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Language and Identity in an LGBT Community of Practice

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Abstract
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This study examines how members of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) student community use terms of self-identification to describe their gender identity and sexuality. In this study I propose that the students form a social circle that utilizes specific linguistic practices to reflect their group and individual identities. These practices include linguistic awareness, avoidance, and the use of several distinct but mutually intelligible definitions of the word *queer*. The semantic value of *queer* depends on the social context of the utterance as well as the speaker's position within the community. In order to test my hypothesis, I conducted ethnographic work and semi-structured interviews. Through these observations and interviews, I gathered data on the way in which members of LGBT student groups linguistically perform their identities.

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Introduction and Literature Review

Historically, sexuality has not been the focus of language and gender studies. However, since sexuality and gender are so closely linked, language and gender studies have always given at least incidental insight into sexuality. Recent work in language and gender has recognized that gender and sexuality "cannot be productively discussed independently of one another" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 470). In this study, I look at how gender and sexuality as well as other identity categories all interact with language simultaneously. The importance of the interaction of multiple identity categories is evident in the linguistic practices of speakers in small communities. In order to study this further, I examine the role of identity in a community of students who met through participation in programs sponsored by an office for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) life at a mid-size private university in Atlanta, Georgia (known throughout this paper as The University). Students at The University who are active in these programs form a social circle that utilizes specific linguistic practices to reflect their group and individual identities.

One program that many of these students participate in is Safe Space training. Safe Space training is a several hour long program where students, staff, and faculty at The University are given information on identity development, policies and laws relevant to LGBT individuals, and on-campus resources. In the information provided to participants in The University Safe Space program, the word *queer* is defined as describing "a sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society" (Safe Space Resource Packet 2010, 1). This definition encompasses all identities included in under LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) as well as other identities that do not traditionally fit within the LGBT

acronym. In the same Safe Space training, *gay* is defined as being a term for homosexual men. *Gay* is also sometimes used as an "umbrella term" like LGBT or queer, and the training says that *gay* is sometimes linked to a specific type of LGBT identity associated with white, male, and upper-middle-classness. An implicit suggestion within the Safe Space training is that saying *queer* or *LGBT* rather than *gay* is preferable for speakers wanting to create a safe, inclusive environment. However, participants are also cautioned that *queer* is considered offensive by some LGBT speakers, and is inappropriate for many situations.

The definition of *queer* provided to students in Safe Space training and through other University sanctioned LGBT programs is contradicted by the Oxford English Dictionary. As of April 2011 the Oxford English Dictionary said that *queer* meant "of or relating to homosexuals or homosexuality," and only sometimes referred to "sexual lifestyles that do not conform to conventional heterosexual behaviour, such as bisexuality or transgenderism" (Appendix A). This definition is closer to the accepted definition of *gay* used by queer speakers at The University, a difference which is probably best explained by the speed at which language changes. While the Oxford English Dictionary's definition differed from that of the Office of LGBT Life at The University, the OED did make note of the controversy surrounding the term by saying that *queer* is still "widely considered offensive, esp. when used by heterosexuals" though it has been used in a non-derogatory fashion since the late 1980s.

In both the Safe Space training and the definition listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, *queer* is shown to be a complex word with more than one accepted meaning. The complexity of *queer* is reflected in the speech of members of an LGBT community of practice at The University. In this study I propose that within a community that has developed among LGBT

students at The University, students rely on a set of linguistic practices including discreet speech, linguistic awareness, and contradictory semantic values of *queer* in order to communicate information about their identities and their roles within the community. The ways in which speakers employ these linguistic techniques reflects the importance of the intersection of multiple identity categories to the speakers.

When I first began this project, my original research goal was to investigate the sex/gender divide constructed in the semantic values of terms such as *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual* versus *transgender, cisgender*, and *genderqueer* (see Appendix A for a definition of *transgender* and other terms of identification). My hypothesis was that while in some situations, individuals who were active participants in queer communities would adhere to the divide between sexual orientation and gender identity in casual conversation, they would identify all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identifying individuals as *gay*. By including all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc. individuals under one category, their casual speech would question the notion that sexual orientation and gender identity are completely separate or unrelated categories.

This original hypothesis was based on previous personal experience with the LGBT community at The University, as well as ethnographic research by David Valentine. In "I Went to Bed with My Own Kind Once: The Erasure of Identity in the Name of Desire" (2006) Valentine interrogates the assumed divide between gender identity and sexuality. In many gender studies texts, a clear divide is constructed between these identity categories. By investigating how low-income transgender and gay identified residents of New York City speak about their own identities, Valentine suggests that this divide may not be naturally produced, or even always useful in practice. Though most of the speakers Valentine observed would be classified as

transgender women by others, they identified themselves as gay. This linguistic practice may construct a dichotomy of heteronormative *straight* versus non-heteronormative *gay*, creating a more cohesive queer identity. However, in communities that have significantly more homosexual individuals than transgender ones, the use of these terms does different cultural work than in the communities studied by Valentine.

The community I had access to was one of almost entirely cisgender individuals. Only two speakers identified as transgender, and most speakers were males who identified as gay (see Appendix B and below). In primarily cisgender gay spaces such as this one the use of the term *gay* as an umbrella term that encompasses and sometimes obscures non-mainstream gender identities may end up privileging the homosexual, non-transgender male identity over other groups. In this way, the gay male identity stands in as the "normal" queer identity, possibly marginalizing homosexual women, transgender individuals, and others who do not easily fit into these categories. This may be mirrored in language when speakers refer to entire LGBT communities as gay. However, in communities where homosexual, cisgender males are more represented than other queer individuals, it is difficult to determine whether the lack of use of terms such as *trans* is a result of a lack of inclusivity, or whether *gay* accurately represents the community.

As my research progressed, I realized that it would be difficult to examine the sexuality/gender divide in a community where cisgendered identities are dominant. Instead, I began to focus on the use of *queer* and *gay* by the students at The University. At The University, students in the community become aware of definitions of *queer* and *gay* through programs such as Safe Space Training. These definitions present *queer* as the more inclusive and preferred term.

However, in their actual speech students use both *queer* and *gay* to refer to mixed-identity groups. Students also connect different identity categories to *queer*. In this research, I focus on the use of *gay* and *queer* as well as other linguistic practices in order to understand more about the intersectionality of race and gender with LGBT and queer identity.

LGBT Language Research Background

Early research on language and sexuality focused on the documentation of language used by homosexual speakers (Cameron and Kulick 2005, 7). According to Cameron and Kulick, this research began as early as the 1920s, when homosexuality was illegal and considered a mental disorder. One early work by Gershon Legman was published as part of a treatise on homosexuality (7) and described an argot used "exclusively by homosexuals" (19). In this article, Legman defined the word *gay* as:

> an adjective used almost exclusively by homosexuals to denote homosexuality, sexual attractiveness, promiscuity ('camped' as promiscuity, on screw, meaning to copulate), or lack of restraint, in a person, place, or party (26).

This definition clearly deviates from current definitions of *gay*. *Gay* is now widely used by non-homosexual speakers, and *gay* is generally not linked to attractiveness or promiscuity. Among the 139 words Legman listed as specific to homosexuals (Cameron and Kulick 2006: 7), the only reference to *queer* was in the definition for *queer bird,* which he defined as "a female homosexual" (1941: 29). As noted by Cameron and Kulick, these lists of definitions can be problematic for those interested in how LGBT and queer speakers actually spoke (16). Legman did not provide any information about the speakers he used for his study, or how and in what contexts they used the terms he defined. No information is provided on how Legman learned this

argot (which may have been difficult in a time when homosexuals could face serious legal consequences), and Legman explicitly states that his glossary refers only to the argot spoken by male homosexuals, since lesbianism "seems in a large measure factitious" (20). As a result of these deficiencies, it is difficult to assess exactly how much of Legman's glossary is accurate. Nonetheless, early research into the connection between sexual orientation, sexual orientation based communities, and language is helpful for understanding the history and evolution of terms such as *gay* and *queer.*

In 1974, Julia Penelope Stanley moved beyond simply documenting and defining terms used in queer communities and began to analyze the social meaning behind the argot. Counter to Legman's claim that lesbianism does not exist, Stanley suggests that lesbian slang is not present in gay slang for other reasons. Lesbians and gay men, Stanley says, exist in a society in which they are at the periphery (1974: 386). While they themselves are marginalized, individuals within gay and lesbian communities marginalize others by perpetuating a power system that is racist, sexist, and classist (385). This power system is apparent in a language which privileges white gay men. Stanley makes connections between what a woman calls herself (*dyke, lesbian,* or *gay woman)* and her political stance. The word *gay* can connote a false sense of happiness to some men, while *homosexual* can seem too clinical and pathologizing (391). Throughout her article Stanley not only describes how lesbians and gay men talk about themselves, but also explains the social importance of word choice in LGBT communities.

Stanley's research focuses on gay men and lesbians in the 1970s; she specifies that she is writing about groups in transition, and about the power structures within them. However,

with the exception of a few notes on the language of gay interracial dating (390), Stanley does not specify the racial, ethnic, or social classes of the speakers. This is potentially problematic, as speakers from different social positions would be reinforcing power structures in different ways depending on their own position within that power structure. By failing to account for intersectionality within LGBT and queer communities, Stanley may be inadvertently mirroring the same power system she criticizes.

