

I didn't mean it in that way! Making sense of how words get imbued with meaning:
A sociolinguistic look at the use of homosexually themed words in online communication

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Abstract

In this master's thesis, I examine how words are imbued with meaning. The words or linguistic forms I focus on are 'gay', 'faggot', 'fag' as well as the phrase 'that's so gay'. I examine the use of these linguistic forms in online communication on Reddit and I discuss their use and the sentiments behind, in order to explain how these specific linguistic forms, become imbued with meaning(s). Furthermore, I will discuss the link between meaning and intention, perception, context, social value and the effect of in-group/out-group. Finally, I will compare my results to previous research about the same topic.

In order to come to terms with meaning in words I use several sociolinguistic and anthropological theories as a stepping stone to my analysis. Most significant I use Agha and Silverstein and their concepts of enregisterment and indexicality as these theories provide me with extensive insight into the imbuing of meanings and the effect the social value of groups has on defining meaning. Concerning Silverstein's levels of indexicality I propose that we see the act of reclaiming (Fasoli et al. 2019) as a new and fourth level, as it is a concept that permeates throughout my entire dataset and thus an important factor to change in meaning. In order to distinguish the concepts and effects of in-group/out-group I use Carnaghi & Maass's (2007) study about category group labels (CGL) such as 'gay' versus derogatory group labels (DGL) such as 'fag' in in-groups and out-groups. This brings relevance to my comparison of three subreddits with different attitudes towards homosexuality and members of LGBT. In lines with this I use the works of McCormack et al. (2011, 2012, 2016) and his definitions of gay-discourse, specifically homophobia and pro-gay language. This helps shed light on my sentiment analysis of the results. Furthermore, when I discuss the concept of reclaiming, I take my inspiration from Fasoli et al. (2019) and Silverstein's levels of indexicality.

Based on my results I found that the use of these linguistic forms shows an image that falls short of McCormack et al.'s (2012, 2016) claim that homophobia is declining. My results indicate a varied use of the linguistic forms that follow Robinson's (2012) and Lalor & Rendle-Short's (2007) 'gay' = lame and neutral/negative use, but with a majority in the negative use as well as a firm belief that associating 'gay' with anything bad is homophobic. Moreover, my results tell of a wish by members of LGBT of reclaiming DGL for themselves as this will alter their negative connotations and index them with positive connotations. However, this is followed by an issue that finds this possible to in-groups users only which leaves it remaining negative to out-group users. Finally, my results show that these words have many different meanings, connotations and registers, but that these depend on intention, perception, context and social value. Arguments flow from believing that

if the intent is negative then the word is negative, to believing that negative connotations only appear if you perceive it as such, to believing that the context constitutes the meanings of linguistic forms and to arguing about the effect that the social value of different groups has on the meanings of words which follows Agha's (2003) enregisterment. A word can have different registers depending on the social value of the social group. Meanings are not a definite concept; it changes all the time, and this study brought about a conformation of this. There is not one factor that causes words to be imbued with meaning, there are many factors, most importantly the intention behind the utterance, the perception of said utterance, the register knowledge and alignment between speakers, the social value of social groups and the context in which the utterance is said, all this matters to the meanings of linguistic forms and all this changes the meanings of linguistic forms.

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1 Introduction

'I feel pretty and witty and gay' and 'I feel pretty and witty and bright'. These are two versions of the same lyric from the same song "I Feel Pretty" from the 1957 musical *West Side Story* and its 1961 movie adaptation. To accommodate for a shift from night to day, 'gay' was replaced for 'bright' to rhyme with today rather than tonight. This was not an odd exchange as these two words do denote the same things; 'carefree', 'light', 'happy', etc. (OED, 2020), but it may seem odd today because when we hear the word 'gay' we think of a homosexual person. Thus 'gay' has gone from meaning 'carefree, merry, jolly' to meaning a homosexual person (OED, 2020). This showcases that language is alive and constantly changing, but it also showcases that words can have more than one meaning, and how these meanings come about and get indexed in societies is what is going to be discussed in this study.

McCormack (2012, 2016) writes that homophobia is declining in British schools and universities and in 2011 he proposed that a new form of gay-discourse that bonded heterosexual and homosexual people together was forming (McCormack, 2011, p. 672). In this form of language 'gay' is used as a positive sentiment to "bond people together in socio-positive ways or to demonstrate pro-gay attitudes" (McCormack, 2011, p. 672). 8 years later Fasoli et al. (2019) made a study that proposed that homosexuals were starting to use derogatory group labels (DGL) such as 'faggot' to refer to each other in a positive manner. These studies focus on face-to-face conversations or situations where people can see each other. My focus with this study will be around online communication where interlocutors cannot see each other that is from conversation on the internet forum Reddit. There I want to examine the different use and meanings of the linguistic forms 'gay', 'that's so gay', 'faggot' and 'fag'. I want to understand how words are imbued with meaning, but also if what McCormack (2011, 2012, 2016) and Fasoli et al. (2019) argues is the case on Reddit or if the now popular use of homosexually-themed words, especially gay, meaning 'lame' (Robinson, 2012; Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007) enhances socio-positive bonding between homosexuals and heterosexuals or if it increases implicit anti-gay bias that Nicolas & Skinner argued in 2012.

Therefore, my problem formulation is: How do words get imbued with meaning?

A study of the use of 'gay', 'that's so gay', 'faggot' and 'fag' on Reddit.

1.1 Clarification of Reddit

This study will be concerned with the use of these aforementioned linguistic forms in online communication or CMC: computer-mediated communication from the forum Reddit. Reddit is a social news and discussion website where people “can share news and content or comment on other people’s posts” (Widman, 2020). It is broken up into millions of forums or communities known as ‘subreddits’, each of which covers a specific topic. Anyone with a Reddit account can create a subreddit, which can be about anything, as long as it follows Reddit’s community guidelines. If users do not stay within these guidelines, the subreddit will be warned, restricted or quarantined, and have the content removed or be banned from Reddit (Reddit, 2020). Users of these subreddits can submit their content “by posting stories, links, images, and videos” (Reddit, 2020) which are commented on by other users and this “provide[s] discussion and often humor” (Reddit, 2020), but also disagreement and hate, as the data will reveal. Users can choose to be either public or anonymous and the anonymity enable some people to open up more, encourage people to share a thought they feel ashamed of, but it also garners hateful opinions that one might not dare share in public. This means that the language I am collecting is unfiltered and natural, although the users still might be censoring themselves to make sure that they stay within Reddit’s as well as within specific subreddits’ guidelines. Furthermore, Reddit is vast in its size and this makes for a substantial amount of data. As of December 4, 2019, it has 430M+ average monthly active users. 130K+ active communities, and 21B average screen views per month (Reddit, 2020). It brands itself as the “front page of the internet” (Reddit, 2020) and according to Alexa (SEO and competitive analysis software) it is the fifth-most-popular site in the United States and the 18th worldwide (Alexa, 2020). Reddit was founded in 2005 by two college friends, Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian (Reddit, 2020).

1.1.1 Subreddits

This study will be concerned with the following three subreddits: r/lgbt, r/unpopularopinion and r/the_donald to get answers from subreddits with differing opinions about LGBT; a positive subreddit, a negative subreddit and a neutral subreddit.

r/lgbt: this is a subreddit for GSRM (Gender, Sexual, and Romantic Minority) people to discuss their lives, issues, interests, and passions in a safe and judgement free environment. It is not just for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, but for all.

Created on March 14, 2008 and currently musters 471k members as of 12/4-20. They say that they are a

safe space for GSRM (Gender, Sexual, and Romantic Minority) folk to discuss their lives, issues, interests, and passions. LGBT is still a popular term used to discuss gender and sexual minorities, but all GSRM are welcome beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people who consent to participate in a safe space (r/lgbt, 2020).

This tells us that the members of this subreddit are definitely not cis-gendered or heterosexual, but for members outside of this sexually majority. Also, the users possibly identify themselves as homosexuals or lesbians or bisexuals which tells us that sexuality, and the treatment of LGBT members is important to them.

r/the_donald: this is a subreddit dedicated to all things related to Donald Trump. The users stand behind Trump no matter what and share their interests with fellow patriots. They are mostly Republicans, Christians, and Americans. They only allow Trump supports, no Cucks or Leftists.

Created on June 27, 2015 and has 793k patriots. By calling themselves patriots they help us in labeling them as most likely Protestants, Christians and people that engage in national pride, in this case American pride, which makes us believe that the 'patriots' of this community are mostly Americans. Their community is about politics, elections and mostly all things supportive of Donald Trump securing his second term, because they quote

I'm confident that Reddit could sway elections. We wouldn't do it, of course. And I don't know how many times we could get away with it. But, if we really wanted to, I'm sure Reddit could have swayed at least this election, this once. (r/the_donald, 2020).

An important distinction to make about this subreddit is the fact that it is restricted or quarantined, meaning it has violated Reddit's rules against violence and other aspects. This means that to access it, you have to agree that you enter a quarantined subreddit, but also it says something about the people or 'patriots' that use it. Reddit themselves say the following about the quarantine of the community: "This community is quarantined: It is restricted due to significant issues with reporting and addressing violations of Reddit's rules against violence and other aspects of the Content Policy. As a visitor or member, you can help moderators maintain the community by reporting and downvoting rule-breaking content." (Reddit, 2020). The use of homophobic language, such as 'fag', 'faggot',

and 'gay' could be part of these violations. This quarantine means that the results from this subreddit ended with the quarantine about a month ago.

r/unpopularopinion: this is a subreddit that focuses on unpopular opinions. Anything is allowed as long as it is unpopular. It is a space free of politics, hatred, sexism, racism, etc. where people can say what they want without judgement.

Created on February 14, 2012 and has 1.2m members as of 12/4-20. It is for any unpopular opinion that one wants to share: "Got a burning unpopular opinion you want to share? Spark some discussions!" (r/unpopularopinion, 2020). This is my chosen neutral community as this is a forum for all people, not only for people tied to a specific sexuality or political strain. This means that I will get answers from this subreddit that are from all sorts of people with all sorts of opinions, both pro- and anti-LGBT, racists and non-racists, homophobes and homosexual people, thus enabling the research to be more reliable.

1.2 Clarification of the concepts meaning and semantic change

My study concerns itself with meaning of words and the many ways words can be used. This leads to two concepts: meaning and semantic change. Before discussing the etymology of 'gay', 'faggot' and 'fag' which will help me understand how these linguistic forms can be used differently, I will discuss meaning and semantic change first.

1.2.1 Meaning

Meaning is a complex endeavor to discuss as Leith (1997) argues. As meaning is not something definitive, most often people have slightly different impressions of a word's meaning based on cultural background, life experiences, social group, context, etc. Words can be polysemic, thus meaning is defined by these aspects; the user's intention along with the receiver's perception as well as the registers defined in different groups. Leith (1997) discusses the complexity of meaning and tries to simplify it by forming six different understandings of meaning in lexical words (Leith, 1997, p. 70).

1. Conceptual meaning: denotative or referential meaning, where words' definition refers to something else, a core meaning, like 'lady' and 'woman' both referring to 'human', even though they are different words in meaning. The relationship between words and referents is a fluid one, as humans tend to need to "*conceptualise* the objects, events, and processes that

we find around us.” (Leith, 1997, p. 70), but these may also be inclined to change over time. These conceptualizations are created from different criteria: formal, function and evaluative. Formal is the form or shape of the thing or concept; function is how they act and evaluative is either approval or disapproval. But just like meaning can differ as a result of difference in society, culture, perception etc. so can these conceptualizations differ.

2. Connotative meaning: the associations and stereotypes you make based of a word or how we use the word. Connotations may vary from person to person, as they “often reflect the values and ideology of a particular social group at a particular time” (Leith, 1997, p. 71). Take ‘lady’ and woman’ again, because while woman might connote the ability to bear children, the tendency to be sensitive and caring and ‘lady’ might connote social status and grace, an elegant ‘woman’ with correct manners. These are not set in place, because they might connote differently to a man than to a woman or to an Asian to a European. It depends on the context, social surroundings and understanding of registers of the users and receivers.
3. Stylistic meaning: certain words pride themselves on belonging to distinct contexts, such as ‘tis’, ‘alas’ which belong to poetry or theatre and in this case ‘steed’ would also be chosen over ‘horse’ because it belongs to this particular style. Historically, “stylistic meanings develop as the language is functionally elaborated, and certain words are specialized in particular fields of usage” (Leith, 1997, p. 72). ‘Steed’ is thus chosen in poetry because it has been associated with this style since the sixteenth century.
4. Affective meaning: when we address people, we tend to use words that are often highly “partisan, particularly where differences of social class, race, sex, region or origin, or political persuasion are concerned” (Leith, 1997, p. 72). Some words have been so affected by this that they become indexed so thoroughly that their conceptual meaning is almost non-existent, hence ‘nigger’ which has almost totally abandoned its denotation (a racial type) and is exclusively today seen as a racist term of abuse.
5. Reflected meaning: over years some words have developed more than one conceptual meaning and may be perceived differently depending on the user.
6. Collocative meaning: concerns the idiosyncratic properties of certain words. ‘Pretty’ and ‘handsome’ are such words, as these share a similar conceptual meaning, but they co-occur with different sets of nouns where they gain associations. This means that pretty collocates with ‘girl’ and ‘village’ rather than ‘boy’ and ‘typewriter’ (Leith, 1997, p. 72). They may

mean the same thing but are not interchangeable because part of their associative meaning relies on the collocations they make.

Meaning derives from history and is affected by many different aspects such as societal changes, cultural differences, context and user/receiver intent/perception. Therefore, there are many different interpretations of meaning and that is also why meaning changes all the time.

1.2.2 Semantic change

One way that the meaning of words changes is in semantics like 'gay' shifting from meaning 'happy' to 'homosexual' during the 20th century (Kutuzov et al. 2018, p. 1) or shifts of cultural associations like 9-11 now being associated with the terrorist attacks against the twin towers.

Bréal (1921) explained semantics as “the science of meanings, from the word σημαίνειν – ‘denote’, as opposed to phonetics, the science of speech sounds” (Breal, 1921, p. 8). Changes in semantics are changes in areas such as denotation, connotation, and stylistic meaning. The changes often happen because of different social, cultural and historical changes. Our basic understanding of words and language and the interaction of communication between people is also a part of semantic change, for language can be understood differently according to registers, context, intent and perception and this can force a change in meaning over time. I will focus on the ‘lexical’ or ‘lexemic’ semantic change; the change in meaning of a word or words, which is “understood to be a change in the concepts associated with a word” (Oklah, 2014, p. 1-2). Part of this change in meaning is change in denotation (a word’s conceptual meaning), connotation (associations we get from the word) or stylistic meaning. Change in denotation is when “the meaning of a lexeme is ‘extended’ or ‘restricted’” (Oklah, 2014, p. 2) and change in connotation is when a word is ‘ameliorated’ or ‘pejorated’, i.e. when a word originally denoting disparagement is given either a neutral or a positive meaning by its users (Leith, 1997, p. 74) and pejoration is when a word acquires a negative meaning by its users; the opposite of amelioration. Change in stylistic meaning is when the “meaning of words may be changed radically according to their context” (Oklah, 2014, p. 2).

Change in denotation

One of the reasons why and how words change in denotation is because we as humans tend to generalize and ‘make simpler’ and this affects our language. This is known as semantic broadening (extension, widening, and generalization). This means that a “specific feature of the word is dropped,

or the word is used outside its original specific context to refer to a more generalized concept or object” (Oklah, 2014, p. 2). Take ‘moron’ as an example:

It was originally adopted by The American Association For the Study of the Feeble-minded in 1910 with a very specific meaning ‘an adult person having a mental age of between eight and twelve’ (OED, 2020); a ‘moron’ was more developed mentally than an imbecile (IQ of 26 to 50) or an idiot (IQ of 0 to 25) (Oklah, 2014, p. 2-3).

All these words were popularized by the American Association For the Study of the Feeble-minded, but since most people were and are not aware of this, they started generalizing them, grouping them, and using them “in a broader sense as an insult” (Oklah, 2014, p. 3). Insults is categorized as one of the motives for semantic change (Oklah, 2014, p. 3). This is true with ‘faggot’ as this began as an innocent term but was later on used as an insult and with that its meaning changed.

Semantic restriction is the opposite of broadening; it is also termed narrowing, reduction, and specialization. In this process, “the meaning of a word is narrowed to refer only to a specific or limited part of its original denotation” (Oklah, 2014, p. 4). ‘Safari’ for example originally meant ‘to travel’, after which it was adopted by East African countries to refer to hunting expeditions and when “it entered English in the nineteenth century, it was still used mostly with this hunting denotation” (Oklah, 2014, p. 4), but over time and after the implementation of hunting bans, animal rights and pacifist organizations the word lost the hunting association. This turned the word into its current definition of sightseeing and scientific investigation; watching animals rather than shooting them.

The above mentioned are the two distinct ways semantic change can happen in the area of denotation.

Change in connotation

Concerning the linguistic forms of this study, change in connotation is more common. Change in connotation is either ameliorative or pejorative. When a word “is used to express negatively loaded values not inherent in its historically original (or historically prior) meaning scope” (Borkowska & Kleparski, 2007, p. 37) it is called pejoration (deterioration or degradation) and when a word gains positive connotations, or “when words rise from humble beginnings to a position of greater importance” (Borkowska & Kleparski, 2007, p. 36) it is called amelioration. Pejorative cases generally happen much more often than ameliorative cases (Kleparski, 1986; Grygiel, 2005). Some scholars agree that this is because of the human tendency to believe in the negative rather than the positive.

Barber (1964) claimed that “human nature being what it is, deterioration is commoner than amelioration: we are only prone to believe the worst of anybody, and this is reflected in the way our words change.” (Barber, 1964, p. 251). ‘Faggot’ is a good example of pejoration, as it started meaning ‘heap or bundle’ (OED, 2020) and now it is mostly used as an insult, often in a homophobic context. ‘Idiot’ and ‘imbecile’ are also words that have pejorated from being specific scientific words about IQ to being used as an insult referring to stupid people.

Amelioration is not as common, but it does happen, for instance in luxury. It came from Old French *luxurie* and meant ‘abundance, sumptuous enjoyment’ (OED, 2020), “and it denoted lechery and lasciviousness in the Middle Ages because the aim of sex then was procreation not enjoyment” (Oklah, 2014, p. 8). Slowly it started losing its negative connotations and began simply meaning luxuriance and abundance, and by the 18th century it was connected, as it is now, with “exquisite and opulent surroundings” (Oklah, 2014, p. 8). A word may also become softened, or neutral, as ‘naughty’ which meant needy or poor and then “due to the snobbish impression which was common then that poverty and need result from some wickedness or villainous nature” (Oklah, 2014, p. 9) it came to mean ‘wicked’ or ‘vile’ (OED, 2020). Now it does not have this negative connotation, it just means ‘to behave badly’ (especially relating to children) or something slightly rude (connected with sex) (OED, 2020).

Change in stylistic meaning

The style and context of words often cause them to shift their meanings, as when words “are used ironically to mean the opposite” (Oklah, 2014, p. 9). For instance, when something bad happens to you and you say ‘excellent’ rather than ‘darn it’ or something similar.

Thus, we can see that semantic change is irregular in its direction “due to the irregularity of its causes. These causes are usually interrelated, and semantic change is rarely the result of one cause exclusively” (Oklah, 2014, p. 9). The changes do not happen radically, they happen gradually and slowly over time, as we can see. The changes are usually the result of human tendencies, like in pejoration, which goes hand-in-hand with humans’ natural tendency to look towards the negative. But the changes can also happen because of different social and cultural changes, as everything that happens in the world constructs our language and language use. As seen with the case of ‘moron’ and ‘idiot’, ignorance and indifference towards technical meanings of words can also lead to change in their denotation and connotation. Lastly, the media plays a crucial role in “causing and

“diffusing” these linguistic changes”” (Oklah, 2014, p. 9) as well as keeping them in place as seen with ‘corona’, which until very recently meant nothing more than a beer to meaning a virus that threatens the whole world’s population. Change in the meaning of words is inevitable and will happen as long as society evolves and changes.

1.3 The etymologies of the linguistic forms

1.3.1 The etymology of ‘gay’

First, I will describe the etymology of ‘gay’ as this is the most common word denoting homosexual, thereafter I will describe the etymology of ‘faggot’ and its short form ‘fag’. The notion that these linguistic forms have so many different meanings will set up my theory about the varied meanings and usages of these linguistic forms.

The word ‘gay’ has gone through many different semantic changes since its origin in the 14th century. According to Leith (1997) this first happened in the 17th century, when it took its first turn towards negativity. The 14th century’s definition of the word ‘gay’ was merry, jolly or light-hearted (OED, 2020) and 300 years later, this light-heartedness took on a pejorative change, when it took on negative connotations and came to be interpreted as “‘frivolity’, ‘lack of seriousness’ or even ‘hedonism’” (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007, p. 148). This hedonism created another semantic change, because ‘gay’ came to mean ‘being addicted to social pleasures’, a euphemism for people who lived immoral and wasteful lives: “woman: Leading an immoral life, living by prostitution” (OED, 2020). Therefore, ‘gay’ was also used as slang to refer to prostitutes, sometimes “male homosexual prostitutes and male homosexuals” (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007, p. 148). This all meant that going into the 20th century, ‘gay’ had both positive and negative connotations. One definition of ‘gay’ was ‘happy’ or ‘colourful’ and another was ‘frivolous’ or ‘hedonistic’ and if one attended a ‘gay’ party “they meant that it was ‘a happy, carefree, colourful, frivolous and hedonistic party’” (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007, p. 148-149). This meaning of the word helped it along to its homosexual meaning, as Butters (1998) explains when he argues the stereotypical homosexual men who attend these types of parties were generally seen as being carefree, frivolous and hedonistic, thus creating the link eventually between ‘gay’ and homosexual, because it would here undergo an enregisterment, where anything hedonistic, frivolous, carefree and ‘gay’ would be indexed with homosexual men. Furthermore, the word was adopted by the homosexual community and they pushed for the word to be accepted as a “standard term of reference” (Leith, 1997, p. 76). This is a metonymically shift

where the new meaning of 'gay' (frivolous, hedonistic) is understood in relation to the source meaning (happy, carefree), basically homosexuals are 'gay' therefore 'gay' means homosexual (Butters, 1998). All this made the word polysemous and by the end of the twentieth century there were different meanings and connotations of 'gay', which were being used equally. 'Gay' could thus mean happy, carefree, colourful, frivolous, hedonistic or homosexual, which carried the stereotypical register of all the other words. Nowadays there is also multiple meanings of 'gay', only we do not use them equally; homosexual is the most common meaning, as it is given as 'gay's primary meaning in dictionaries across different languages. Leith says that earlier versions of the word, like its association with prostitution, seem to have been forgotten (Leith, 1997, p. 76). According to Hughes (1998, pp. 370-372) 'gay' was preceded by many other terms for homosexual starting with 'sodomite' in the 1300th century and later 'bugger' and 'bug' which turned into 'fag' and most recent 'queer', but the common term is now collectively 'gay'. Until the 1960s 'gay' was only meant for male homosexuals, but now it is both used to refer to homosexual men and women. Hughes (1998) comments that the first indication of this is from 1969 where a male prostitute John Saul refers to both his male and female colleagues as 'gay' (Hughes, 1998, pp. 376-77).

1.3.2 The etymology of 'faggot' and 'fag'

Originally 'faggot' meant a bundle of sticks used for kindling the fire (first cited 1312 according to OED). Today it is mostly known as a derogatory slang for a "homosexual man, sometimes *spec.* one considered to be effeminate...[and] (as a term of abuse or contempt) a weak or cowardly man or boy; a sissy" (OED, 2020). 'Faggot' thus underwent a pejorative change in meaning. 'Bundle of sticks used for fires' and 'homosexual' are suggested to be linked by witch burnings. When we used to burn witches and other heretics, a 'faggot' was used in this process "a person who has recanted heresy, must public carry a faggot for at certain time as a mark of shame" (OED, 2020); 'faggot' in this sense was a stake. One could also say "to fry a faggot" (OED, 2020). Apparently when these burnings would occur, they also burnt homosexuals:

During the Spanish Inquisition when heretics were burned at the stake, presumed male homosexuals were considered the only thing low enough to help kindle the fires. Bundled up with faggots of wood, they were tied to the base of the stake at which the heretic was to die. (Johansson, 1975, p. 356).

Johansson says this might even go back to the middle ages. In this sense 'faggots' were used to light 'faggots'. And if this is the case, then this explains why homosexuals do not like being called

faggots. This source is questionable though, as OED does not mention it, neither does Partridge and Johansson calls it a myth that “can safely be relegated to folk etymology” (Johansson, 1975, p. 357). The more accepted source is that it is the English version of ‘fagot’ which derives from both the Norwegian ‘fagg’ which means “heap, bundle” (Johansson, 1975, p. 356) hence ‘bundle of sticks’, and Modern Icelandic ‘föggur’ which means “luggage, traps” (Johansson, 1975, p. 356) which alongside Johansson Partridge also says is the English explanation of a woman as baggage (Partridge, 1984, p. 373; Johansson, 1975, p. 356) which appeared before the 17th century. The connection between ‘faggot’ and women is supported by John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley’s (1891) as they define ‘faggot’ as “A term of opprobrium applied to women; a ‘baggage’ [and] To copulate; also to frequent the company of loose women.” (Farmer & Henry, 1891, pp. 366-367) and by Joseph Wright (1900) who records ‘faggot’ as “A term of contempt or reproach applied to women and children; a slattern, a worthless woman” (Wright, 1900, p. 278); ‘fat, slovenly woman’ in Johansson (Johansson, 1975, p. 357). Again, we can see the pejorative change in meaning as ‘woman’ evolved into a ‘fat, slow, loose woman’. It also creates a link between femininity and ‘faggot’.

