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On: 31 October 2012, At: 07:12

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Multicultural Discourses

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmd20>

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Version of record first published: 25 Jun 2012.

To cite this article: Shinsuke Eguchi (2012): Gender and queer as multicultural discourses, Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 7:3, 277-282

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2012.699058>

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Gender and queer as multicultural discourses

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Black queer studies: a critical anthology, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2005, xiii + 377 pp., US\$94.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-8223-3629-7, US\$26.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-3618-1

Communicating power and gender, by Deborah J. Borisoff and James W. Chesebro, Long Grove, IL, Waveland, 2011, iii + 234 pp., US\$ 25.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-5776-6690-5

Gendered lives: communication, gender, and culture, by Julia T. Wood, Boston, MA, Wadsworth, 2011, iv + 378 pp., US\$114.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-4957-9416-5

Queer theory and communication: from disciplining queers to queering the discipline(s), edited by Gust A. Yep, Karen E. Lovaas and John P. Elia, Binghamton, NY, Hartworth, 2003, xix + 415 pp., US\$125.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-5602-3276-6, US\$54.50 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-5602-3277-3

A number of communication scholars have paid extensive attention to critical issues in gender and queer discourses. For example, Wood (2011, 23) considered that gender ‘is neither innate nor necessarily stable’, adding that it ‘involves outward expressions of what society considers masculine or feminine’. In order to properly examine gender and communication, Borisoff and Chesebro (2011, 2) considered the role of sexuality, stating that ‘Sexuality recognizes the biology of people, but it highlights the social and psychological characteristics and attributes that people give or attribute to sex’. Heteronormativity – the concept of heterosexuality as normal – plays as a powerful discourse when we think of sexuality (Borisoff and Chesebro 2011). By unpacking heteronormativity and understanding sexuality as a multiple, unstable, and fluid construct, Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003, 4) claimed, ‘Queer theory challenges the modern system of sexuality as a body of knowledge that structures and organizes the personal, institutional, and cultural life of individuals in Western societies’. However, queer theory has been a site of discursive struggle, because it does not fully articulate the knowledge constructed by the intersection of multiple social positionings (e.g. race, ethnicity, class, and nationality). To reconcile the situation, Johnson and Henderson (2005) seek ways to explicate the racialized and class knowledge of GLBT (gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender) individuals of color.

This disciplinary situation gives rise to the question: How can we authentically articulate gender and queer as multicultural discourses? To begin to answer this, I

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propose a critical review of the four books as a means of exploring today's gender and queer discourses in the discipline of communication. Following this, I also intend to suggest what needs to be considered to further articulate gender and queer as *multicultural* discourses in the future.

Analyzing gender, queer, and communication

Each of the books I reviewed in this article uniquely contributes to our ways of understanding gender and queer discourses today. At the same time, while conducting this book review on gender, queer, and communication, one major theme emerges in my gay transnational Japanese perspective. I view that the discipline of communication still struggles to fully articulate the Crenshaw's (1991) and Collins' (2000) view of intersectionality to unpack the simultaneous interplay of multiple social positionings (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class) in cultural and communicative lives. Especially, I view that the discipline of communication has not fully examined the multiplicity of gendered and queer lives intersecting with multiple social positionalities in the context of transnationalism – the phenomenon of incorporating diverse social, cultural, political, and historical elements beyond the borders of multiple nations and cultures, which is promoted by today's globalization. Thus, I describe my reactions to each book in the following section.

Today's gender discourse

In *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, Wood (2011) located gender discourses in the rhetoric of US women's and men's movements in Chapters 3 and 4. She introduces, 'Rhetorical movements are collective, persuasive efforts to challenge and change existing attitudes, laws, and policies' (69). Analyzing the discourse surrounding both women's and men's movements is significant since the rhetoric of men's movements is often hidden. Throughout the chapters, Wood (2011) also refers to the gendered rhetorical movements outside of the USA. At the same time, I view that these international references reinforce the Western ways of defining gendered rhetorical movements. Wood (2011) omits to describe unique and particular cultural, ethnic, and class knowledge embedded in gendered movements in non-Western contexts. Speaking from a transnational feminist' perspective on Afghanistan women, Abu-Lughod (2002) supports my reaction. Abu-Lughod (2002, 787) raises a critical question, 'Can we [feminist in or from the West] only free Afghan women to be like us or might we have to recognize that even after "liberation" from the Taliban, they might want different things than we would want for them?'. Then, she continues to write that 'we [feminists in or from the West] may want justice for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we [feminists in or from the West] envision as best?' (2002, 787–8). Given this transnational feminist's perspective, I strongly believe that describing *alternative* ways of thinking about gendered rhetorical movements both in domestic and international contexts would have significantly contributed readers to further understand the intersection of communication, gender, and culture in the context of today's transnationalism.

