

Dissertation abstract:

Title: Southern Language and Identity among High School Sorority Members

This dissertation explores how members of a Southern high school sorority use language to define their identities. In particular, it investigates how these female youth are both adopting and rejecting traditional notions of Southern speech as well as how constructions of regional identity must be understood in relation to other social factors, like gender and socioeconomic class. Using ethnographic participant-observation and analyzing audio-recorded conversations and interviews, this dissertation examines how these speakers' language practices relate to language ideologies about Southern speech as well as those of age, gender, and tradition. Studying this particular group of female adolescent Southerners provides an opportunity to consider the influences of both regional linguistic standards and national standards of the language associated with teenage girlhood. By asking questions about the relationship between language, place, and identity, this dissertation explores the linguistic and social construction of what it means both to be Southern and to sound Southern for young women growing up in the contemporary South.