz (1999) asserted that "disidentification is a remaking and rewriting of a dominant script" (p. 19). I have felt safe dwelling in queer color-to-color relational spaces as both of us share the historical racialization of our non-White bodies in the globalized White-centered gay cultural contexts.

At the same time, my disidentification with the White gay normativity through my queer color-to-color relationality is not entirely in opposition to Asian/American men performing what they think of is masculine, dominant, and powerful to disidentify with the racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed hierarchy of queer desire. For example, some Asian/American men extensively work out to achieve bodies reflecting White gay aesthetic and engage in sexually aggressive and rough acts to disidentify with the homoeroticism of Asian bottom-White top encounters; however, their non-White masculinities are repeatedly discounted in the dominant gay community (e.g., Han, 2009; Poon & Ho, 2008). Similarly, I engage in queer color-to-color relationality to disidentify with the homoeroticism of Asian bottom-White top encounters; however, my performances of Asian male-femininity that fail to be submissive, passive, and quite are repeatedly discounted in the dominant gay community. These seemingly different displays ambiguously illuminate the shared condition. That is, "gay Asian men are socially conditioned to not question



White gay supremacy within the White-centered gay community” (Han, 2015, p. 55). This subordination of Asian/American men mirrors a discursive and material consequence of Orientalism. As Said (1979) noted, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (p. 1). The symbolic and material feminizations and subordinations of Asian men ideologically explicate, produce, and sustain the power of White gay normativity as superior.

As soon as I rethink of White gay normativity, I begin to recall the continuation of my bar conversation with Jack. After Jack rolled his eyes at me in his response to my earlier question about the limitation of top-bottom binary, Jack asserted, “Come on. Man. You know this. Most Japanese men here want to be with [U.S.] Americans. They are normally bottoms looking for White tops. Look at them [pointing to a few American/White-Japanese/Asian couples in the bar].” So, I immediately replied “But I do not think that everyone wants to date an American or a White man. Quite frankly, I haven’t seriously dated White American men.” He immediately smiled and asked me, “Then, why haven’t you dated non-American men though?”

In this moment, I critique my on-going interplay of contradictions reproduced by my queer westward attention. I must recognize that I yet desire for the Western/U.S. American queerness even when I situate myself around other *Western/U.S. American men of color*. Suganuma (2012) reinforced my queer westward attention by saying: “Western [or U.S. American] gay culture is deemed as ‘advanced’ and ‘mobile’ whereas Japan’s queer culture is ‘backward’ and ‘static’” (p. 160). More specifically, I grew up in parts of post-Second-World-War Japan, where the presences of U.S. American military occupations are historically hyper-visible. In these intercultural places, I internalized the U.S. American imperialist rhetoric that reproduces social, cultural, and political aspects of United States as “powerful,” “glamorous,” and “cool.” Particularly, I aspired to the Western/U.S. American normative ways of gay life that seemed to be far more progressive, advanced, and liberal than Japan. So, I “naturally” gravitated toward the Western/U.S. American men. With this aspiration in mind, I moved to the United States in 2001 and have traveled back and forth between the United States and Japan. As described earlier, however, I have actively refused to accept a second-class-citizen status by *rewriting* the master narrative of queer desire through my color-to-color relationality. At the same time, I recognize the paradox associated with my queer relational performance. My (dis)identification with the White gay normativity actually takes place “within” the expected norm of East-Japan/West-U.S. American binary. My shifting desire yet explicates, elucidates, and elaborates the rhetorical manifestation of Japanese national cultural identity that looks up to the western hegemony and modernity. This embodied performance, which makes the rest of world invisible, reproduces political, economical, and cultural privileges associated with my Japanese national citizenship and U.S. lawful permanent residency (LPR) status. As Muñoz (1999) asserted, “We [queers of color] thus disidentify with the White ideal. We desire it but desire it with a difference. The negotiations between desire, identification, and ideology are a part of important work of disidentification” (p. 15). Thus, I conclude

that on-going intersections and interplays between assimilation and resistance are paradoxically embedded in the *material* contents of my Asian/Japanese queer practices of belonging.

We assert that the embodied performance of Asianness/Japaneseness and queerness becomes a contested site of material and symbolic struggle between sexuality and perceived racialized, gendered, and classed performances in the historical continuum of political, economic, and cultural globalization. Next, we move to showcase the complex and evocative particularities of belonging that are strongly embedded in the material contents of Blackness and queerness.