Contrastingly, later researchers such as Rusty Barrett focus on more narrowly defined groups of people in order to understand the connection between language, gender, and sexuality. Barrett (2006) says that African American drag queens strategically employ a mix of language variety in order to both perform an identity that has symbolic power as well as to reinforce their "symbolic solidarity with groups that are dominated by the authority symbolized by the standard variety" (162). By focusing on the speech of a single ethnic group and gender identity, Barrett is able to gain a more complex view of symbolic power of language varieties (162) than if he had focused on code-switching among LGBT and queer communities as a whole.

Other research (Eckert 1992 and 2006, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1995, Valentine 2002 and 2006) has gone beyond specifying race, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation and looked instead at the speech of specific communities of practice. Information obtained from studying communities of practice cannot always be applied to larger identity categories; however, this method shows how speakers perform aspects of their identity and reinforce or confront the symbolic power of language varieties with more regard for the social context of the speech (see the following section for more on communities of practice). This information

can be useful in determining why speakers choose certain words and varieties and what these choices mean.

Language, Dominance, and the Normalization of *Gay*

In "White Normativity: The Cultural Dimensions of Whiteness in a Racially Diverse LGBT Organization," Jane Ward suggests that within LGBT communities, even ones that are racially diverse, racially-based power norms can exist in a way that gives white experiences an often unexamined privilege. Ward investigated the function of race and whiteness in a racially diverse LGBT center in Los Angeles. While half of the staff at the center identified as people of color, the organization was viewed as a "white" center by members of the larger Los Angeles LGBT community. Ward says that the perceived whiteness of the institution occurred despite the presence of "a degree of institutional power" (2008, 564) afforded to the staff members of color. Ward argues that the perceived "whiteness" of the center was a result of an institutionalized form of white normalcy that privileged white experiences, and made staff and patrons of color as "the other". Ward also suggests that these white normative practices are the result of a "corporate" model of diversity which features events such as a Diversity Day and Diversity Initiatives (2008, 567). These events, Ward says, suggested that diversity was not simply a byproduct of having many types of experiences present in the organization, but rather a "means to an institutional end" (2008, 573).

The Diversity Day and Diversity Initiatives of the Los Angeles LGBT center may be somewhat mirrored by The University's LGBT community, as there are several discussion groups and programs aimed at increasing visibility and acceptance of queer people of color, queer

women, and transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming people. However, Diversity Day at the center was criticized as being a practice that mostly benefited white employees, validated the experiences of white employees over those of color, and made inaccurate generalizations about the cultures of non-white employees (573). Conversely, the discussion groups and programs at The University are sometimes closed off to those who do not identify as members of the demographic their program seeks to help. This difference is crucial in how these practices are perceived by members of the community, since resources that are only available to the minority group are more likely to be perceived as benefiting that minority group, and not the majority. However, an understanding of how the corporate model of diversity affects the Los Angeles LGBT center may be useful in understanding how white, male, and cisgender identities are coded as the unmarked, "normal" gay identity.

Social or cultural dominance is performed through language alongside identity. McConnell-Ginet and Eckert (1995) explain how dominance in language is created and then sustained when a community of practice privileges one set of experiences and linguistic practices over another. These linguistic practices then become understood as the "unmarked" and natural practices, creating a form of symbolic privilege that "requires no explanation or justification" (483).

In this community of LGBT students, multiple levels of power are recognized. First, students recognize the groups' position in relation to other, non-LGBT groups. While the actions of "other" people are unmarked, their own actions and identities are marked as gay, queer, or LGBT. Within the community of practice, however, some identities have symbolic power over others. Specifically, it appears that *gay*, as opposed to *lesbian*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, or *queer*

identities, is considered the "neutral" term. This symbolic privileging of gayness over other

identities in the LGBT spectrum is locally and community-based, emerging from specific

linguistic practices (to be described further in this paper). However, this privileging is not

without cultural precedence. In his examination of media representations of LGBT persons,

sociologist Steven Seidman (2005) suggests that LGBT communities have attempted to gain a

form of social power by aligning themselves with "normal" or mainstream straight identities. He

associates the "normal gay" with traditional masculinity and adherence to gender norms, as well

as associating oneself with middle-class ideals. Lesbian identities, he says, are less prevalent in

the image of the "normal gay," and transgender or gender non-conforming even less so. The

main LGBT identity presented as "normal" and as having the most cultural power with non-

LGBT culture is that of the gay male. The privileging of cisgendered male-identities, along with

the privileging of whiteness described by Ward, suggests that broader cultural power constructs

have an influence on the language and culture of marginalized communities (Santiago 2010).

Community of Practice

Many language and gender studies have focused on communities where one racial or

ethnic group is dominant (Stanley 1974, Barrett 2006, Bucholtz 1999, Valentine 2002). The

LGBT student community at The University provides a unique opportunity for study because

while white students are in the majority, the group of students most active in this LGBT social

group are racially heterogeneous (see Appendix B). It is also notable that not all of the students

know how other members of the group identify in terms of sexual orientation and gender

identity. Therefore, the group's identity is not necessarily contingent all of the members sharing a

specific identity.

As a result of these facets of the community, it is particularly useful to examine this group through the framework of a community of practice, which is by definition any number of people who gather together over a period of time for a common purpose (Eckert 1992, 4). Communities of practice can emerge in formal, organized ways such as through clubs or classes, or through informal institutions such as families and groups of friends. In the case of LGBT and ally students, the common purpose is an interest in LGBT issues and community. The students who constitute this community of practice participate in programs and organizations sponsored by The University's Office of LGBT Life, such as the President's Commission on the Sexuality, Gender Diversity, and Queer Equality, the Office of LGBT Life's advisory board, various queer discussion groups, or the undergraduate student group The University Pride. However, more so than their individual participation in the Office's programs, what forms them as a community of practice is their presence as a "viable crowd" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999, 186) and visible community on The University's campus.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet describe a similar phenomenon in which Asian-American high schoolers of various Asian-American ethnicities form a social group in which there is a "self-conscious construction of unity around a particular set of differences" (1992, 187). This "self-conscious construction," in the case of LGBT students at The University, is the performance of various individual identities that frequently draw from or purposefully reject tropes and archetypes of LGBT identity, which are then contextualized within the community. Studies utilizing communities of practice as an analytic framework have investigated groups that fall outside of traditional categorization. This includes research focusing on a group of "nerd

girls" (Bucholtz 1999) who construct their "nerd" identity through positive and negative linguistic practices (212). The community of practice is key to the study of nerd girls since nerds could be overlooked in a speech community model. Marginal community members who differ from the norm of the community are not represented in studies of speech communities (208). When looking at individuals whose presentation or personal identification differ from that of the larger community, a different approach is necessary. The community of practice model is also useful for groups such as the LGBT students at The University since the students represent a variety of identities.

Queer Ethnography

When looking at a community that is labeled and/or has labeled itself as LGBT, queer, or gay it is important to look at exactly how that label is applied and utilized. Specifically Suzanne de Castell and Mary Bryson (1998: 98) question what exactly makes a community and the ethnographic study of that community queer. When describing communities, de Castell and Bryson emphasize the importance of not assuming "queerness" is inherent in lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. The act of being queer is not simply an act of sex or sexual orientation, but rather something that is performed in one way or another in multiple aspects of life but rather as:

> Queer is, *tout court,* about the deliberate enactment of an endless series of transgression: queer shoes, queer hair, queer speech patterns; in short, an apparently queer set of cultural practices that define the parameters of a queer life. (1998, 102)

When describing the LGBT student community at The University, I kept in mind the importance of perfomativity, both in regards to specific linguistic practices as well as that the students involved in this community had chosen in some way or another to publicly identify themselves

as queer. For many of the students, their queer cultural practices were their participation in activities and programs that were marked as queer, their physical presence in marked places such as the Office of LGBT Life at The University (which regularly keeps its door open and is next to a main entrance of the student union), as well as their identification of themselves as gay, queer, lesbian, etc. Their performances of queer identity in spaces marked as *queer* were important factors in determining their membership in this community of practice.

Language and Identity

Language is used to perform and reinforce individual identities, as well as to negotiate the speakers' role within a community by positioning themselves with or against other speakers. The study of language, gender, and sexuality assumes that language is an important part of human identity, and that it is "a primary tool people use in constituting themselves and others as 'kinds' of people in terms of which attributes, activities, and participating in social practice can be regulated." (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995, 470).

Some scholars such as Don Kulick have argued that the connection between language and identity should not be the main focus for contemporary linguists. Instead, Kulick calls for a renewed focus on the connection between language and the expression of desire (2000). However, Bucholtz and Hall say that "to set aside sexual identity in linguistic research has serious implications for the field of language and sexuality," (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 472), by potentially marginalizing further members of society who have been alternatively ignored and oppressed. They then criticize Kulick for his attempts to "smuggle identity into the desire framework" when analyzing the "desire for identity" (2004: 479), and reiterate the importance of

recognizing identity as a key aspect of gender and sexuality. Bucholtz and Hall say that desire is "always mediated in some way by identity" and that identity is therefore "a central element in the linguistic and social production of sexuality" (2004: 507).

This is particularly relevant for the analysis of the LGBT student community at The University. Students rarely speak about personal desire in a group setting, and, as previously mentioned, it is common for students to not know the sexual orientation of other members of the community. Like with the Asian American students described by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), it is not the sharing of an abstract concept (such as homosexual desire) that holds the group together. Instead, the group itself has value for its members as it allows them to perform a diverse range of specific LGBT and queer identities within it.