According to Johansson, the first entry of ‘faggot’ as homosexual showcased this femininity. It was by Louis E. Jackson and C. R. Hellyer (1914). They compared ‘drag’ to homosexuality and femininity: “Amongst female impersonators on the stage and men of dual sex instincts “drag” denotes female attire donned by a male. Example: “All the fagots (sissies) will be dressed in drag at the ball tonight” (Jackson & Hellyer, 1914, p. 30). Here we also see that it was considered weak and degrading to be a ‘fagot’ as they compared it to a sissy which is also considered an effeminate man or someone who is weak or cowardly (Lexico, 2020). This is another change in the pejorative as ‘homosexual’ as it is not just linked to femininity, but also linked to the notion that it is weak and wrong to behave in such a way.

In the same way that ‘gay’ used to refer to prostitution, so did ‘faggot’, but only in its short form ‘fags’ (Johansson, 1975, p. 356) hence the correlation between these words: “Fairies or Fags are men or boys who exploit sex for profit” (Anderson, 1923, p. 103). Stereotypically prostitution was usually a women’s work and thus ‘fag’ is here again related to women and femininity. Furthermore, Johansson explains that the Norwegian ‘fagg’ and ‘bagge’ had derivations like the French ‘bagasse’, Catalan ‘bagassa’, Spanish ‘bagasa’, Portugese ‘bagaxa’, and Italian ‘bagascia’ (Johansson, 1975, p. 357). All of these denote prostitution and ‘frequenting the company of loose women’. These homosexual words were all connected to women, weakness and prostitution. Also ‘fagot’ was paralleled by ‘bagot’ for ‘bagages’ in French and thus Johansson argues that we should not be

surprised if these two words melted together. Coming to mean homosexual Johansson argues that 'faggot' usurped 'bugger' [the English version of 'bagge'] as these two had semantically similar meanings and 'faggot' would come to be the chosen one.

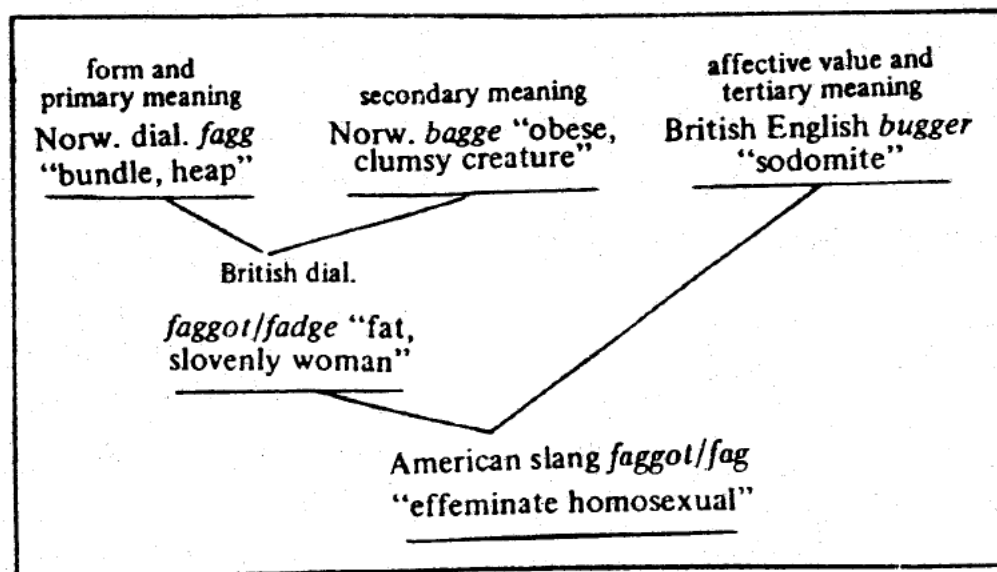


Image 1: The etymology of 'faggot'

(Johansson, 1975, p. 358)

'Fag' is nowadays known as the derivative form of 'faggot' that especially in the US is used as slur for homosexual people, and according to Johansson this is based on the fact that the suffix of '-ot' is diminutive in all dialects of Old French thus 'fag' must be the short form of 'faggot' in the same way that 'vamp' is short for 'vampire' (Johansson, 1975, p. 356). 'Fag' is a polysemous word with reflected meaning, because 'fag' does not just denote homosexual, in the UK it denotes a cigarette and before that a flag or a loose piece of cloth (OED, 2020). 'Fag' as cigarette first appeared at the end of the 1880s and was derived from the word 'fagend' "the fag-end of cigars", which refers to the end of a smoked cigarette (Partridge, 1984, p. 373). The short form of 'faggot' started to appear during the 1920s (OED, 2020) and was first adopted by the US in the 1960s and 1970s in the UK (Partridge, 1984, p. 373), but the word 'fag' had a different kind of meaning before this. Partridge says that since the 1780s 'fag' was defined "anything that causes weariness" (Partridge, 1984, p. 373) and "to make (someone or something) fatigued, tire by labor" (Partridge, 1984, p. 373). Later it was used to describe "a boy at a PUBLIC SCHOOL who has to do jobs for an older boy (OED, 2010, p. 546), and then it came to be known as a term for cigarette and lastly by 1960 it came to mean "a male homosexual, esp. if a pathic, a 'female' partner in male homosexuality" (Partridge, 1984, p. 373). Here we can see a relation between femininity and homosexuality, as the gay person

is deemed a 'female'. Unlike 'gay' which is also used about females, 'faggot' and 'fag' are almost exclusively used about males nowadays. OED lists the slur 'faggot' as a term for a homosexual man and only very occasionally about a lesbian (female). However, according to OED 'faggot' was as early as 1591 used to refer derogatorily to a woman; "one considered to be troublesome, useless, or slatternly...Often as a term of abuse or contempt. Occasionally also with reference to a man or an animal." (OED, 2020). It is interesting to see this shift from concerning women to concerning men over time. Furthermore, 'gay' is considered to be CGL (category group label) and 'fag(got)' is considered to be DGL (derogatory group label). Finally, according to Hughes (2006) they are all considered to be swearwords, and this is interesting as he argues that "meanings of basic swearwords vary according to speech community" (Hughes, 2006, p. 252). This is shared by previous research regarding these words and by my study, as the most important factor in these is the matter of intent and context.

2 Theory

My theory will feature a discussion of previous studies concerning these linguistic forms and how they differ from my study. After this, I will discuss the sociolinguistic aspect of my study and finally the concepts of enregisterment and indexicality as these will provide the groundwork for my discussion.

2.1 An overview of previous research regarding this topic

Previous research (Lalor & Rendle-Short 2007; Robinson 2012; Nicolas & Skinner 2012; Carnaghi & Maass, 2007; Corbett, 2001; Fasoli et al. 2019; McCormack et al. 2012, 2016) about the use of these linguistic forms have focused on their relation to homophobia, and my study will follow this as well, but unlike these which have primarily been conducted through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews; offline language, my data will be collected from CMC which is a language and a branch of sociolinguistics in itself. Regarding my study, the key component of CMC is the fact that it happens online, meaning that body language and facial expressions are left out (most often) and that will make it harder to judge the meaning behind people's use of the linguistic forms, and secondly because I have chosen Reddit where people are mostly anonymous, this will (I hope) retract some norms of standard and behavior and produce different results to the previous studies.

McCormack et al.'s (2012, 2016) studies differs from the rest as they argue that homophobia is declining and that DGL are not used in the pursuit of being homophobic, but merely as neutral terms of inclination towards homosexual peers or as a form of disparagement not linked to homosexuality. The majority of the 35 homosexual participants from their 2016 study did not consider the phrase 'that's so gay' to be being homophobic, instead they were arguing the intent behind its use and the context in which it is used, were vital in understanding their effect and meaning. Furthermore, they did not find homophobic speech to really be a problem anymore. This distinction led them to consider a different distinction of homosexual language apart from homophobia. They argue that homophobic language as an "antigay language that is intended to wound another person" (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 750) where the key component is intent and effect (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 750) and "homophobic language tended to be said in an already homophobic environment" (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 750). However, in previous research (2012) McCormack discussed that homophobia was decreasing in cultures, and that this would lead to different forms of homosexual language and the key to this was the new and varied use of the word 'gay'. Before McCormack,

studies have rather hinted at the use of 'gay' meaning 'lame' (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; Burn, 2008; Robinson, 2012; Nicolas & Skinner, 2012; Carnaghi & Maass, 2007) and 'faggot' meaning 'loser' (Corbett, 2001; Carnaghi & Maass, 2007). They argue that these meanings would conjure up homophobia as these meanings would indicate or normalize negativity in company with homosexuality, because the denotation of homosexuality cannot escape the word. Central to these findings was often the distinction of age as young people showed a greater capability of hearing multiple meanings of a word, where the older participants would rather be stuck with their learned version of 'gay' as a homosexual term that was often used homophobically (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; Robinson, 2012). McCormack et al. (2016) called the use of 'gay' to express frustration or denoting general negativity a 'gay discourse' that had little or no homophobia in it (McCormack et al, 2016, p. 751). It even bonded straight and gay people together when 'that's so gay' could be used "through humour and ironic jokes about stereotypes of gay men" (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 751). They called this kind of language as "'pro-language', defining it as 'the use of homosexually themed language that is used to bond people together in socio-positive ways or to demonstrate pro-gay attitudes'" (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 751). Homosexually themed words and phrases have no inherent meaning the participants argued, it all "depends on cultural context and social dynamics of the speech" (McCormack, 2016, p. 751). Fasoli et al. (2019) and Carnaghi & Maass's (2007) studies focused on the reclaiming of homosexually themed words 'gay' and 'fag' and they also found that the use of homosexually themed language in appropriate groups bonded social groups together, but when they were used by sexually straight speakers to label others, they were deemed to be homophobic. Therefore, these words are only homophobic if the intent and context is also homophobic. Corbett (2001), Burn (2008) and Nicolas & Skinner (2012) show a more direct negativity related to homosexually themed words (fag(got) and queer). Corbett argues that the diffusing of 'faggot' = 'loser' will regenerate homophobia and that this serves to reestablish male's heterosexuality and therefore power, because "The loss of masculinity is configured on the homosexual's experience of passivity in relation to other men: passivity = femininity = loss. The loss of power is configured according to the homosexual's assumed relinquishing of power to another man: passivity = smallness = loss." (Corbett, 2001, p. 24). Burn follows this argument as she discusses the fact that male heterosexuals use homophobic language to deride one another. This behavior "may win approval from their social group" (Burn, 2008, p. 1), but it will cause harm to homosexuals as they feel insulted by the general linking of negativity to homosexuality. Similar results come from Nicolas & Skinner's (2012) study as their results revealed that "exposure to the general negative usage

of gay increased implicit anti-gay bias” (Nicolas & Skinner, 2012, p. 1). The study of homosexually themed words has revealed varied results that alter from them always being homophobic to depending on the intent and context. I will see if this is also the case in CMC.

2.2 Sociolinguistics

As the meanings of ‘gay’ and ‘faggot’ are socially conditioned (they both mean homosexual), a sociolinguistic framework will form the basis of the study. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society where differences in social categories, cultural categories, context of utterance, intent and perception of utterance play a role in the changing process of language and understanding of meaning in words. Labov argued that language was controlled by macrogroups, “such as class, sex and age, which tell us something about our social place in society” (Akselberg, 1997, p. 33). This has since been supplemented by the addition of microgroups, i.e. the groups we make ourselves (in-group which leaves everyone else in out-groups) as well as the impact of intent, perception and context. Akselberg argues that the ways in which people constitute their own worlds (in-groups) based on own and others experiences and consciousness of themselves and of the world, also control language (Akselberg, 1997, p. 33). This, we see later is also the case in my study and other studies regarding these linguistic forms. Askelberg argues that “informal speech in any everyday social context is controlled by how we constitute our everyday world.” (Akselberg, 1997, p. 33). Asif Agha’s process of enregisterment and Silverstein’s levels of indexicality also follow this as they present the argument that meaning comes from shared registers of language which is indexed differently according to in-groups and out-groups. The change in language and meaning can then occur in in-groups without it changing anywhere else.

2.3 Indexicality and enregisterment

When understanding and placing sociolinguistic patterns of variation and change, a good place to start is linguistic anthropology, and especially the terms indexicality (Silverstein, 2003) and enregisterment (Agha, 2003) as these describe how particular words come to account for particular identities and activities (Johnstone, 2016, p. 632). Silverstein and Agha have created a framework that “helps us see how “social meanings” and linguistic choices can come to be linked and how sets of linguistic choices can come to be understood as varieties” (Johnstone, 2016, p. 633). Any sign (word, gesture, glance, shoes, hats, etc., anything that has meaning) is indexical if it is related “to its meaning by virtue of co-occurring with what it takes to mean” (Johnstone, 2016, p. 633).

This means that specific words are often linked to other signs like ‘thunder’ making us think of lightning, dark skies or rain. These can differ depending on society, culture, context like ‘football’ denoting ‘a sport played with hands in the US and feet in the rest of the world’, but specific groups or situations can also become associated with specific signs if they ‘force’ this association by indexing the signs for themselves. Over time words will become aligned with certain situations, and it is hard to separate those and get used to their eventual semantic changes, something which words almost always undergo at some point. This process is what Agha calls enregisterment; “the processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population” (Agha, 2007, p. 81). Registers are “cultural models of action that link diverse behavioral signs to enactable effects, including images of persona, interpersonal relationship, and type of conduct” (Agha, 2007, p. 145). Registers only become nameable objects when people accept them and start to orient them, meaning that registers can exist for some people and at the same time be unknown to others. A register can only exist when “its forms and values become differentiable from the rest of language...for a given population of speakers” (Agha, 2007, p. 168). A register is then like a linguistic form with and constitutive of a context (Johnstone, 2016, p. 633) and this can change from context to context.

The process of enregisterment is conceptualized by Johnstone as follows:

A (a linguistic form, or meaningful act) is enregistered with B (a register) by C (an agent) in accordance to D (an ideological schema) because of E (an interactional exigency in which calling to the enregisterment of or enregistering one or more forms serves some rhetorical function) and F (a sociohistorical exigency that gives rise to metapragmatic practices) (Johnstone, 2016, pp. 633-634).

Enregisterment can be seen as the process in which words get imbued with social meaning or social value as Agha denotes. He argues that there are specific

social processes—processes of value production, maintenance and transformation—through which the scheme of cultural values has a social life, as it were, a processual and dynamic existence that depends on the activities of social persons, linked to each other through discursive interactions and institutions (Agha, 2003, p. 232).

Language changes and construction are formed through these interactions and thus some groups form languages, or enregisters words in their in-group differently from the out-group. Furthermore, Agha argues

that cultural value is not a static property of things or people but a precipitate of socio-historically locatable practices, including discursive practices, which imbue cultural forms with recognizable sign-values and bring these values into circulation along identifiable trajectories in social space (Agha, 2003, p. 232).

In other words, cultural forms or words get imbued with social meaning/value by language use and cultural influence and place them into different registers in different social spaces. Homosexual language ('gay', 'fag', 'queer', 'fairy') can have different social values depending on where it is said. If we define in-group as any group belonging to the LGBT community and out-group as those not belonging to this community, then the use of these words may vary depending on the enregisterment of each group. The out-group may partake to the stereotypes ('gay' = homosexual or lame, 'fag' = homophobic slur or cigarette) and the in-group may define their own social value to these words by using them positively (reclaiming; Fasoli et al. 2019). This means that the same words can have more than one register and social value depending on the context.

The process of this can be explained through Silverstein's social indexicality or levels of indexicality (Silverstein, 2003) which is the process in which "semiotic agents access macro-sociological plane categories and concepts as values in the indexable realm of the micro-contextual" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 193). In other words, it tells us how a linguistic form goes from being recognized on a macro-social level to becoming enregistered in a specific community and takes on a layer of social value. Jensen (2016) argues that Silverstein's levels of indexicality is mapped onto Labov's indicators, markers and stereotypes (Jensen, 2016, p. 3). Indicators are the forms that all members of a social group use and therefore they only index the macro-social identity of the speaker (Jensen, 2016, p. 3); they are not specific to either the community or the speaker (Jensen, 2016, p. 2). Markers are known to the group and they also index style; how the linguistic form is used in that particular social group. Finally, stereotypes are markers "whose interpretation is now wholly in the $n + 1^{\text{st}}$ order indexical field, i.e., the social connotations of the linguistic form are presupposed before the original (n -th order) interpretation" (Jensen, 2016, p. 3). They are what the social group is first and foremost associated with. Whereas only the in-group members are aware of markers, both in-group and out-group members are aware of the stereotypes and thus they often have a higher level of awareness attached to them: "due to their status as stereotype, they often function as a basis for negative comments and are often misrepresentations of vernacular speech. Stereotyped features, though, might enjoy widespread prestige among in-group speakers." (Jensen, 2016, p. 2). This

makes them even less likely to change, as “their ultra-salient status as this “may inhibit accommodation”” (Jensen, 2016, p. 2).

Put together with Agha’s (2003) processes of enregisterment, Jensen argues that “the $(n + 1)$ +1st order indexical value of a linguistic form expresses the enregistered meaning of the form.” (Jensen, 2016, p. 3). The stereotypic value of a linguistic form is the result of this form becoming enregistered as such. She presents an overview of these two processes put together to show how they are related even clearer:

- n th order indexicality/first order: this describes a linguistic form whose frequency of use patterns according to the socio-demographic background of the speakers (gender, class, region, age).
- n +1st order indexicality/second order: this describes a linguistic form which has acquired a social meaning which reflects dominant ideologies in the speech community (e.g., language correctness). At this stage, the form and social meaning are noticed by speakers.
- $(n+1)$ +1st order indexicality/third order: this describes a linguistic form which has acquired an additional indexical meaning (in addition to its first order index) which results in it being interpreted in light of a different ideology (than the second order index). It is on this level that we find the additional layer of social value and where the form has been enregistered in the community. A link has been established between the use of the form and the social value (e.g., localness of the speaker). (Jensen, 2016, p. 3).

This demonstrates that Silverstein’s (2003) indexicality explains how linguistics forms receive social meaning in a community and Agha’s (2003) enregisterment explains “the processes which cement the third order indexical values of these forms in a community” (Jensen, 2016, p. 3), i.e. how words get imbued with specific social values which reflect specific in-groups. Indexicality and enregisterment are thus terms that work together in the process of explaining semantic change, how words become imbued with meaning and how come some certain linguistic forms come to be stereotyped within certain groups. Stereotypes therefore links certain peoples to certain social or cultural groups and makes these incompatible to each other.

3 Methods

In this thesis, I observed the different usages of the linguistic forms ‘gay’ and ‘faggot’ as well as ‘fag’ and ‘that’s so gay’ which during my research I found to be justifiable of a search of its own. I attempted to distinguish their different meanings by analyzing their varied usages while considering how much of an impact intention, perception and context had. The research will be based on reflections and data provided by online communities. This means that I will look at the online use of these linguistic forms which is unlike much of the other research that is concerned with these linguistic forms.

3.1 Participants

Data comes from users from three different subreddits: r/lgbt, r/the_donald and r/unpopularopinion. Data was collected from the subreddit’s inception to April 2020. R/lgbt is from 2008, r/the_donald is from 2015 and r/unpopularopinion is from 2012. These were chosen to obtain a nuanced look at the use and meaning of the linguistic forms; r/lgbt because of its pro-lgbt attitudes, r/the_donald because of its anti-lgbt attitudes and r/unpopularopinion because of its neutrality. This was to ensure that I not only got the voices from in-groups, but also from out-groups. The linguistic forms concerned were initially ‘gay’ and ‘faggot’, but after viewing my data I noticed a significant focus on ‘fag’ and the phrase ‘that’s so gay’, so data were collected from these as well. While a majority of research on these linguistic forms has been conducted from face-to-face interview and questionnaires, my study focused on online communication or computer mediated communication (CMC). I did not only choose to collect my data from CMC because of its massive amount of data to be collected, but also because of its anonymity. Whenever we are asked about our language, and especially about words like these that carry specific fragile connotations from person to person, we tend to go by the norms and answer whatever will make us appear as good as possible. We would therefore say that we never use them homophobically or insulting, but only in their denotational meaning, even though that might not be the case. On the internet though we tend to speak in our natural language, and this will generate more true usages of these words. This is perhaps why there are so many examples of the words being used as an insult or offense and not as many being used positively or neutrally like some of the other articles show (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; Carnaghi & Maass, 2007; Robinson, 2012). However online communication often also hides our faces, gender, age, name. Thus, the sociolinguistic features I will consider when mining (the process of discovering patterns in large data) the data are opinions, stereotypes, norms, context, registers. I will

consider the social context they write in, the social value of the words and group and the intent and perception of the user and receiver.

3.2 Procedures

Data was collected via pushshift API (Application programming interface) which “was designed and created by the /r/datasets mod team to help provide enhanced functionality and search capabilities for searching Reddit comments and submissions” (Github, 2020) and structured in AntConc a “freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis” (Anthony, 2019) to develop a rich understanding of the frequency of the use and opinions from participants regarding these linguistic forms. Collecting data via pushshift API is a way ensuring that I get all the information I need: the author name, submission, comment, link, but also plenty of information that I do not need, so before I can do anything I ‘clean’ it. Data ‘cleaning’ is also called “normalizing parts of our data” (Weisser, 2016, p. 69). It means taking away the unwanted data and only leaving the wanted data. In my case I only want to know what the author is called (Username on Reddit), what is written (containing the appropriate words), and which post is being referred to.

Before cleaning it, the API looks like this (Image 2: API before cleaning)

```
{
  "data": [
    {
      "all_awardings": [],
      "allow_live_comments": false,
      "author": "The69thBrokage",
      "author_flair_background_color": "",
      "author_flair_css_class": "DOORKNOCKER",
      "author_flair_richtext": [],
      "author_flair_text": "MAGA",
      "author_flair_text_color": "dark",
      "author_flair_type": "text",
      "author_fullname": "t2_2v6k41l9",
      "author_patreon_flair": false,
      "author_premium": false,
      "awards": [],
      "can_mod_post": false,
      "contest_mode": false,
      "created_utc": 1582758292,
      "domain": "self.The_Donald",
      "full_link": "https://www.reddit.com/r/The_Donald/comments/fa25qw/the_admins_will_never_shut_us_down_theyre_going/",
      "gildings": {},
      "id": "fa25qw",
      "is_crosspostable": false,
      "is_meta": false,
      "is_original_content": false,
      "is_reddit_media_domain": false,
      "is_robot_indexable": true,
      "is_self": true,
      "is_video": false,
      "link_flair_background_color": "",
      "link_flair_richtext": [],
      "link_flair_text_color": "dark",
      "link_flair_type": "text",
      "locked": false,
      "media_only": false,
      "no_follow": true,
      "num_comments": 18,
      "num_crossposts": 0,
      "over_18": false,
      "parent_whitelist_status": "no_ads",
      "permalink": "/r/The_Donald/comments/fa25qw/the_admins_will_never_shut_us_down_theyre_going/",
      "pinned": false,
      "pwls": 0,
      "retrieved_on": 1582758297,
      "score": 1,
      "selftext": "They don't want the press shitstorm that would come from banning the largest pro-Trump community on the net. They want to figuratively put chemicals in the water that TURN THE FRIGGIN FROGS GAY. They want to lop off our massive saggy nuts. \n\nWe need to not take this quietly. We need to make sure it's the truth that gets heard by the masses, and not the corporate line from some asshole tech weiner. We know their gameplan. We need to shout from the rooftops that we don't care what they do. We'll beat them (figuratively of course).\n\nThis last part is for these aspiring Stalins. \n\nI dare you to ban us. You don't got the sack to do it.",
      "send_replies": true,
      "spoiler": false,
      "stickied": false,
    }
  ]
}
```

I cleaned my data manually by extracting the necessary data and putting it into a txt-file so that it could be read by AntConc. In AntConc I coded for sentiment analysis and sentiment categories with the aid of concordance. Concordancing is an “analysis technique that allows linguists to investigate the occurrences and behavior of different word forms in real-life contexts, that is, in situations where they have actually been used by native or non-native speakers” (Weisser, 2016, p. 80) as well as used “to select the most frequent, suitable, and representative examples of a particular lexicon entry, as well as to help disambiguate between its different senses” (Weisser, 2016, p. p. 80) . This means that I can put my data in order and spot patterns and the different reasons behind the different usages of the linguistic forms.

As an example, I uploaded the data for 'that's so gay' in r/lgbt in AntConc and searched for 'gay' in concordance and then we receive this:

Image 4: Example of concordance in AntConc.

The screenshot shows the AntConc software interface. At the top, it says "Concordance Hits 466". Below this is a table with three columns: "Hit", "KWIC", and "File". The "Hit" column contains line numbers from 1 to 35. The "KWIC" column contains text excerpts with the search term "gay" highlighted in blue. The "File" column contains the source file for each hit. Below the table, there is a search bar with the text "gay" and a search window size of 50. There are also buttons for "Start", "Stop", "Sort", and "Show Every Nth Row". At the bottom, there are checkboxes for "Level 1", "Level 2", and "Level 3", and a "Clone Results" button.

Here we see that it shows the phrase 'that's so gay' and the words it is in concordance with, for instance 'faggot', 'question', 'fag', 'accept', etc. and from this together with the rest of the post, I distinguished its different sentiments. It also shows us that we hit 466 concordance results, which gives us a reasonable amount of data to analyze. Another aspect of my research was coding for different

markers, such as 'homophobic', 'lame', 'context', 'bully', 'lame', etc. For instance, when coding for homophobic in AntConc, we see that it generates a lot of results (n=153) and that most of them are from r/lgbt and most of these from 'that's so gay' (n=42). Some of these results occur because the word is mentioned more times in an utterance, but nonetheless it shows that the members of r/lgbt are concerned with the homophobic aspect of 'that's so gay', so here we can see that 'homophobic' is an important sentiment category.

3.2.1 Methodological approach

This study used a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative methods. A quantitative method will allow me to look at large quantities of data from afar and a qualitative method will allow me to study these closer; like through a magnifying glass. Mixed methods "contribute to a better understanding of the various phenomena under investigation; while quantitative research is useful towards generalizing research findings..., qualitative approaches are particularly valuable in providing in-depth, rich data." (Angouri, 2011, p. 33). This is how I will utilize my method; quantitative to achieve an overview of how many results each subreddit (submissions and comments) contributes to each word and phrase. Then the qualitative method to get a deeper, richer understanding of the context, denotation, connotation and social value of the words and phrases. Thus, through a combination of these two a better understanding of the variation in meanings of the linguistic forms was achieved. Within the quantitative method, corpus analysis was carried out to describe the overall patterns of use and within the qualitative method, sentiment analysis was carried out to describe the many varied ways in which the linguistic forms can be used; positively, negatively and neutrally.