### **Case 2: Discursive and material effects of blackness and queerness**

I (the second author) argue that my intercultural processes of embodying Black racial identity and U.S. American queerness illuminate the complex and contested practices of belongings. More precisely, I identify as a *same-gender-loving* African immigrant from Ghana with a postcolonial influence. My undercurrent alternative identification became necessary since my embodiment of intersectionality such as African, Black, queer, and masculine do not fit into the homo/normative constructions of White masculinity and hyper-sexualized Black masculinity. Moving from a postcolonial country with ambiguous antigay laws to U.S. America, I thought I would be “free.” However, the material conditions associated with my race, class, gender/sex/sexuality, and immigration status positioned me within the complex webs of various power relations. The transnational movements of Black bodies across the borders of the United States present new insights, complexities, and challenges to the multifarious intersections of embodiment and performativity (Hall, 2012). I begin this conversation by offering how my experiences with nonheteronormative sexuality in Ghana influenced my queer intercultural relationality in the United States.

It was around 11 pm in my home country, Ghana. I was getting ready to go to bed when I got a phone call from Joe, a very good friend, that he had been held up by the brother of a guy he met on the Internet. He told me they were demanding an amount of money from him. Otherwise, they were taking him to the Police to be charged for sodomy. Joe pleaded with me to bring him some money. As scary it sounded, I asked him and the people holding him to meet me at a popular restaurant. I was also petrified since I did not want to be seen as an accomplice to homosexuality. But I sneaked out of home with some cash to help my friend. After waiting for about 15 minutes, a man showed up with my friend. He took the money and just walked away. I was so angry that this could happen to Joe. I became infuriated knowing we could not report this case to the Police.

This incident showed me how vulnerable I could be as a same-gender-loving man in the postcolonial country. In countries such as South Africa, which decriminalized sodomy in 1998, violence against sexual minorities is still rampant and sometimes goes unpunished (Epprecht, 2013). A recent example is “corrective rape” in South Africa, where some lesbians are raped because of an assumption that they are not satisfied by their male partners—hence their queerness. In Ghana, I also learned

that a young man was beaten and robbed of his money by a group of men because he was suspected to be gay. These kinds of violence become part of the materiality of queerness in Ghana where one's agency to perform and enact their queer identity can have dire consequences (Asante & Roberts, 2014; Okech, 2013). Inasmuch as violence permeates an African queer existentiality, there are some changes. A transgender woman in Kenya won a legal case against the Kenyan government to use her new female identity on her driver's license. In 2015, the government of Mozambique overturned colonial era clause outlawing "vices against nature." In Uganda, activists openly engage in protests to resist draconian laws instituted by lawmakers. In spite of these achievements, African queers largely continue to endure, negotiate, and resist various forms of physical and institutional violence that penetrate their lives (Asante & Roberts, 2014; Epprecht, 2013). As Ossome (2013) reinforced, "Sexual violence directed toward queer individuals may be understood in one sense as a political weapon in the hands of the disenfranchised groups that are themselves victims of the structural violence in the unequal economic system which induces violence among the excluded or economically marginalized" (p. 37). In this cultural context, I internalize that my victimized friend's slight feminine attributes, signifying male-homosexuality, made him a target. So, I began to disidentify with the heteronormative performances of masculinity to deflect my queerness.

To prevent any forms of intimidation, I practiced my nonheteronormative sexuality by "straight-acting" (Eguchi, 2009). In conversations with friends, for instance, I will deliberately talk about women to deflect the attention from my queerness. In addition, I go to the gym almost five times a week to gain more muscles to reduce any suspicion of my queerness. At the same time, I felt empowered in my queerness as I resisted the heteronormative constructions of relationality. Staying single has been my way to disidentify with the heteronormative institutional policy that criminalizes my queerness. As Bhabha (1994) mentioned, mimicry is a kind of performance that exposes the artificiality of all symbolic expressions of power. Extending Frantz Fanon's (1967) concept of mimicry, Bhabha asserted that mimicry could be a space of resistance and empowerment. He argued that mimicry produces new native subjects whose difference distorts and subverts the identity of the colonizing subject by "rearticulating its presence in terms of its Otherness" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 91). Thus, mimicking what I assumed to be specific masculine performances created spaces for disidentification with my *criminalized* queerness.