It is also important to note that the students discussed in this study are not necessarily representative of other LGBT students, even on the same campus. The students share some specific linguistic practices, which are influenced by a broader concept of LGBT culture. However, they do not represent all LGBT individuals, even of their same age range. Rusty Barrett describes linguistics that focuses on queer speakers as "a linguistics in which identity categories are not accepted as a priori entities, but are recognized as ideological constructs produced by social discourse" (1999, 28). Following this thought, I will not try to identify universalities regarding how LGBT or queer identities are performed during my analysis. Instead, I will look at a specific community as a means of highlighting the contextual nature of identity formation (Eckert 1992, 462, Cameron 2005). By examining the performance of identity in this specific community, my research will provide further examples of identity as a local and community based practice. By examining the connection between language and identity in queer

students, I will be able to provide insight into the concerns and desires of this frequently underrepresented group.

Methodology

This study was created to research the linguistic practices employed by speakers within a an LGBT student community at The University. This research took place in two phases. During the first phase, I was a participant-observer in a LGBT student community at The University. The specific student community I researched was a group of students actively involved in University-sanctioned activities such as student discussion groups and committees. During this phase of research I focused on collecting data about the use of terms of identification such as *gay*, *lesbian*, *queer*, and *LGBT*. During the second phase I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the same LGBT student community. These two phases allowed me to observe spontaneous speech in the participant observation phase, as well as learn more in depth about the students' familiarity with and definition of specific terms. For the purposes of this research I looked at the students as members of a community of practice. The students constitute a community of practice because they frequent the same places (the Office of LGBT Life and meeting venues) and regularly engage in the same activities.

Phase One

The first phase of this research took place over the summer and fall of 2010. In order to overhear natural speech by members of LGBT student communities, I worked and volunteered in The University's Office of LGBT Life. As a result, this study focuses on students who actively

participate in organizations and programs sponsored by the Office. The Office employs 4-5 students at a time, and 20-30 students regularly participate in the undergraduate student group, The University Pride. The LGBT community at The University is also interesting in that a number of different races, ethnicities, and social classes are represented, creating a unique social environment largely held together by a shared interest in LGBT identities. These students were also more accessible for research because they could be recruited for research through the Office's mailing lists and online conferences.

The first phase of this research took place between early June 2010 and mid October 2010. I spent between 3 and 6 hours a day, 5 days a week in the Office of LGBT Life during June, July, and most of August. At the Office, I participated by doing office-related tasks such as rearranging the library, making labels for DVDS, writing informational pamphlets to be handed out at events, and most importantly studying and socializing with other students. Since this took place over the summer there were a limited number of students on campus, and I took notes on five individuals who frequented the office. In September and October I worked in the Office of LGBT Life as a work-study student. I was in the office on average 10 hours a week. I observed 16 individuals during this time, including 4 who were also present over the summer.

During the five months of this phase of research, I took notes on the speech of a total of 16 students and 2 full-time employees of the Office. In my notes, I wrote down conversations that occurred between members of the community that included any term relating to identity, such as *gay, LGBT, LGBTQ, straight, hetero, lesbian, trans*, etc. I also noted the location of speech, who else was present, time and date, whether or not the setting was private, and notes on the context of the speech including genre and register. Figures 1 and 2 show the gender and

racial/ethnic distribution of the students whom I took notes on during this phase of research.

Participants were informed that I was conducting linguistic research for my honors thesis and

that I would be writing down parts of conversations I overheard. In order to limit the influence of

my study on the speech of participants, they were not told the specific focus of my research.
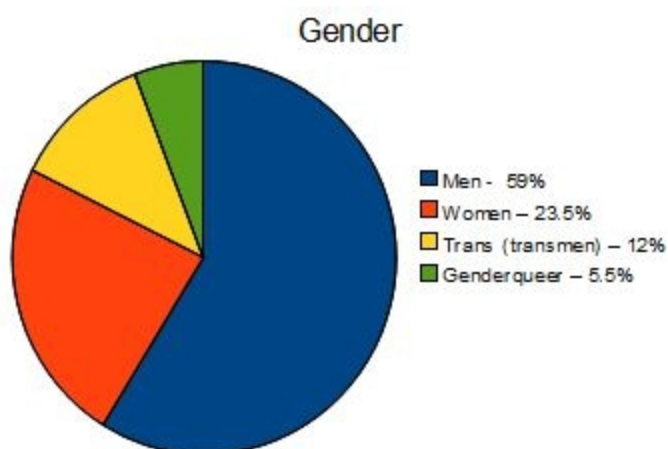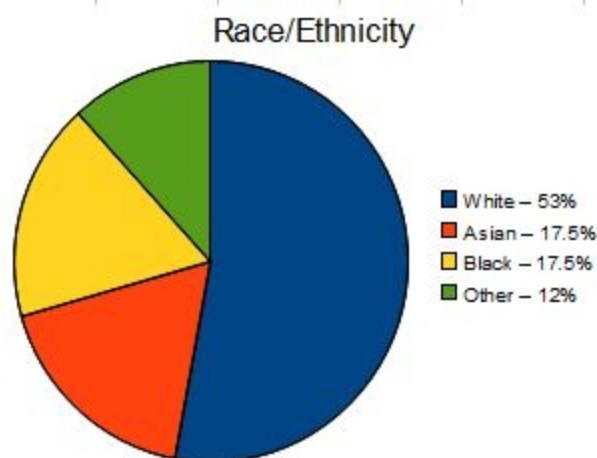

Figure 1. Gender of Participants

Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Participants. See Appendix B for more information in informants.

For this phase of research, I particularly focused on conversations where the terms *gay*,

lesbian, *bisexual*, *trans, transgender, LGBT,* and *queer* occurred. In order to keep my research

unbiased, I chose not to take notes on conversations in which I felt I played too large a role. In some instances I took notes on a conversation that I later discarded because I felt my own word choice might have influenced that of the other students.

Phase 2:

After completing five months of participant observation I conducted interviews with five individuals who appeared frequently in my notes. These interviews allowed me to ask specific questions about the individuals' identities and preferred terminology that were not always clear through observation, but are useful for analysis. While the interviews were informal in nature, they also created an environment where the speakers were more likely to speak in a formal register, since they were being audio recorded. The interviews also allowed me to assess participants' metalinguistic knowledge, and information about their linguistic history.

Three of the five interviews took place on November 24, 2010. For these interviews, I began with the following set of questions:

-How do you self-identify?
-How do you personally define [the term used to self-identify]?
-Where did you first hear [the term used to self-identify]?
-Has the way you self-identify changed during your lifetime?
-Do people always understand what you mean when you say you identify as [the term used to self-identify]? If not, how do you explain it?
-Are there certain words that you feel more or less comfortable using to describe yourself or other LGBT people depending on the environment? Do you change how you describe your identity depending on who you're talking to (e.g. call yourself *gay* instead of *queer*)?
-Has being involved with the Office of LGBT Life or any other LGBT organization changed the way you describe yourself or other LGBT people?

This set of questions was used when interviewing participants under the pseudonyms Pietro, Goldilocks, and Amy (Table 1). The remaining two interviews (Emmanuel and Poppy) took

place on February 3, 2011. Three of the interviews were with female-identified individuals (Goldilocks, Amy, and Poppy) and two were with male-identified individuals (Pietro and Emmanuel). The longest interview (with Pietro)was 81 minutes and 31 seconds long , the shortest (with Amy) was 37 minutes and 44 seconds long, and they averaged 52 minutes and 42 seconds in length.

Four of the five participants were involved in the Office of LGBT Life in an official capacity (such as being an officer in a club, leading a discussion forum, or being a work-study student). The other participant, Goldilocks, while not holding an official leadership position in any club or group, is a common presence in the Office of LGBT Life and has participated in the social life of the LGBT student community for almost three years. One participant identified as Brazilian, one as Singaporean, one as African American, one as white, and one as Sicilian American. The interviews were recorded with Audacity 1.2.6 sound editing software, using the built-in microphone of a Toshiba Satellite laptop.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender Identity	Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	year (F11)
Emmanuel	19	M	gay	African American	sophomore
Pietro	20	M (trans)	"Mostly gay"	White/Sicilian	junior
Goldilocks	20	F	lesbian	White/Hispanic	junior
Amy	20	F	bi/questioning	Asian	sophomore
Poppy	19	F	bi/questioning	White	sophomore

Table 1. Speaker Information/Demographics of Interviewed Participants

Before beginning the interviews, I knew how each of the participants self-identified, and could reasonably assume they were aware of my knowledge. However, direct questioning of another person's sexuality or gender identity is rare in The University's LGBT student community. Being asked, even by someone they knew and regularly saw in LGBT spaces,

seemed to make the first two participants I interviewed feel uncomfortable. For this reason, after the first two interviews I switched to asking about experiences that required the participants to reveal how they identified in order to answer. One such question was "have you come out to anyone in recent years?". Another question used was "what have been some of your experiences with the Office of LGBT Life?" Once the participant's identity was elicited, questions about the terms they used while answering followed. In order to minimize my influence on the participants speech, I avoided using terms such as *queer* and *gay* until the participants themselves had used them. In order to broadly explain the topic of my research, I used the term *LGBT.*

In the interviews, my role as an insider ethnographer was particularly noteworthy. Typically interviews elicit more formal speech from speakers, since they are aware that their speech is being recorded and will be reviewed by someone at a later date. However, because I knew and was on good terms with all of the speakers, their speech was less formal than might be expected. This was beneficial to my research but also raised a potential problem; because I knew the speakers beforehand, I was aware of the speakers' identities, many of their coming out stories, and how they typically used the terms of identification. The speakers therefore may have felt they did not need to elaborate in their answers as much as they might have with someone they did not know. Nonetheless, I believe I was able to elicit more candid speech from the participants that better reflected their actual speech. While an ethnographer who was unfamiliar to the speakers may have had an easier time getting the speakers to explain aspects of their life in detail, I was able to elicit the speech that sometimes contrasts with reported usage.

