



LGBTIQ in Kyrgyzstan: Terminology and the Expansion of Queer Potentials

A Talk by Dr. Samuel Buelow

September 29 | Page Hall 020 | 4:30 reception | 5:15 lecture

Kyrgyzstan is a former Soviet republic located in Central Asia and home to a little under 6 million people. Kyrgyzstan's LGBTIQ population has been organized around NGOs since shortly after male homosexuality was decriminalized in 1998. While NGO culture began to thrive in the capital city of Bishkek, the LGBTIQ community went largely unnoticed until 2014, when the parliament made a move to criminalize "gay propaganda" with a bill harsher and broader in scope than similar legislation that had passed in Russia the year before.

In Kyrgyzstan, a variety of terminology in English, Russian, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek is being utilized within LGBTIQ activist spheres and LGBTIQ communities to describe themselves and their experiences and to communicate those experiences as part of a global dialogue surrounding gender and sexuality. While English language terms come to Kyrgyzstan through participation in global conferences, engagement with Western NGOs, and through English language media, these terms take on new meanings in Kyrgyzstan that expand the potential of the way that gender and sexuality are understood through these terms. Terms such as gay, MSM, queer, transgender, cisgender, and crossdresser are adapted in ways that expand and subvert US-centric understandings of queer subjectivities. Terms, however, often lack absolute consensus, undermining the idea that they are "localized" to Kyrgyzstan. This multiplicity of meanings further contributes to the expansion of queer potentials.



Dr. Samuel Buelow is a recent graduate of Indiana University's Department of Anthropology with minors in Gender Studies and Central Eurasian and Uralic Studies. He began working in Central Asia 15 years ago on an archaeological dig in Kazakhstan. He has been studying LGBTIQ issues in Central Asia since 2007. This talk is based on fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 2014-15 funded by the American Councils for International Education and the Indiana University President's Diversity Fellowship.