After moving to the United States from Ghana in 2007, I have realized the salience and materiality of my Blackness in the dominant gay community. At the same time, my embodiment of foreignness and/or Ghanaian cultural identity always already complicates my sense of belonging(s). For example, on a date with a White man I met online, we began a conversation about race. He said that "I have never felt comfortable talking about race with African Americans, they make it such a big deal." He clearly stereotyped that Africans do not fight over race as much as African Americans do. Thus, he felt comfortable being around me because Africans are not threatening. At the same time, he ignored the discursive and material reality of my skin color that

reproduce my racialized queerness shared with African Americans. So, I responded to him, “When you have to live with Blackness everyday, it becomes a big deal.” This politics of identity fragmentation of my intersectional identities as Black, African, queer, and migrant explicitly explicates the subordination of Africans/Ghanaians in the post-colonial continuum of queer intercultural relationality. To resist this representational hierarchy, I have shifted my attention to the aesthetic of Black/African American masculinity. I have begun to adapt the culturally specific codes of heteronormative Black masculinity to empower my performance of racialized and foreignized queerness in the dominant gay community.

At the same time, my shifting attention reinforces the paradox that I yearned for a sense of belonging I never had in my home country. That is my cultural membership to a gay community that is not criminalized. More specifically, performing the aesthetic of Blackness/African Americanness temporarily enables me to feel my sense of belonging to a gay cultural expectation of Black manhood. As McCune (2008) suggested, “Coolness is a performative utterance and action whereby Black queer men define themselves within and against traditional standards” (p. 302). However, I disidentify with the performative modes of my Black hyper-masculinity through my transnational/migrant hybridity that can be often read as feminine and foreign. This remaking and rewriting performance, at the same time, creates the myth that I am still in the closet. People often asked me if I have a wife and children back home. My immediate response to such a question is that “I am gay” while I do not use gay to describe my nonheteronormative sexuality. However, my response should not be read as I am “coming out.” Saying I am gay is a nuanced form of disidentification with the Western/U.S. American construction of Black masculinity that fails to accommodate the historical, geopolitical, and material factors rooted in my racialized and foreignized queerness. I am neither in the closet nor on the down low.

At a going-away party, for example, a friend began a conversation with me about feminine gay men and how they make him uncomfortable. He said that “I don’t know why gay men want to act feminine, you gotta be a man. You don’t act gay and that’s good.” So, I asked him why my queerness doesn’t make him feel uncomfortable. He said that “you act like a man.” That evening, another female friend of mine mentioned that she was leaving. So, I immediately turned to her and said “Guurl [the African American queer vernacular of saying girl]!” My male friend suddenly turned his head at me and said, “I did not know you act feminine too.” This scenario reinforces how I as a Black man am socially pressured to identify with the hegemony and imperialism of heteronormative Black masculinity as the necessity of survival (e.g., McCune, 2008, 2014; Snorton, 2014). This social expectation simultaneously repudiates effeminate forms of queerness (Johnson, 2001).

In light of these struggles and tensions, I identify myself as a *same-gender-loving person* as I refuse to participate in the hyper-effeminized representation gay men. However, I paradoxically identify with the label, gay, sometimes as I seek to gain political alliance with other gay men. On the contrary, I identify neither as a

same-gender-loving person nor a gay man when I go back to Ghana, where homosexuality is institutionally constructed as *foreign* and *un-African*. These contradictory processes of dis/identifications with specific labels unveil the complex and nuanced tensions and dynamics associated with my overall queerness. Thus, I maintain that the complex and dynamic negotiations of intersectionality become a site of contention as I search for a sense of belonging in an environment entrenched in the politics of identity.

### **Conclusion: Toward queer(y)ing intercultural communication theory**

In this theoretical essay, we have attempted to illustrate that embodied performances of disidentifications are a complex, contested, contradictory, and dynamic intersections and interplays between assimilation and resistance in the lives of queer (of color) transnational migrants. In particular, we have attempted to show that we simultaneously (dis)identify with *interlocking* effects of power, oppression, and privilege to develop, negotiate, and shift our practices of belonging(s). From this line of thinking, we propose that intercultural negotiations of identity and practices of belonging are never a simple process of life learning and growth; they are on-going complex and paradoxical dialectics of life struggle in historical and ideological spaces.

By understanding complex and contradictory practices of belonging experienced by queer (of color) transnational migrants through a theory of disidentifications, intercultural communication theorists will explore previously hidden insights about the connections among identities, politics, globalization, and migration. In recent years, there has been a push toward queer(y)ing the circumference of theory building in interpersonal/family communication (Chevrette, 2013) and organizational communication (McDonald, 2015). To join this intellectual and political movement, we suggest that a theory of disidentifications offers intercultural communication scholars ways to look at, critique, and shift embodied performances of minoritarian identities and subjectivities that reveal nuanced forms of neither assimilation nor resistance. A performative mode of disidentifications is an intercultural praxis of questioning the epistemological assumptions through which we must analyze and understand complex, contingent, and contradictory renegotiations of identity and practices of belonging. Thus, we call attention to sexuality, sex/gender, and body that are rooted in intercultural communication processes to “see epistemological concerns as an open-ended process, as a process that resist fixed, discrete bits of knowledge, which encompasses the dynamic nature of cultural processes” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 66).

