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The language of hate and its reappropriation

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Introduction

Language is not only a conventional communicative system, it has a role in our society. It carries power and can reinforce existing authority models through simple words. The most influential groups in society have always used language to subjugate and undermine the weakest. However, reappropriating these terms can be just as powerful and help minorities fight back against oppression. The aim of this thesis is to research if reappropriation has had a real impact on the lives of the target groups and if it is an effective tool for empowerment and social fight.

In the first chapter, I am going to explore what the language of discrimination is, how it works and its effect on the target group. I will explain how language of discrimination can be more subtle or more explicit. Moreover I will explain the phenomenon of hate speech and why it has become more frequent in the last years and the legal measures that international legal communities have took against its spread. Finally, I will analyze the effects that the use of derogatory language has on the victims.

In the second chapter, I will investigate the process of reappropriation and the need for a sense of community and shared identity to make this process work. I will firstly review all the different approaches that people who are part of a stigmatized community adopt in order to protect themselves. Then, I will explain why even if it is possible to self-label using slurs, group identification and cohesion are fundamental to start the reappropriation of derogatory language. Afterwards, I will list the effects that language reappropriation has on both people in the stigmatized group and outside it. At the end, I am going to present the different sides of the debate over language reappropriation.

In the third chapter, in order to have a more concrete view of the phenomenon of reappropriation, I am going to examine the evolution of the word "queer" from an historical point of view. Starting from the original meaning of "strange" or "peculiar", to a pejorative meaning used to insult people in the LGBT community to an umbrella term that anyone who isn't cisgender or heterosexual can feel comfortable using to identify themselves. Afterwards, I will proceed to analyze the evolution of the word queer through the use of the Corpus of Historical American English from the beginning of the the 1820s to the 2020s.

Chapter One
The Language of Discrimination

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview on language-based discrimination, the different forms it can take, its aims, and its effects on target groups. It will explore on a critical discourse level how language may be manipulated and how hate speech, especially on social media, appears to have become a vehicle for spreading prejudice and hostility.

1.1 Language-based discrimination

In history, the most well-known acts of discrimination are perhaps those of blatant violence and hate, for example, the existence of organizations such as the "Ku Klux Klan", which preaches white supremacy, or the pseudo-scientific practice of conversion therapy, whose objective is to change people in order to fit heterosexual normative and cisgender models (Haldeman, 1994: 221-227). As terrible and inhumane as these phenomena are, they are not the only forms of discrimination that people have to face.

It has been argued that language is used by groups that consider themselves the norm in order to promote the idea that what is not like them is wrong and should be eradicated. A thesis that supports this argument is the Communication-Accommodation Thesis (CAT), developed by Howard Giles at the end of the 1970s. This thesisaims to demonstrate that people change and adapt their way of speaking in order to have different effects, one of which is related to the "status differential". People can either adjust their language to increase similarities (Convergence) or create more dissimilarities (Divergence) (Giles, 2016:295). Maintenance, or the lack of adjustment of speech during conversations, and divergence are one of the many tools used to create distance.

Another example is given by Hung Ng (2007:107), who indicates four primary relationships between language and social discrimination: linguistic justification of discrimination; linguistic encoding of discrimination, linguistic enactment of discrimination; and linguistic routinization of discrimination. Focusing on linguistic enactment, Hung Ng (2007:111) attests that it "is [...] a fully social act, connecting the

perpetrator with the victim in the face of retaliation or, worse still, getting into trouble with a third party, such as the law".

With linguistic discrimination, we are not only speaking about epithets and insults but also how language itself becomes exploited in order to make discrimination more subtle and less likely to be noticed. Essed (1991:45) focuses on racial discrimination, affirming that "racial discrimination includes all acts – verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal". Quasthoff (1978:2) pinpoints four types of stereotypical utterances, each one with a different degree of directness, as shown below.

1. "Analytical" propositions that claim to express the truth,
2. Restricted statements such as impersonal structures or "common knowledge" (It is believed that…).
3. Directly expressed stereotypes where the speaker uses personal constructions and *verbum putandi* (I believe…) or *verbum cogitandi* (I think…).
4. Text linguistic types where the stereotype is not expressed directly but inferred.