After the interviews I transcribed the audio files using Express Scribe. I then analyzed the audio files, as well as conversations from my phase one notes, in MAXQDA+ (Figure 4).

Databases were created for the words *queer*, *gay*, *LGBT*, *lesbian, bi/bisexual*, and *trans*. For each

word, I analyzed how frequently it was used by each speaker, what part of speech it was used in,

as well as the contextual meaning of each term.
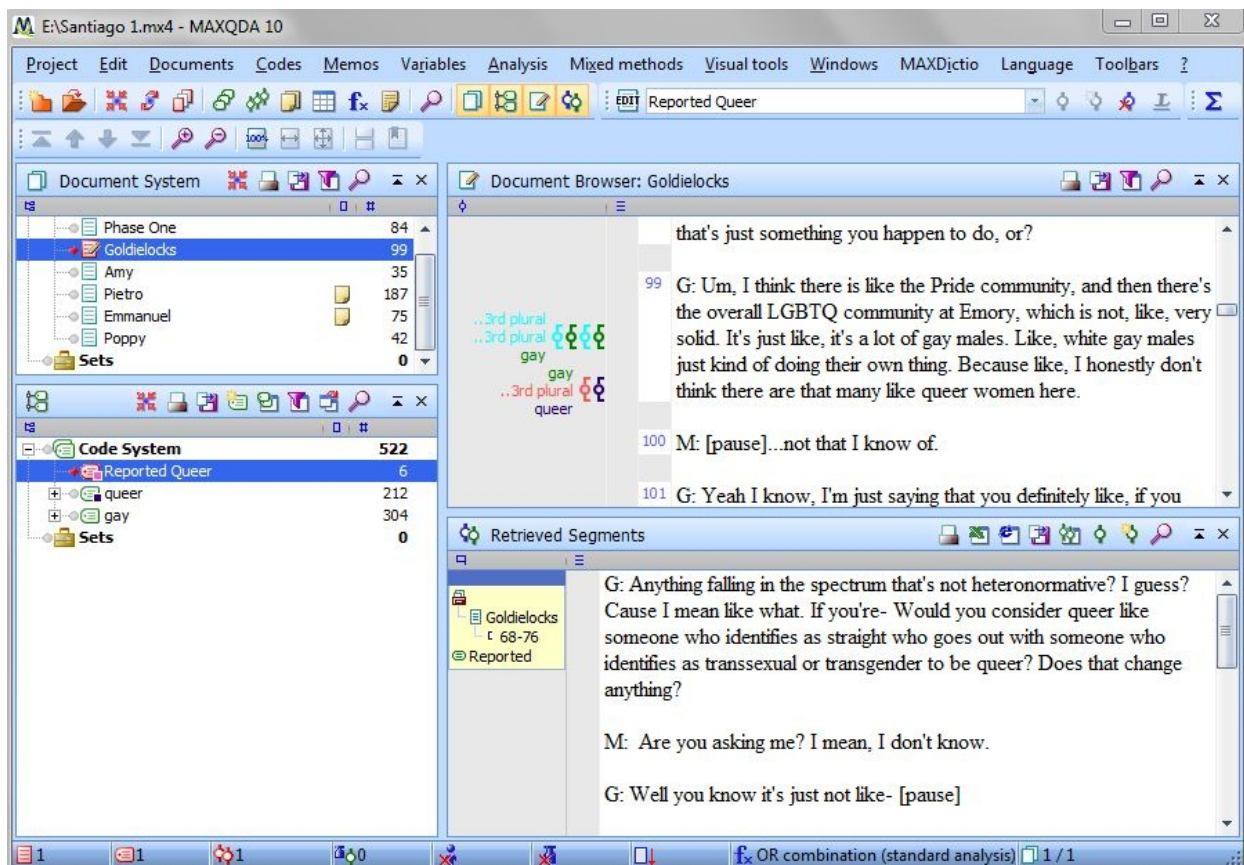
Figure 4. Screen shot of MaxQDA+

Ethnography

An important factor of this study is my own connection to the community I studied. I

have been involved with the Office of LGBT Life at The University since January 2009. As a

result of this involvement, my role within this research is best classified as that of an insider

ethnographer. There is significant literature on the ability of a person who can claim membership

within a group to produce accurate scholarship (Kulick (1999), Lewin and Leap (1996),

Valentine (2002)). In my research I recognize the potential problems associated with being an insider ethnographer, such as the inability to recognize practices of the community that have become normalized to me, or a disinclination to record data I might feel reflects negatively on my own community.

Arguments can be made that being an insider will hamper my ability to accurately gather and analyze data. Gathering data as an insider can be problematic because, as a member of the group I am observing, some of the differences in speech may not be as noticeable to me as they are to those unfamiliar with the community's speech. For instance, individuals may feel especially aware of the use of the term *queer* if they do not hear this term on a regular basis. A member of the community, however, may have become used to this term and no longer feel as though it stands out. While I am familiar with The University's LGBT student culture, prior to 2009 I had no experience with LGBT or LGBT-inclusive communities. I was mostly unfamiliar with both the formal and informal uses of terms such as *gay* and *queer* as they are used in the student community, and had only heard most of the terms in a derogatory context. I believe that the specific parts of language I am focusing on are new enough to me that I will not have particular trouble noticing their subtleties of use. The fact that these terms are still relatively new to me means I am less likely to overlook how they are used.

Another possible complication of my role as an insider ethnographer is that I might have trouble presenting data that does not reflect favorably on the community. While it is true that I have a connection to The University Pride and the Office of LGBT Life, the research I am doing is descriptive in nature. I do not believe that the type of data I am gathering will reflect favorably or unfavorably on the speakers. More broadly, I do not believe that certain types of language use

can be objectively good or bad, and I would have no incentive to misrepresent this aspect of the community. However, with this potential issue in mind, I made sure to keep accurate and thorough data, and I reviewed my findings for bias (c.f. Kulick 1999, Lewin and Leap 1996 and 2002, Valentine 2002 and 2006).

Along with recognizing the potential problems with being an insider ethnographer, I also recognize the unique vantage point my pre-established role in the community gives me. Speakers in this and other communities change the level of formality in their speech depending on how familiar they are with fellow speakers. These distinctions are very present in the use of terms such as *gay*, *lesbian*, *queer*, and *trans*. A key part of my research was to understand why and when speakers use specific lexical items, and the different semantic values these items have that depend on the context of speech. In order to hear these differences in speech, I had to be able to observe speakers as they were speaking informally with members of the community. This would have been more difficult for a person who was not a part of the LGBT student culture at The University, either through past work or volunteer experience or through personal identification as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person. During my observations, I have noted that the presence of an outsider to the community will change the register of speech, making it either more formal or on occasion more markedly informal. Being an insider has allowed me to gather more natural and reliable data, since my presence will be less likely to change natural speech.

Results

For the first phase of research, I focused on conversations where the terms *gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, transgender, LGBT,* and *queer* occurred. Over this five month period, *gay* and *queer* were the terms used most frequently by speakers to describe either themselves or others. I overheard uses of t*rans, t*ransgender, or variants such as *transguy* 17 times (Table 2). All of these tokens were said by speakers who identify as transgender.

	Tokens (used in all contexts and grammatical categories)
Gay	30
Queer	24
Trans/Transgender	17
Bi/Bisexual	3
Lesbian	5
LGBT	4
Total	83

Table 2. Phase 1 Overall Term Usage. This chart represents instance of terms overheard in all contexts and grammatical categories.

The fact that only transgender identified speakers use terms such as *trans* and *transguy* is not particularly surprising if we assume they are the only speakers who regularly talk about transgender-related issues. However, I also overheard other speakers engage in discussions about trans individuals and identities. When talking about transgender people, it seemed more common for individuals who identified as part of the LGBT community but were not themselves transgender to avoid using the words *trans* or *transgender.* This avoidance can be seen in a conversation that took place between myself and another student on October 19, 2010:

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1. Jake:       I was talking to him and I'm not sure how much I can let him (.)* like I get it.
2.             You're more manly than me.
3. Marina:     Yeah, he does that, but I mean (.) he's trying to prove something. He's not
4.             comfortable with himself
5. Jake:       You think?
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6. Marina: Yeah, definitely, I mean=
7. Jake: =When did he start, like, telling everyone about (.)
8. Marina: About a year ago. When I met him, that's when he really started.
9. Jake: Oh, okay. See, if it had been when he was like a teenager.
*Transcription conventions: (.) indicate a pause in speech, while = indicates overlapping speech

Jake was expressing frustration that an acquaintance who identifies as a transgender man would frequently try to prove he was more "manly" than Jake, a cisgender man. When Jake asked me how long the mutual friend had been publicly transitioning, he relied on our mutual implied understanding. This type of indirectness is typical of students talking about identities that are not their own. The conversation took place on a bus where there was no one else in hearing distance, so Jake's avoidance of terms such as *trans* can not be attributed entirely to protecting the other student's privacy. His pause in line 7 is most likely a sign that he was not comfortable with the words *trans* and *transgender*. This could also suggest that within the community of practice, the idea of "coming out" (line 7, "start, like, telling everyone about") is not generally associated with transgender individuals. In this context, referring to the student as being *queer* (a word Jake has used in other contexts) would not be appropriate because Jake, myself, and the other person could all fit under the label *queer*, and when Jake and I discuss the other person's identity we rely on other terms to differentiate the student from ourselves.