Before concluding this essay, therefore, we advocate for theorizing communicative meaning-making processes and practices of disidentifications with shifting power relations that are embedded in the material realities of queers of color and queer transnational migrants. As Chávez (2013b) has shown, on the other hand, we recognize that there has been a huge body of migration scholarship that provides the interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to understand the multiplicity, complexity, and fluidity of belongings (e.g., Espín, 1997; Fujiwara, 2008; Romero, 2002). The

Careful examinations of subjective positions and marginalized experiences surrounding queer migrants and diasporic queers (e.g., Asencio & Acosta, 2009; Decena, 2011; Gopinath, 2005) have particularly advanced our understandings of complex and nuanced tensions of sexuality, sex/gender, and intersectionality. However, we see possibilities for complicating, complementing, and shifting the circumference of intercultural communication theory further by drawing from the lenses on the nuanced complexity of queer (of color) transnational migrant subjectivities and possibilities. This move toward communication theorizing simultaneously benefits to build on queer migration studies.

For example, we witness the social, political, and economic changes regarding U.S. America's institutional supports for gay and lesbian rights, including same-sex marriage. Also, the department of homeland security now accepts same-sex couples as a part of family sponsorships based applications for LPR. These changes seemingly improve the discursive and material conditions for various queer transnationals/migrants residing in the United States. However, Chávez (2013a) explicitly warned, "as support for gay and lesbian rights has increased, concern and support for the rights of people of color has declined along with an understanding of the racialization of sexuality and gender" (p. 87). The hegemony and imperialism of White gay normativity continue to differentiate, marginalize, and/or erase queers of color and queer transnationals/migrants in multiple localities (e.g., Eguchi, 2015; Han, 2015; Lim, 2014; McCune, 2014; Snorton, 2014). The Western/U.S. American imperialist practices of Whitening nonheteronormative sexualities ironically reproduce the material boundaries between Whites and non-Whites. In this dynamic and changing environment, queers of colors and queer transnationals/migrants are yet forced to disidentify with shifting power relations to navigate the majoritarian codes of map.

With this in mind, we emphasize that thick investigations of queer (of color) migrant subjectivities and possibilities through a theory of disidentifications require further attention. More precisely, what need to be carefully considered in these investigations are complex and shifting roles of communication that "involves the creation, constitution, and intertwining of situated meanings, social practices, structures, discourses, and the nondiscursive" (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010, p. 7). Communication is an essential site for queers (of color) and queer transnational migrants to rearticulate their subjectivities and possibilities in complex and shifting dynamics of culture. To explicitly explicate, elucidate, and elaborate communication processes and practices of disidentifications among queer (of color) transnationals/migrants, we pose questions that could look like, including "how do the complex nuances of disidentifications among queer (of color) transnationals/migrants alter, reinforce, and shape the concept of communication as an open-ended and shifting process of knowledge production?" and "how does communication as an open-ended and shifting process of knowledge production for queer (of color) transnationals/migrants serve as a site of ideological struggle in which the social and performative scripts of disidentifications are remade and rewritten?" Scholarly efforts to complicate these questions resonate with the goal of intercultural communication that "includes

challenging systems of domination, critiquing hierarchies of power and confronting discrimination to create a more equitable world” (Sorrells, 2010, p. 182). Hence, we hope that intercultural communication theorists will revisit the utility and opportunity of disidentifications as a theoretical lens for examining the connections among queer (of color) identities, politics, globalization, and migration that would push the boundaries and conceptualization of intercultural communication for the future.

In conclusion, as transnational queer men of color, we want to voice that queer intercultural *in-between* spaces are discursive and ideological sites in which we are comfortable to exist, live, dwell, and inhabit. Ideally speaking, we want to be who we are. However, Muñoz (2009) reinforced that “QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here. Queerness is an ideality ... Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present” (p. 1, emphasis in original). We acknowledge that we live in a historical site of social change in which the Western/White capitalistic heteropatriarchal circulations of power always already surround the discursive materiality of queers of color in general and queer migrants in particular. Thus, we end this theoretical essay by reiterating our personal, intellectual, and political belief that the intersections and interplays between the queer and the intercultural require on-going critiques, examinations, and theorizations.

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