3.2.2 Corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics "involves the analysis of (usually) very large collections of electronically stored texts, aided by computer software" (Baker, 2011, p. 93). The corpora for my analysis will be created via the Pushshift API and AntConc. Froehlich (2015) explains that corpus analysis is a form of text analysis where you make "comparisons between textual objects at a large scale (so-called 'distant reading'). It allows us to see things that we don't necessarily see when reading as humans" (Froehlich, 2015). As a result, Baker (2011) characterizes corpus linguistics as a 'methodology' rather than a traditional type of linguistics like grammar, phonetics, semantics or sociolinguistics (Baker, 2011, p. 93). Theoretically it is rooted in

empirical, inductive forms of analysis, relying on real-world instances of language use in order to derive rules or explore trends about the ways in which people actually produce language (as opposed to models of language that rely on made-up examples or introspection). (Baker, 2011, p. 94).

It is therefore a quantitative method in its inductive way of analyzing. However, there is also complications when using corpus analysis as “humans do not always make accurate introspective judgments regarding language, instead relying on cognitive and social biases” (Baker, 2011, p. 94).

Therefore, linguists look for speech outputs and variations instead of asking people what they say, because often people do not know, or they are prohibited from giving an honest answer by norms of behavior. Corpus analysis will essentially allow me to describe overall patterns of use such as which words are being used and in which frequency. However, as my study focuses on the different meanings and reasons behind these different usages, I will also use sentiment analysis because this will aid me in unpacking the many varied ways in which the linguistic forms are used.

3.2.3 Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis focuses on “people’s opinions, sentiments, evaluations, attitudes, and emotions from written language” (Liu, 2012, p. 1). This is especially valid in my project, as my data will be categorized in different ‘emotional’ boxes (positive, negative, neutral) and the defining categories these attain to. Sentiment analysis is usually accompanied by opinion mining which is gathered from “data mining, Web mining, and text mining” (Liu, 2012, p. 1). Reddit is an opinion based medium and the subreddit r/unpopularopinion in particular, therefore it is obvious to use opinion mining and sentiment analysis as one of my methods in my study. Liu (2012) says:

Opinions are central to almost all human activities and are key influences of our behaviors. Our beliefs and perceptions of reality, and the choices we make, are, to a considerable degree, conditioned upon how others see and evaluate the world (Liu, 2012, p. xiii).

I hypothesize that this will be the case in my different subreddits; the pro- and anti-lgbt subreddits will use the words differently from each other, and the neutral subreddit will use the linguistic forms neutrally, and all this will be a result of their beliefs and social background. Sentiment analysis focuses on “people’s opinions, sentiments, evaluations, appraisals, attitudes, and emotions towards entities such as products, services, organizations, individuals, issues, events, topics, and their

attributes.” (Liu, 2012, p. 1). Especially topics are exactly what is being discussed on Reddit, thus it is very useful there.

There are three different levels of analysis in sentiment analysis: Document level, sentence level, and entity and aspect level. The task of document level is to classify if a whole opinion document expresses either a positive or negative sentiment; the task of sentence level (which is more what I will utilize) is to determine “whether each sentence expressed a positive, negative, or neutral opinion. Neutral usually means no opinion.” (Liu, 2012, p. 4). I am going to be looking at sentence level and each specific usage of the linguistic forms, and from there consider a careful determination of the more overall opinions of each subreddit. Lastly, entity and aspect level does not worry about the language constructs (documents, paragraphs, sentences, clauses, phrases, etc.), but the opinion itself. It is based upon the idea that an opinion must consist of a sentiment (negative or positive) and a target (of opinion) (ibid.). This does not mean that an opinion is neither negative nor positive, in fact it shows that sentiment analysis is not so black and white, as a sentence can be both positive and negative, and as a phrase or a word also can be used in a positive and negative way in the same sentence. Thus, the goal of this “level of analysis is to discover sentiments on entities and/or their aspects” (Liu, 2012, p. 5). This kind of analysis will eventually summarize and categorize any unstructured text into structured data which will make it valid in both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

There are some challenges when dealing with sentiments, feelings, because people are not just positive, negative or neutral. They are a mix of all these and sometimes seem to be positive or negative when the opposite is the case. The challenges are: detecting subjectivity and tone, understanding sarcasm and irony, dealing with the issues of context and polarity, because the context has a lot to do with what is being said, how what is being said is perceived, and lastly how do we define neutral? Liu says that neutral “usually means no opinion.” (Liu, 2012, p. 4), as it is ambiguous and lacks information. But in fact, it should more be understood as the boundary between positive and negative sentiments which will helps us to distinguish between those that are somewhat in between both kind of sentiments and not just because of sarcasm or irony. MonkeyLearn – “a text mining cloud platform that allows companies to easily get relevant data from text using machine learning technologies” (u/wildcodegowrong,, 2015) – also deals with sentiment analysis and these issues. They list different identifications to look for when looking for neutrality. They are:

1. Objective texts. So called *objective* texts do not contain explicit sentiments, so you should include those texts into the neutral category.
2. Irrelevant information. If you haven't preprocessed your data to filter out irrelevant information, you can tag it neutral. However, be careful! Only do this if you know how this could affect overall performance. Sometimes, you will be adding noise to your classifier and performance could get worse.
3. Texts containing wishes. Some wishes like, *I wish the product had more integrations* are generally neutral. However, those including comparisons like, *I wish the product were better* are pretty difficult to categorize (MonkeyLearn, 2020).

Another issue of sentiment analysis is sarcasm and irony to which they say that “people express their negative sentiments using positive words” (MonkeyLearn, 2020). To assert this, I looked for overall sentiment in ‘posts’, ‘contexts’ ‘emojis’, ‘words denoting sarcasm and irony’ or the ‘tone’ of the sentence. But tone together with subjectivity is another issue, as it is very difficult detecting the tone in written text if one does not have expletives or ‘emojis’. Finally, it was problematic to perceive whether the person writing was subjective or objective so in order to distinguish between this, the context of the subreddit or post was considered.

3.3 Setup for discussion

After creating the corpora and dividing them into sentiments, I categorized these sentiments to pursue a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the use of each linguistic form. The sentiments I coded for were initially positive, negative and neutral. These I named P = positive, N2 = negative and N = neutral. During coding, I realized that some of my data could not be attached to a single sentiment; this I will discuss later in my discussion, and therefore I added two other categories: neutral/negative (N/N2) and positive/negative (P/N2). This showcases the entity and aspect level of sentiment analysis as well as the challenges that can occur, when applying sentiment analysis on an online communication site like Reddit. Each sentiment had multiple sentiment categories attached to them which are numbered and described in appendix 5. I had them numbered to ease my coding process, but they remain unnumbered in the charts with only the description visible in AntConc, I coded for the most important sentiment categories such as ‘homophobic’, ‘lame’, ‘reclaim’ as well as for ‘context’ and other aspects which led me to formulate a step by step discussion manual as seen below:

- 1) ‘That’s so gay’ and the aspect of N/N2: intentions and perceptions

- 2) 'Words only hurt if you let them' and the impact of context
- 3) The difference in registers concerning 'fag': UK vs. US
- 4) The reclaiming of words.

These are the most important aspects that I have found in my results and my discussion will revolve around these along with a comparison of my study with other studies that deal with the same research will permeate the entire discussion. The comparison will revolve around the issue of homophobia, the in-group/out-group effect and the effect that intention, perception, context, and social value have on the imbuing of meaning(s) in these linguistic forms.

4 Results

First, I will show the overall frequency of the linguistic forms and their use in the three subreddits. Thereafter I will show the results of the overall sentiment analysis. These are both quantitative. From there I will present the results of sentiment categories which I will then discuss.

4.1 Results of the use of all the linguistic forms

I searched for the linguistic forms in both submissions and comments from all three subreddits and this led to a total of $n=726912$ results. This is split between the three subreddits as shown in table 1:

Table 1: The distribution of the total amount of linguistic forms used split between the three subreddits

r/lgbt	$n=291991$ (40%)
r/unpopularopinion	$n=175806$ (24%)
r/the_donald	$n=259115$ (36%)

The subreddit connected to homosexuality is also the subreddit who mostly uses the linguistic forms which may either indicate that they use them to refer to themselves or they discuss their derogatory use in other groups.

4.2 Results of the use of all the linguistic forms split between the subreddits

Underneath is an overview of the frequency of the linguistic forms 'gay', 'that's so gay' 'faggot' and 'fag' in the three subreddits.

4.2.1 'Gay'

Gay: $n=652590$ results out of the total $n=726912$ (90%).

Table 2: The distribution of the use of 'gay' split between the three subreddits

r/lgbt	$n=283590$ (43%)
r/unpopularopinion	$n=167848$ (26%)
r/the_donald	$n=201152$ (31%)

With 'gay' we see that r/lgbt uses it mostly, then r/the_donald and lastly r/unpopularopinion. It is quite close here though, indicating that 'gay' is a word used by all manners of people with all manners of opinions. This is also expected as 'gay' is the most versatile word (OED, 2020).

4.2.2 'That's so gay'

That's so gay: n=695 results out of the total n=726912 (0,1%).

Table 3: The distribution of the use of 'that's so gay' split between the three subreddits

r/lgbt	n=555 (80%)
r/unpopularopinion	n=84 (12%)
r/the_donald	n=56 (8%)

Like 'gay' r/lgbt uses 'that's so gay' the most, then r/unpopularopinion and finally r/the_donald.

Why r/lgbt uses this phrase so much, which is considered both neutral and negative (Robinson, 2012; Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007), is interesting. I would argue that they stray away from the neutral usage of the phrase and considers it negative, and therefore they argue that the phrase should not be used so liberally as it is.

4.2.3 'Faggot'

Faggot: n=56786 results out of the total n=726912 (8%).

Table 4: The distribution of the use of 'faggot' split between the three subreddits

r/lgbt	n=4661 (8%)
r/unpopularopinion	n=5885 (10%)
r/the_donald	n=46240 (81%)

From this we can see that r/the_donald uses 'faggot' the most and r/lgbt and r/unpopularopinion are very close. As 'faggot' is very often considered derogatory (OED, 2020) and this is probably why the subreddit with the negative attitude towards homosexuality r/the_donald uses it mostly.

4.2.4 'Fag'

Fag: n=16841 results out of the total n=726912 (2%).

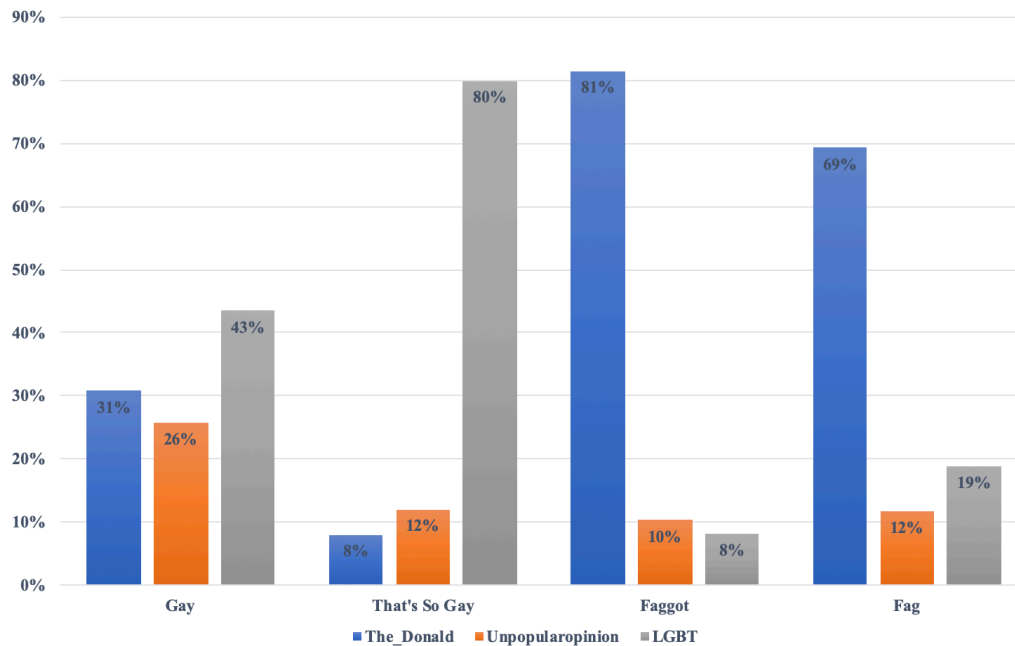
Table 5: The distribution of the use of 'fag' split between the three subreddits

r/lgbt	n=3185 (19%)
r/unpopularopinion	n=1989 (12%)
r/the_donald	n=11667 (69%)

Again, we see that r/the_donald uses it the most, r/lgbt secondly and lastly r/unpopularopinion.

'Fag' is used a substantial amount more in r/the_donald which goes well with the notion of 'fag' being a homophobic slur (Carnaghi & Maass, 2007) and the fact that r/the_donald has anti-lgbt tendencies in their community. Chart 1 has all of the tables put together.

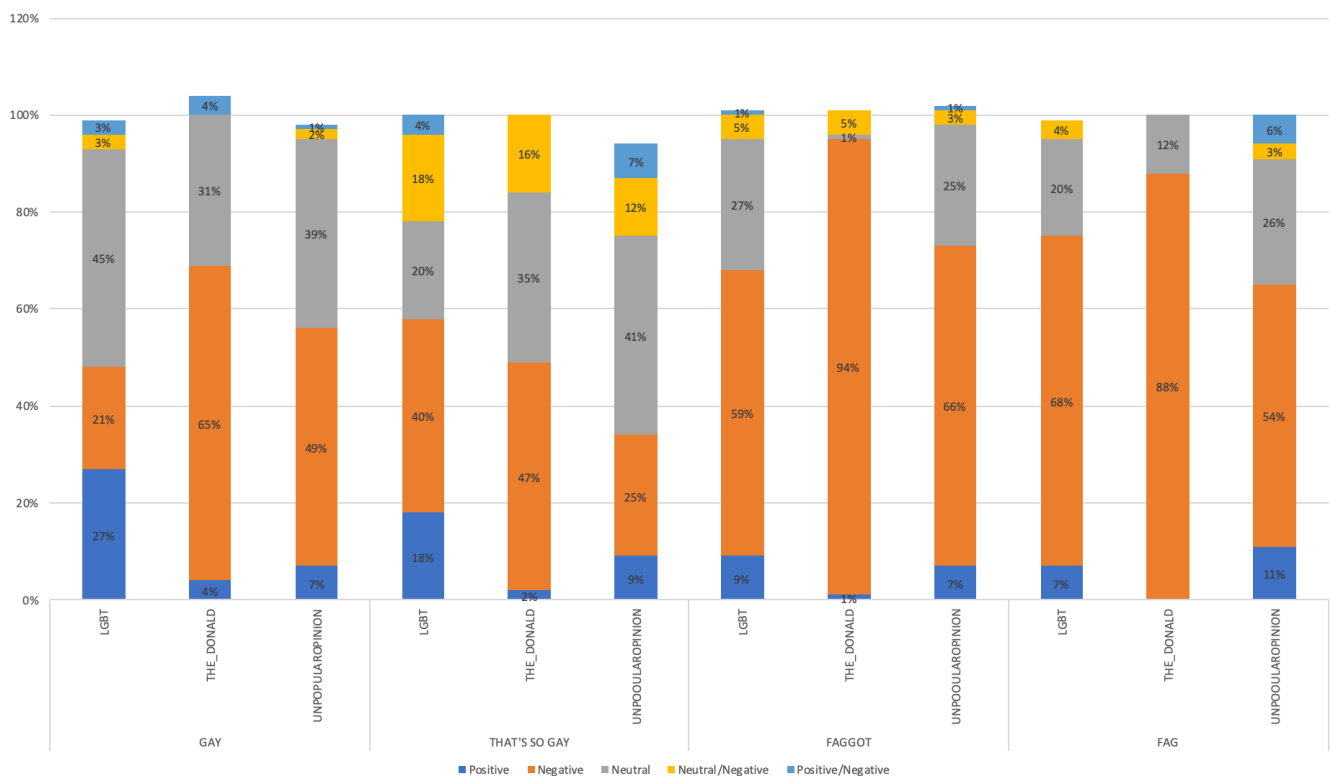
Chart 1: An overview of the amount of each linguistic form split between the subreddits



4.3 Results of sentiment analysis

From this dataset, I pulled ≈ 100 submissions and comments on each linguistic form from each subreddit to use sentiment analysis on. The sentiments I searched for were positive (P), negative (N2), neutral (N), negative/neutral (N/N2) and positive/negative (P/N2). The frequencies and distribution between the linguistic forms and subreddits is seen below in chart 2.

Chart 2: The frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic forms by the subreddits.



4.3.1 'Gay'

From this we can see that with 'gay' the split between sentiments is as the following:

In r/lgbt it is: 1) Neutral 2) Positive 3) Negative 4) Neutral/Negative 5) Positive/Negative.

In r/the_donald it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive 4) Positive/Negative.

In r/unpopularopinion it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive 4) Neutral/Negative 5) Positive/Negative.

This tells us that 'gay' is mainly used as a derogatory term in my study, secondly as a neutral term and finally positive, N/N2 and P/N2. Only in the subreddit that is pro-lgbt is it used more in the positive sentiment than in the negative sentiment.

4.3.2 'That's so gay'

The split between sentiments with 'that's so gay' is:

In r/lgbt it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive & Neutral/Negative 4) Positive/Negative.

In r/the_donald it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Neutral/Negative 4) Positive.

In r/unpopularopinion it is: Neutral 2) Negative 3) Negative/Neutral 4) Positive/Negative.

'That's so gay' in my study is used negatively the most, closely followed by neutrally, then N/N2 and finally positive and P/N2. This is by far the most varied in sentiments of all the topics and the topic where N/N2 is utilized the most.

4.3.3 'Faggot'

The split between sentiments with 'faggot' is:

In r/lgbt it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive 4) Neutral/Negative 5) Positive/Negative.

In r/the_donald it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral/Negative 3) Neutral & Positive.

In r/unpopularopinion it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive 4) Neutral/Negative 5) Positive/Negative.

From this we can tell that 'faggot' is mainly used as a negative term and only very rarely as a positive term. 'Faggot' as a neutral term is used second to negative, but apart from one result in r/the_donald, the distribution is exclusively between r/unpopularopinion and r/lgbt.

4.3.4 'Fag'

The split between sentiments with 'fag' is:

In r/lgbt it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive 4) Neutral/Negative.

In r/the_donald it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Neutral/Negative.

In r/unpopularopinion it is: 1) Negative 2) Neutral 3) Positive 4) Neutral/Negative & Positive/Negative.

Here we can see that 'fag' is used mostly in the negative sentiment, neutrally second and finally positive, N/N2 and P/N2. It is nearly the same as with 'faggot', only that in r/the_donald it is used more neutrally than 'faggot'; because of the difference in registers concerning UK and US (cigarette vs homosexual slur). Interestingly it is not r/lgbt that uses the positive sentiment the most, as it is with the other words, but r/unpopularopinion. It seems that 'fag' is considered so negative to homosexuals that they do not use it very much, and maybe people outside of this community uses the word to refer to themselves endearingly.

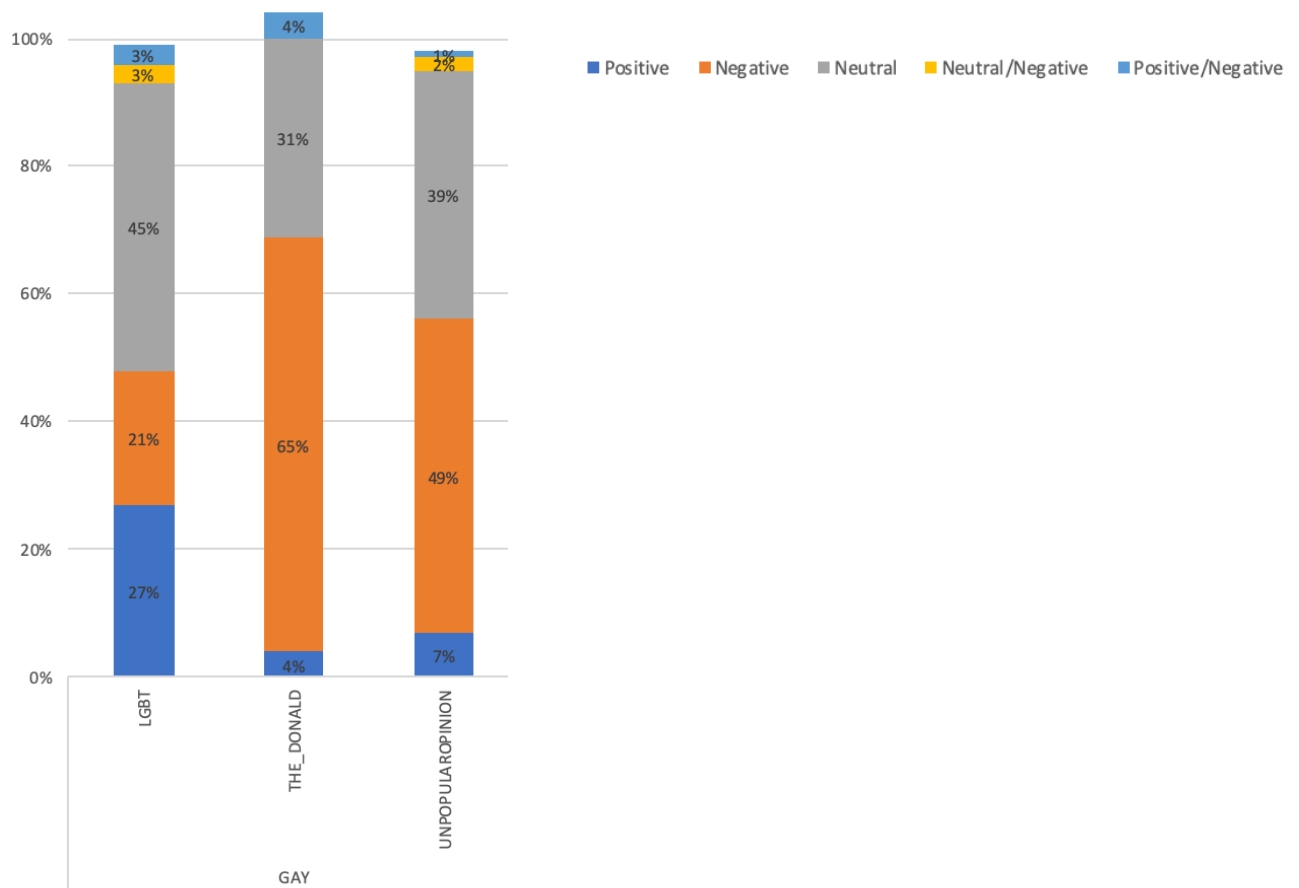
Overall the most frequented sentiment was the negative sentiment, both in CGL and DGL. This underlines Carnaghi & Maass's (2007) results that "showed that both category and derogatory labels equally activated those semantic concepts that are stereotypically associated with gays." (Carnaghi & Maass, 2007, p. 146). The connotative meaning that being gay is wrong has overtaken the denotative meaning of homosexuality, thus no matter which word (CGL or DGL), as long as they link to the category of homosexuality there is a stronger connection to the negative in these words than to the neutral and positive as my studies show. This could also indicate why the only subreddit that uses 'gay' and 'that's so gay' (CGL) more positive than the two other subreddits is that they possibly do not think of the stereotype as being bad, because they are proud of their gay identity.

4.4 Results of sentiment categories of each linguistic form on each subreddit

From the sentiment analysis I searched for the sentiment categories to see what meanings lay behind the sentiments. I wanted to see if the words are used to spark anti-gay bias and homophobia or as the more general insult and 'lame', 'stupid', 'boring' as previous studies (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; Robinson; 2012; McCormack et al., 2016) indicate is the new meaning behind these kinds of words, especially 'gay' and 'that's so gay'. Before I present the distribution of sentiment categories in each linguistic form, I start with a closeup of each linguistic form was split in sentiments, to give a better overview of how the sentiments were categorized.

4.4.1 'Gay'

Chart 3: The frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'gay' by the subreddits



In the following tables I will show the sentiment categories behind the use of positive, negative and neutral sentiments. How the total amount of sentiments is distributed is presented in the chart above and below I will show how the different sentiment categories is distributed under each sentiment.

I always start with the results from 'gay' first, then 'that's so gay' then 'faggot' and finally 'fag' and I start with r/lgbt, then r/the_donald and finally r/unpopularopinion.

r/lgbt

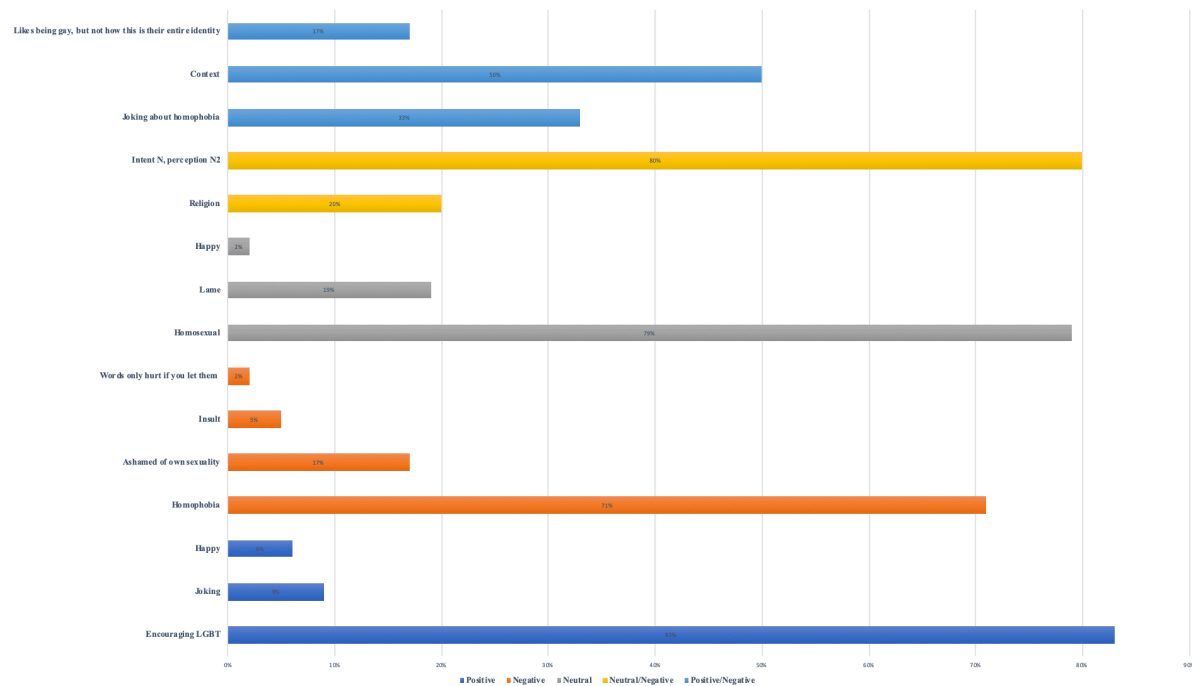
Table 6: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/lgbt. n=187 total.