In the example from the first phase of my research, a member of the community of practice displayed an awareness of the performativity of his lexical choices, as well as a tendency to avoid directly naming the identity of others. Examples of these two linguistic practices appeared multiple times throughout my study. During participant observation, I also noted (Appendix C) that at least one student self-reported speech contradictory uses of the word *queer*. *Queer* was of particular interest to my research because the speakers' definitions of *queer* were

so varied, and because the definitions they provided seem to give insight into how they understand the LGBT community. In the second phase of research, I was also able to discuss more directly with the students how they defined the term *queer*.

I conducted five interviews with speakers who had been active in the community during the time I did participant observation. These speakers were Goldilocks, Amy, Pietro, Emmanuel, and Poppy (demographic information can be found in Appendix B). In the five interviews, the words *queer* and *gay* were said 216 times by the participants. Ninety of these times were the word *queer*, so of the times a speaker said *gay* or *queer* only 41.7% were the term *queer*. The remaining 126 were the word *gay,* suggesting that *gay* is more commonly used by members of the community of practice (Table 3). However, while this may be true overall, each individual participant used the terms *gay* and *queer* in ways differently from the other participants. Some speakers, such as Amy and Emmanuel, used *queer* over 60% of the time they used a term of identification, while others used *gay* the majority of the time. Poppy used *queer* three times, but only when asked if she ever used that word to describe LGBT communities or people.

	Queer	Gay	Total
Goldilocks	12 (24.5%)	37	49
Amy	11 (64.7%)	6	17
Pietro	41 (44.1%)	52	93
Emmanuel	23 (62.2%)	14	37
Poppy	3 (15%)	17	20
Total	90 (41.7%)	126	216

Table 3. Phase 2 Overall Term Usage. This table shows how many times each speaker said *queer* or *gay* in their interview.

Table 4 shows the number of times the speakers used *gay* and *queer* to refer to themselves or to others. This distinction was made because two of the participants identified themselves as

gay, and none of the participants identified as only queer (as such, participants who used queer in reference to themselves also identified as either gay, lesbian, or transgender). Therefore it was not a surprising result that *gay* was used more often than *queer* since *gay* was used when referring both to the individual speaker and to others.

	Queer	Gay	Total
Self-Reference	5 (17.8%)	22	28
Reference to Others	85 (45.2%)	104	188
Total	90 (41.7%)	126	216

Table 4. *Queer* and *Gay* (Total). This table shows how many times all speakers said *queer* or *gay*. See Appendix D for information on individual speakers.

When asked how they identified, only Pietro and Emmanuel described themselves as gay. The other speakers, when asked to describe their personal identities, used *lesbian, bi, questioning* and *ally.* While Pietro used *gay* and *queer* to speak about other LGBT people or communities about equally, Emmanuel used *queer* 77.8% of the time (Table 3). Even though Pietro used the term *gay* more often than Emmanuel overall, both gay-identified men use *gay* when speaking in first person more often than the word *queer.*

While both Emmanuel and Pietro identified as gay, their experiences and backgrounds are very different from one another. They both distinguished the term *queer* from *gay*, but using different litmus tests. While Pietro, who is transgendered, distinguished between the more trans-inclusive *queer* and the less trans-inclusive *gay*, Emmanuel suggested a connection between the word *queer* and people of color. Emmanuel, who is black, said that "gay American society" is "white oriented," and that by using the term *queer*, speakers are being subversive (Appendix E3). Pietro also coded *gay* as white, but focused more on *gay* as a term that, when referring to communities, is inherently cisgendered while *queer* communities are more likely to be "enlightened" about transgender issues.

When making the distinction between *gay* and *queer* communities, Pietro focused on the community's perception of transgender issues and how much importance they placed on being transgender inclusive, not on whether or not the members of the *queer* community were themselves transgender. When comparing *gay* to *queer*, Pietro said that members of the *gay* community "don't understand," (Appendix E3, line 7) while people who identify as *queer* "get it" (line 13). He then contradicts himself, saying that *queer* individuals "usually don't understand trans stuff at all. Or care about it" (line 12). This discrepancy in his self-reported definition suggests that to him, *queer* holds at least two meanings: the *queer* ideal, which is trans-inclusive, and the actual *queer*, which is the same as his perception of *gay*. The *queer* ideal is in line with the definition of *queer* that is provided by the Office of LGBT Life, while the latter definition reflects Pietro's perceptions about the cisgender-dominated queer culture at The University.

Goldilocks, who identified herself as a lesbian, used *queer* when speaking in first person 28.6% of the time (Appendix D, Table 8). She used *gay* in first person speech 71.4% of the time and in third person 76.2% of the time. Unlike Pietro and Emmanuel, she did not report attaching any extra connotations to *queer*, saying it was a broader term for *LGBT.* Despite this self-reported definition, she makes a distinction between "white gay males" she sees on campus who are not involved in the LGBT community and "queer women," who are less visible unless they are actively involved in queer student life (Appendix E6). Goldilocks says she frequently sees white gay men on campus that, despite not being part of her social group, she "knows" are gay. When saying she rarely sees women she would identify as being LGBT or queer, she used *queer* instead of *gay,* which she had used when referring to men. This wording suggests that while she doesn't overtly associate *queer* with trans-inclusivity or people of color, she may be implicitly

linking *gay* with male identities, and *queer* with the marked female identities.

Amy and Poppy both described themselves as *bi* and *questioning,* and potentially as futures allies. At no point in their interviews did either one use the terms *gay* or *queer* to refer to themselves. Poppy said she preferred not to use the word *queer* because of its "negative connotation" and association with being "strange" (Appendix E5, line 7). However, she also said she was comfortable using it as a "blanket term" with a meaning similar to the acronym *LGBT.* This contradiction is similar to Pietro's report that *queer* individuals "get it" (E3 line 13) and "don't understand" (E3 line 7). Poppy, like Pietro, has two meanings of *queer* that exist simultaneously in her speech. Despite having this similarity with Pietro, both of Poppy's definitions are different than his. In Poppy's speech, one definition of *queer is* a "not offensive" (E5 line 4) blanket term that could be synonymous with *LGBT* or other speaker's use of *gay* as an umbrella term. The other definition has a negative connotation and means "strange" (E5 line 7). Amy said she didn't use *queer* to describe herself because the word was not common in her home country, Singapore (she went to an English-speaking school). Despite this, she still used *queer* more often than *gay* (Appendix E2).

Table 5 illustrates how the five speakers defined *queer.* The table shows the definitions of *queer* as the speakers reported them, which sometimes differed from how they actually used *queer* during the interviews. Seven semantic features are listed, including *queer* being defined as (A) an umbrella term that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities, (B) a word with negative connotations, (C) a word that the speaker claims he or she actually uses, (D) a word that is used by other people in the speaker's social circle, (E) a word that is used to refer to

people of color, (F) a word that is used when referring to speakers who are aware of and sensitive to transgender issues, and (G) a word that is used to refer to women.

	Goldilocks	Amy	Pietro	Emmanuel	Poppy
A. Umbrella term	+	+	+	+	+
B. Negative Connotation	-	-	-	-	+/-
C. Used by the speaker	-	-	+	+	+/-
D. Used in speaker's social circle	+	+/-	+	?	+
E. Refers to People of Color	-	-	-	+	-
F. Implies sensitivity to transgender related issues	-	-	+/-	-	-
G. Refers to Women	-	-	-	-	-

Table 5. Semantic and Pragmatic Features of Speakers' Reported Usage of *Queer*. See Appendix E for interview transcripts relevant to this chart.

Though Goldilocks may have implicitly linked *queer*ness to women, none of the speakers reported and connection between *queer* and any (non-transgender) gender identity. Only one speaker, Emmanuel, linked *queer* to race. Also, two of the speakers gave contradictory information for two of the semantic features. Pietro said that *queer* individuals were more aware of transgender issues, but at another point that they didn't care. Poppy said that *queer* was an acceptable, non-offensive umbrella term, but also that she associated it with being strange. These contradictory definitions indicate that *queer* is a word whose semantic value is in flux, and can mean multiple things to multiple people.

The only feature that all five speakers agreed on was that *queer* is an umbrella term that by definition includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities. This definition is consistent with the information provided to students by the Office of LGBT Life at The University (Safe Space Resource Packet 2010, 1). Almost all of the speakers said that *queer* is used in their social circle, but it was unclear in Emmanuel's case. These similarities indicate Office of LGBT Life and the social groups that form around the Office's programs has an influence on how speakers understand and use the word *queer*.