Wood (2011) also discusses how gender links to the issues of power and violence such as in gender intimidation, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, sexual

harassment, genital surgery, and gender-based murder in the Chapter 12. I view Wood's (2011) attention to gendered violence as tremendously significant. This is because, although gendered violence often takes place across various cultural and communicative contexts, individuals tend to avoid discussing gendered violence due to the culturally sensitive and often stigmatized nature of the topic. At the same time, I strongly believe that the further articulations of transnational and GLBT narratives relating to gender violence is necessary. For example, Poon (2000) explores violence in same-sex relationships between gay Asian men and their White partners. He writes, 'The accentuated socioeconomic differences between Asian men and their Caucasian partner may result in an increase in their [gay Asian men's] vulnerability to intimate violence' (2000, 62). This suggests that each gay man uniquely and differently experiences gendered issues relating to power and violence depending on his intersection of multiple social positionings. Thus, it is critical for communication scholars to further create spaces to talk about issues relating to gender, power, and violence. At the same time, communication scholars must also pay attention to the multiplicity of issues constructed by the intersection of gender, power, and violence.

In *Communicating Power and Gender*, Borisoff and Chesebro (2011) sought to illustrate the intersection of gender and power in communication processes. In Chapter 6, Borisoff and Chesebro (2011) examine how women and men experience their professional lives as a result of gendered scripts and organizational power structures. This is very significant because Borisoff and Chesebro (2011) unpack various gendered stereotypes embedded in the material realities of institutional lives in the USA. They intend to consider the intersectionality of multiple social positionings in their discussion on gendered institutional lives. However, they could have further incorporated multiple organizational realities embedded in women and men of color. For instance, Borisoff and Chesebro (2011) introduced the discourse of model-minority and how it affects Asian American professionals. I recognize the impact of model-minority discourse embedded in Asian American professional experiences. At the same time, I wonder if today's transnationalism creates other possible realities for various Asian American professionals. Perhaps, transnationalism requires the need for Asian American hybrid communication skills in the context of global capitalism in which the Asian/Pacific market (e.g. China, India, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan) plays a critical role. Analyzing eight Asian American male professionals' subjective experiences, Eguchi and Starosta (in press) also describe this on-going interplay of contradictions. Their Asian American male informants view that the model-minority discourse is strongly embedded in their institutional lives. At the same time, today's transnationalism also promotes the dynamite nature of their institutional experiences. In this way, multiple articulations of intersectionality further require attentions when communication scholars consider gender, power, and communication processes in the context of organizations.

Today's queer discourse

The ways in which gender intersects with sexuality, body, and other social positions is underlined in the collection of pieces brought together by Yep, Lovaas, and Elia's (2003) book, *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)*. For example, by rethinking relationships from the queer perspective, Elia's chapter in Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003, 77) explored the notion that 'queering relationships means thinking and acting outside of the traditional

hetero-relational paradigm – for after all, queer is antithetical to the kinds of boxes, borders, and oppressive qualities that have constituted the heteronormative model of relating'. Similarly, Henderson's chapter in Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) examines that same-sex marriage becomes a site of reproducing heteronormative model of relational communication. These critical examinations of heteronormativity embedded in personal and institutional dimensions of gendered lives contribute significantly to the discipline of communication.

This collection (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia 2003) is furthermore significant as it also includes multiple perspectives on queer theory. At the same time, these perspectives illustrate the weakness of queer theory in considering gender, sexuality, and body within the context of intersectionality. For example, Lee's chapter in Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) seeks to articulate her racial/womanist/transnational perspectives on queer discourse. In this piece, Lee asserts, 'sexual minorities who are not White, male, and affluent remain relatively invisible in their different localities' (160) as a result of the queer discourse. Alexander's chapter in Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) is similarly concerned with queer theory as White, male, and affluent. He asserts, 'How can queer theory ask us (Black Queer Studies scholars) to disregard our racial, ethnic, cultural, and practiced interests, for some presumed collective inclusion under the umbrella of Queer Studies? and are not these constructions already infected with issues of race and culture?' (350). In this regard, Johnson's chapter in Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) explored performance in heteronormative Black masculinity among Black entertainers to consider how race, gender, sexuality, and class are intersected. This weakness of queer theory relating to intersectionality is further problematized in another book.

In *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, Johnson and Henderson (2005) bring together a collection of diverse pieces to highlight the contradiction between queer and race and class. For example, Cohen's chapter in Johnson and Henderson (2005, 22) identifies that 'queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between the heterosexual and everything "queer"'. By questioning the hetero/queer divide, Cohen sought to analyze the intersection of racism, classism, and sexism in the context of queer discourse. Johnson's chapter in Johnson and Henderson (2005) utilizes an African American vernacular for queer, *Quare*, to describe GLBT individuals of color. He writes, "'Quare" offers a way to critique a stable notion of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledge' (127). Proposing Quare Studies, Johnson explores how race and class simultaneously function in constructing material realities for GLBT individuals of color. To locate the intersectionality in the context of Quare discourse, Carbado's chapter in Johnson and Henderson (2005) unpacks real-life examples relating to the discursive manifestations of White, Male, and heterosexual privileges. Therefore, this edited book significantly contributes to the discipline of communication by locating race and class in the queer/quare discourse to explicate the knowledge embedded in the material realities of GLBT individuals of color.