One example could be the manipulation of sentence structure, a very effective method that can bring the reader or listener's attention to what the author wants. Semin and Fielder (1992 in Hung Ng, 2007:113) demonstrate the link between abstract/concrete verbs and psychological properties: "Abstract verbs are used to describe positive in-group behaviors (thereby safeguarding the good image against falsification), whereas concrete verbs are used to describe negative in-group behaviors (thereby allowing the in-group to improve its bad image in the future)" (Hung Ng, 2007:114). Similarly, Maass (1999:80) identifies what is called "linguistic inter-group bias" (LIB), a model through which the use of abstract and concrete verbs helps reinforce stereotypes and biases between different groups but also attributes advantaging credit to the in-group over the out-group. For example, by using an abstract verb such as be and saying "A is violent", it is inferred that this character is expected to have aggressive and violent behavior and it is a characteristic that defines the actor. On the other hand, in the sentence "A hit B" by using a concrete verb this action can be considered as an isolated event and not a defining characteristic of the actor (Maass, 1999: 80).

According to Maya Khemlani David (2014:164), language can be used and manipulated by those in power in order to maintain their position of advantage, and its vocabulary can be inherently beneficial to those who have always been in power. Hung Ng and Deng (2017) argue that English is a man-made language, full of words and grammar rules that reflect male dominance and sexism but are easily ignored because it is spoken so often without a deeper examination by women, men, and non-binary people alike. Stanley (1978: 801) affirms that:

> the men who set themselves the task of describing English usage also established their usage as authoritative, without having to offer explanations or apologies. The immediate consequence of their social and economic position was the exclusion of women from discussions of learning and language use

What is considered a convention or common sense and usually accepted by the general public may be a convention created by those in power in order to legitimize themselves and excuse their position of advantage compared to others. Spencer offers us an example: "masculinity is the unmarked form: the assumption is that the world is male unless proven otherwise. Femininity is the marked form:it is the proof of the otherwise". She continues with empirical evidence of this ideal. When a woman enters a male dominated space, she is automatically referred as an exception and she is referred as such through the use of labels such as *female* surgeon, *waitress, woman* lawyer. As stated by Fairclough (1989:22) "language is a social process [...] conditioned by other (non-linguistic) parts of society"; thus those who are in a position of power can shape and form it at will.

1.2 Derogatory Language

Cervone (2020:81) identifies derogatory language as "any disparaging statement referring to a social category as a whole or to its members." It can attack physical traits, like the word "cunt", which is used to address women by referring to them by their reproductive organs and implying that being a woman makes people less: less strong, less smart or less important. Derogatory language includes different forms of statements such as sexist language, epithets and verbal bullying, but hate speech is considered a more peculiar

phenomenon. While the official definition is still ambiguous and widely discussed, the European Court of Human Rights defines hate speech as:

all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin (Council of Europe, 1997: 107).

Hate speech presents characteristics that separate it from other forms of derogatory language. The most relevant one is that hate speech is mainly propagated through social media. Anonymity and the fact that it is accessible to most have made the spread of hate speech much easier (Cervone, 2020:82). One of the main issues when facing the problem of hate speech is stating a clear line between people's right to be free from verbal abuse and people's freedom of speech. Suppressing hate speech by asking for the intervention of the government just because the message is seen as harmful or disturbing would be a clear violation of democracy. Those who advocate freedom of speech often underline the need for "content neutrality". Chemerinsky affirms that "All speech, regardless of its content, must be treated the same by the government"(2000: 55) because allowing the government to target and decide which views are correct and which are not can create a "greatly distorted marketplace of ideas" (2000: 56).

On the other hand, as stated by Cohen-Almagor (2019:19) "certain kinds of speech are beyond tolerance" and the importance of protecting minorities from verbal abuse is just as important as people's freedom of speech. This debate involves two fundamental concepts in our society and so it is very difficult to balance them and clearly indicates where one person's freedom of speech ends and the other's right to not to be verbally abused starts. As hate speech and its impressive spread online is a fairly new concept, the legal issue is still developing. Chetty and Alathur (2018: 111) present a table that clearly explains the evolution of the legal framework established by some of the main international communities for human rights.

Table 1: International legal frameworks of hate speech (Hate speech review in the context of online social networks)

Table 1
International legal frameworks for hate speech.