How the 187 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=51) (27%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging LGBT n=44 (83%) • Joking n=4 (9%) • Happy n=3 (6%)
Negative (n=40) (21%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homophobia n=30 (71%) • Ashamed of own homosexuality n=7 (17%) • Insult (5%) n=2 • Words only hurt if you let them n=1 (2%)
Neutral (n=85) (45%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homosexual n=68 (79%) • Lame n=15 (19%) • Happy n=2 (2%)
Neutral/Negative (n=5) (3%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion n=1 (20%) • Intent N, perception N2 n=4 (80%)
Positive/Negative (n=6) (3%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joking about homophobia n=2 (33%) • Context: P in LGBT, N2 elsewhere n=3 (50%) • Likes being gay, but not how this is their entire identity n=1 (17%)

The way to read this chart is that there are 51 results that use the positive sentiment out of the 187 total results, and out of these 51 the sentiment category 'Encouraging LGBT' accounts for 83% (n=44), 'Joking' accounts for 9% (n=4) of and finally 'Happy' accounts for 6% (n=3) and so on with the other sentiments. This way follows with the rest of the linguistic forms.

The dark blue is the positive sentiment, the orange is the negative sentiment, the grey is the neutral sentiment, the yellow is the neutral/negative sentiment and the light blue is the positive/negative sentiment. The rest of the linguistic forms follows this pattern.

Chart 4: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/lgbt



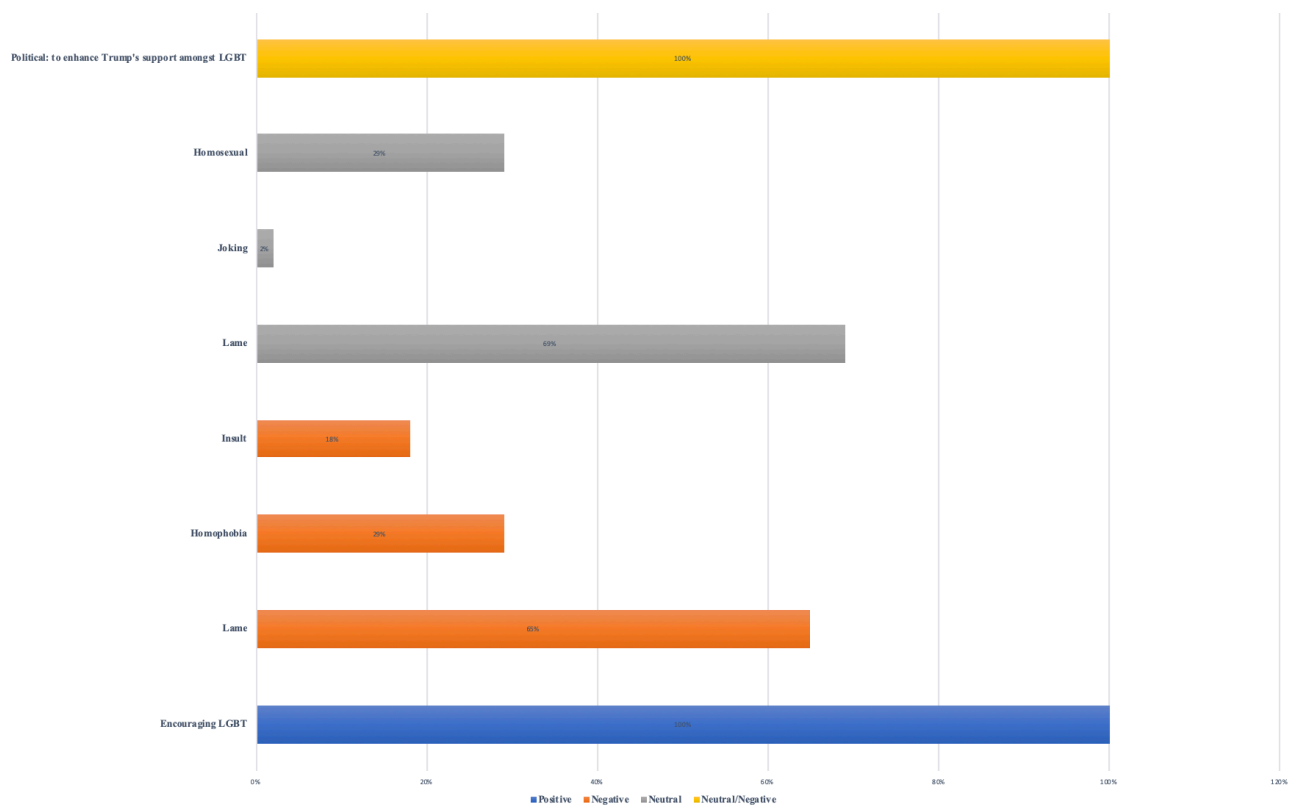
What we see here is that 'gay' in r/lgbt frequents most in the neutral sentiment to mean 'homosexual' followed by 'lame' and then in its older form 'happy'. Then it is used in the positive segment between in-group members (LGBT) to encourage each other and complement each other. They are happy about being called 'gay' and calling each other 'gay'; they are proud of their sexual identity. Next is it used in the negative segment mostly as a homophobic and insulting term, but also by people who are ashamed of being a homosexual. Lastly there are cases in N/N2 where it was intended neutral, but the receivers perceived it negative followed by the most used category in P/N2 which is about the reclaiming of the word by LGBT-members that makes it only allowed to use by homosexuals, no one else.

r/the_donald

Table 7: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/the_donald. n=188 total.

How the 188 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=7) (4%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=7 (100%)
Negative (n=123) (65%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lame n=53 (65%) Homophobia n=36 (29%) Insult n=22 (18%)
Neutral (n=58) (31%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lame n=40 (69%) Joking n=1 (2%) Homosexual n=17 (29%)
Positive/Negative (n=7) (4%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political: to enhance Trump's support amongst LGBT n=7 (100%)

Chart 5: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/the_donald



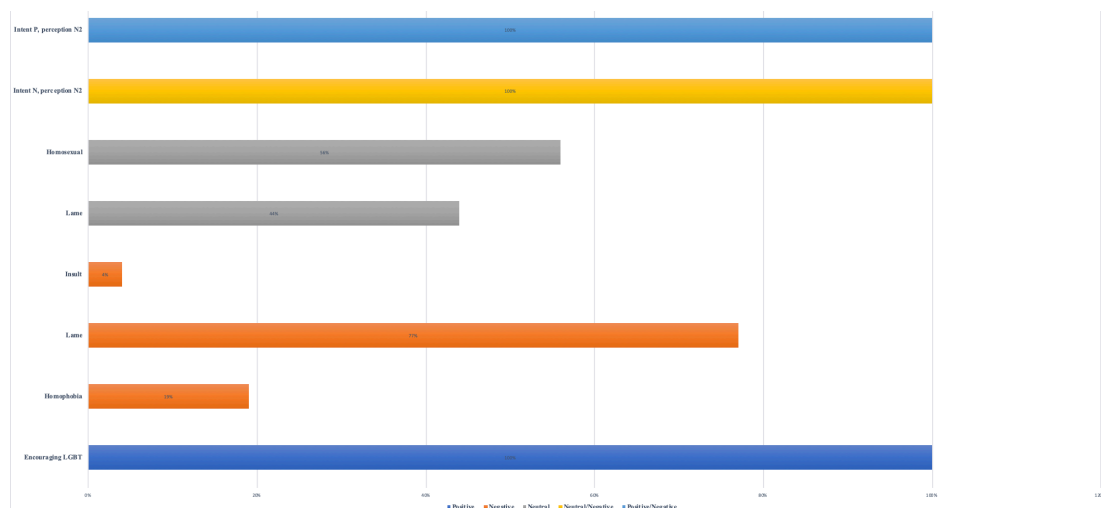
The anti-gay subreddit r/the_donald uses as presupposed 'gay' in the negative sentiment the most. Mainly as a negative version of gay = lame, where the intention is to harm, then as a homophobic slur and lastly as a general insult. The neutral sentiment is the second most frequented sentiment, where 'gay' = lame is used the most, followed by the denotative meaning of 'homosexual'. Finally, there are examples of positivity towards homosexuality and the homosexual community in the positive sentiment and then in the P/N2 sentiment the word is used blatantly to enhance Trump's support amongst the members of LGBT. This is neither fully positive nor negative because I could not be sure if they were positive about it, or if they were merely exploiting the word to enhance Trump's support amongst LGBT.

r/unpopularopinion

Table 8: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/unpopularopinion. n=182 total.

How the 182 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=17) (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=17 (100%)
Negative (n=90) (49%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homophobia n=17 (19%) Lame n=69 (77%) Insult n=4 (4%)
Neutral (n=71) (39%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lame n=31 (44%) Homosexual n=40 (56%)
Neutral/Negative (n=3) (2%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intent N, perception N2 n=3 (100%)
Positive/Negative (n=1) (1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intent P, perception N2 n=3 (100%)

Chart 6: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/unpopularopinion

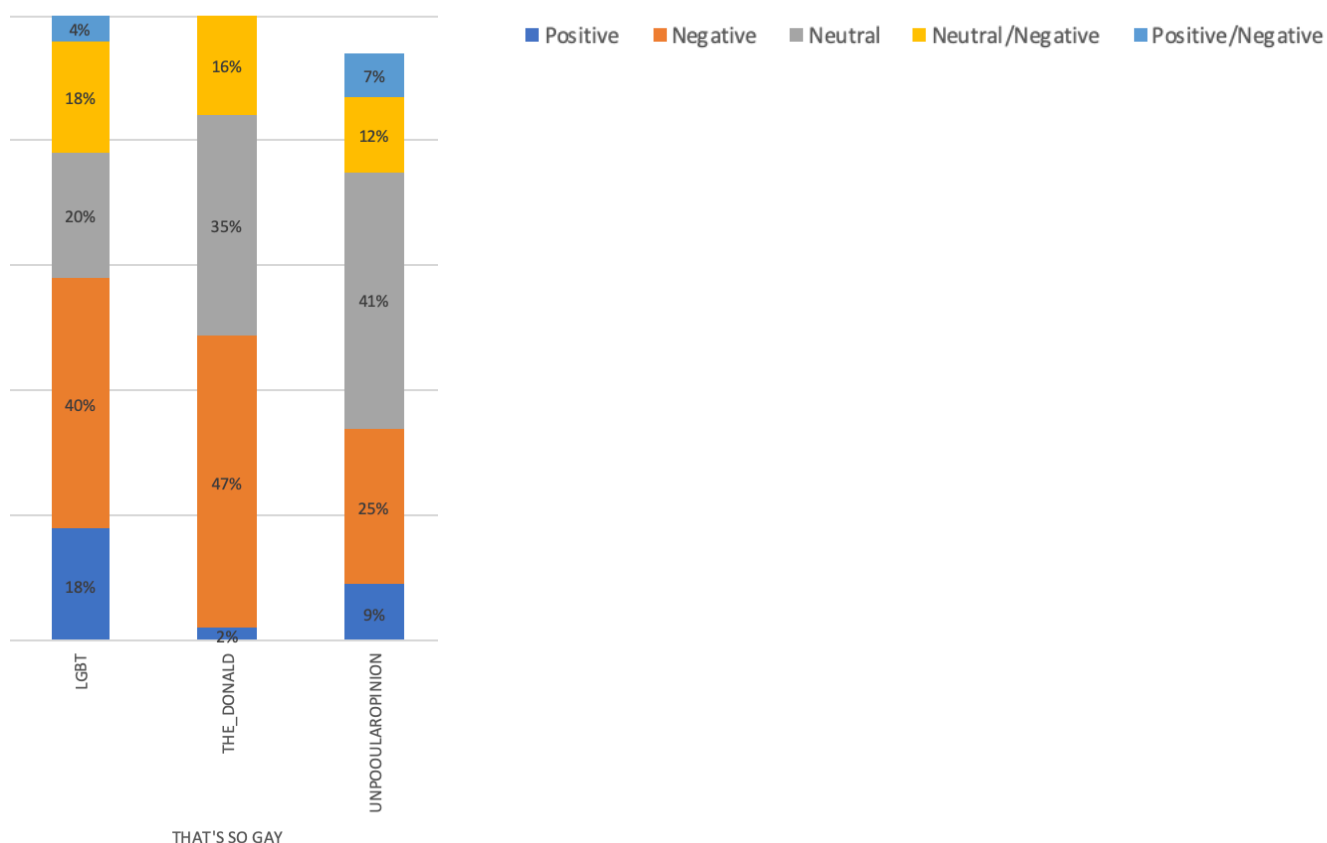


Here we can see that the negative sentiment is the most frequent with the sentiment category 'lame' followed by 'homophobia' and 'insult'. Secondly 'gay' frequents most in the neutral sentiment as 'homosexual' and then 'lame'. Positively it is used to encourage being gay and members of LGBT. The N/N2 and P/N2 sentiments does not frequent very much, but the follow r/lgbt's sentiment categories of N intent, N2 perception and then as the only one P intent, N2 perception.

The results show that 'gay' is a word with many meanings and varied usages. Where 'that's so gay' is either neutral or negative, depending on intention/perception and context 'gay' is more diverted in its sentiments. There is generally more focus on its denotative meaning of homosexual, but also more confusion between intention and perception than we saw with 'that's so gay'. And where 'that's so gay' = lame is generally neutral, 'gay' = lame is in this case used negatively rather than neutrally. This indicates that when one merely wants to point out that something is 'lame', 'stupid' or 'boring' 'that's so gay' is the preferred linguistic form, but when you want to direct hate by calling someone 'lame' 'gay' is the preferred linguistic form. Positively 'gay' is used among gay people and gay peers to denote each other and be proud of their sexual identity.

4.4.2 'That's so gay'

Chart 7: An overview of the frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by the subreddits

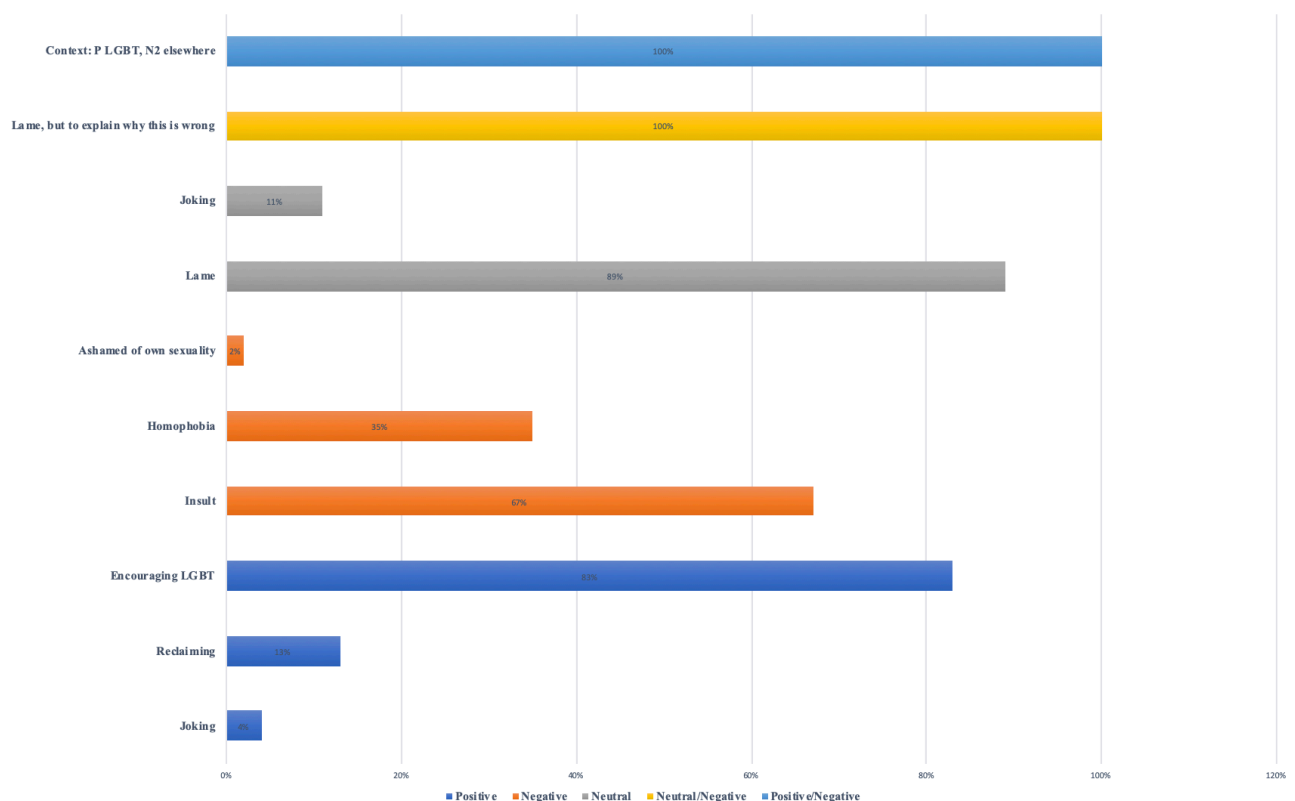


r/lgbt

Table 9: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/lgbt. n=141 total.

How the 141 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (18%) (n=24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=20 (83%) Reclaiming n=3 (13%) Joking n=1 (4%)
Negative (40%) (n=54)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homophobia n=19 (35%) Ashamed of own sexuality n=1 (2%) Insult n=36 (67%)
Neutral (20%) (n=27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joking n=3 (11%) Lame n=24 (89%)
Neutral/Negative (18%) (n=25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lame, but to explain why this is wrong n=25 (100%)
Positive/Negative (4%) (n=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context: P LGBT, N2 elsewhere n=6 (100%)

Chart 8: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/lgbt



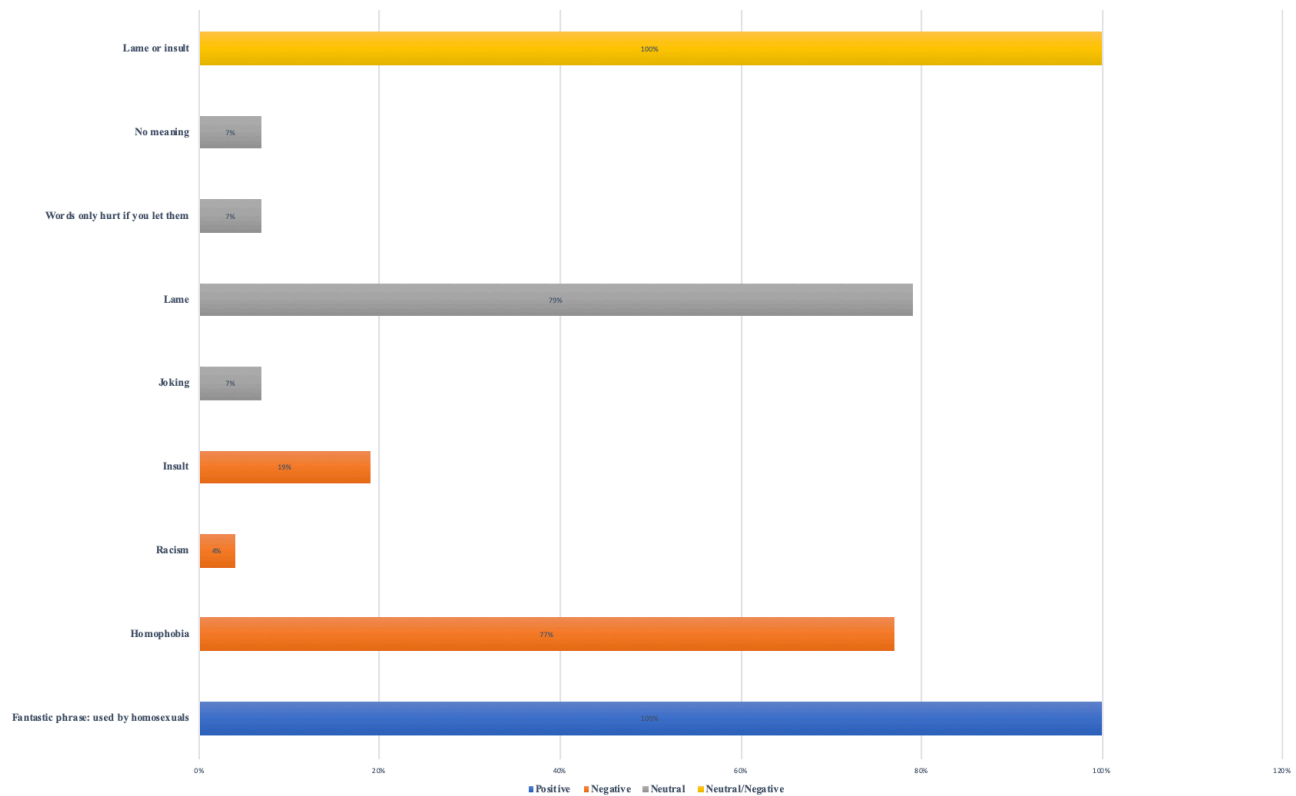
The phrase is used mostly negative where 'insult' is the most used sentiment category, followed by 'homophobia'. Under neutral; 'that's so gay' as meaning lame is the most used version and under Positive the phrase is used as way to encourage being gay and a part of LGBT, followed by discussions of reclaiming. The results also show that r/lgbt use the phrase to explain why it is wrong and homophobic under Neutral/Negative and this along with their large amount of negative results, indicate that the members of LGBT in this study do find the phrase insulting and homophobic unlike the studies of McCormack et al. (2011, 2012, 2016) who argue that homosexuals do not find the phrase homophobic, only when it is directly intended as such. There are a few results that argue that the phrase is okay to use in their in-group (LGBT) which the positive and negative results exemplifies, as they show the phrase being used to encourage being gay, but when outsiders use it, they find it negative and homophobic.

r/the_donald

Table 10: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/the_donald. n=55 total.

How the 55 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution of amount
Positive (n=1) (2%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fantastic phrase: used by homosexuals n=1 (100%)
Negative (n=26) (47%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homophobia n=20 (77%) Racism n=1 (4%) Insult n=5 (19%)
Neutral (n=19) (35%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joking n=2 (7%) Lame n=22 (79%) Words only hurt if you let them n=2 (7%) No meaning n=2 (7%)
Neutral/Negative (n=9) (16%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lame or insult n=9 (100%)

Chart 9: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/the_donald



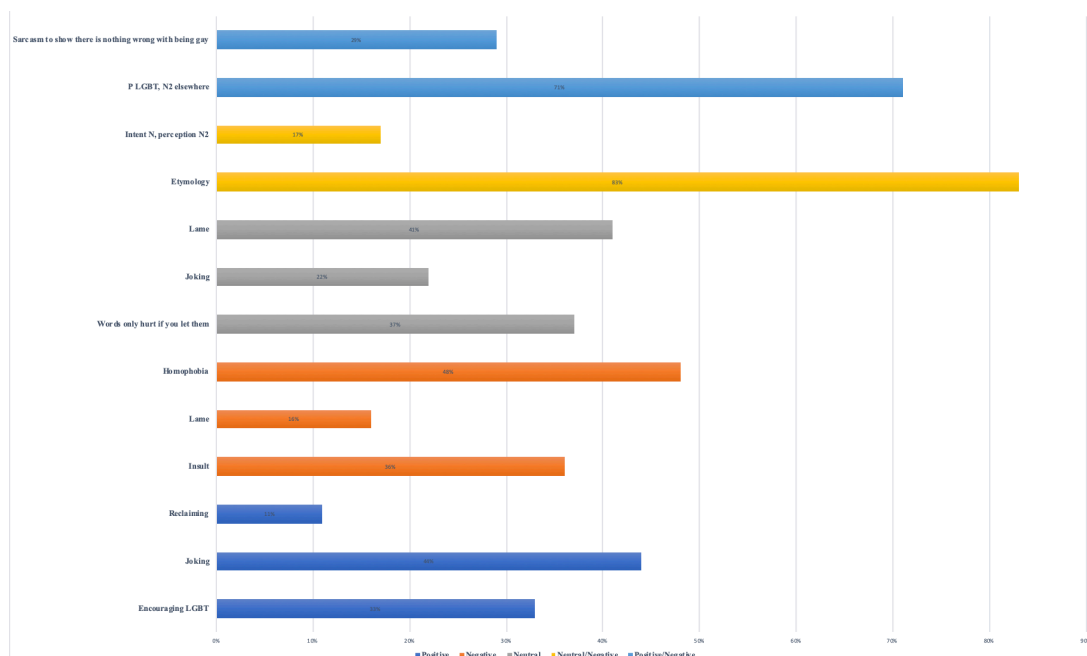
Here we can see that the phrase is used mostly in the negative sentiment as a 'homophobic' and insulting term. The sentiment that frequents second is the neutral sentiment, where the phrase is used mostly in the gay = lame fashion, but also to say that there is nothing wrong with the word in 'joking', 'no meaning' and 'words only hurt if you let them'. 'Joking' and 'no meaning' indicate that words are just words and one should not take them so seriously, and 'words only hurt if you let them' tells us that the negative power of the phrase lies in the perception; if you perceive it to be negative, it is negative. In the positive sentiment the phrase features in one example with the argument that since gays are using it (Fasoli et al. 2019) it must be okay for everyone else to use as well. This belief goes against the P/N2 category of r/lgbt, as it is only okay for gays, no one else. Finally, 16% of the results were impossible to distinguish between 'lame' or 'insult', so they were categorized as Neutral/Negative (N/N2).

r/unpopularopinion

Table 11: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/unpopularopinion. n=99 total.