Discussion

Unspoken Identities

One noticeable factor in students' linguistic choices is that they seemed relatively aware of and interested in how their word choices were perceived by others. This awareness is displayed in this interaction from October 20, 2011:

1. Steve (to me):   Hello, I'm Steve, I'm gay and I like glitter and unicorns.
2. Marina: (.) What?

This statement occurred before a meeting of The University Pride. Steve and a group of three other students had been sitting a few feet away from me. After Steve said this, he and another student explained that an orientation leader had asked students if they knew anyone who identified as an LGBT ally during a freshman orientation earlier in the day. They were then asked if they knew anyone who was LGBT, and finally if they themselves were lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Steve was the only person in his group who chose to identify himself as gay.

Though the point of the orientation was to encourage students to be accepting of LGBT individuals, Steve and the others retelling the event found it humorous as well as somewhat

uncomfortable to be asked to publicly announce their identities in that setting. When Steve referenced the stereotype of gay men being feminine ("glitter and unicorns"), he was most likely referring to how the other students perceived him as a result of his identity. In other situations, Steve has identified himself as *queer* and *genderqueer,* but his retelling of the story suggests that he is more likely to refer to himself as *gay* if he is in a group of people he doesn't know very well, such as an orientation group. By referring to himself as *gay* rather than *queer* or *genderqueer* he makes his identity more accessible to speakers outside of the community of practice, but that accessibility allows them to draw stereotypical conclusions about his personality.

This event was notable enough to Steve that not only did he tell the story to his friends, but the group decided to call over another person (me) to share the punchline. This exchange shows that Steve is aware of the performative nature of his identity. In the original orientation group, he was performing an identity that was somewhat thrust upon him, and he believes the other students interpreted this as him being a stereotypical "glitter and unicorns" gay man. However, when he retold the story to students in Pride he was able to re-assert his identity as a member of the community of practice, as well as his identity as a queer individual. Not only did he tell a story about being singled out that was relatable to other LGBT students, but by announcing the line "I'm gay and I like glitter and unicorns" to me before I knew the context he was able to joke about how the perception of his gay identity did not match up to the reality. This exchange also reflects on the tendency of members of the community of practice to avoid declarative statements such as "I'm gay." Part of the humor of the situation came from the awkwardness and unfamiliarity of such a direct statement of identity.

This example shows members of the community using negative identity practices. In other communities (Bucholtz 1999: 211) negative identity practices are used by individuals to distance themselves from another identity, such as nerd girls avoiding slang to distance themselves from "cool" groups (219). In the LGBT student community, however, the negative identity practices are not just avoiding forms used by other communities in order to reaffirm their own otherness. Instead, individuals like Steve avoid using *queer* when outside of the community because he feels the non-derogatory definition may be unfamiliar to non-LGBT groups. By having to avoid certain terms and subsequently telling his friends in Pride about it, Steve asserts the importance of the queer community, since that is the group where he is comfortable using the term *queer* as well as joking about gay stereotypes. In this example as well as in the exchange between myself and Jake the avoidance of specific words is one of the ways individuals perform their membership within the community.

Normal *Gay* and Deviant *Queer*

In the previous example, Steve most likely used *gay* partially because it was a term more familiar to individuals not involved in LGBT communities. Similar negotiations over which terms are appropriate for use outside of the community of practice occurred a number of times. In another example, Pietro and I discussed an application I was filling out on behalf of The University Pride. After mentioning that I need three "interesting facts" about the group, this exchange occurred:

1. Pietro: [joking tone] We've got a lot of gays.
2. Marina: I'm sure they'll like that.
3. Pietro: A lot of gays and allies.
4. Marina: Well, and other people. Not just gays (.) a lot of queers*?

5. Pietro: I'm on the fence. I use gays and queers interchangeably. You should put that in
6.   your research thing.
7. Marina: I will.
8. Pietro: A lot of people at [redacted] don't like queer. I tried to say how it was used, but
9.   they were like "No." They all had negative connotations with it.
10. Marina: Yeah. I use them like that in just conversation, but for official things I put, like,
11.   LGBT.
12. Pietro: Yeah, because people might see queers and be like (.)
13. Marina: Yeah.

*Instances of *gay* and *queer* after line 4 were not included in Table 2 due to my own influence on the conversation.

Like in the previous example with Steve, Pietro's joking use of *gay* in line 1 is probably a reference to how he believes a group like The University Pride is perceived by others: a place only for gay students. Both Pietro and Steve believe that terms like *queer* would not be understood in heteronormative communities. Pietro then more seriously amends his statement so that it includes allies. In line 3, *gay* is referring to how the group is perceived by others, but also as an umbrella term that includes everyone who might go to The University Pride who isn't a straight, cisgendered ally. As I am filling out the form, I suggest that *queers* is a term that describes the membership of Pride better than *gays*. Pietro refers to himself as "on the fence" about the two terms, saying that he uses them synonymously. While he contradicts this statement at various points during my research (see Appendix C1), in this exchange he says he equates *queer* and *gay* as equally appropriate umbrella terms to classify heterogeneous groups of LGBT individuals. He also equates his own usage of *queer* as synonymous with *gay* as the more enlightened approach, mentioning that he had tried to explain its usage to members of another LGBT organization. These individuals associated negative connotations with the word *queer* and therefore were not comfortable with its use.

In another exchange, Pietro said that individuals who do not feel comfortable using the

word *queer* as an umbrella term for LGBT identities "haven't been around Justin [the current director of the Office of LGBT Life] enough" (Appendix C1). This suggests that to Pietro, use of the word *queer* indicates that a person has "been around" the Office enough to acclimate to its linguistic practices, therefore making them a member of the community of practice. Using *queer* at the University is acquired by being around individuals and authority figures (such as Justin) who also use the word as a means of increasing inclusivity. Therefore the use of *queer* becomes a way to distinguish who is and is not a member of the community of practice. When a speaker avoids *queer* where it would otherwise make sense (such as to refer to Steve's identity or to the members of Pride) suggests that the speaker thinks he or she is speaking to someone who is not familiar with the community or its terminology. Using *queer* within the community would then suggest that a speaker is both familiar and comfortable with the LGBT culture at The University.

Pietro and Steve both imply that *queer* is the preferred term. Steve jokes about publicly calling himself *gay* because of the cultural assumptions linked to male homosexuality, and Pietro says he tried to encourage the use of *queer* to others who rejected it. Steve and Pietro assume that students at the University who are not members of this or other queer communities of practice would not have exposure to these terms or may view it as derogatory. This assumption leads to Steve referring to himself as *gay* where he would otherwise call himself *queer*, and Pietro overtly distinguishing between those who have and have not been around Justin. The avoidance of *queer* in certain contexts is acknowledged as a concession to a culture that is either heteronormative or does not understand LGBT issues, while the usage of *queer* in the community is a positive identity marker.

As is evident by the preceding examples, speakers in the community of practice place different values on the terms *gay* and *queer*. While both terms can be used to refer to the same individuals or groups of people, they hold different connotations. *Gay* is more acceptable for use outside of specifically queer communities, such as the LGBT student community at The University. *Queer* then comes to mean a deviation from the *gay* norm, though individual speakers may regard different identity categories (race, gender, trans-status) as more important when determining who is and isn't queer (Table 5). When used without a specific referent, *gay* is coded as inherently white, cisgendered, and male. This can be seen in the way the speakers define *queer*. To Emmanuel, queer communities are connected to people of color, while gay ones are not. Pietro links ideal queerness with an understanding of transgender issues, not just issues relevant to gay individuals. Goldilocks, while not explicitly linking queerness to any gender or other identity category, implicitly suggested that while men are gay, women are queer. These definitions of *queer* are all tied to the individual speakers identity and place within the community: Emmanuel is a person of color, Pietro is transgender, and Goldilocks is a woman. Each of these speakers has one identity that deviates from the white, male, and cisgendered *gay* identity, and that deviation is present in how they differentiated *queer* from *gay*.

Conclusions and Limitations

The data used in this study was collected by observing a small group of seventeen students at The University, as well as interviewing five of this group of students. This is only a part of the LGBT community at The University and the small sample size is a limitation of the study. A significant part of the observation time took place over the summer when few students

were regularly on campus. As a result, the data from the first half of the observation time consists of information from only five students. During the fall semester more students were on campus and visiting the Office on a daily basis; however, during this time I was unable to spend as much time observing due to my own work and class schedule. The study would have been improved by having a longer observation period that followed the group of students through their entire time at The University. Future research should expand the population sample size and the length of the observation time. Furthermore, Steve's anecdote offered some insight into the way students alter their language in different social contexts. In future research I would like to observe students who identify as *queer* in non-LGBT or queer communities, as well as student groups at other universities with similar organizations similar to that of the Office of LGBT Life.

Through participant-observation and interviews, I have concluded that the speakers' understanding of *queer* and *gay* normalizes *gay* and others *queer.* However, the actual usage of *queer* and *gay* also showed that the use of *queer* in any non-derogatory form was a way for students to perform their membership in the community. Members of the community of practice also displayed an awareness of the performativity of their lexical choices, as well as the negative linguistic practice of avoiding specific terms. Students use these positive and negative linguistic practices not only to negotiate their identity with those who are considered outsiders (such as the freshman orientation group), but also their racial and gender identities within the community itself.

The many, sometimes contradicting definitions of *queer* used by the community are significant because all of the speakers seemed to share at least one definition that came from the same source. This definitions, in which *queer* is a positive, reclaimed word that encompasses all

non-heteronormative identities is the definition provided by the Office of LGBT Life and its affiliated programs. For almost all of the students in the community, including myself, the social groups that emerged around the Office of LGBT Life were their first experience with a primarily queer community. As a result the Office was very influential in how the students perceived LGBT and queer identities and subsequently how they spoke about these identities.