S. no.	International body	Adaptation year	Free speech article no.	Rights on free speech	Hate speech article no.
1	UDHR	1948	19	• Hold opinions • Seek information and ideas • Receive information and ideas • Impart information and ideas	29(2)
2	ECHR	1950	10(1)	• Hold opinions • Receive information and ideas • Impart information and ideas	10(2)
3	ICCPR	1976	19(2)	• Seek information and ideas • Receive information and ideas • Impart information and ideas	19(3) 20(1) 20(2)
4	ICERD	1969	–	–	4

- Law determines the restrictions
- Restrictions are meant to respect rights and freedom of others
- Restrictions are to attain morality, public order, and welfare of society.

- Retaining national security, territorial integrity or public safety
- Prevention of disorder or Crime
- Protection of health or morals
- Protection of the reputation or rights of others
- Preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence
- Maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary
- To maintain the respect for the rights or reputations of others
- Protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals
- Prohibit propaganda for war
- Prohibit advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred
- Condemn propagandas based on ideas of superiority of one race or group of persons of one color or ethnic origin
- Condemn the attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form
- Undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of such discrimination.

Another example on legal procedures taken to counteract the spread of hateful language is the Section 2(a) of the Lanham. This acts bars the United States Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) from registering trademarks that "may disparage" a group of people. The current registration of the act says:

> No trademark by which the goods of the applicant may be distinguished from the goods of others shall be refused registration on the principal register on account of its nature. [...]. A mark which would be likely to cause dilution by blurring or dilution by tarnishment under section 1125(c) of this title, may be refused registration only pursuant to a proceeding brought under section 1063 of this title. A registration for a mark which would be likely to cause dilution by blurring or dilution by tarnishment under section 1125(c) of this title, may be canceled pursuant to a proceeding brought under either section 1064 of this title or section 1092 of this title.

1.3 Targets and Perpetrators

Hate speech can be differentiated on the basis of the category that it refers to, but also of its target. Hate speech thrives online and that gives one the chance to analyze written material and discern the characteristics of different types of hate speech depending on who is being attacked. El Sherief et al. (2018:43) identify two main categories: directed and generalized hate speech.

Directed hate speech is more personal and it suggests "intentional action". It uses specific words that hamper the credibility of the target and their actions and usually; its attacks are based on gender or sexuality. Moreover directed hate speech has an angrier tone and it is more informal than generalized hate speech. Generalized hate speech is typically used against categories of different religions. It uses words that incite physical violence and murderous intent.

Leandro, et al. (2016:689) gather their dataset from two different social media: Twitter and Whisper. The former is one of the most famous and widely used social media platforms, and it gives one the possibility to convey one's opinion faster than any other social media. It is not anonymous but there is still the possibility to create a fake account and hide behind a false identity. Whisper on the other hand makes one's post anonymous, giving a more protected environment to those who write hateful posts. At the end of this study, the authors were able to identify nine main categories that are the targets of hate speech on these two sites.

Table 2: Analyzing the Targets of Hate in Online Social Media

Twitter		Whisper	
Categories	**% posts**	**Categories**	**% posts**
Race	48.73	Behavior	35.81
Behavior	37.05	Race	19.27
Physical	3.38	Physical	14.06
Sexual orientation	1.86	Sexual orientation	9.32
Class	1.08	Class	3.63
Ethnicity	0.57	Ethnicity	1.96
Gender	0.56	Religion	1.89
Disability	0.19	Gender	0.82
Religion	0.07	Disability	0.41
Other	6.50	Other	12.84

Although the corpus for this research was substantial (20,305 tweets and 7,604 whispers) we can say for certain that it does not represent the entirety of hate speech posts that we can find on these sites. Many of them are written in order to not be detected. The use of * or modifying the words with the use of numbers instead of letters is very common (qu33r, f*aggot…). Another reason for this auto-censorship is in order to not be detected by the algorithm of some sites, which automatically delete posts or videos that contain these words.

