

Lesson 1

Classroom Atmosphere and Moral Questioning

Activity 5

Exercise on Language:

Divide into small groups and try to find categories or patterns among the terms for sex that you found/came up with.

What messages do these terms send? How do we find these terms useful, or not? Or maybe the better question is, where are they useful and with whom?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Now take a second look at your list of terms. Which can be identified as "slang"? What do you think is the purpose of slang? Why is slang something we use more frequently with friends than parents?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Consider: Language is constantly changing and evolving. Slang exemplifies this. In our attempts to connect with others, and to avoid the discomfort some words bring, we change them up; we make them funny, disguise them as something else, or reinvent them entirely. Most of the time, it seems the words targeted are more proper, formal, or "serious." For example, someone may prefer to describe their crush as "hot" as opposed to "exceptionally attractive," or "particularly physically appealing." Our slang serves to separate us from other groups; culturally, developmentally, and socially. It furthers our ease and ability to discuss and explore difficult or complicated subjects while also re-enforcing our in-group identity.

Slang can be harmless, and allow for greater ease in conversation. It can also be harmful, depending on how the words are constructed and the images associated. For example, are there slang words, terms,

or expressions in your list that objectify or demean? Are some more or less explicit or crude? Are there certain groups or cultures in which explicit slang is more prevalent? Why is this so and how does it differentiate us subculturally?

Let's talk about context. How do we talk about sex in the moment with our partner? With friends? In music and the media? Why does it vary? Perhaps there are many pieces to this puzzle. Respect, familiarity, comfort, and the influence of gender may be a few. Maybe there isn't enough language that makes up "middle words," or language that can't be classified as either "formal" or "slang." What do you think?

Example: Jennifer and Brian have been dating for a while now, and have recently started having sex. On this particular Saturday night, while watching a movie, the couple starts to "make-out." Some time goes by, "things" escalate, and Jennifer stops Brian:

J: Can we "do it"?

B: What do you mean?

J: Do you "have something"?

B: Oh yeah, I bought "some" yesterday.

The words in quotes could be put into multiple other contexts and consequently mean entirely differently things. In fact, that entire exchange could have been placed in an entirely different situation and still make sense. So where have our words gone, so to speak?

Here are some things to think about:

- Developmental stage of the relationship; experience vs. non-object gains meaning after its usage.
- Safety and self-preservation—is the word "condom" too straightforward? Presumptuous?
- Does familiarity bring with it the ability to use more complex words? How is language related to the developmental trajectory of the relationship?
- Are vague words more seductive? Less awkward than all that comes to mind with the literal "condom." Disguise poses a playful obstacle to the pursuer, a suggestive challenge.

In a medical situation, the euphemism refers to something potentially dangerous yet highly pleasurable; in a sexual situation, it refers to something unpleasant yet highly effective in preventing danger. The difference is subtle but crucial: While each seeks to disguise certain unappealing qualities, one usage goes a step further—it feigns innocence, giving off a faint, seductive ring of irony.