The Office emphasized the importance of language use and linguistic awareness through programs such as Safe Space training, and this awareness was reflected in the speech of the students. The Office also seemed to sanction the use of specific words and definitions through these programs, and this was also reflected in the reported speech of the students. Students in the community picked up on the terms and usages considered appropriate by the Office and claimed to use those terms in their own speech. However, their actual speech was more complex. Speakers changed the definitions based on their own identities and experiences, while still retaining and understanding the definition provided by the Office. This speaks to the power of language change; even within a small community, speakers definitions are in flux as they personally redefine words whose definitions are prescribed to them by an centralizing authority figure. While the definitions and usages provided by the Office have linguistic power in the community of practice, the individual students are nonetheless continuously changing how they express their identities through language.

When looking at groups in which there is a dominant source of information (such as schools, classes, clubs, political parties, etc). It is important to note that while that source of information will be influential on the language use of the speakers, reported speech may not always match up to actual usage. While this discrepancy is well known, what I have found in this

study is that speakers will in fact sometimes use speech in the same way they report. However, they are simultaneously using other definitions that reflect aspects of their individual identity and experiences. This complexity is indicative of the malleable nature of language as a tool for identity construction.

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Appendix A – Glossary of Terms

The ways in which these terms are used are in a continuous state of change, and this glossary represents the way some words were understood by members of The University's LGBT community at the time this study was conducted. Hudson's FTM Resource Guide says of its definitions:

> These definitions are not meant to be the "last word" on any particular term or subject; rather, they are meant to help orient those who may be new to FTM issues. Please think of this page as one possible starting point toward knowledge and understanding of trans men's issues.

The same holds true for the definitions in this glossary; they are not meant to be the final word on any of these terms or on what is most accepted by LGBT and queer people. These definitions are based on how I have heard them be used by students at The University, as well as how they are defined by some LGBT and queer organizations. Not all of these terms are used by all of the speakers, and not all of the terms are understood by all of the speakers in the same way. This glossary defines the terms as they are used in this paper.

Cisgender

The University of Texas at Austin's Gender and Sexuality Center says that *cisgender* "provides a name for a gender identity or performance in a gender role that society considers to be a match or appropriate for one's sex. The idea of cisgender originated as a way to shift the focus off of a marginalized group, by defining not only the minority group but also the majority." Cisgender is generally used as an antonym of transgender.

Gay

The following is an n excerpt from the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of *gay*.

> d. orig. U.S. slang. (a) Of a person: homosexual; (b) (of a place, milieu, way of life, etc.) of or relating to homosexuals. Although more frequently used of male homosexuals, this sense can either include or exclude lesbians: see, for example, quots. 1962 and 1993.

Gay can be used to refer to homosexual men or as a term for LGBT and queer communities as a whole.

Genderqueer

> A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. (Hudson)

Genderqueer was rarely used by students at The University.

LGBT

LGBT is an acronym which stands for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender. There are other variants of this acronym, including GLBT, LGBTQ (With the Q standing for Queer), LGBTQQIA (Questioning/Intersex/Asexual), etc. LGBT was the variant of the acronym used by students in the queer community at The University, most likely because of the name of the Office of LGBT Life.

Queer

Queer is an umbrella term that refers to LGBT identity. Queer is also used by some individuals in

place of words such as *gay* or *lesbian*, or to refer to a different type of non-heterosexual, anti-heteronormative identity. *Queer* is considered offensive by many people, and re-appropriated by others.

The following is an excerpt from the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of *queer*.

> **3.** *colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*). Of a person: homosexual. Hence: of or relating to homosexuals or homosexuality. Cf. earlier queer n.^{2} 2.
>
> Although originally chiefly derogatory (and still widely considered offensive, esp. when used by heterosexual people), from the late 1980s it began to be used as a neutral or positive term (originally of self-reference, by some homosexuals; cf. Queer Nation n. and also quot. 1952^2 at queer n.^{2} 2) in place of *gay* or *homosexual*, without regard to, or in implicit denial of, its negative connotations. In some academic contexts it is the preferred adjective in the study of issues relating to homosexuality (cf. queer theory n. at Special uses 2); it is also sometimes used of sexual lifestyles that do not conform to conventional heterosexual behaviour, such as bisexuality or transgenderism.

Questioning

Questioning refers to an individual who is unsure of or otherwise questioning their sexuality and/or gender identity.

Transgender/Trans

> Broadly speaking, transgender people are individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were born into. The word transgender is an umbrella term which is often used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including: FTM [female-to-male] transsexuals, MTF [male-to female] transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings, genderqueers, and many more. Because transgender is an umbrella term, it is imprecise and does not adequately describe the particulars of specific identities and experiences. (For example, the identity/experience of a post-operative FTM transsexual will probably be very different from that of a female-identified drag king who performs on weekends, but both are often lumped together under the term "transgender.") (Hudson)
> *Trans* refers to transgender and transsexual identity. This is an umbrella term can also

encompass genderqueer, bigender, gender fluid, etc. identities.

Transman

> "Short for "female-to-male transsexual" or "transsexual man;" sometimes also used to refer to those who were identified as/assigned female at birth and identify along a masculine spectrum." (Hudson)

In this paper, *transman* is used to describe transgender individuals who present as men and use masculine pronouns.

Appendix B – Speaker Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender Identity	Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	year (F11)
Emmanuel	19	M	gay	African American	sophomore
Pietro	20	M (trans)	"Mostly gay"	White/Sicilian	junior
Goldilocks	20	F	lesbian	White/Hispanic	junior
Amy	20	F	bi/questioning	Asian	sophomore
Poppy	19	F	bi/questioning	White	sophomore
Justin	37	M	gay	White	Director
Steve	18	M (genderqueer)	gay	White	freshman
Brian A	18	M	gay	Asian	freshman
Paul	25	M (trans)	unknown	White	grad
Josh	20	M	gay	White	junior
Jake	19	M	queer/unknown	African American	junior
Kevin	21	M	gay	White	junior
Nora	24	F	lesbian	White	Program Coordinator
Colby	21	M	gay	White	senior
Derrek	21	M	gay	Middle Eastern	senior
Harris	21	M	gay	White	senior
James	21	M	gay	African American	senior
JT	20	M	gay	Asian	sophomore

All of the speakers are identified with pseudonyms. The first five speakers participated in semi-structured, audio recorded interviews.

For the purposes of this study, M refers to male/masculine identities and F refers to female/feminine identities. Gender identity is assumed to match biological sex unless otherwise indicated. The terms *trans* and *genderqueer* are defined in Appendix A.

Appendix C – Transcripts
The following three transcripts include one speaker discussing the word queer and how he and others use it.

Transcription conventions
(.) pause
=   overlapping speech
[ ] indicates tone or omitted lines

1. Pietro
June 14, 2010, 12:15PM
Pietro, Mike, and I are in the Office of LGBT Life. Pietro making the website for an LGBT organization off-campus. He is upset that they have not kept in contact with him about the website, and that they only emailed him to ask him to set it up without providing enough information. He suggests that he'll take information from Emory Pride's website and mission statement. As he reads over Emory Pride's website, he comments on the use of the word queer in its mission statement.

1. Pietro: They have a problem with the word queer. They haven't been around Justin
2.   enough.

He then recounts a meeting where they talked about words and someone said

3. Unknown: I hate the word queer.

Pietro says he used to hate the word queer, but that now he doesn't.

Sept. 10, 2010, 12:30PM
In the Office of LGBT Life. Pietro, myself, and another person are in the Office.

1. Marina: I need three interesting facts about Emory Pride for this application thing.
2. Pietro: [joking tone] We've got a lot of gays.
3. Marina: I'm sure they'll like that.
4. Pietro: A lot of gays and allies.
5. Marina: Well, and other people. Not just gays (.) a lot of queers?
6. Pietro: I'm on the fence. I use gays and queers interchangeably. You should put that in
7.   your research thing.
8. Marina: I will.
9. Pietro: A lot of people at [another organization] don't like queer. I tried to say how it was
10.   used, but they were like "No." They all had negative connotations with it.
11. Marina: Yeah. I use them like that in just conversation, but for official things I put, like,
12.   LGBT.
13. Pietro: Yeah, because people might see queers and be like (.)
14. Marina: Yeah.

October 13, 2010 6:50PM

Pietro, Jake, and I are walking from the Office of LGBT Life to the location of an Emory Pride meeting. We are discussing the language used on a poster for an off-campus event.

1. Pietro: People use gay to mean queer. I have a problem with that.
2. Me: You've used them like that before.
3. Jake: Yeah
4. Pietro: I used to. I'm trying to get better.

Appendix D – Phase 2 Results

The following tables show how many times each speaker used queer and gay during their interview.