How the 99 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=9) (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=3 (33%) Joking n=4 (44%) Reclaiming n=2 (11%)
Negative (n=25) (25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insult n=9 (36%) Lame n=4 (16%) Homophobia n=12 (48%)
Neutral (n=41) (41%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words only hurt if you let them n=15 (37%) Joking n=9 (22%) Lame n=17 (41%)
Neutral/Negative (n=12) (12%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Etymology n=10 (83%) Intent N, perception N2 n=2 (17%)
Positive/Negative (n=7) (7%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P LGBT, N2 elsewhere n=5 (71%) Sarcasm to show that there is nothing wrong with being gay n=2 (29%)

Chart 10: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/unpopularopinion



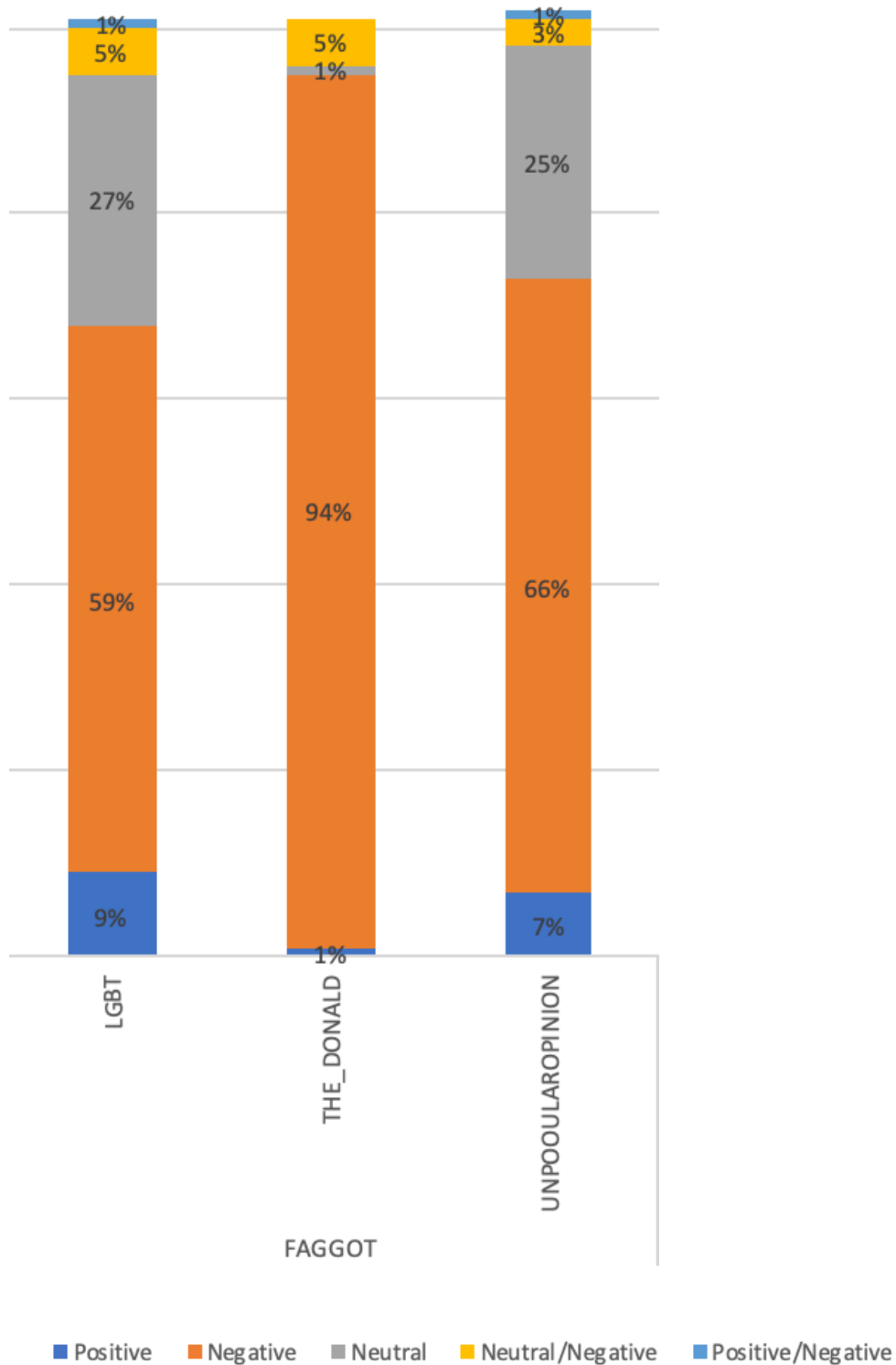
Firstly r/unpopularopinion uses the phrase in a neutral sentiment the most, it is split between the sentiment categories 1) lame, 2) words only hurt if you let them and 3) joking. In second place they use the phrase in a negative sentiment with the sentiment category homophobia most prominent, then insult and finally lame. Here the phrase is both used to indicate hatred, but most of them are used to discuss instances in which they have come across this phrase in a homophobic or insulting manner; there is reason to suspect that some of the users of r/lgbt also frequents r/unpopularopinion. Thirdly the use the phrase to either signal that words change their meaning over time, so it was once neutral and now it is negative and in examples where the intention were neutral, but the perception was negative, thus these lie in the sentiment N/N2. In fourth place lies the positive usages. Like r/lgbt, r/unpopularopinion also focuses on reclaiming and encouragement of LGBT, but they use it mostly in a joking manner to make fun of those who use it negatively. Concerning reclaiming the phrase is also used to indicate that it may already have been reclaimed by the LGBT, because these examples argue that this phrase can only be used positively with users that are part of the LGBT themselves, making it negative anywhere else, thus they go in the sentiment P/N2.

My results of 'that's so gay' thus show that there is a divide in its usage and no general definition. The gay = lame is frequent, but unlike McCormack et al. (2011, 2012, 2016) and supportive of Nicolas & Skinner (2012) most of the users of r/lgbt in my study finds the phrase homophobic and in out-groups the phrase is still used as a homophobic term like Carnaghi & Maass (2007) also touches upon. The sheer fact that it is used so much in the negative sentiment in my study tells us that it is not on its path away from homophobia as McCormack argues when he argues that homophobia is declining (McCormack, 2012, p. 63). The 18% of N/N2 in r/lgbt is a large amount and they all use the phrase to argue how wrong it is to use. Furthermore, the notion that it is okay to use in LGBT in-groups and not okay outside of these tell us that in these cases the phrase is generally thought to be negative.

4.4.3 'Faggot'

Here is the distribution of sentiments on 'faggot'.

Chart 11: An overview of the frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the subreddits

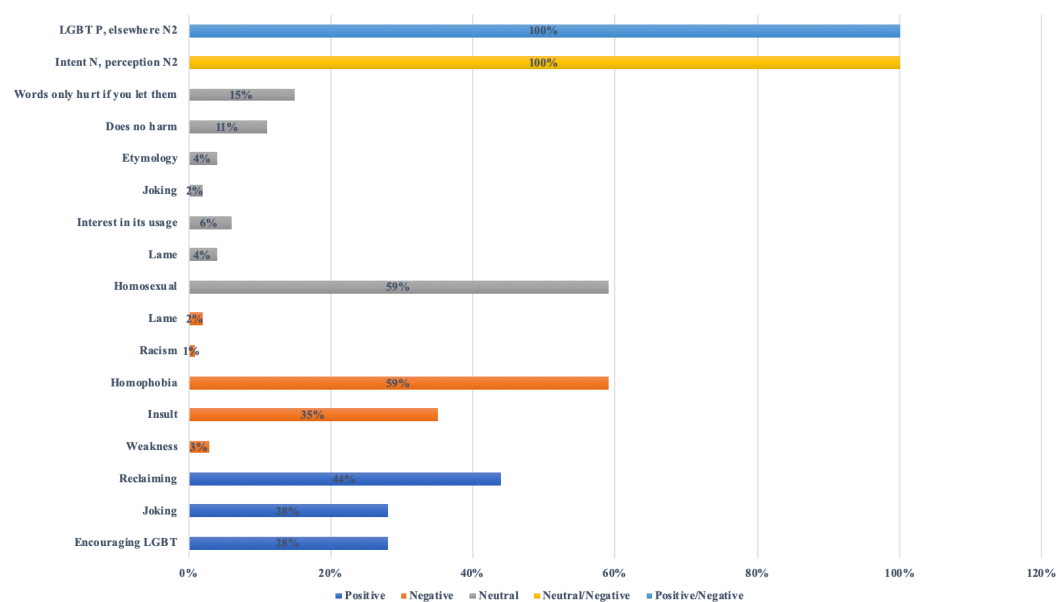


r/lgbt

Table 12: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/lgbt. n=199 total.

How the 199 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=18) (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=5 (28%) Joking n=5 (28%) Reclaiming n=8 (44%)
Negative (n=117) (59%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weakness n=4 (3%) Insult n=41 (35%) Homophobia n=69 (59%) Racism n=1 (1%) Lame n=2 (2%)
Neutral (n=54) (27%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homosexual n=32 (59%) Lame n=2 (4%) Interest in its usage n=3 (6%) Joking n=1 (2%) Etymology n=2 (4%) Does no harm n=6 (11%) Words only hurt if you let them n=8 (15%)
Neutral/Negative (n=9) (5%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intent N, perception N2 n=9 (100%)
Positive/Negative (n=1) (1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGBT P, elsewhere N2 n=1 (100%)

Chart 12: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/lgbt



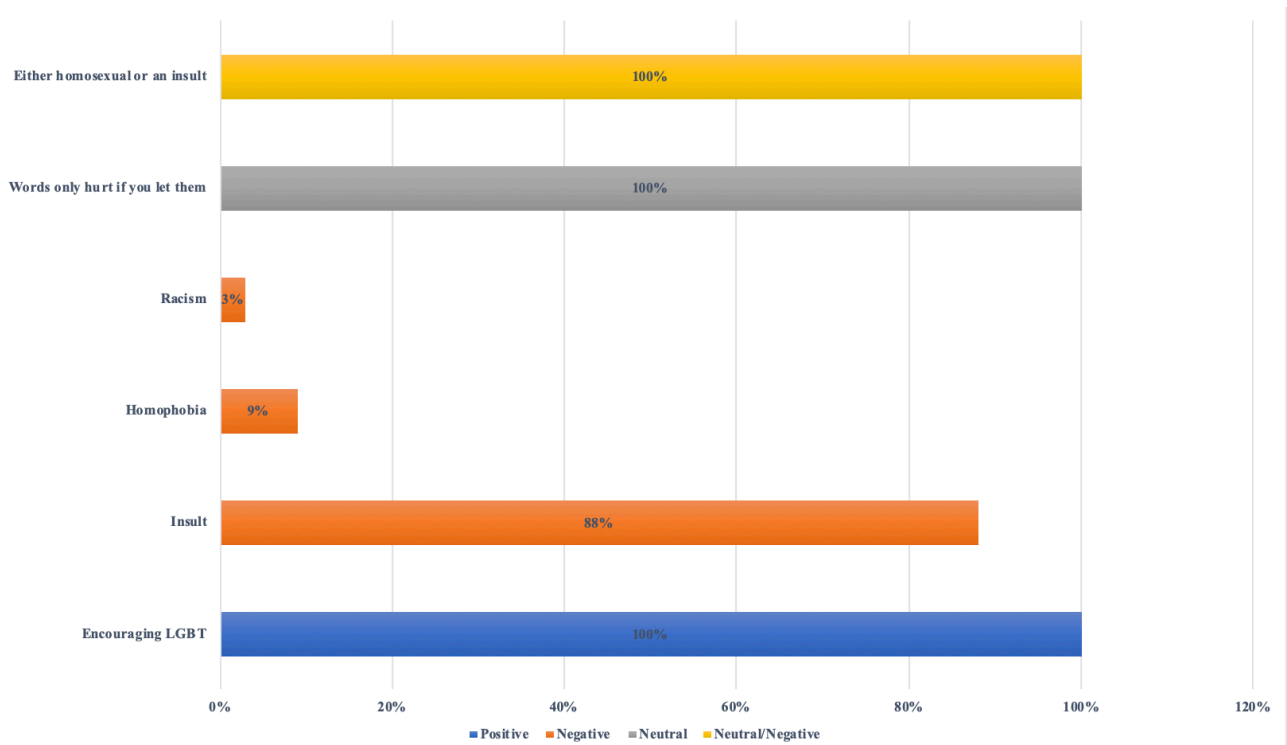
'Faggot' is considered a homophobic slur in r/lgbt, as the negative sentiment is the most frequented with 'homophobia' the first, followed by 'insult' and then 'weakness', 'lame' and 'racism'. After this we can see it is used second most in the neutral sentiment as denotative for homosexuality, and then the discussion about perception being the source to negativity in a word that has permeated the other linguistic forms as well. In the positive sentiment it is used mostly in an argument about re-claiming this linguistic form. This category is also present in the other linguistic forms, but this is the first example where it is the most frequented, indicating that 'faggot' is the worst homophobic slur and therefore the most important to reclaim, as that would take most of the negative power away from DGL. Moreover, it is used jokingly to indicate there is nothing wrong with being gay and saying 'faggot' does not harm then and then to encourage LGBT. In N/N2 we can see that it is the case where the intention was neutral, but the perception was negative. In P/N2 there is only one example which argues the words exclusivity among members of LGBT.

r/the_donald

Table 13: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/the_donald. n=200 total.

How the 200 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=1) (1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=1 (100%)
Negative (n=188) (94%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insult n=166 (88%) Homophobia n=16 (9%) Racism n=6 (3%)
Neutral (n=1) (1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words only hurt if you let them n=1 (100%)
Neutral/Negative (n=10) (5%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Either homosexual or an insult n=10 (100%)

Chart 13: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/the_donald



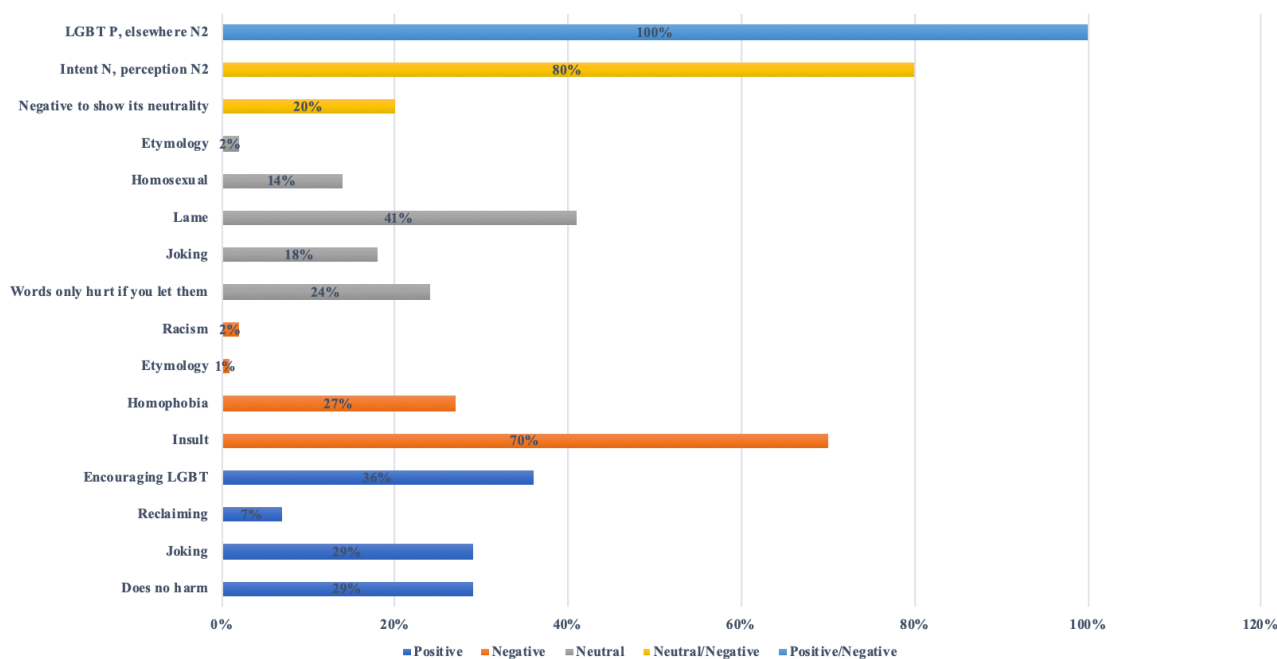
R/the_donald's use of 'faggot' is very similar to that of 'fag', only just more focus on the negative sentiment (94%), mainly as an 'insult', but also 'homophobia' and 'racism'. There is only one example in the positive sentiment where it encourages LGBT and one in neutral under 'words only hurt if you let them'. The rest are in N/N2, where it was either used to denote homosexuality or as an insult.

r/unpopularopinion

Table 14: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/unpopularopinion. n=200 total.

How the 200 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=14) (7%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does no harm n=4 (29%) • Joking n=4 (29%) • Reclaiming n=1 (7%) • Encouraging LGBT (n=5 36%)
Negative (n=131) (66%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insult n=92 (70%) • Homophobia n=36 (27%) • Etymology n=1 (1%) • Racism n=2 (2%)
Neutral (n=49) (25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words only hurt if you let them n=12 (24%) • Joking n=9 (18%) • Lamé n=20 (41%) • Homosexual n=7 (14%) • Etymology n=1 (2%)
Neutral/Negative (n=5) (3%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative to show its neutrality n=1 (20%) • Intent N, perception N2 n=4 (80%)
Positive/Negative (n=1) (1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT P, elsewhere N2 n=1 (100%)

Chart 14: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/unpopularopinion



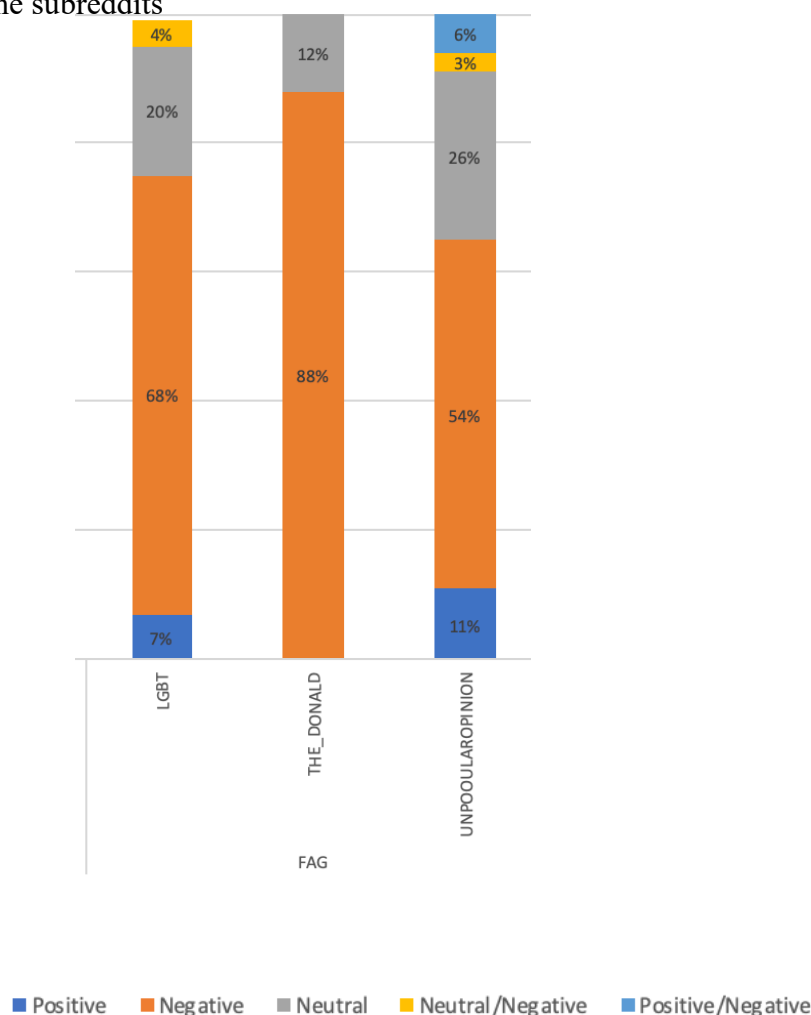
Thus 'faggot' in r/unpopularopinons is used primarily in the negative sentiment, with a majority in 'insult' and then 'homophobia'. Then it is used in the neutral sentiment where most of them is in the 'faggot' = lame category, then as meaning homosexual and quite a few of them also take part in the discussion about words only hurting if you let them. This indicates that there is an opinion that homosexually themed words either belongs only to the LGBT members or that 'faggot' has such a demanding negative connotation that the only way to not feel this power is by ignoring it and start using 'faggot' in a positive sense. Finally, the word is used slightly in the positive sentiment with people encouraging LGBT or jokingly using it to make fun of the word's negative connotation; this is a reclaiming tool as well. In the N/N2 sentiment they use the word to show that it is just a word with no meaning behind it and in the P/N2 they use it to show its exclusivity to LGBT members.

Overall 'faggot' is used mostly negative; homophobically in r/lgbt, the two other subreddits use 'faggot' mostly as an insult. This supplements Corbett's study of 'faggot' in which he found the use of 'faggot' in out-groups to be very much non-related to homosexuality and merely denoting someone as "alienated losers" (Corbett, 2001, p. 5), but that such a use might turn to homophobia and that is what happens in my study. The in-group members feel that the basic use of the word

‘faggot’ in its homosexuality version is homophobic as that it caters only to the stereotype of a feminine or weak person. The basic notion of equating homosexuality to something negative is homophobic as it is a direct hit on their sexuality and with that their identity. There are very few positive examples which underlines the negative connotations of ‘faggot’ which have more or less taken over the denotative meaning of ‘faggot’. Unlike the rest of the linguistic forms, ‘faggot’ is almost never used to refer to homosexuality, only in a negative statement. The positive examples there are either comes from r/lgbt, where they use the word to express positivity towards each other and homosexuality, or from arguments about LGBT reclaiming the word. The latter again underlines the derogatory effect of ‘faggot’ and therefore the only thing to do to change this connotation is to promote in-group members to use ‘faggot’ in a positive manner about themselves as McCormack et al.’s (2016) study showed: “I use it all the time. In fact, it was probably one of my favourite things to say as a kid [and] I say it a lot” (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 757).

4.4.4 ‘Fag’

Chart 15: An overview of the frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form ‘fag’ by the subreddits

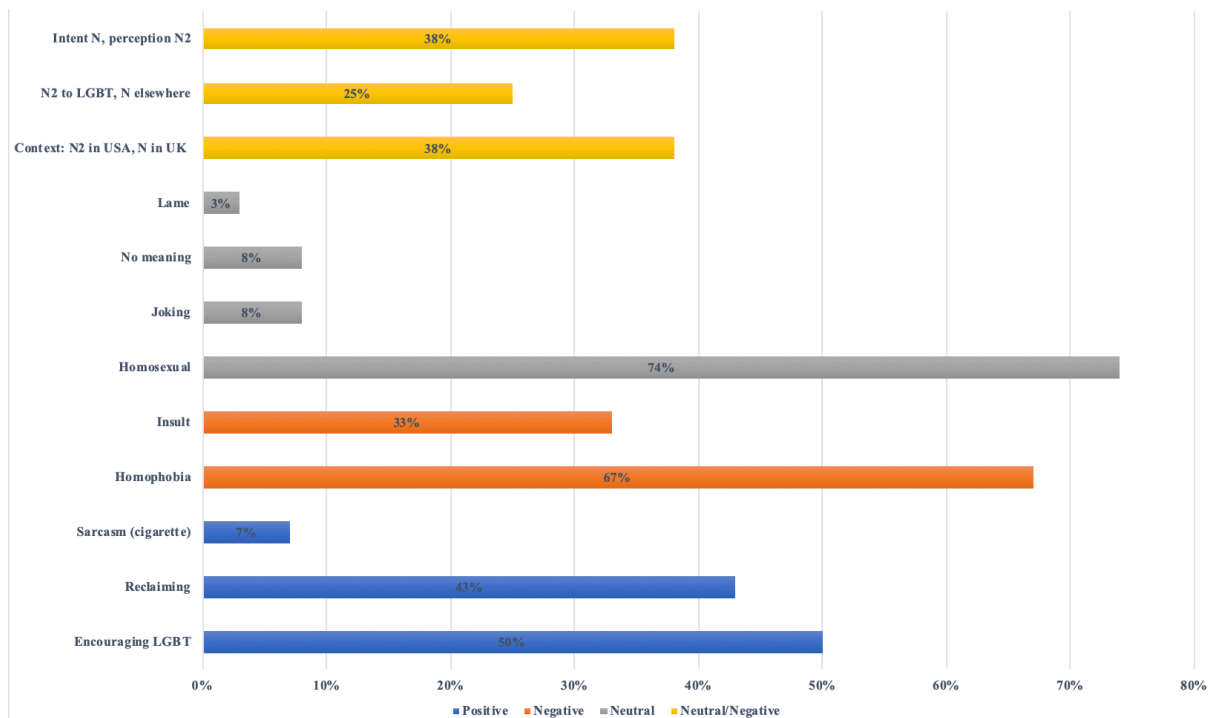


r/lgbt

Table 15: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/lgbt. n=191 total.