In this regard, Yep, Lovaas, and Elia's (2003) and Johnson and Henderson's (2005) works on queer theory provide scholarly spaces for considering how to intersect multiple social positions (e.g. race, gender, and class) and for examining how they simultaneously function within each other in the context of queer discourse. From my gay transnational Japanese perspective, these two works mostly focus on gender and queer as multicultural discourses in the context of US A or the West. I would underline the importance of extending Lee's idea in Yep, Lovaas, and

Elia (2003) on locating transnationalism in the context of queer discourse. This review leaves me with the concern of how to locate queer discourse in non-Western contexts. Also, this review leaves me with a question about how we will consider queer discourse in a nation in which being non-heterosexual is considered illegal and/or may result in capital punishment for GLBT individuals. Moreover, I am left wondering how the queer discourse articulates cultural and communicative dimensions of diaspora and migration for GLBT individuals in the context of transnationalism. Thus, I view that today's gender and queer discourses are not yet to be truly 'multicultural' in the context of transnationalism.

Articulating gender and queer as multicultural discourses

This book review confirms that the discipline of communication has put extensive effort into studying discourse about gender and queer. At the same time, there is a need to articulate gender and queer as part of multicultural discourses in the context of transnationalism. Nakayama and Halualani (2010, 597) observed, 'Globalization is changing the world in ways that are significant'. Then, they continue to assert, 'The more entwined our economics become, the more world economic waves can impact people around the world' (597). Given this idea, I would like to suggest two questions in order for communication scholars to locate gender and queer as multicultural discourses in the context of transnationalism.

As illustrated in the earlier section, one particular question was strongly present while this review. That is, how do we theorize the possibility of understanding social and performative constructions of gender, sexuality, and body from non-Western vantage points to embrace gender and queer as multicultural discourses in the context of transnationalism? For example, Miike (2007) observes that the Eurocentric discourse of knowledge is strongly embedded in the current communication theory. Proposing an Asiancentric worldview, which is parallel to the Eurocentric worldview, Miike (2007) unpacks the five Eurocentric biases (i.e. individuality and independence, ego-centeredness and self-enhancement, reason and rationality, rights and freedom, and pragmatism and materialism) that are the basis of today's prominent ways of knowing about communication in the discipline. Given the Miike's (2007) Asiancentric reflection on Eurocentric biases embedded in today's communication theory, I wonder if today's epistemology about gender, queer, and communication is limited to the Western intellectual perspectives. I am particularly concerned if today's epistemology about gender, queer, and communication emerging from the Western thoughts might become a discursive site of colonizing discourse and knowledge about social and performative constructions of gender, sexuality, and body among non-Western others. Therefore, it is critical for communication scholars to move beyond today's ways of knowing about gender, sexuality, and body in order to locate gender and queer as truly multicultural discourses in the context of transnationalism.

To take this first step, I need to raise another critical question. How do we transform intellectual academic spaces to promote further articulations of social and performative constructions of gender, sexuality, and body from non-Western vantage points in order to embrace gender and queer as multicultural discourses in the context of transnationalism? For example, Calafell (2012) observes that the academia is not ready to have 'truly' multicultural voices from people of color in general and women of color in particular yet. These multicultural voices are often marginalized

and/or muted. Issues relating to racism, sexism, and homophobia still continue to characterize today's academic spaces (Calafell 2012). Given the Calafell's (2012) perspective on academy, I wonder if today's power system of academy also produces and reproduces how we theorize social and performative constructions of gender, sexuality, and body. In this sense, we, as academicians, must need to consider how we can be accountable for producing multicultural gendered and queer discourses and knowledge that reflect today's global and transnational world. I believe that our intellectual commitment is to deconstruct power and privilege to embrace multiple voices and to examine human communicative phenomena from multiple points of view. Thus, I hope that we will move toward disrupting and disempowering what we know about gender and queer discourses today and expand intellectual spaces for 'truly' articulating gender and queer as multicultural discourses.

In conclusion, I hope that the discipline of communication will continue to answer questions raised above to play as a point of departure to 'truly' embrace gender and queer as multicultural discourses in the context of transnationalism. In doing so, the epistemology of communication relating to social and performative constructions of gender, sexuality, and body as multiple, unstable, and fluid across nations and cultures will be successfully and authentically expanded in the context of today's frequent global contacts.

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