Table 6 - *Queer* and *Gay* (Pietro)

	Queer	Gay	Total
Self-Reference	1 (10%)	9	10
Reference to Others	40 (48%)	43	83
Total	41 (44.1%)	52	93

Table 7 - *Queer* and *Gay* (Emmanuel)

	Queer	Gay	Total
Self-Reference	2 (20%)	8	10
Reference to Others	21 (77.8%)	6	27
Total	23 (62.2%)	14	37

Table 8 - *Queer* and *Gay* (Goldilocks)

	Queer	Gay	Total
Self-Reference	2 (28.6%)	5	7
Reference to Others	10 (23.8%)	32	42
Total	12 (32.4%)	37	49

Table 9 - *Queer* and *Gay* (Amy)

	Queer	Gay	Total
Self-Reference	0	0	0
Reference to Others	11 (64.7%)	6	17
Total	11 (64.7%)	6	17

Table 10 - *Queer* and *Gay* (Poppy)

	Queer	Gay	Total
Self-Reference	0	0	0
Reference to Others	3 (15%)	17	20
Total	3 (15%)	17	20

Appendix E – *Queer* **Reported Usage/Actual Usage**

The following tables and transcripts show the semantic features of queer as reported by the speakers.

1. Goldilocks

Table 11. Semantic Features of Goldilocks' Reported Usage of *Queer*

	Goldilocks
A. Umbrella term	+
B. Negative Connotation	-
C. Used by speaker	-
D. Used in Emory LGBT community/ speaker's social circle	+
E. Refers to People of Color	-
F. Implies sensitivity to gender/ transgender issues	-

1. Marina: So how would you define queer? I mean, now.
2. Goldilocks: Queer.
3. Marina: Queer.
4. Goldilocks: **(A)** Anything falling in the spectrum that's not heteronormative? I guess? Cause I
5.   mean like what. If you're- Would you consider queer like someone who identifies
6.   as straight who goes out with someone who identifies as transsexual or
7.   transgender to be queer? Does that change anything?
8. Marina: Are you asking me? I mean, I don't know.
9. Goldilocks: Well you know it's just not like (.)
10. Marina: It's not like
11. Goldilocks: =Full fledged, man and woman (...)
                   [lines omitted]
12. Goldilocks: **(C)** Uh, I don't really use it.
10. Marina: Hm- hm.
11. Goldilocks: I mean, and, I don't know, **(D)** I've only heard my friends say it like since college,
12.   really, cause at my high school it was quite like, black and white. Like we had a
13.   gay population but it was like, oh, he's a gay guy. She's a lesbian. That person's
14.   bisexual. That's person's (.) we had like one [quieter] transgender person. So. But
15.   it was like. It was never like "I'm queer." Everyone would be like "what does that
16.   mean?" You know?

2. Amy

Table 12. Semantic Features of Amy's Reported Usage of *Queer*

	Amy
A. Umbrella term	+
B. Negative Connotation	-
C. Used by speaker	-
D. Used in Emory LGBT community/ speaker's social circle	-/+
E. Refers to People of Color	-
F. Implies sensitivity to gender/ transgender issues	-

1. Amy:	I think, uh, the use of the word queer, I think some people are, may not be
2.	comfortable with may, the kind of (.) cultural baggage it carries. Especially like,
3.	straight people. If they're even aware of the cultural baggage, they prefer not to
4.	use it because they don't feel like they own the term. **(D)** Where as in the LGBT
5.	community people do use it, comfortably, and some don't. Because they're
6.	uncomfortable about that. And for me like, **(C)** when I use queer, um. It sort of
7.	like I feel the term queer subsumes um, **(A)** the term LGBT subsumes under the
8.	word queer. Queer can refer to other, like, non-heteronormative, not gender
9.	normative um, terms. Identities that that don't fall strictly under LGBT. So for me
10.	I feel that queer is an umbrella term which may not be accurate. But that's what I
11.	mean when I use it.
	[lines omitted]
12. Amy:	Actually, now that I think about it the word queer, **(C)** I never used it to identify
13.	myself partially because like, like in Singapore we didn't use the word queer. Like
14.	at all. It wasn't really said. You would either identify as lesbian, gay, bi. Yeah, but
15.	there isn't like. Most people wouldn't describe themselves as queer. So it wasn't
16.	really in our like everyday vocabulary, which is probably why I identify as that.
17.	Because basically, pick and choose range. But going back to your question. Yeah,
18.	um. I probably tend to use terms that fit with people are more familiar with and
19.	that still apply to me, so.
20. Marina:	So did you start picking up on queer more when you came to college, or=
21. Amy:	=Yeah. Because it started being used more so **(D)** it entered the everyday lexicon.

3. Pietro

Table 13. Semantic Features of Pietro's Reported Usage of *Queer*

	Pietro
A. Umbrella term	+
B. Negative Connotation	-
C. Used by speaker	+
D. Used in Emory LGBT community/ speaker's social circle	+
E. Refers to People of Color	-
F. Implies sensitivity to gender/ transgender issues	+/-

1. Pietro:	Yeah, I had to explain to my mom that **(D)** we can use that term, and what it mean
2.	a little bit. Basically if I explain it I'm just like **(A)** LGBT plus anyone who's not
3.	straight. Or not gender conforming. Is my general understanding of the word
4.	queer. And there's like an extra, like (.) er, **(C)** when I say the queer community I
5.	usually mean like more of an **(F)** enlightened group of LGBT plus (...) all that
6.	kind of people. If I say gay community I just mean like **(F)** cisgendered white*
7.	gay men kind of thing. Who don't understand.
8. Marina:	So you clearly, like I know your answers to this but, you divide the LGBT or the
9.	gay or the queer communities into different groups. do you feel like the people
10.	you use the word queer with are going to understand transgender issues more, or=
11. Pietro:	**(F)** That would be my hope, but a lot of the time **(A)** I just use it as a catch all.
12.	And um, but they usually don't understand trans stuff at all. Or care about it. So.
13.	In theory yes, most people who self-identify as queer I've found get it. **(F)** But if
14.	I'm saying that they're queer, then they're, I'm not necessarily saying they're going
15.	to be.
16. Marina:	Okay, so yeah. Has being involved in the Office of LGBT Life, its organizations,
17.	or any other LGBT group you may be involved in changed the way you might
18.	understand other LGBT people?
19. Pietro:	Yeah. Because before I did what everyone else did and used the gay community,
20.	but being around Michael who uses queer like none other, I've basically kind of
21.	learned why **(C, D)** we use queer and started implementing that. Because **(A)** it's
22.	more inclusive. So it's changed that. And I've learned about other aspects of the
23.	queer community that I never knew about, like genderqueer and stuff.

*Though Pietro lists white along with cisgendered and man when comparing gay and queer, I do not list him as connecting queer to people of color since he mentions race only in conjunction with gender and cisgenderedness. He talks at length about cisgenderedness, but never references race outside of this context.

4. Emmanuel

Table 14. Semantic Features of Emmanuel's Reported Usage of *Queer*

	Emmanuel
A. Umbrella term	+
B. Negative Connotation	-
C. Used by speaker	+
D. Used in Emory LGBT community/ speaker's social circle	?
E. Refers to People of Color	+
F. Implies sensitivity to gender/ transgender issues	-

1. Emmanuel: No, it seems to connote different things. Um. It's hard to exactly put that into
2.   words. But um. [drums on table] let's see here. I don't know, you know. Queer
3.   could mean a number of different things. Obviously. As I'd mentioned, **(A)**
4.   ambiguity. People like ambiguity, people don't like to be put in boxes, I don't like
5.   to see myself in a box.
          [lines omitted]
6. Emmanuel: And for some reason **(E)** I sort of see the term as for some reason to have a
7.   relationship with people of color, somehow. And I'm not=
8. Marina: =Interesting
9. Emmanuel: Not exactly sure. But usually when I hear the term that's one of the things that
10.   comes to mind. A person of color who wants to, who's being subversive to this
11.   whole, white oriented idea of the gay American society. Which is odd because
12.   things like Queer Nation was like, twenty years ago. [inaudible] So I don't know.
13.   Maybe.

5. Poppy

Table 15. Semantic Features of Poppy's Reported Usage of *Queer*

	Poppy
A. Umbrella term	+
B. Negative Connotation	+/-
C. Used by speaker	+/-
D. Used in Emory LGBT community/ speaker's social circle	+
E. Refers to People of Color	-
F. Implies sensitivity to gender/ transgender issues	-

1. Poppy:	**(D)** Queer, probably came up in eleventh or twelfth grade for me. Um. And that
2.	was when I joined the gay straight alliance. And I mean, I, **(C)** I guess I'm
3.	comfortable using the word, but **(A)** it feels like sort of a blanket term. So it's not,
4.	it's not, um. Offensive to anybody? But it's, it's kind of like saying Asians.
	[lines omitted]
5.	So, like, **(C)** I'd rather say, refer to somebody as being gay or straight or bi or
6.	transgendered, as opposed to just queer. I guess queer to me sort of has a **(B)**
7.	negative connotation, because it means strange.

6. Queer in Actual Speech

In this excerpt, Goldilocks refers to "gay males" and "queer women."

1. Goldilocks:	Um, I think there is like the Pride community, and then there's the overall LGBTQ
2.	community at Emory, which is not, like, very solid. It's just like, it's a lot of **gay**
3.	**males.** Like, white **gay males** just kind of doing their own thing. Because like, I
4.	honestly don't think there are that many like **queer women** here.
5. Marina:	(…) not that I know of.
6. Goldilocks:	Yeah I know, I'm just saying that you definitely like, if you see someone on
7.	campus and you're like, oh he's a gay guy but I've never seen him at Pride but I 8.
	know, you know. I know he's gay. But I never feel that way about girls. Like, oh,
9.	there's a queer girl, like, and I've never seen her at Pride. Like, I could never say
10.	that.