How the 191 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=14) 7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging LGBT n=7 (50%) Reclaiming n=6 (43%) Sarcasm (cigarette) n=1 (7%)
Negative (n=130) 68%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homophobia n=87 (67%) Insult n=43 (33%)
Neutral (n=39) 20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homosexual n=29 (74%) Joking n=3 (8%) No meaning n=3 (8%) Lame n=1 (3%)
Neutral/Negative (n=8) 4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context: N2 in USA, N in UK n=3 (38%) N2 to LGBT, N elsewhere n=2 (25%) Intent N, perception N2 n=3 (38%)

Chart 16: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/lgbt



'Fag' is dominant in the negative sentiment with the users of r/lgbt. It is mostly 'homophobic' and then 'insult'. Were r/the_donald uses it homophobically, 'fag' is in the negative sentiment here because they find the use homophobic or because they describe situations in which it has been used homophobically. Secondly it is used to denote homosexuality and in the positive sentiment it is used most to encourage homosexuality and reclaiming of the word. Finally, it is used in N/N2 under the difference between registers in UK and US, the argument that it is only allowed to use for members of LGBT, nowhere else and finally examples where the intent was neutral, but the perception was negative.

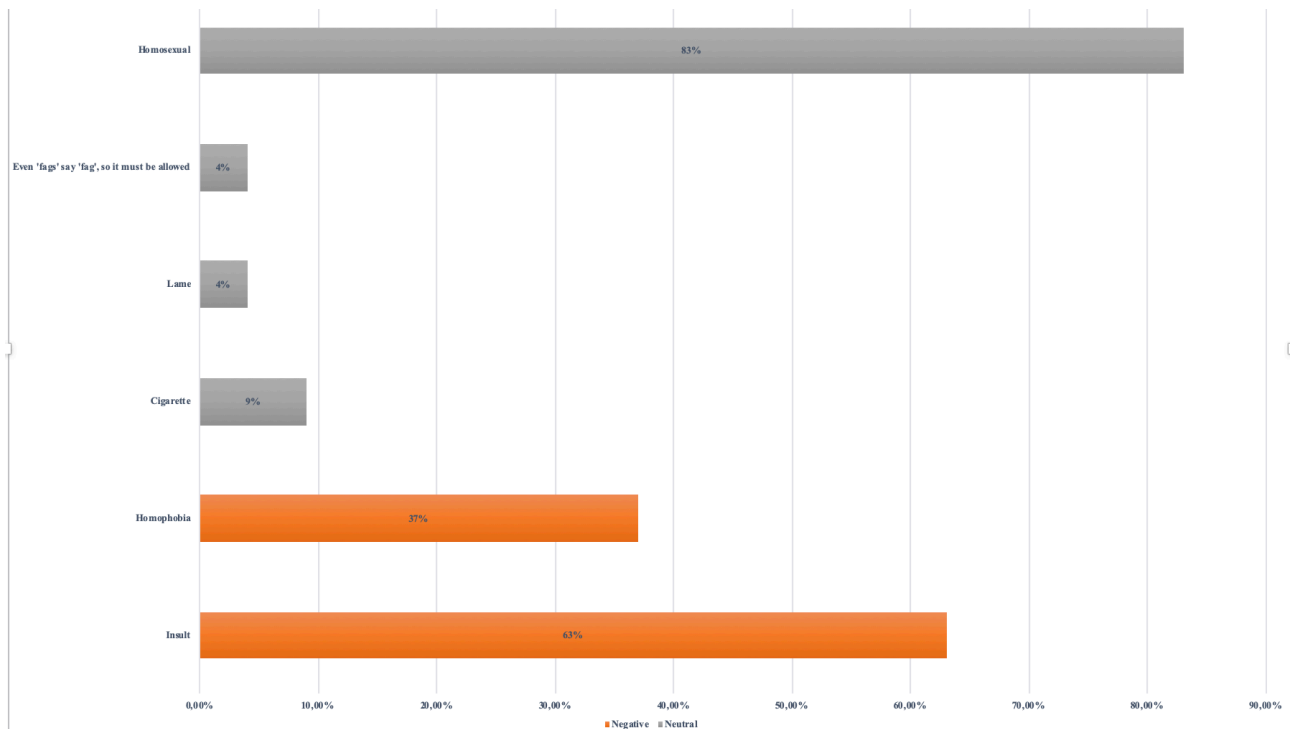
'Fag' is very much a homophobic slur and an insult. Negative usage in these two categories especially where the denominators of the study. Neutrally it was used to denote homosexuality and cigarettes. The slight positive usage there was focused on the encouragement of homosexuality, but also about reclaiming, as some found the word so negative that the only thing that would stop it being used homophobically were for the homosexual community to reclaim it and start using it positively which would erase the negative use over time. That is the idea at least. Also interesting is the proof that people understand the difference in registers (UK vs US). Some of the results argue that the word is never okay to use in the US, as it is a homophobic slur, but in the UK, it will depend on the context and intention, as it also means cigarette over there.

r/the_donald

Table 16: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/the_donald. n=198 total.

How the 198 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Negative (n=175) (88%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insult n=110 (63%) • Homophobia n=65 (37%)
Neutral (n=23) (12%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cigarette n=2 (9%) • Lane n=1 (4%) • Even 'fags' say 'fag', so it must be allowed n=1 (4%) • Homosexual n=19 (83%)

Chart 17: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/the_donald



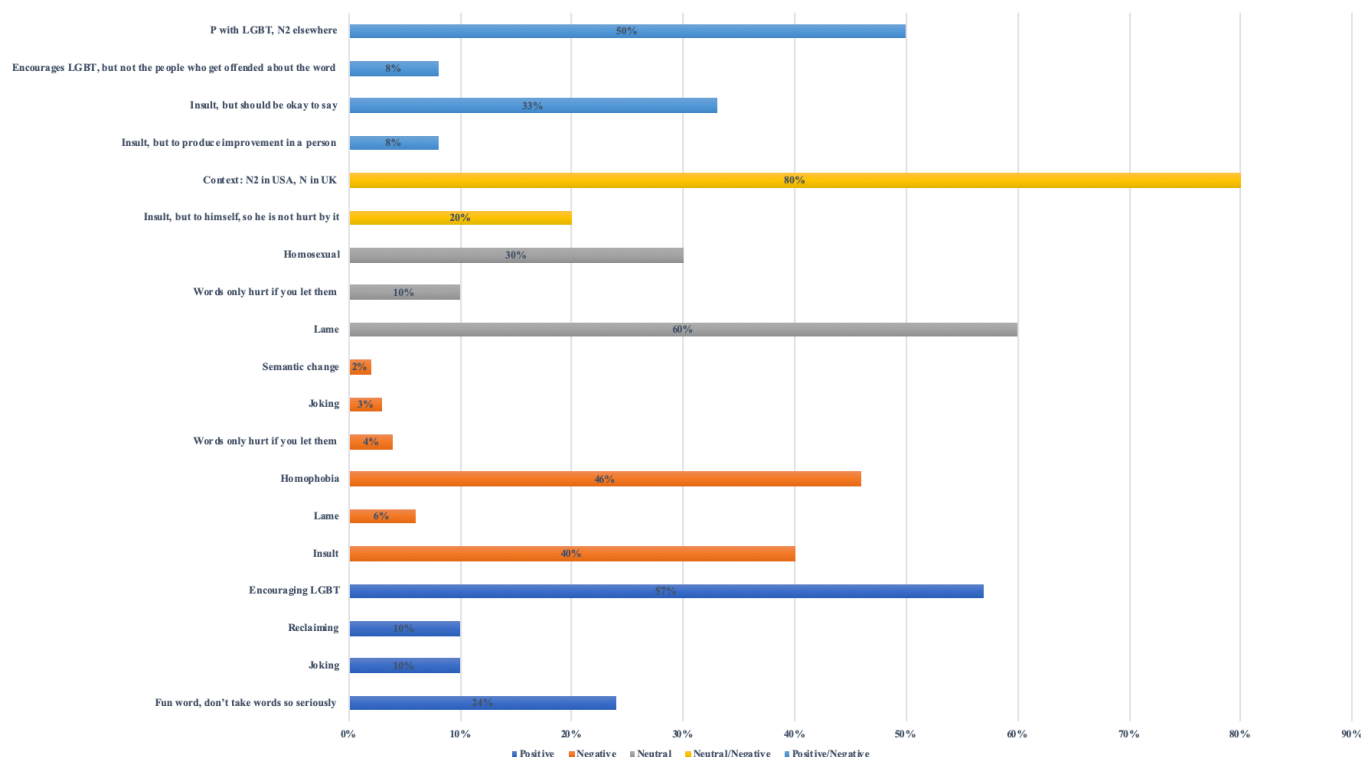
This tells us that the choice of making this subreddit the anti-LGBT subreddit was correct, because 88% of the results are from the negative sentiment where it is used as a general insult and as a homophobic slur. 12% of the results are from the neutral sentiment where it is used to explain homosexuality, denoting something is lame and as the UK slang for cigarette. There is no other sentiment used which underlines its connotative meanings.

r/unpopularopinion

Table 17: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/unpopularopinion. n=195 total.

How the 195 results are split in sentiments	Sentiment categories and their distribution
Positive (n=21) 11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun word, don't take words so seriously n=5 (24%) • Joking n=2 (10%) • Reclaiming n=2 (10%) • Encouraging LGBT n=12 (57%)
Negative (n=106) 54%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insult n=42 (40%) • Lamé n=6 (6%) • Homophobia n=49 (46%) • Words hurt if you let them n=4 (4%) • Joking n=3 (3%) • Semantic change n=2 (2%)
Neutral (n=50) 26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamé n=30 (60%) • Words only hurt if you let them n=5 (10%) • Homosexual n=15 (30%)
Neutral/Negative (n=5) 3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insult, but to himself, so he is not hurt by it n=1 (20%) • Context: N2 in USA, N in UK n=4 (80%)
Positive/Negative (n=12) 6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insult, but to produce improvement in a person n=1 (8%) • Insult, but should be okay to say n=4 (33%) • Encourages LGBT, but not the people who get offended about the word n=1 (8%) • P with LGBT, N2 elsewhere n=6 (50%)

Chart 18: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/unpopularopinion



What we see here is a very mixed split between sentiment categories. 'Fag' is here by far used in the negative sentiment the most, with 'homophobia' and 'insult' being the most frequented sentiment categories. It is also used in 'lame' like 'gay' and 'words only hurt if you let them' where the argument is that derogatory words only hurt if you perceive them to hurt, but in this case (hence why they are in the negative sentiment) they did hurt the receiver and the intention was to hurt; the users are merely just attempting to get away with using 'fag' by saying that people can just stop being hurt by them. This category is also present in the neutral sentiment, but with a wondering about the power of words, no harmful intentions behind it. The neutral sentiment is the second most used, with 'fag' meaning 'lame' and 'homosexual' and the abovementioned category. In the positive sentiment 'fag' is also used to indicate that perhaps people should not be so offended by words, because the user is being positive about homosexuality. There is also in the positive sentiment arguments about reclaiming that homosexuals should take the word 'fag' for themselves like the African-Americans has done with 'nigger'. Mostly 'fag' is used to encourage homosexuality. But the positive sentiment is used nowhere nearly as much as the negative and neutral sentiments. In the sentiment P/N2 there is same discussion about it only being allowed in LGBT groups, while in the

N/N2 sentiment the focus is on the differing registers of 'fag' that are in the UK and US. They say that it is neutral in the UK (as cigarette) and negative in the US (as a homophobic slur).

From the results we can observe that the linguistic forms can be used in many different ways, but the overall sentiment is negative; it is only in in-groups that the linguistic forms are being used positively. The connotative meanings that are the most used are 'homophobia', 'lame' both in N2 and N, 'insult' and 'encouraging LGBT'. This shows us that even though that all of the words mean homosexual they are and can be used in many different ways and sentiments. While the distribution of sentiments under 'gay' is rather split between the sentiments, 'faggot' and 'fag' are pretty set in their negative sentiments, but with a clear wish about reclaiming them and turning them positive from both r/lgbt and r/unpopularopinion users. Most of the positive results were of encouraging character, so a form of pro-gay language which according to McCormack (2011) is used to rid some of the word's negativity and for bonding people together in different social groups. The most important factor these results have demonstrated is that these linguistic forms have many different meanings, depending on social group and context; intention and perception and they are also being used in many different ways, but with a general understanding and argument that they are either neutral as 'lame' or negative as 'homophobia', but only positive in LGBT in-groups.

5 Discussion

The purpose of this study has been to understand how the homosexually themed words 'gay' and 'faggot' along with 'that's so gay' and 'fag' are imbued with meaning. Moreover, the study has been interested in the semantic change of the words and was keen to see whether these words could be valid for a new semantic change in the sense of reclaiming that Fasoli et al. (2019) discusses in their study; when a derogatory word is indexed in a positive register by the group that the derogatory word targets. Queer has been reclaimed by the LGBT, and 'that's so gay' is not considered homophobic by in-group members, according to McCormack et al. (2016), so I wanted to see if 'gay' and 'faggot' are candidates for reclaiming by LGBT as well or if they are still being used to ignite anti-gay bias that Nicolas & Skinner (2012) argues. Because of this and because the words all denote 'homosexual', I explored the homophobic aspect of the words to see if this category remains the powerhouse or if another one has taken its place.

Since there are many of these studies where the data is collected through questionnaires, interviews; face-to-face communication, I wanted to focus on a different kind of language, but one that has a large place in today's discourse. This discourse is online communication and specifically anonymous online communication on the forum Reddit. This communication form eliminates face-to-face interaction and that will possibly enable my answers to be in their true language as they are not inhibited by norms and social restrictions and therefore, I would be able to see truly how these words are understood and used.

Sentiment analysis was chosen to separate the subreddits and words from each other and to label the intention behind each word. From there, I separated these sentiments into sentiment categories to label the different meanings of each word and from this to see how words are intended and perceived differently depending on what social background and context these are from. From my results, I was able to determine how the words are used in different communities; the many different denotations and connotations each word has and how differently they are used from each other. Then, from observing and digging closer into my results, looking at examples, I was able to follow the person's own opinions about how words are imbued with meaning, how they were intended and perceived, and from this gather the most pressing aspects that became my discussion topics:

- 1) 'that's so gay' and the aspect of N/N2: intentions and perceptions
- 2) 'Words only hurt if you let them' and the impact of context
- 3) The difference in registers concerning 'fag': UK vs. US

4) The reclaiming of words.

They will also be discussed in this order.

5.1 'That's so gay' and the aspect of N/N2: intentions and perceptions

5.1.1 Clarification of 'That's so gay'

The most important distinction about the current usage of 'gay' is the fact that the negative meaning of it being homophobic has now been replaced with a more general negativity that comments on things as 'lame', 'boring', 'ugly, or 'weird'. These are still negative words, but they are not said with the intent to hurt any homosexuals; the words speak of a general negativity rather. The phrase 'that's so gay' is homophobic in its essence, but its usage is most often not homophobic, but used "unconsciously and without hurtful intent" (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 4), meaning it has different meaning in different registers. In-group members might find them homophobic, as they do in my results, but more often than not this phrase is said outside of such communities and then its connotation is not considered homophobic. It is "most often used to mean that something is bad or rubbish" (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 4). Thus, comparing something 'rubbish' or 'bad' to being 'gay' means that being 'gay' is 'rubbish' or 'bad'. This usage of 'gay' thus showcases the registers in a single word that seemingly means the same to all: homosexual, but which can also mean so many other things to others and be used in many registers. Kibirige & Tryl (2020) explain how this phrase is the most common form of homophobic language (in schools) as "99 per cent of gay young people report hearing the casual use of these phrases in school" (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 4). Lalor & Rendle-Short (2007) lists 'that's so gay' as the contemporary way of using 'gay' in Australian English, and that this elicit homophobic language, but also as the more neutral way the phrase is understood. Kibirige & Tryl (2020) argues that it is only "sometimes directed towards people who are actually, or perceived to be, 'gay'. However, [it is] most often used to mean that something is bad or rubbish, with no conscious link to sexual orientation at all." (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 4). Even though the phrase is essentially homophobic, it is not perceived to be this by primary school and University students as McCormack et. al's (2012, 2016) studies demonstrate. Even teachers (adults) agree that this type of language is not homophobic: "The expression 'gay' in this context has little or nothing to do with sexuality. It is interchangeable with 'crap' or 'stupid'." (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 11). Even teachers use 'gay' = lame which then enables pupils to believe that they are okay to use and not homophobic:

one in five gay young people (17 per cent) says that teachers within a school make homophobic comments. When teachers use homophobic language, they role model this behavior to young people making them think that it is also acceptable for them to use phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 13).

But maybe the semantic change of 'gay' in this case has evolved to where it does not elicit anti-gay bias in just its own form, but only when the intention and perception considers it homophobic; otherwise it shows a general negativity that is not very harmful.

Robinson (2012) also touches upon the idea of 'gay' meaning 'lame' which is used to describe something as 'stupid' or 'boring'; "a number of younger participants describe their school as *gay*" (Robinson, 2012, p. 43). She discusses how semantic change happens in a community, through a questionnaire about the adjective 'gay' and how the speakers understand and use the word. She then makes a detailed analysis of each sense of the adjective 'gay', one of them being the more recent development of 'gay' in the sense of 'lame'. Here she discusses the belief that 'gay' in this sense is a form of homophobic language, as the following other two cases argue: "there is some concern in the literature Lalor & Rendle-Short (2007) and also in educational circles (e.g. in guides for teachers) that this new sense of *gay* projects homophobic undertones" (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007, p. 48), but this is not the case in Robinson's data. First of all, Robinson explains that

the use of *gay* as a general term of displeasure or disapproval, whose meaning, according to the participants of this survey, ranges from 'boring' (in reference to school, lessons, writing, reading, friends, dad), and 'not interesting', to 'weird' (in reference to various politicians), 'annoying' (in reference to 'my sister'), 'bad', 'rubbish', and 'stupid' (Robinson, 2012, p. 47).

Secondly, she describes that these referred to key areas in a young person's life such as school, family and friends, and it is not obvious that all of those would evoke the notion of homosexuality" (Ibid., 48). Thirdly, she describes how she directly asked students "whether the new uses of *gay* carry any homophobic meaning, and they denied this." (Robinson, 2012, p. 47).

She also found, similarly to McCormack et al (2016) that the teenage boys generally did not find the word 'gay' to be homophobic and never used as a hateful insult. (Robinson, 2012, p. 48).

McCormack et al. (2016) argue that 'gay' as 'lame' can have social bonding proprieties and positive social effect. He calls it "the use of homosexually-themed language that is used to bond people

together in socio-positive ways or to demonstrate pro-gay attitudes.” (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 751). Pro-gay language, where you jokingly call each other ‘gay’ or refer to things as ‘gay’, can according to McCormack help promote gay friendly cultures of inclusivity the same way that homophobic language once excluded homosexuals. In McCormack’s (2011) research ‘gay’ is not seen as homophobic and neither in a different study of his in which he interviewed 35 youth homosexuals from four different universities about the ‘that’s so gay’ and these in-group members too found the phrase not to be insulting or homophobic, unless it was intended this way: “It’s all about the intention I guess. If it’s intentionally hurting somebody else, then it’s bad and it shouldn’t happen.” (McCormack, 2016, p. 759). All this suggests that today ‘gay’ functions very much as “a non-homophobic term of disapproval or an insult...and can be read as ‘ironic, self-referential, habitual, or even deployed without a “knowing” relation to gayness as a sexual signifier” (Robinson, 2012, p. 48). My results showed that this is true, but to a certain degree. ‘Gay’ is used as ‘lame’, but it is also used to denote ‘homosexual’ and homophobically, but mostly in r/lgbt, where the members find the old register of ‘gay’ being negative a little hard to forget and ignore when it comes to this new fashion of ‘gay’, the latest semantic change ‘gay’ has gone through. ‘That’s so gay’ in particular still carries the negative assumption that being ‘gay’ is bad and therefore there are many mixed results in this phrase’s usage. This also demonstrates that the meaning of ‘gay’ depends on the intention and perception of the word and if these correlate or clashes.

5.1.2 N/N2: the misalignment between intentions and perceptions

Intention and perception are what constitute discourse; utterances between people which involves “a person’s intention in making an utterance and other’s perception of that utterance” (Chang et al., 2020, p. 1). Oftentimes during a conversation, a misalignment between these perspectives occurs and such can “lead to undesirable outcomes, such as misunderstandings, low productivity and even overt strife” (Chang et al., 2020, p. 1). This misalignment can occur because of difference in intellect, social values, registers, and culture. There are some results of this in my data concerning ‘that’s so gay’, where the intention was neutral, but the perception was negative. This indicates that there is a misalignment between the registers of this phrase where they can either be understood as ‘lame’, ‘homosexual’ or as an ‘insult’ of sorts. Perhaps the user who intended to use it as neutral does not have in his register of ‘that’s so gay’ that it can also be hurtful and vice versa and as such a misunderstanding can appear. It can also be that the user had not considered the social value of the receiver; if this person was a member of LGBT, because it is often these that get hurt by this phrase

along with people who get offended about being categorized alongside members of LGBT which again offends this community. In my data under N/N2, the sentiment category 3.3 is from cases where there in the post itself is a discussion about the fact that one said it without the intention to hurt, but the receiver perceived it as such. Out of the 100% results of 'that's so gay' in r/lgbt, 18% accounts for this type of difference and 38% accounts for the negative sentiment. This indicates that there is reason to believe that the register of 'that's so gay' as something generally negative unrelated to homophobia does not register with the members of LGBT. In r/the_donald it is also used mostly negative. It is only in the neutral subreddit r/unpopularopinion that the neutral sentiment is used mostly. The negative connotation of which the phrase is born upon with, 'gay' = wrong is hard to escape from it seems. Even though one wishes to use it neutrally, it will still carry its negative connotation and according to Nicolas & Skinner (2012) a general priming of the "general negative usage of *gay* activates an implicit association between gay people and negative evaluations" (Nicolas & Skinner, 2012, p. 656). A constant indication of 'gay' as something negative, homophobic or not, would keep the stereotype of 'gay' as something negative alive and increase anti-gay bias. 'Gay' is thus imbued with negative meaning as long as it attributes to negativity even though it does not involve 'gay' as a sexuality. My results therefore suggest that there is a disagreement in the phrase's meaning. Generally, it is found to be negative, but no indication whether it is mostly a general negative or homophobic word. Really the meaning of the phrase depends on the context as the study by Lalor & Rendle-Short (2007) shows.

McCormack et al. (2016) have also conducted a study of the phrase 'that's so gay' where their results contradict Stonewalls' who argue that the phrase has a harmful effect on young lesbian, gay and bisexual "people's sense of belonging, self-esteem and attainment at school" (Kibirige & Tryl, 2020, p. 7). Their study like mine shows that there is no clear agreement on what the phrase means or the effects it has on people (McCormack et al., 2016). In their case and in my case, there are some members of LGBT who finds it positive and uses it and there are some that find it negative. The meaning of the phrase depends on the age of the speaker and listener as Lalor & Rendle-Short (2007) highlighted when they saw a generational divide in understanding the neutral use of gay discourse (McCormack et al., 2016, p. 763), and the intent with which it is said, the context in which it is said and the similarities in norms and understanding of registers between speaker and listener. The meanings and effects of the phrase will also be different if they were directed at a gay person, and with negative intent (McCormack et al., 2016, pp. 762-765). It can be homophobic if said with this kind of negative intent or within a homophobic environment like I deemed

r/the_donald to be. But, as McCormack et al. (2016) and some of my results shows, when it is said in settings where sexual minorities are out, proud and socially included (in-groups), and heterosexual men are friends with their openly gay peers, it takes on different meanings. In such a context it is not homophobic. The study of Lalor & Rendle-Short (2007) furthers this as a number of participants from their study stated that 'that's so gay' when meaning 'bad', 'lame' or 'weird' has nothing to do with homosexuality. Thus, as one of their participants noted, when used this way it cannot be "interpreted homophobically because it is so widely used; as a result, it no longer carries homosexual connotations when used in this new context." (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007, p. 168). Using a word in a specific meaning is a form of semantic change that takes it away from its original meaning, because when a word is used purely in this new way, the old way is forgotten. But as my results show, it is not only used this way and therefore as Baker (2005) argues as long as the word 'gay' is being associated with something negative, 'gay' will also be considered negative and will keep the stereotypes alive. The social value of homosexuals involves a deep-rooted negativity towards homosexuality, because that is what they are used to and therefore they will consider these words negative, until they reclaim them. Baker (2005) says that "it is this sense of ambiguity surrounding terms such as gay that contributes to homophobia, with the polysemy of the term itself reflecting 'the ambivalence that parts of society feel towards homosexuality'" (Baker, 2005, p. 225). The study by Nicolas & Skinner (2012) also demonstrates this, as their results "indicate that exposure to the general negative usage of *gay* activates an implicit association between gay people and negative evaluations [and may] still be perceived as homonegative...and negative attitudes towards gay people may have been activated directly" (Nicolas & Skinner, 2012, pp. 656-657). It may be that 'gay' is undergoing its semantic change into a general negativity outside of homosexuality, and that this is just the repercussions needed on the way. The word is at best ambiguous right now and this is also seen in Robinson's (2012) study. One of the most associated stereotypes attributed by society to homosexuals is that they are effeminate or 'unmanly' as Robinson coins it in her study. She explains that when teenagers use 'gay' they mean 'lame', but when young adult males use it, they use it slightly different, because they cater to the stereotype of homosexuality being 'unmanly'. These males use 'gay' to describe activities, "such as 'eating salads', 'carrying an umbrella', or to describe looks, such as 'wearing two earrings.'" (Robinson, 2012, p. 113). These also refer to 'faggot's' etymology which describes 'faggot' as a "fat, slovenly woman" and 3) "effeminate homosexual" (Johansson, 1975, p. 357). Femininity and weakness are what describes a 'gay' person in this sense, because they are not masculine. This may seem homophobic, but the participants of Robinson's

study argued that they did not find these descriptions homophobic, they were simply describing a 'gay' act, unrelated to sexuality. The majority of the participants in McCormack et al.'s study said that they did not find the phrase homophobic; that they even use it themselves, and therefore, he says, we might just accept this (McCormack, 2016, p. 757).

