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Title: Spelling Sexuality: An Ethnographic Study on Language and Queer Culture with UIUC Undergraduate Students

About the Author: I am a senior undergraduate student studying Psychology and Spanish at the UIUC; interests include but are not limited to counseling psychology, gender and women's studies, political science, Spanish language and culture, English literature, and social work.

Keywords: Language, Queer, LGBT, culture, reclamation, sexuality

Abstract: My research addresses queer culture and language on the UIUC campus; how students currently use terms, such as "homosexual" and "queer" on campus, what terms are being eliminated or replaced from popular vocabulary and how students on the UIUC campus are reclaiming certain words or terms regarding queer culture.

Question: This research will address queer culture and language on the UIUC campus. How do students use these terms (i.e. "homosexual" and "queer") on the UIUC campus? What terms are being eliminated or replaced from popular vocabulary? How are students on the UIUC campus reclaiming certain words or terms regarding queer culture? How does this process neglect or promote queer culture on campus? What differences lie in the vocabularies among LGBTQ-identified students and non-LGBTQ identified, or straight, students?

Plan

Methods and Participants: This research will involve a combination of interviews, observation, and historical research.

- I will interview students at the UIUC regarding their knowledge and use of language that relates to the LGBT or queer community. For example, how often does one use the phrase "That's so gay?" or who now uses the term "queer" to describe themselves?
- I would like to have periods of observation to study students, especially those of LGBT-related student organizations, and their use of language.
- I will do extensive historical/archival research in the hopes of examining underlying patterns of language reclamation.
- I will advertise through the LGBT Resource Center listserv (InQueeri) and on LGBT student groups' Facebook pages. I will also post flyers in the LGBT Resource Center, Counseling Center, Gender & Women's Studies Building, and Psychology Building. I will also give information about my research to colleagues of mine who run support groups on campus specifically for queer people.

Schedule:

- Feb 20 - Final draft of individual interview questions. Contact student groups for potential observation. Continue archival research.
- Feb 20-Mar 16 - Conduct interviews/observations. Continue archival research.
- Mar 26-30 - Wrap up interviews/observations. Continue archival research.
- Apr 1-20 - Analysis of interviews, report writing
- Apr 24 - In-Class Presentation
- May 1 - Presentation at EUI Conference
- May 10 - Final Project Due

EUI References/Tagging: [1=Read, but not relevant, i.e., I took a look at this project but my own EUI project does not really have anything to do with it; 2=Somewhat Relevant, i.e., I think my project is related to this EUI project, but I do not really build specifically on any of its arguments or data in my project; 3=Very relevant, i.e., My project builds on this project; namely, my project's arguments confirm/contradict the discussions in this project.]

- Britton, Kari. (2009). Educating our Youth in Queer Topics: Is UIUC Truly a Community Leader? (2)

- Hasinoff, Amy A. (2011). No right to sext? A critical examination of media and legal debates about teenage girls' sexual agency in the digital age. (1)
- Romero, Jason C. (2008). The Facebook Effect: Social Networking Sites and Changing Experiences of LGBT Students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (2)

Reflect: Learning about and complying with the Institutional Review Board was a very interesting experience. Not having any experience with research previously, it was very intriguing to learn about the different processes involved with the IRB and doing work through the EUI conference.

Recommendations: My findings not only revealed a fluidity within students' language regarding sexual and gender orientation, but there is also a clear lack of knowledge regarding inclusive language and LGBTQ visibility on campus; most notably those of Business and Engineering Colleges. The Gender and Women's Studies department is doing a wonderful job of educating its students, but it definitely needs the University's support in raising awareness and creating more diverse and inclusive accommodations (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms, including other options on ISIS or other feedback forms regarding gender identity, etc.)