Despite all the measures that sites can adopt, the internet is still a suitable environment for hate groups to recruit new allies and create group identities. Even though the members of these groups do not know each other, they are connected by the same ideals and the total conviction of their superiority compared to the target groups of their hateful posts. These accounts tend to be very active and even though they are suspended they resurface with new accounts and they support one another by sharing each other's content. This behavior results in the spreading of hateful content which is "faster, farther and reaches a much wider audience as compared to the content generated by users that do not produce hate speech" (Siegel, 2020: 12).

1.3 Effects

Derogatory language and hate speech are not just annoying forms of hate. They have a specific role in the sequence of events that often lead to violence. Allport (1954: 57) argues that anti-Semitic speech preceded the passing of the Nuremberg Laws during the Nazi regime "Here we see the not infrequent progression: antilocution > avoidance> discrimination > physical attacks >extermination". This scheme on the evolution of hate from hateful words to violent action is known as the Allport's scale of prejudice. In addition, Cervone et al. (2020:89) note that the effects of hate speech and derogatory language can be seen by both targets and bystanders.

As concerns the targets, the damage of hate speech is both physical and psychological. In the experiment conducted by Greenburg and Pyszczynski (1985), the subjects were asked to participate in a debate. During this debate, one of the debaters was always black. It was shown how hate speech can influence an observer's judgment negatively. The evaluation given by white participants to black participants who lost the

debate was lower after the latter were described using racial slurs. Other psychological effects on the target are "mental or emotional distress, challenges of self-worth and restriction in personal freedom." (Cowan & Hodge, 1996:356). Derogatory language can also lead targets to harmful behavior such as smoking, substance abuse and even attempt suicide (Cervone et al, 2021: 88). For example the National Library of Medicine (2016) attests that.

> The suicide attempt rate among transgender persons ranges from 32% to 50% across the countries. Gender-based victimization, discrimination, bullying, violence, being rejected by the family, friends, and community; harassment by intimate partner, family members, police and public; discrimination and ill treatment at health-care system are the major risk factors that influence the suicidal behavior among transgender persons.

Bystanders who are exposed to hate speech and derogatory language often become used to this type of language. Desensitization is a very common process in human beings, but not often studied when talking about hate speech. In the study carried on by Soral, Bilewicz and Winiewski (2018), participants were shown examples of hate speech directed at LGBT people and Muslims. The result showed that "people who frequently encounter examples of hate speech are less inclined to perceive hate speech as an offensive and abusive phenomenon" (Soral el al, 2018:139). This phenomenon, although less evident, is a risk factor because through desensitization people do not recognize hate speech (and consequently hate crimes) as immoral and reprehensible but as the norm.

Chapter Two:
Reappropriation and self-labeling

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the processes that may lead to the reappropriation of derogatory terms, by giving them new meanings for the community that was initially attacked by those terms. It will be seen that for such processes to be successful, what is needed is a strong sense of community.

2.1 Approaches towards stigma

Jeshion defines *stereotype semantics of slurs* as the use of slurs with the intent to "semantically encode and express or conventionally implicate stereotypes of the group that is referenced by the slur's neutral counterpart" (2013:314). This means that slurs, besides the plain offensive meaning, bring with them stereotypes that are linked to the minority that are addressed with that slur. For example with the word "queer" used in a pejorative sense, women may be shamed for being hyper-sexual or not feminine enough (Worthen, 2022:2). These stereotypes become heavily linked with these communities and can also be perceived as stigmas which are almost impossible to change or erase. In order to change the view of these communities there are many different approaches that can help change these stereotypes and free minorities from these stigmas.

Cook et al. (2014:104) divide these interventions into the following: structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interventions on a structural level are meant to have an impact on a social level and as a consequence affect a large number of people. These can range from policies and laws made to protect minorities to educational interventions. Interpersonal interventions can be developed in social situations between stigmatized and non-stigmatized groups. For example, intergroup contact encourages people from the non-stigmatized groups to interact, especially in person, with those stigmatized. Lastly, intragroup interventions are targeted toward the individual and can be further divided into interventions for the members of stigmatized groups and those who are not part of these groups. The aim of the former is to help the members of stigmatized groups cope with the stigma and change harmful habits derived from shame and public judgment (Cook et al., 2014:103). Encouraging a sense of belonging to a group or a community is one of these

interventions. The latter aims to reduce stereotypical notions that non-stigmatized people may have. Education can be a valuable means as often stereotypes derive also from cultural ignorance (Cook et al.,2014:104).