My results showed that the majority of negative results were 'homophobic' with an almost identical amount of the results in the 'insult' category. This contradicts the results of McCormack et al.'s (2016) study. It therefore seems that 'that's so gay' is imbued with many different meanings and that it alters between neutral and negative usage with a distinction between 'general negativity' and 'homophobia', where context determines the meaning. Interestingly, and supportive of McCormack et al.'s (2016) findings, the pro-LGBT subreddit have the least amount of homophobic results, where the anti-LGBT subreddit has the most amount of homophobic results. The following two examples showcase the overall thought of my results from r/lgbt which is that they find the use of gay = lame to be homophobic. The first is from GamingzLeastGr8 and he/she argues:

Another form of homophobia I think people carry out nearly every day but don't realise is the use of the 'gay' or 'bent' (a UK slang word for gay) to describe things that are classed as bad or weird in one way or another. This is all too common in adolescents and is less common in adults. I hate this, and point it out to anyone who says something, for which my friends laugh at me for saying 'it's a joke'. But it isn't a joke. Someone who is a lesbian, gay or bisexual would not want someone to associate their sexuality with a bad thing. The use of this word as an insult is also homophobic, e.g. today in school I was straightening a few tables (because I'm a perfectionist like that) and my friend said 'that's so gay' expecting me to be insulted – I was not, I did the aforementioned and told him to stop being homophobic. I just wanted to talk about this briefly, as it is an increasingly annoying and serious problem which should be stopped. So, to those of you who use these words or are generally homophobic, please stop. You say 'LGBT don't deserve rights', but you never consider that they fought for their rights like black people did theirs. What did you do to deserve your rights? You were born. LGBT are still fighting for their rights, so shut it, be happy with what you have and be more select with your choice of words. (GamingzLeastGr8, 2020).

The second example comes from Zerar and he/she says:

One of my best friend always jokingly say “i’m gay” and he also jokingly hit on guys he say stuff like “hi baby”, or “hi sexy” etc he does it all the time. He is also seem homophobic like saying “that’s so gay” when something bad happens and he also say the word “fag”. He also say those things all the time like he doesn’t know or care just how offensive it can be to people. He use the word “gay” or anything related to it in almost every sentence in one form or another I never asked or confronted him about it because I don’t want him to get mad at me. Now I’m starting to wonder if he is actually gay but just too afraid to truly admit it or is he just homophobic? And what is the best way to go about this? (Zerar, 2020)

GamingzLeastGr8 and Zerar find the neutral use of ‘that’s so gay’ (when used to describe something general as negative) to be homophobic. They do not think that it is just a joke and find that the association between the identity of homosexuals and bad things is wrong. They believe that the use of ‘that’s so gay’ will only reinforce homophobia and stunt LGBT members’ pursuit in equal rights, no matter if it is used neutrally ‘as a joke’ or as an insult unrelated to homosexuality. Because as long as the equation goes; homosexuality = bad, it is homophobic. Interestingly as well, in regard to the etymology of ‘gay’ is that Zerar finds ‘gay’ and ‘bent’ to be of equal harm. This indicates that they find all homosexual themed words capable of being homophobic, when said in this kind of manner. Even when people do not know it, they promote anti-gay thoughts, just as Nicolas & Skinner (2012) argue.

However, my results also showed that some people believe that words have no negative effect, only when you perceive it to be negative which they argue makes it okay to use DGL because people can just stop being offended, but it is not so easy, as I will discuss now.

5.2 ‘Words only hurt if you let them’ and the impact of context

5.2.1 The key to meaning: perception?

The definitions of homophobic crimes speak of hate incidents perceived “as being motivated by prejudice or hate based on a person’s sexual orientation” (Dick, 2020, p. 7). This notion defines a sentiment category that comes up a lot of times in all my data, not just under ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘gay’. This category is called: ‘Words only hurt if you let them’. The people who use the linguistic forms argue that they only harm if you let them harm and to make them not harm one should just ignore their harming effects and reclaim them for themselves. This is an interesting claim because

that denotes that words only become imbued with meaning when one perceives that it has any meaning, but it must have a meaning beforehand otherwise the perceiver would not be able to perceive a meaning. But it also seems like a cheap way to get away with saying slurs because if the receiver is hurt by these words, the meaning of the linguistic form will have a negative connotative meaning, no matter the intent. The meaning of the linguistic form is not constituted by its perception, but by perception along with intent, context and connotation (stereotypes). This means that the speaker of these claims does not consider other people's register and relies upon his or her own registers and therefore cannot see that other people can have negative registers. This is why in-group/out-group matters in determining meaning. There are quite a few results of this sentiment category and where I would argue that a word can have power from the intention behind the usage, these people argue that words only have power if the receiver perceives it as such. Like SiLv3rShArK92 from r/unpopularopinion under 'faggot'. He says:

However, what is the first thought that comes into any mind when you hear the term \u201cconcentration camp.\u201d Nazi concentration camps that committed one of the most systematic genocides the world has ever seen. Because of the Nazis, the colloquial meaning of the word has changed...The true meaning and definition of the swastika from Wikipedia \u201cThe swastika or sauwastika (as a character, \u5350 or \u534d, respectively) is a geometrical figure and an ancient religious icon in the cultures of Eurasia. It is used as a symbol of divinity and spirituality in Indian religions. In the Western world, it was a symbol of auspiciousness and good luck until the 1930....Well according to how we like to use the literal definition, it means good luck and I am ok to use it without reprisal because it means this.\n\nAnother example, the word faggot. Its literal definition is a bundle of sticks used to create a pyre. The colloquial meaning is a repulsive insult to homosexuals and more recently, it has become a definition of homophobic insult. However, if I am using the original definition, I can use and say the word and state that my meaning is obviously the original, a bundle of sticks....These examples are meant to state the she is opening up a can of worms when doing this and showing obvious hypocrisy that does nothing but cause divide. Some words and symbols have literal definitions and strong colloquial definitions. (SiLv3rShArK92, 2020).

Here he/she explains how Nazism has changed the colloquial meaning of concentration camps and the swastika; that cultural actions have the ability to implant a word with specific definitions

overshadowing the literal definition(s) of the word. He then compares the meaning of the swastika to that of the meaning of 'faggot'. He says that they both have a negative connotation, but as long as you make it clear that you use the original meaning (swastika = auspiciousness and good luck, faggot = bundle of sticks) then it is alright to use. It only becomes negative if you choose it to be negative, otherwise words are harmless. Thus, the meaning of the word purely depends on the perception. Xoolixz, also from r/unpopularopinion and 'faggot', argues too that words are essentially harmless, as their meaning comes from perception. He says:

[There is nothing wrong with saying a slur]. Even in situations where it is clearly derogatory. It's just a word and placing it on a pedestal is what gives it any sort of power to begin with. If no one cared when someone said 'nigger', 'kike', 'cracker', 'zipperhead', 'tranny', 'faggot' etc. then those words would lose, not their meaning, but the ability to upset people. \n\nNaturally people should be held accountable for their actions but trying to silence someone for it or use violence against someone who says a slur is immoral and, especially if you disagree with the other person, reinforces their right to say the word. (Xoolixz, 2020).

First of all, 'Xoolixz' claims that there is nothing wrong with saying a slur, even in situations where it is clearly derogatory. 'Xoolixz' claims this because he/she argues that making it a slur is what gives it any sort of power to begin with. Also, if no one cared when someone said 'faggot' or any other derogatory word like 'nigger', 'kike', 'tranny', etc. then the words would lose their ability to upset people. Their meaning would not change, but their negative connotation would. Thus, the words become negative if you choose to perceive it negatively. If people act on the meanings behind the words then it would be wrong, but as it is most often is not the case, then the words are just harmless words. Adventuresofzarek from r/unpopularopinion and 'faggot' brings another aspect into the discussion; intention, because he says:

Words like 'faggot, gay, retard, autistic, etc.' have no power if you don't think of them as powerful.",. "I used to be one of the many people who holds such power over these words that are just that, words. If you don't give 'faggot' any power, it is just another word. I have many friends who agree, and black friends who would go as far to say that 'n-' has no power and should be able to be said by anyone. No I don't agree that we should run around yelling 'that's gay' every second possible, but I do believe that people get triggered too easily and there's no reason that your weekend should be ruined because someone called you faggot. (Adventuresofzarek, 2020).

This I would agree with because people can also cater to a word's negative connotation by barking every time these types of words are mentioned, no matter the context. A word should not be forbidden in itself, but the malicious intent behind the usage should be considered condemned. It is the intent together with the perception and context that give words power, not just one thing.

Finally, VexbaneAramori, from r/unpopularopinion and 'faggot', speaks on Agha's (2003) enregisterment when he says:

...im male... i call my husband faggot and homo and queer as terms of endearment.

\n\n[im] sure some dude bro's do the same to their friend \n\n\nWords mean what they mean in context not definition unless the context is its definition. (e.g. explaining what it is on a definitive base)\n\n​\n\n[anyways]. love ya faggot (VexbaneAramori, 2020).

Here VexbaneAramori says that in their specific in-group (him and his husband) they have a special register for 'faggot' which to them is used as a term of endearment. This is exemplifying the indication that in certain groups, large or small, different words can have different meanings and DGL can even be pejorated to have a positive meaning. He and his husband have reclaimed 'faggot' for themselves and imbued it with a new meaning as a term of endearment, but only in their in-group, in out-groups 'faggot' would still be negative. Therefore, VexbaneAramori argues that a word's meaning depends solely on context, when said in a negative context it is negative and when said in a positive context, it is positive.

The presented examples say that the linguistic forms only come to have derogatory meaning if someone chooses to take offense to them. Essentially what they are saying is that words have no inherent meaning, only when you choose to give the word meaning. However, I would argue that linguistic forms such as these have inherent meaning, their negative connotation is so strong that, they do not have negative connotation just because someone wants to harm, it is because of what they indicate, where they come from. I would therefore argue that these words have negative connotations because of their enregisterment and social value; their $(n+1)+1^{\text{st}}$ /third order is what gives them meaning and until another layer is indexed we cannot ignore that they connote homophobia. Furthermore, it depends on the context in which they are said and with what intention, because if there is nothing malicious behind the statements and the receiver is not offended by the homophobic register, then the word does not indicate this. But if the word is said with malicious intent then no matter how the receiver perceives it the word will still be negative. No matter what word is used, if it is

used with negative intent it will become negative. Moreover, it depends on the enregisterment of the linguistic forms in different social groups (in-group/out-group) like in VexbaneAramori's example, but like 'queer', as long as 'gay' is being associated with something negative, the meaning of the words will also be associated with something negative. A 'fag' may be a cigarette, but it is also a homophobic slur that hurts a lot of people and perception alone will not change that. So, when a member of the LGBT community takes offense to 'that's so gay' even though the phrase is not meant homophobically it is because of the negative connotations 'gay' keeps. Replacing 'gay' with 'lame/stupid' is therefore a reinforcement of the fact that being 'gay' is wrong, being 'gay' is 'lame/stupid'. The phrase really only works in its neutral fashion with out-group members, as they do not consider these negative connotations and there is no indication of harm, so the phrase is not harmful in these situations. Whenever an in-group member is involved the word, as Baker (2005) says, will evoke these negative connotations.

5.2.2 The key to meaning: context?

The most important aspect from these examples is the impact of context, because if the context is negative then the word is negative, and if the context is positive then the word is also positive. This is why a word like 'faggot' which is inherently negative, can be used positively if the context is positive. However, if we consider the previous claims about intention and perception, then the receiver of 'faggot' also needs to perceive the word as positive, otherwise we have the clash of sentiments which then leads to misunderstanding. Correspondence between registers and sentiments, agreement on the context and intention/perception are what imbues a word with meaning.

Context is discussed a few times in data like from Steezyman, from r/unpopularopinion under 'faggot'/'fag', who follows up on the previous argument that words only hurt if you give them the power to hurt. He says:

I can't stand when people start pearl clutching because I called my friend who is acting like a fucking retard, retarded. I can't stand when people cry about me being homophobic because I call a dude I know who is acting like a little moron a faggot. For me fag was never a way to insult homosexuals, it was just a thing you said to people you were friends with who were acting like a fag. \n\nLike that South Park episode with the bikers who make as much noise as possible. Were they gay? No. Were they acting like a bunch of fags? Yes. \n\nSure, I could call them something else, like a dumb ass, or an annoying prick, but why censor myself when I know in my heart it's

not meant in a hateful or bigoted manner? \n\nAnd yes, here is the cliché \”have gay friends\” and they genuinely don’t give a shit about me saying it. It’s always someone who has to offend for other people. (Steezyman, 2020).

Steezyman feels that context matters when it comes to a word’s meaning, because if the context surrounding the utterance is positive then ‘faggot’ does no harm, as there is no harm intended behind it. Furthermore, he shows that he does not recognize the register of ‘fag’ used as a homophobic slur. He simply does not know that this register exists. He also expresses that he does not wish to stop saying these words because HE knows that he does not mean anything hurtful by them, but the receiver might not know this and therefore his point that meaning is only made during perception somewhat stands alone, because this still indicates that these words are capable of having an insulting effect and his intention alone will not eliminate this, only if the perception matches the intention. Nadenoh from r/lgbt under ‘fag’ comes with a repost to Steezyman’s argument when he says:

Is the word \”tranny\” generally accepted as offensive?”. “I’m gay and personally think that the word is offensive, regardless of intent. This might be because I have heard it used in a derogatory context before. To me it is no different to \”fag\” or homo\ (Nadenoh, 2020).

Nadenoh argues against the previous example, because he/she believes that no matter the intent, perception and context, DGL will always be offensive. He/she does not see a context in which they can be positive, and he/she believes it is because he/she has heard it used in its derogatory context beforehand. This is also what Baker (2005) argues when he says that once homosexuals have countered negativity against their identity (being homosexual), they will always feel this negativity, and it will always be indexed this way to them. Perhaps this is why it should only be allowed to say within the LGBT community as Noseylurker from r/unopopularopinion under ‘that’s so gay’ argues. He/she feels that context matters entirely to a word’s connotation. He says:

I was talking with a gay co-worker and we were joking around and laughing and I said something like \”that’s so gay\” or \”don’t be gay\” because it just popped out and I stopped and asked him if that was still ok to say, in that context, and he told me no. My generation used it in the \”lame\” context before all the PC and snowflakes came to be. I guess gay people can say it but others can’t. But I like the dude and respect his feelings so I just have to think before speaking I guess. (NoseyLurker, 2020).

NoseyLurker addresses the notion of sentiment P/N2 and N/N2 with an indication that DGL is only allowed to use for people part of the LGBT community. In this situation DGL will always carry a

negative connotation as long as it is said outside of the in-group (LGBT). This is the case in many of my results in the sentiment category P/N2. The people behind these results feel that the linguistic forms are only okay to use by the LGBT community as they deal with homosexuality, which is their own domain and as such, like 'nigger' for African-Americans, they are the only ones entitled to use the word. These people see the distinction between in-group and out-group meanings of a word and rely on the derogatory register concerning these words. They possibly believe that these are so rooted in place that they cannot go away as long as out-group people use the linguistic forms as well, because this will keep the negative connotation in place and thus limiting their use to in-group members. In-group use of DGL would rid these of their negativity, as presumably no in-group member would use DGL to fuel homophobia. This is therefore a form of reclaiming where the linguistic form simply changes its connotations depending on the social context, thus it will always be negative outside of LGBT while LGBT can pick and choose which sentiment they like to add to the words. BigBeanNova also speaks of this assumption:

I think it comes down to intention, context and implication. When straight people say \"That's so gay\" it usually has a much different, much more negative intention and implication, and is usually applied to things that are seen as undesirable or abnormal. When straight people say \"That's so gay\" it acts to reinforce negative connotations that they, or their peers, may have. It's similar to how a black person saying the N word and a white person saying the N word hold two very different undertones. If you're taking it at *face value*, sure, it's no different. But if you want to confront the complex reality of inequality and the nature of social oppression, here's the Wikipedia article on [Reappropriation] (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reappropriation>) to give you an idea of the stance some sociologist take on this. (BigBeanNova, 2020).

This one furthers Noseylurker's notion as BigBeanNova believes that when heterosexual persons use homophobic slurs they reinforce the negative stereotypes and connotations that society has put upon homosexuals throughout history, and therefore it is only okay to use if you are an in-group member, never if you are an out-group member. Heterosexuals and homosexuals come from two different cultures and they have different social values and different associations to 'gay' and 'faggot'. This also means that they have different connotations of the same words and as we can see this often leads to a misunderstanding in communication, where one perhaps has a limited register of homosexuality and does not consider the hurtful nature that lives in the words or as the first discussion argued; if the intent and perception does not align.

Context is thus very important to the understanding of the different meanings that words can have, and the one word from my study where context really matter is 'fag' and this I will discuss now.

5.3 The difference in registers concerning 'fag': UK vs. US

Agha says that even though people acknowledge the same register there can be a difference in understanding this. He discusses RP (Received Pronunciation) and says that accents play a role in a possible misunderstanding between people. Similarly, context and place can align for a possible misunderstanding. This is the case with 'fag' which presents a clash of registers or a difference in register understanding, as 'fag' is registered as one thing in the UK and another in the US (and the rest of the world). It has what Leith (1997) calls a reflected meaning, where its conceptual meaning (cigarette or homosexual) depends on the user. 'Fag' in the UK has been enregistered as cigarette since 1887 (Partridge, 1984, p. 373) meanwhile in the US it is enregistered as the short form of 'faggot' which is slang for a 'male homosexual' (OED, 2020). Which Partridge (1984) remarks was common by 1960s in the US, but it is unclear by which decade that it crossed the Atlantic to be put along traditionally British pejoratives as 'bent', 'pansy', 'poofteer', etc., but Partridge notes that by 1977 it was "now not uncommon in West London". This type of enregisterment follows Agha's (2003) definition of enregisterment because in this case 'fag' has undergone two different processes of enregisterment, one in the UK and one in the US (and the rest of the world). It makes sense that the word started to be linked to homosexuality here as the Gay Rights Movement began in the UK in the 1970s following the Stonewall Riots of 69. Just like in the US, where 'fag' is "shot through with homophobic venom, generally understood as a term loaded with malicious intent, aimed all at once at the world's entire LGBTQ population" (Bourn, 2019) it has long been registered to mean the homophobic slur 'faggot', but it still plays second-fiddle to the register of 'cigarette'. It is therefore acceptable to call out for a 'fag' in the UK unlike the US, as long as you accompany it with proper hand signals. Bengry points out that 'faggot' is not the chosen slur in Britain because throughout most of the 20th century 'faggot' had a different meaning that took it away from its homophobic associations that the US version has. A 'faggot' was "a type of Welsh-English haggis, made with pork liver, spices and sauce" (Bourn, 2019) So, similarly to how 'pussy' is not as strong a word as 'cunt' because of it being the name for a cat, 'faggot' has also been undermined in the UK because of its association with an unappetizing dinner. When using the word 'fag' or 'faggot'

one then has to take these two different registers into account or else a misalignment may be conjured.

If we take 'fag's' etymology through Silverstein's levels of indexicality it will give us an understanding of the possibility of misunderstanding. First 'fag' went through the first level and was enregistered as a word, then by the second order it was attributed not one meaning, but two different meanings: one where it meant something that became weary or declining in strength, and then a second additional meaning in the UK where it came to mean 'cigarette', which it still does today. So, already during the second level we have a potential clash of registers, because if two people were to use the word 'fag' in a conversation barring that one was from the UK and one from the US, the American would not have knowledge of the added register that the British had required and thus they would not be able to understand each other. Similarly, regarding accents and dialects where the common register might be RP, but because different dialects contain different registers of the same words this would lead to miscommunication. In the third level 'fag' undergoes another change where it has acquired an additional indexical meaning of 'male homosexual'. This happened in 1914 (OED, 2020) and was common in the US by the 1960s and in the UK 50 years later by 1977 (Partridge, 1984, p. 373). The fact that 'cigarette' only was enregistered in the UK presents an obstacle in registers when conversing with a Briton. My results also indicate that there is knowledge about these two kinds of registers, and this is taken into account when using 'fag' in these cases.

Like this example from lunakinesis from r/unpopularopinion 'fag':

One isn[t] inherently worse than the other. It[s] more of a cultural thing in a sense. Different countries have different sensibilities and different words have different impacts depending on where you are. Re: using the word...fag...in the UK vs US. Slang for cigarette vs a common slur against gay men (or just as LGBT+ folk in general because the people using the slur obviously don[t] care for distinction.). (Lunakinesis, 2020).

Lunakinesis argues that the meaning of 'fag' depends entirely on context. In the UK it is neutral, and in the US, it is negative, but this does not mean that it can never be negative in the UK because as moonbyjonghyun from r/lgbt 'fag' points out, 'fag' in the UK is also used as a slur: "And a fag is a cigarette here too but theyre both still used as slurs, ive been called a faggot, fag and fairy many times in the uk lol." (Moonbyjonghyun, 2020). In the US the users understand one register of 'fag' the homosexual register, while in the UK it is indexed as cigarette as well, thus when the receivers of 'fag' in the UK has to consider its meaning, they must consider intention and context as well.

This is similar to the use of ‘that’s so gay’ which can be derogatory if the intent and context determine it negative, but it can also be neutral or positive. If the intention is too harm, the word will be perceived negative, and if the word is said by a Briton it may mean something different than if it was said by an American. The fact that people take notion to ‘fag’s multiple meanings; cigarette vs homosexual showcases that there is an understanding that words can have multiple registers depending on the context and situation. It also shows that a word like this which is a DGL does not necessarily have to be negative all the time, like some of my other results suggest, because in this case the people using and receiving the word are fully aware about the difference in registers.

Finally, I will discuss the concept of reclaiming because this created the lividest discussions in my results.

5.4 The reclaiming of words

Meaning in words are imbued and understood in many ways as my results indicate. The linguistic forms in question can be used in all sentiments, as we saw, but the general assumption of my study is that the power of a word lies in a combination of intention, perception and context, and that the linguistic forms are enregistered differently depending on specific social groups; the in-group/out-group effect. There are some who argues that the power in these words only lies in the perception of the receiver; if he/she does not find it negative, it is not negative and vice versa. There are others who argue that the power lies in the intention behind; if the intention is too harm, they will harm and vice versa and then there are some who believe that it relies purely on context; that is if the context is negative, it will be considered negative and vice versa, but this assumption also brings intention and perception into the mix. Finally, there are some of my results who argue that the in-group members (LGBT) have the power themselves to take the negative power of these linguistic forms and any homosexually themed word away; by reclaiming them and making them their own and using them positively about the community, like this example from the UK vs. US register and r/lgbt:

Ah see I love both those words...\n\nAlso I'm British so fag just means cigarette...\n\nFaggot can also mean bundle of sticks or meatballs. \nEither way to me and my partner it's a funny word. \n\nRepurpose insults and use them for yourself!
(Quinn_El_Reed, 2020).

Quinn_El_Reed has a special in-group with his partner where they use ‘faggot’ as a funny word, it does not harm them because they have reclaimed it and therefore, they do not choose to be hurt by

it in this specific in-group. This does not leave out hateful use by out-group members, but his point is that if all victims of homophobic or insulting slurs reclaimed them it would take away these powers of the words and the hateful users would not have any words left to do harm with.

This kind of process is what Fasoli et al. (2019) calls reclaiming or re-appropriation. Reclaiming occurs when minority groups start using derogatory group labels (DGL), in this case homophobic language, to refer to themselves or members of the same minority with positive or joking effect to empower them and their sexuality. It is a two-stage process. “First, DGL need to be reframed as non-offensive if used by stigmatised group members. Second, minority group members need to be recognised as empowered because they take the risk of taking ownership of what DGL might mean.” (Fasoli et al., 2019, p. 805). It is “a *social creativity* strategy that aims to break the association between the in-group and the DGL’s negative expressive function” (Fasoli et al., 2019, p. 799). In other words, they want to break the indexed form of DGL that applies homophobia on top of the words and replace them with a positive indexicality. The means to do this is for in-group members to self-label with DGL because that should cause the DGL to be perceived as less offensive, “whilst the speaker is perceived as more empowered and more identified with the relevant minority group” (Ibid.) and research has shown this to be the case. But it is not that easy, because changing beliefs about a single term’s offensiveness may be easier than changing beliefs about a group’s power.

