



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

TOPICS

Gay Rights Issues: Gay Marriage and “Don't Ask, Don't Tell”; Famous Americans: Oprah Winfrey; sneak preview; instead of versus rather than; a lot versus lots

GLOSSARY

gay – homosexual; a person who is romantically and physically attracted to people of the same sex

* Cecil was afraid to tell his parents that he was gay, but made the decision to tell them anyway.

rights – things that people are allowed to do and should be allowed to do

* Students in school don't have the same rights to privacy that adults have.

spouse – a husband or wife; one-half of a married couple

* The invitation said that our spouses are invited to the office party as well.

civil union – a legal arrangement that is similar to marriage, but that does not necessarily have the same rights

* Gay rights activists say that a civil union is not the same as a marriage.

to object – to oppose something; to be against something

* Unless anyone objects, I'm going to move into the empty office next to the meeting room.

military – all of the groups and people who fight for a country, including the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard

* Jeannine spent over 30 years as a soldier in the military and will retire next month.

sexual orientation – whether one prefers romantic relationships with men, women, or both

* This school's policy is to treat all students fairly, regardless of sexual orientation.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

media personality – a person who is very well known for many reasons, primarily related to television

* Some media personalities gain as much fame and money as movie or TV stars.

talk show – a type of TV program with a host (leader) who invites different people to discuss a particular topic on each episode, usually with some participation from the audience

* When will Jeff McQuillan be a guest on Oprah's talk show?

influential – having the power to affect other people; having the ability to change what other people think and believe

* Several books were influential in helping me decide on the career I chose.

to endorse – to state publicly that one approves of something; to say publicly that one supports an idea, plan, or candidate for elected office

* Do you think we can get some celebrities to endorse ESL Podcast?

philanthropic – giving money to organizations that help people; giving money and support to organizations that try to improve society and people's lives

* Our organization's philanthropic goal is to raise money for the homeless.

sneak preview – the chance to see something before the general public or a larger group does; an event offering the chance to see a film before its official release date

* Do you want to go with us tonight to see a sneak preview of the new James Bond movie?

instead of – in place of; as a substitute for

* Instead of worrying about whether it will rain, let's make plans in case it does rain.

rather than – in place of; as a substitute for

* Let's make chicken rather than duck for dinner, since more people are likely to eat chicken than duck.

lots / a lot – a large amount; a great number

* A lot of the people who attended the concert bought lots of T-shirts and other souvenirs.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Harvey Milk

Politicians who want to be “elected” (selected by voters) to government “office” (jobs) need to be careful about their “public image,” or how people view them. Because of the “stigma” (negative associations) of being gay, many gay politicians are still “in the closet” (keeping secret) about their homosexuality.

One of the earliest American politicians to be “openly” (not secretly) gay is Harvey Milk. Harvey Milk was the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California, and he served as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, a group that passed city and county laws for the city of San Francisco. At that time, San Francisco was going through a “transformation” (major change) as large numbers of gay men began moving to the Castro District of the city. Harvey Milk used the growing power of the gay community to get into office, and while there, he was able to help pass major gay rights “ordinances” (laws).

Sadly, Harvey Milk was in office for only 11 months. On November 27, 1978, he and the mayor of San Francisco were “assassinated” (killed) by a man who had recently “resigned” (quit) the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, but who had wanted his job back.

Since his death, Harvey Milk has become a symbol of the growing political power of the gay community, and of the changing social attitudes toward homosexuality in the U.S. In 2008, a “biographical” (about a person’s life) film was made of Harvey Milk, called simply Milk. It received much “acclaim” (praise) and many awards, including an Academy Award nomination for Best “Picture” (Film). The actor who “portrayed” (acted the role of) Harvey Milk, Sean Penn, won the Academy Award for Best Actor.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 225.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 225. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development here in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. You can download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English even faster. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store and our ESL Podcast Blog.

On this Café, we're going to talk about gay rights in the U.S., or the things that gays or homosexuals can and cannot do in the United States. We'll also continue our series on famous Americans, focusing on Oprah Winfrey. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins with a discussion of what is commonly called "gay rights." A "gay" (gay) person is a "homosexual," a person who is romantically and physically attracted to people of the same sex. The word "gay" used to mean happy, and you will read it in some books – older books that still use that particular term. But in the last half a century or so, at least at least in the U.S., it has taken on a different meaning. In American English the term "gay" refers to homosexual men, and the term "lesbian" refers to homosexual women, but many times "gay" refers to all homosexuals in general, both men and women.

"Rights," as you probably know, are the things that people are allowed to do, often things that you can do or are allowed to do without any interference from the government. We can talk about the right to vote, or the right to have an education. Some these may be rights; some of these may be things that we want. But the term "rights" refers to things that, in some ways, you must be allowed to do if you want to; 25-30 years ago the term often related to ending discrimination in the workplace, for example.

When we talk about gay rights, most people think about a current topic in the U.S.: gay marriage. Gay marriage is a controversial topic; many people have very strong opinions for or against. Some people believe that marriage should only be between a man and a woman. More than 30 states of the 50 of the US states have passed laws saying just that, defining marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. Many people think it's wrong for two men to get married or for two women to get married. Of course, other people disagree; this



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

is America, people all have different opinions. Others believe that homosexuals who are in a long-term, committed relationship should be allowed to marry each other and get all the “benefits,” or advantages that other married people have.

Gay people want to have the right to marry, in part because it brings them many benefits. When people are married, for example, any health insurance they receive through their job can be used to “cover,” or to include their spouse. A “spouse” (spouse) is a husband or wife – one half of the married couple, we could say. Married people also get to go into the spouse’s hospital room if they’re sick and are often allowed to make decisions for the spouse if the spouse is too sick to make decisions for him or herself. This isn’t always true, however; it’s common in many places now for people to have left instructions about what they want done if they get very sick. But in a general sense, this is still true. If one spouse passes away (which is just a polite way of saying “dies”), the other spouse will typically receive his or her “assets,” that is their money and their property, unless of course the person who died wrote a “will” (will), which is a legal document saying how you want your money to be distributed after you die.

The federal government – the U.S. national government does not recognize same-sex marriage, which is another term for gay marriage. The terms mean the same thing: same-sex marriage – gay marriage. Now the federal government doesn’t actually marry anyone however, marriage is something that is left to the states – the states regulate and control marriage. The federal government however could, if it wanted to, recognize these same-sex marriages as legal, but currently they do not. As I said, individual states can make their own laws, and do. Right now, as I’m recording this episode, same-sex marriage is allowed in some states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Vermont. These are all cases where a group of judges have decided that gay marriage must be allowed – must be legal. Same-sex marriages were allowed in California for five months in the year 2008, once again, after a group of judges decided to make it legal, but they are not allowed anymore. A majority of Californians voted again to ban, or not allow gay marriage. All of this can change from year to year. As I said, most states do not currently allow gay marriage and a majority specifically prohibit it.

Some other states allow something called “civil unions,” which are legal arrangements that are similar to marriages, but they don’t use the word “marriage.” California, for example, has civil unions; it gives gay couples all of the same legal benefits as being married, without the word “married.” Some people who object to gay marriage will accept civil unions. To “object” to something means to be against something, to be opposed to something.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

The U.S. military, once again run by the federal or national government, includes all of those who fight for the country: the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. They also has rules about homosexuality. Currently the federal law does not allow anyone who intends to or does engage in sexual activity with someone of the same sex, or who talks about being gay or in a gay relationship, to serve in, or to be part of the military. This policy is normally referred to as “don’t ask, don’t tell.” It means that people in the Army should not ask other people in the military whether they are gay or straight. “Straight” is the opposite of gay; a straight couple would be a man and a woman; someone who is straight would be attracted to the opposite sex. So, “don’t ask” means that the Army is not supposed to ask their soldiers if they are gay. The other side is “don’t tell.” Gay people are, I guess, advised that they should not offer information about their homosexuality. They’re supposed to keep it a secret, therefore not having to lie about it.

Before this policy was introduced in 1993, gays were not allowed to serve in the military at all. After the policy was “implemented,” meaning after the policy began – when they started using the policy, gays could serve in the military as long as they didn’t talk about (reveal) their sexual orientation. The phrase “sexual orientation” is used to talk about whether someone prefers relationships, usually sexual relationships, with a man, a woman, or both.

It’s impossible to predict what will happen in the gay marriage debate. It continues here in California and in many states in the U.S.

Now let’s continue our series on famous Americans, focusing on a well-known – very well-known woman in the United States called Oprah Winfrey. Perhaps the best way to describe her is a “media personality,” a person who is very well known, but for many reasons. She’s primarily known, however, for her television presence. Oprah Winfrey has been an actress, an author (she’s written books), a TV producer (someone who makes TV shows), a magazine publisher, and a literary (or book) critic. She is best known, however, for her television show. She has a talk show, called – are you ready – The Oprah Winfrey Show; usually people just call it Oprah.

A talk show is a type of TV program where you have a host (a leader) who invites different people to discuss a particular topic on each episode, usually with some participation from the audience. Oprah’s talk show covers many different topics, including stories about ordinary people who have done, perhaps, amazing things. She has interviews with celebrities (famous actors, actresses). She also has a



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

lot of information about how people can be happier and improve their life, a lot of what we would call “self-help” topics. The show has been running (has been on the air) since 1986, so more than 20 years. It is extremely popular, especially among women. It usually is shown in the afternoon, three or four o’clock; I’m not sure, because I don’t watch it.

Oprah’s talk show and other “ventures,” or projects have been very “profitable” for her, meaning they have made her a lot of money. She is thought to be worth more than 2.7 billion dollars. Many people and organizations call her the most influential woman in the world. Someone who is “influential” has the power to influence other people, the ability to change, perhaps, what other people believe or think. I’m not sure if that’s true, but one obvious example of Oprah’s influence is in the publishing industry. One “segment,” or part of her television show is called “Oprah’s Book Club,” where she encourages her viewers (the people watching) to read a certain book and then she discusses that book on the show, usually with the author (the writer of the book). Whenever Oprah chooses a new book for her viewers to read, it immediately becomes a “best-seller,” meaning one of the most purchased books. Often it causes another million copies of a book to be sold. Obviously, authors want to have their books chosen by Oprah!