‘Gay’ and ‘faggot’ have negative connotations and especially ‘faggot’ and ‘fag’ are most often used as insults, but by reclaiming these words and using them positively, the LGBT community feel they might ameliorate these connotations and therefore force a new semantic change. When considering previous semantic changes and their development this makes sense, because changes in language often are a result of cultural or historical changes in society, and if we change towards ‘faggot’ meaning homosexual in a good way, and not the insulting way it is now, this change would probably happen. Homophobic words have to be enregistered as a positive connotation of homosexuals for the change to start, and by beginning to reclaim the words and to use them positively towards each other they would start this enregisterment. If no one was offended by the words, they would also lose their insulting effect. The insulting effect of these words rely on the social value of the words, because when that is offensive and demeaning the word then has the ability to be used in this way, as the social value of words change depending on social groups. ‘Faggot’ for instance, when used as slang, is a derogatory description of a homosexual, one considered to be effeminate and

“more generally: any man considered to be effeminate; (as a term of abuse or contempt) a weak or cowardly man or boy; a sissy” (OED, 2020). All these words indicate weakness and thus the social value of ‘faggot’ is that of a weak person. It is enregistered in our norms and understanding of language in this description. If people did not mind being considered weak and would use [the word](#) to indicate the opposite, it would over time lose this social meaning and become enregistered with a new social meaning, one based on a positive social value. This is the general idea behind the reclaiming of derogatory words. A word that has undergone this transformation is ‘queer’. This is a word which according to OED means “Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric” (OED, 2020), and has meant ‘homosexual’ since ca. 1920s (OED, 2020). These two meanings put together, make a negative connotation for ‘homosexual’ as a man who is out of place, who does not belong to society, and therefore it was for a long time considered a slur and an insult to homosexual men (Rocheleau, 2019). But today ‘queer’ is used in a positive way, Netflix (a streaming service) has a show called ‘Queer Eye’ and LGBT has even adopted it onto the end of their acronym, so it now spells LGBTQ+ (the plus encompasses spectrums of sexuality and gender). Even though the register still falls on ‘queer’ as ‘odd’, that does not need to mean anything bad, it can actually be a good thing to stand out and when accepting this, the register also turns from negative to positive. If people are proud of being ‘queer’ it becomes difficult using the word as a slur and thus the word has been reclaimed. In the article *A Former Slur Is Reclaimed, And Listeners Have Mixed Feelings*, members of LGBTQ+ share their feelings concerning ‘queer’. One of them, Bob Mondello, explains how it was a pejorative used to insult when he was young, but when he heard it used at rallies, he saw that people used it to “describe themselves with pride – that’s a very empowering thing.” (Rocheleau, 2019). Finding pride in a negative description and indexing this as a positive and empowering description can alter the power in a word completely. There is also evidence of this ambition in my data of ‘that’s so gay’, ‘fag’ and ‘faggot’ in LGBT and r/unpopularopinion, but the results are scarce, and the primary wish revolves around ‘fag’ in LGBT. ‘Fag’, which is used overpoweringly negatively either homophobically or insulting/offensive (where it means lame/stupid/idiot in a disparaging manner) in all three subreddits. Less as a neutral term and very little as a positive term. Fasoli et al. (2019) also believes that “*Queer* may be easier to reclaim than *fag*” (Fasoli et al., 2019, p. 805). Although ‘queer’ has undergone a reclaiming process since the 1980s (Fasoli et al. 2019) it can “still be used to denigrate” (Fasoli et al., 2019, p. 799), since how a word is perceived depends on context and intention. Similarly, Fasoli et al. (2019) says that ‘fag’ has undergone some reclamation but is largely still perceived as pejorative. My results demonstrate these results as well, but also

that there is a genuine interest and wish in the reclamation of this word along with 'faggot'. One example of this is from TheDerpyDisaster from r/unpopularopinion who says:

Racial and sexist slurs should not be considered offensive. Do not try to take the word away from those who would use it to spread hatred and hurt others. Take the power away from the word so it is impossible to be weaponized. \n\nWords like: [nigger], [faggot], [cunt], [slut]. These words probably made you nervous (and might get me banned) because society has placed a lot of shock value on them, but that doesn\[t] have to be the case. These words are only offensive because people take offense to them. They don\[t] have any actual meaning other than a history of hateful usage. If you stop preserving the history of these words then people who would use these words to direct hatred can no longer do so. \n\nSure, don\[t] use these words if you don\[t] feel comfortable with them. I sure don\[t] (outside of this post), because I am a white male who doesn\[t] want to offend anybody and does not harbor any hatred for any group of people. But to those who would take offense to these words, I ask you to consider why you take offense to them. (TheDerpyDisaster, 2020).

This is a definite example of reclaiming, because the whole concept of reclaiming is not to take the words away from those who wish to use them to hurt others, but to take away the power of the word so it becomes impossible to hurt with. This is exactly what this result says. TheDerpyDisaster links 'faggot' to 'slut' and 'cunt' to indicate that these are derogatory words, but only because society has placed a lot of shock value on them. This is a part of semantic change: societal forces changes. This does not have to be the case he/she argues, as we can take this shock value away by choosing not to be offended by them, because they are only offensive as long as people let them be offensive, just like in the 'words only hurt if you let them' category. TheDerpyDisaster argues that they don't "have any actual meaning other than a history of hateful usage" (TheDerpyDisaster, 2020). This is not correct though, but his point is that if you "stop preserving the history of these words then they lose their meaning. If you take the power from these words then people who would use these words to direct hatred can no longer do so." (TheDerpyDisaster, 2020). He chooses not to use them because he understands their hurtful abilities, but he employs people to ask themselves why they take offense to them; why these words have become offensive to them. In short, 'faggot' only has negative connotations because people choose to perceive them like this. This has been forced by an intent to harm in the first place by choosing to put negative connotations onto the word. Golden-gorl from r/lgbt finds that reclaiming 'faggot' and 'fag' is essential if she wants to keep being strong

enough to be called “a fag in derogatory way” (golden-gorl, 2020). Reclaiming these words make them closer in their community and makes them appear strong together. J_miles, from r/lgbt, concurs this as he finds that the act of calling himself and his gay friends ‘faggot’ in a positive way, will separate him from those people, who use the words hatefully. J_miles comments:

This almost makes me want to reclaim that slur like – okay, I’m a fucking faggot and I’m happy about it. At least I’m not filled with hatred and vitriol towards anyone and everyone who doesn’t fit into my restrictive idea of normality. (j_miles, 2020).

His comment was a remark to a post made by lol62056 that was titled “The way republicans view us” and was accompanied by ‘Image 5’: Picture from post by lol62056 from r/lgbt.



(lol62056, 2020)

Justmyopinion,-- compares the reclaiming of ‘faggot’ to that of ‘nigger’ when he says:

Homosexuals should own the word fag, just as the African American community owned the n word. Not necessarily saying anyone else can say it still. But make it less harmful by using it and realizing it[s] just a word...Yo, what up my faggot. (justmyopinion--, 2020).

Justmyopinion,-- argues that homosexuals should reclaim the word in the same way that ‘nigger’ has been reclaimed by the African-American society. Thus, if in-group members normalized ‘faggot’ it would take away the stigma, in their group, but it would still be considered negative if a heterosexual person were to call a homosexual person ‘faggot’. Reclaiming is therefore only possible in the specific in-group, as out-group members would not know that the word has been reclaimed

by these in-group members. Reclaiming therefore must be accompanied by a positive perception no matter of the intention. Even though 'nigger' has been reclaimed by the African-American community it is still considered very negative to say outside of this, and even the fact that I am spelling it out rather than using the n-word could be frowned upon by in-group members. Reclaiming in this case does not take away all the negative power of the words, but it takes away its negative power in in-groups. Perhaps one should rather do as this next example argues (the author has been deleted). He/she thinks that rather than reclaiming homosexually themed words, one should just point out that it is homophobic whenever these words are being used. He/she says:

I am proposing that we turn the words associated with homophobia. Homophobic, into a negative word. \n\n[I] feel that turning the word \"straight\" into a negative word is too difficult. It simply is a privilege of theirs...and there is too much inherent value in the idea of \"straight\" (in other context like straight roads, edges, etc.). \n\nInstead, let's broaden the usage of \"homophobia.\" Let us use it in a way that, well, means what it means, except even in contexts outside of sexuality. Let it mean\n*ignorant of other peoples' feelings.\n*of old and outdated mindset\n*inconsiderate\n*unable to accept new ideas\n*disrespectful of others' dignity\n*stubborn\n*socially backwards\n\nWhen people say, \"that's so gay.\" Retort with \"that's so homophobic.\" \n\nAnd if they argue that \"gay\" has an alternate meaning, simply reply that it is still homophobic... you are still being an considerate douche for associating some people's identity with a negative context. (Reddit, 2020).

He/she argues about reclaiming. He/she believes that rather than 'straight' going through a pejoration, a reclaiming of homophobic words should be done. But, he really talks about using the word 'homophobia' as a counter against homophobic slur, so answering 'that's so homophobic' when someone uses homosexually themed words negatively, no matter if they are referring to sexuality or not, because he believes that no matter the context, homosexually themed words occur in, they still hurt the people of that community, because the negativity behind the words are so ingrained into their social value. It is simply homophobic to associate being gay with something negative.

Carnaghi & Maass (2007) argue that "gays are known to have imported derogatory terms into their own language" (Carnaghi & Maass, 2007, p. 153). This is also argued by at some of my results, for example by Casualpotato96 in the subreddit r/lgbt under the word 'fag', when he says

Yeah it[s] kind of like the n word used to be a derogatory term and now black people have kind of reclaimed it and made it their own. Same thing with fag like 99% of the gay guys I know use the word fag (Casualpotato69, 2020).

Here he also touches on the in-group/out-group dilemma that comes with reclaiming, because just like the n word is okay to use within the certain in-group it is not okay to use outside of that, we cannot even spell it out and the same goes with 'fag'. Fag-Adorer from r/lgbt under 'fag' even has it in his username and he uses the word encouraging of homosexuals: "I am a fag and I love fags soooo much...Hello my lovely fellow fags" (Fag_Adorer, 2020) and Mhalo15, from r/lgbt under 'faggot' and 'fag' also identifies himself as a 'fag' or a "bleedin faggot!" (Mhalo15, 2020). But on the whole, my results contradict Carnaghi and Maass' (2007) statement about members of LGBT already having reclaimed most of the derogatory homosexually themed words for themselves, since in my study there is more a wish about reclaiming the words rather than it having actually happened, but also a slight neglect towards it truly ever occurring, because the negative connotations are so ingrained. Dearshrewdwit from r/lgbt under 'fag' says that reclaiming is possible, and he has done so with the word queer, but "the memories never go away." (Dearshrewdwit, 2020). The few positive results of LGBT's usage of the linguistic forms and the few results of reclaiming indicate that this change is probably not happening anytime soon, or that it at least will be a long battle. 'Fag' and 'faggot' are indexed negatively towards the LGBT community (especially 'faggot') but reclaiming them would be a way of indexing them towards something positive and forcing a semantic change in connotation an example of amelioration rather than follow the pejorative changes they have been through so far.

Reclaiming can be argued as a different layer to Silverstein's (2003) $(n+1)+1^{\text{st}}$ order, because in reclaiming an additional indexical meaning is added to its $(n+1)+1^{\text{st}}$ order. 'Faggot' and the rest of the words has gone through all Silverstein's levels of indexicality and during the last level it became enregistered in the community of LGBT with the social value of anti-gay/derogatory, which then causes anyone using this term to be perceived as being homophobic. 'Faggot' is considered a homophobic slur to this community and as such its use will be linked to this social value as long as it stays this way. Reclaiming would enregister a new social value in the community, a positive social value which would then be linked to the use of the form and be a way of identification with the in-group of gays i.e. users of the term would also identify as gay themselves like McCormack et al.(2016) propose with their social bonding argument. Reclaiming would then be Silverstein's

(2003) fourth order that replaces an indexical form, a negative connotation, with a new indexical form, a positive connotation.

However, it is not necessarily that easy as Professor_Finn, from r/unpopularopinion writes:

Title: LGBTQ+ people shouldn\[t] say f*g or f****t, and their...reclaiming...of the word is actually really harmful. For context, I\[g] a gay college student and there is a large LGBTQ+ community on my campus. At parties, casual events, on social media, etc, a lot of my friends (usually gay guys, from experience) feel comfortable saying fag, or faggot, when they\[re] talking. Just casually. I mean I understand that they\[re] comfortable with the word, and power to them for not being upset about it anymore, but every time I hear someone say it I can\[t] do anything except visibly wince.\n\nI worry that there are a ton of people in the closet who hear those words when these guys say it and won\[t] get that its being used casually. When you\[re] in the closet, even the most mildly homophobic language (like calling something...gay...for example) can be incredibly upsetting and harmful to your mental health. For me personally, I\[ve] had negative experiences with the word in the past and I\[d] rather just not hear it. I feel like it\[s] not a good look for anyone and...concept...just don\[t] say it? I don\[t] think it\[s] just unnecessary and harmful, and I really truly worry for all of the closeted people out there who may have to put up with hearing it just because some entitled gay guy thought it was funny to say. \n\nTo anyone who may think this is a popular opinion, it really doesn\[t] seem to be that way in the gay community, and I just heard someone say it like 20 minutes ago, hence this post.” (Professor_Finn, 2020).

Professor Finn argues that reclaiming is actually harmful. The fact that ‘faggot’ has negative connotations stays, even when it is said within the LGBT-community. ‘Faggot’ will in this case also be fuel for homophobia and reclaiming it will do nothing but aid to the homophobia because it becomes accepted rather than taboo. This would probably enable ‘faggot’ to be said more often and this will hurt those who feel harm by the word even more.

Another of my results showed that if these types of words ‘faggot’ and ‘fag’ were to be reclaimed there would be a time where the words would lead a double life and in this time many more people would be abused by the words, because they will be called ‘faggot’ or ‘fag’ against their will, since

the word has been 'reclaimed' by the community, so it is allowed to say. But just because it will be allowed to say by the community, the word requires many years for it to escape its negative connotations and not to abuse anyone. Gp-realtalk says:

People argue that reclaiming slurs, such as queer, and turning them into identifiers takes power away from the homophobes. In reality, it doesn't actually do that. First of all, queer is still used as a slur. Secondly, even if queer were off-limits, homophobes would still have an entire arsenal of slurs to use – fairy, poof, fag, faggot, homo, cock-sucker, fudge packer, sodomite, fruitcake, pansy, etc. If anything, the impact is harmful because people who were abused by the word queer are being called queer without their consent. (gp-realtalk, 2020).

Gp-realtalk rejects the notion of reclaiming as a means to ameliorate DGL. Instead he argues that homophobes would simply find another slur to use, as they are homophobic to their core and reclaiming a word would not ease this. Reclaiming can possibly enregister words positively for in-groups, but it will do nothing for the out-groups. They will continue being homophobes.

Reclaiming comes from a good place and may seem like the only thing that would take away the homophobic meanings of these type of words, and to rather empower the in-group members, but it is a long and tricky process and there are positives and negatives to it as we saw in my results. Decreasing the offensiveness of DGL “may precede the recognition that reclaiming language is a form of collective empowerment” (Fasoli et al., 2019, p. 805). A word can easily become enregistered by LGBT, but it takes a lot for it to be enregistered outside of this group as well and become the acknowledged indexed form of the word. r/lgbt can index 'faggot' and 'fag' in the positive sentiment as much as they want, but it will be a very long process before the negative people of r/the_donald will register this indexed form as well. Another problem with reclaiming is that it happens in the in-group, so very few people actually understand that the word has been reclaimed in the first place, “so they continue to use it in the older negative way, but you can also have different understandings of what the reclaiming actually means. And even if you're in on it, you still may not participate.” (Nunn, 2015). This is what we see in the case with 'gay' = 'lame'.

Agha (1998) argues that stereotypes about language form and that their use play a crucial part in the formulation of pragmatic value(s) of register systems (Agha, 1998, p. 151). The stereotypes about the male homosexual vary according to which word you attribute to explain such a person and

thereby choosing which register system the male homosexual attains to. Furthermore, he elaborates on my beginning notion that homosexual DGL have already been reclaimed by the in-group as the words register their identity and as a result of this, they are the only people allowed to use the words. Agha (1998) speaks of honorific language and argues that “metapragmatic stereotypes about honorific language REVALORIZE the pragmatic properties of such language, imbuing it with pragmatic values additional to the marking of respect and honor” (Agha, 1998, p. 152). Similarly, homosexual languages have markings of sexuality and identity and the stereotypes add additional layers to it of weakness, wrongness, femininity, lame, etc. In other words, it becomes enregistered with these stereotypes on top of the register of homosexuality through language use. My results note that the use of ‘faggot’, ‘fag’, ‘gay’ and ‘that’s so gay’ should only be allowed to use by in-group members as outside use of it reinforces these stereotypes; by calling a friend a ‘fag’ if he wears two earrings or does the dishes, the user feeds the negative stereotypes that homosexuals are feminine and weak. Agha (1998) relates to this when he says that in all languages there are expressions that

are said to be used only BY certain people or FOR certain people...[and that they] formulate signs of social identity by linking features of utterance-form with social categories of persons; at the same time, such stereotypes formulate social standards by which individual acts of language use are judged (Agha, 1998, p. 152).

Thus, the utterance of a register’s forms formulates the social occasion of language and the stereotypic features such as the social value of the register, the role and relationship of the user and receiver and the social context in which the utterance occurs (Agha, 2007, p. 148). ‘Faggot’ takes on different registers if said in an in-group vs. out-group environment. Even if out-group members claim that they are not using homosexual DGL in a homophobic manner they will be judged this way, because the stereotypes of such DGL are so rooted in place that they can only be escaped if they are part of the in-group where using DGL positively is possible. Although some research claims that the use of homophobia (among students) is declining and that homosexual language is being used to encourage homosexuality and to identify themselves with the identity of their homosexual peers. McCormack is one of these as he has researched sixth-form students’ (heterosexual and homosexual) use of and attitudes towards homophobic language and his results show that neither the heterosexual nor the homosexual participants find that the use of ‘gay’, ‘faggot’ and ‘fag’ is derogatory, but in fact inclusive to the homosexual environment. It is only if the intent is truly negative and homophobic that it becomes harmful (McCormack, 2012, p. 72-87).

My study shows that some believe that homosexual language belongs to the people who attain to this sexuality, so that the negative register becomes obsolete, like earlier versions of 'faggot' and like McCormack's (2012) study argues. Reclaiming them to the in-group can in this sense be seen as a form of semantic change where it comes to take on a different meaning depending on which sexual orientation one attains to. In this sense homosexual language is a category for itself that is spoken in the in-group with certain language structures, words, stereotypes that is used exclusively in this group and therefore when spoken in an out-group the speakers either become associated with the in-group or they are considered homophobic if the language is used to deride this in-group. It can also be that the in-group members choose to take a derogatory word like 'faggot' and use it positively, but only in that specific in-group. The word is therefore still derogatory outside of this group, but in this specific group they have reclaimed the word and indexed it positively to them. Take this example where the in-group is the user and his husband. They have reclaimed 'faggot' to call each other endearingly, because they play to the stereotypes of a 'faggot' being a flamboyant and feminine man, but they like being this way, therefore it is positive to them, but only in this context, only in their little in-group where they are both aware of the intent and perception of the word and therefore they can use it with no harm done. Outside of this comfort zone the word is still conceptually derogatory. It all depends on the context and the people who use it and receive it. As such we can talk about anti-gay language which is the 'normal' homophobia and pro-gay language which encourages gay identities and uses DGL in a positive sense. Reclaiming can therefore be seen as a type of pro-gay language.

6 Conclusion

My results show that there is a distinct difference in the usage of 'gay'/'that's so gay' and 'fag'/'faggot' and how these are perceived. They all mean 'homosexual', but 'gay' is the only one used to describe 'homosexuality' more than any of the other categories. 'Gay' is very much a 'category group label' (CGL) where 'faggot' and 'fags' are 'derogatory group labels' (DGL). In the examples explaining the meanings of the linguistic forms according to intention/perception and context, almost all of them deal with 'faggot' and 'fag', a little bit with 'that's so gay' and none with 'gay'. This supports my previous claim. 'That's so gay' is extremely varied in its usage, but generally the members of LGBT find it derogatory as they do not want anything negative to be associated to homosexuality and the rest find it to be denotative of 'lame', neutral and nothing to do with homosexuality. There is also a difference when we look at the sentiment analysis as 'gay' is used quite mixed between the three sentiments and quite a bit of those are the neutral sentiment, the 'homosexual' denotative. 'Fag' and 'faggot' on the other hand are used mostly with the negative sentiment, 'insulting' and 'homophobic'. There is nevertheless proof of the phrase not being considered to be homophobic amongst the members of LGBT, as 'insult' is by far the most used negative sentiment, with homophobic being used half as much, and when they use it positively they first and foremost use to spark positivity about LGBT and the fact of being homosexual. These words are thus imbued with many different meanings depending on the context, intent/perception, register knowledge and correspondence and social value. The process of reclaiming would alter this spectrum and many already feel that the in-group members should do this, because they already belong with the homosexual environment since they deal with homosexuality in one way or another. Finally, my results showed a tendency towards more negativity in the usages of the linguistic forms unlike some of the other studies that have been produced on this topic (Robinson, 2012; Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; McCormack et al., 2012, 2016). An expansion of this study could be interviews with the willing participants, who wrote these texts, about their intentions and perceptions and their general usage and understandings of these linguistic forms. This would give me a wider field of data which would make it more representative. Although with this, I would still have to take into account the norms and standards of our culture, because it is not certain that they would admit to using a word similarly to how they use it on the internet because they know that this kind of usage is wrong and people do not like to admit that they're wrong, and they do not like to make themselves seem worse than they intend to be. A recurring statement throughout my data is the basic notion that associating being gay with something negative is homophobic, no matter the context. This argues against the

whole notion of 'that's so gay' as meaning 'lame' or in-group members using DGL as terms of endearment or encouragement as other results of my data shows. They believe that the context is what constitutes a word's meaning, so any word can be used negatively or positively depending on the context. The contradicting arguments throughout my study and many of the other similar studies is exemplifying that the concept of meaning is a difficult concept to grasp, as Leith proclaims. Words do not adhere to their conceptual meaning, they change constantly and can be used in many varied ways. How words are imbued with meaning was my initial problem and to answer this was not easy, but my study contributed to answering it from a CMC aspect. Meanings differ depending on context, intention and perception; a word may be indexed as meaning one thing in a particular in-group while being indexed as meaning another thing in another in-group. And furthermore, by meaning something entirely different in an out-group. This is a result of enregisterment where different groups enregister words differently. Therefore, intention and perception also play a part as one may intend to use a word in one way, but it may be perceived differently and thus we have a clash of understandings in meaning that showcases a difference in registers. Words therefore have initial denotative meanings that are universally understood, but they have many different connotative meanings that vary accordingly to enregisterment, context, intention and perception. Words are imbued with meaning as a result of semantic change, understanding on registers, difference in indexed forms of the words, in-group/out-group meanings and because of context, intention and perception. Meaning is not a definite term as people understand the meanings of words differently depending on social groups, class, education, etc. therefore words also get imbued with different meanings, but most of them have core meanings; denotative and connotative that everyone ascribes to, but they may be indexed in many other ways because of social value, as the social value determines how a word is intended and perceived and this varies depending on social group. As language is forever evolving so will meaning forever evolve.

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8 Appendixes

8.1 Appendix 1: Overview of charts

Chart 1. An overview of the amount of each linguistic form split between the subreddits

Chart 2: The frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic forms by the subreddits

Chart 3: The frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'gay' by the subreddits

Chart 4: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/lgbt

Chart 5: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/the_donald

Chart 6: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/unpopularopinion

Chart 7: An overview of the frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by the subreddits

Chart 8: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/lgbt

Chart 9: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/the_donald

Chart 10: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/unpopularopinion

Chart 11: An overview of the frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the subreddits

Chart 12: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/lgbt

Chart 13: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/the_donald

Chart 14: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/unpopularopinion

Chart 15: An overview of the frequency and distribution of sentiments on the linguistic form 'fag' by the subreddits

Chart 16: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/lgbt

Chart 17: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/the_donald

Chart 18: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/unpopularopinion

8.2 Appendix 2: Overview of tables

Table 1: The distribution of the total amount of linguistic forms used split between the three subreddits

Table 2: The distribution of the use of 'gay' split between the three subreddits

Table 3: The distribution of the use of 'that's so gay' split between the three subreddits

Table 4: The distribution of the use of 'faggot' split between the three subreddits

Table 5: The distribution of the use of 'fag' split between the three subreddits

Table 6: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/lgbt

Table 7: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/the_donald

Table 8: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'gay' by r/unpopularopinion

Table 9: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/lgbt

Table 10: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'that's so gay' by r/the_donald

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Table 12: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/lgbt

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Table 14: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'faggot' by the r/unpopularopinion

Table 15: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/lgbt

Table 16: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/the_donald

Table 17: The frequency and distribution of sentiment categories on the linguistic form 'fag' by the r/unpopularopinion

8.3 Appendix 3: Overview of images

Images

Image 1: The etymology of 'faggot'

Image 2: API before cleaning

Image 3: API after cleaning

Image 4: Example of concordance in AntConc

Image 5: Picture from comment by lol62056 from r/lgbt

8.4 Appendix 4: Overview of abbreviations

CGL: category group labels

DGL: derogatory group labels

LGBT: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning. The plus is used to encompass spectrums of sexuality and gender

n: amount

N: neutral

N2: negative

P: positive

N/N2: neutral/negative

P/N2: positive/negative

GSRM: Gender, Sexual, and Romantic Minority

In-group: a social group to which a person identifies as being a member

Out-group: a social group with which an individual does not identify to the in-group

RP: Received Pronunciation

8.5 Appendix 5: Overview of sentiment categories

Neutral (N)

- 1 (joking: sarcasm/irony)
- 2 (lame: stupid, boring, ugly)
- 3 (no meaning)
- 4 (words only hurt if you let them)
- 5 (homosexual)
- 6 (happy)
- 7 (interest in its usage)
- 8 (etymology: bundle of sticks)
- 9 (does no harm)

Negative (N2):

- 1.1 (homophobia)
- 2.1 (ashamed of own sexuality)
- 3.1 (insult: general negativity towards something or someone)
- 4.1 (racism)
- 5.1 (lame: with a direct hatred)
- 6.1 (words only hurt if you let them: the power of the word lies in the perception)
- 7.1 (joking: sarcasm/irony)
- 8.1 (semantic change: used to be neutral, now is negative)
- 9.1 (weakness)

Positive (P):

- 1.2 (encouraging LGBT)
- 2.2 (reclaiming: concerning LGBT)
- 3.2 (joking: sarcasm/irony)
- 4.2 (fantastic phrase: used by homosexuals)
- 5.2 (happy)
- 6.2 (fun word, don't take words so seriously)
- 7.2 (does no harm)

Neutral/Negative (N/N2):

- 1.3 (lame, but only to explain why this is wrong)
- 2.3 (lame or insult)
- 3.3 (intent N, perception N2)
- 4.3 (religion)
- 5.3 (insult, but to himself, so he is not hurt by it)
- 6.3 (context: N2 in USA, N in UK)
- 7.3 (N2 to LGBT, N elsewhere)
- 8.3 (homosexual or insult)
- 9.3 (negative to show its neutrality)

Positive/Negative (P/N2):

- 1.4 (context: P with LGBT, elsewhere N2)
- 2.4 (sarcasm to show that there is nothing wrong with being gay)
- 3.4 (joking about homophobia)
- 4.4 (likes being gay, but not how this is their entire identity)
- 5.4 (to enhance Trump's pro-attitude towards LGBT, so we do not know if they truly register 'Gay' as a positive term of just take advantage of this register for their own benefit, or for Trump's benefit)
- 6.4 (intent P, perception N2)
- 7.4 (insult, but to produce improvement in a person)
- 8.4 (insult, but should be okay to say)
- 9.4 (encourages LGBT, but not the people who get offended about the word)