Oprah also has some political influence, some people believe. In 2008, she “endorsed” Barack Obama as the U.S. presidential candidate for the Democratic Party. This means she stated publicly that she thought he would be the best president. Some people think that her endorsement of Obama helped him win the nomination over Hillary Clinton.

Many people respect Oprah because she uses her influence often for good and tries to help people. She has been very “philanthropic,” which means that she shares her money with other people and organizations that need it. In 2005, a magazine called Business Week said that she was America’s 32nd-most “generous,” or most giving, philanthropist. She gave away more than 300 million dollars by 2005. She not only gives away her own money, she encourages television viewers to donate their money to what she thinks are important projects and organizations.

If you have a chance to see The Oprah Winfrey Show on television, you might enjoy it. If nothing else, it’s a good way to learn more about American culture and the types of things that interest many Americans.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

Our first question comes from Khashayar (Khashayar) in Iran. The question has to do with the term “sneak preview.”

A “sneak preview” is an event that offers you a chance to see a film before everybody else does – before the what we would call “official release date,” when it goes out to all the theaters. More generally, a sneak preview refers to a chance to see anything before the larger group or general public gets to see it. Normally, sneak previews are offered as an “exclusive” event, meaning only certain people are invited. However, many times studios use the sneak preview as a way of trying to get people interested in the movie, and they allow just about anyone who comes to go to the movie. They may, for example, just show the movie in one movie theater, and give the tickets away as part of a contest.

Sometimes the movie is shown in more than one theater, and in that case, it would probably be called “in limited release.” It’s quite common for smaller films, for example, to be in limited release only in New York and Los Angeles. Then, a few weeks later, if the movie is popular it will go to other markets – that is, other cities. But that’s different from a sneak preview; a sneak preview is just a chance to see something before everybody else.

Anderson (Anderson) in Brazil wants to know the difference between the phrases “instead of” and “rather than.” Both expressions can mean in place of, or as a substitute for: “Would you like milk instead of cream for your coffee?” “Would you like milk rather than cream in your coffee?” They both mean the same thing. However, for that meaning “instead of” is probably more common than “rather than.”

“Rather than” is more often used not as a single phrase but rather two words separated in a sentence, and when that happens it really means the same as the verb “prefer,” or like or want something better or more. For example: “I would rather have tea than coffee.” “Rather” and “than” are separated in the sentence. “I would rather have tea than coffee” means I prefer tea over coffee, or I want tea instead of coffee. You could say “Would you rather read a book than watch television?” “Yes, I’d rather read a book than watch television.” The “than” can sometimes be left out if there is no substitute mentioned. Again, here the word “rather” means the same as prefer. “I would rather not listen to my neighbors children screaming very loudly.” I don’t use the word “than” in that sentence because I’m not giving another option – another preference.

Sometimes someone will ask you a question – ask about your preferences, and if you don’t want to do something you could just say, “I’d rather not.” Usually when



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

you say “I’d rather not,” you’re trying to be a little polite to the person; you’re indicating that it isn’t really what you want to do, but you might do it if you had to. For example: “Do you want to watch The Oprah Winfrey Show?” You could say, “I’d rather not.”

“Rather,” when used alone in a sentence, can also mean somewhat, or very, depending on the sentence. For example: “Joyce went to get her coat because it’s rather cold outside.”

Finally, Hendra (Hendra), from a country unknown, wants to know the difference between “lots” (lots) and “a lot” (a lot – two words).

“Lots” and “a lot” can sometimes mean the same thing: a great amount of something, a great number. “The children get lots of presents at Christmas.” This part of the country gets lots of rain this time of year.” You could say, “The children get a lot of presents at Christmas.” “This part of the country gets a lot of rain this time of year.” So “lots” and “a lot of” are the same in these cases. The real difference between them is the level of formality. Some people think that “lots” is more informal English than “a lot.” Both are used in writing and in conversation; I would say “lots” tends to be used more in informal kinds of writing. There’s a related expression, “lots and lots,” which is saying a great deal; it’s more emphatic. It’s giving the idea that the number is huge – it’s large.

Both expressions can be used with adjectives along with the word “more” to give an even stronger meaning. You could say “I am a lot more focused on studying now that I’m dating a girl in my class.” You can also say “This job is lots more demanding than my last one. The use of “lots” in this way is a little less common than “a lot.”

Finally, “lot,” singular (lot), is used with “the” to mean the whole group, not a specific number or amount. For example: “When I asked how many workers she would need to finish this project, Nancy said, ‘I need the lot of them.’” “The lot of” means all of that particular group. This is a little less common, and is not possible to use “lots” in this way. You can’t say “I need the lots of them,” no, “I need the lot of them.”

If you have a lot of questions, or lots of questions, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. We get lots of questions every week, too many for us to answer on the Café, but we will certainly do our best.



English as a Second Language Podcast
www.eslpod.com

ENGLISH CAFÉ – 225

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan and Dr. Lucy Tse, copyright 2010 by the Center for Educational Development.