Every intervention mentioned above has as its goal the gradual elimination of stereotypes and stigmas both in the minds of those who use derogatory language against minorities but also in those who are the targets of this language. However the latter need strategies to protect themselves as prejudice is still very present in our society. Wang et al. (2017:26) offer an insight into what the most common strategies are. The most immediate is to hide away from the stigma and keep a certain distance from being recognized as part of a certain community. In the LGBT community this strategy acquired its own name as it is so common, especially among young people: "being in the closet ". "The insect that stole the butter?" Oxford's dictionary on the origins of this phrase reveals that its etymology is from the beginning of the 17th century. The closet in American English originally indicated a small room dedicated to studying or praying. The privacy that this small room provided also evoked the idea of hiding something. Being in the closet means that the person is keeping something a secret, in this case their sexual identity (Cresswell, 2009:90). This evasion of the stigma can be effective in order not to be recognized as part of a stigmatized group but it leaves the initial stigma untouched and still able to harm and spread hate (Wang et al., 2017:76).

Stigmas are a product of our society and can be challenged. Processes like reframing and self-labeling may, instead of eliminating words that are associated with the stigma, change their meaning into a more positive one. Through the operation of reframing, characteristics that are seen as liabilities are changed and seen with a different lens and transformed into assets. One of the most harmful stigmas linked to the LGBT community since the 1980s is HIV. Philbin assess how the reframing of HIV as a disease helped to starting to heal this stigma. During the 1980s, HIV was considered as exceptional, due to methods of transmission and how it affected both racial and sexual minorities. The change of status of this disease from exceptional to unexceptional chronic helped create an environment where being tested and treated became a clinical routine. Society achieved a normalization of this procedure even though it is only on a healthcare level (Philbin, 2014:290).

Self-labeling purposely embraces slurs and takes away their pejorative connotation and makes them empowering (Wang et al., 2017:78). Galinsky et al. (2003) differentiate between the connotative and denotative meanings of words and how the connotative meaning is based on social context. They argue that manipulating the connotative meaning of words is useful in order for the non-stigmatized to distance themselves from the stigmatized and maintain a sense of superiority (Galinsky et al., 2003:229). On another hand the stigmatized group can change the connotative meaning of "queer" from a discriminating slur to a "tool of acceptance" which allows the community to celebrate their differences and not be ashamed of them.

## 2.2 The importance of group identification

Although the act of reappropriation comes from within the stigmatized group, it cannot start as an act from just an individual or a small part of the community. Cohesion and the collaboration of the whole group are fundamental for the sake of the true reappropriation of slurs, according to Galinsky, as it implies going against the hierarchy of power. Cohesion is described by Festinger et al. (1950:164) as "the total field of forces that act on members to remain in the group". This force field has two sources: the group's attractiveness and the group's ability to help members achieve their goals. As stated by Herny et al. (1999:564) cohesion is a source for group identification however these two terms are not interchangeable.

Magee (2008:16) describes social power as "asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations" and states that derogatory language is needed by those who have power to maintain the difference of power between what they hold and what the stigmatized hold. Empirical studies have been made specifically on the effect that homophobic labels have on outgroup discrimination. Fasoli et al. (2014) conducted an experiment whose objective was to assess whether derogatory language produces discriminatory allocation of resources. The experiment consisted in exposing the heterosexual participants to homophobic labels and then have them allocate fake resources to two prevention programs. The first was about sterility prevention, dedicated to heterosexual couples, while the other was for AIDS-HIV prevention for people at high risk (homosexuals being part of this category). The study showed that heterosexuals were

more encouraged to give more funds to the cause of their ingroup after hearing derogatory labels directed to the outgroup (in this case homosexuals) (Fasoli et al., 2014:389).

As stated by Cervone (2020:85), "Slurs not only keep social minorities in their subordinate position, but also assure the privileged position of the dominant group." and reappropriation takes away this tool from the dominant group. Galinsky et al. (2003:236) give a very clear explanation of how self-labeling becomes more powerful when recognized and accepted by more people of the ingroup by means of the following figure.

Figure 1 The reappropriation of stigmatizing labels: implications for social identity (Galinsky et al 2003:236)
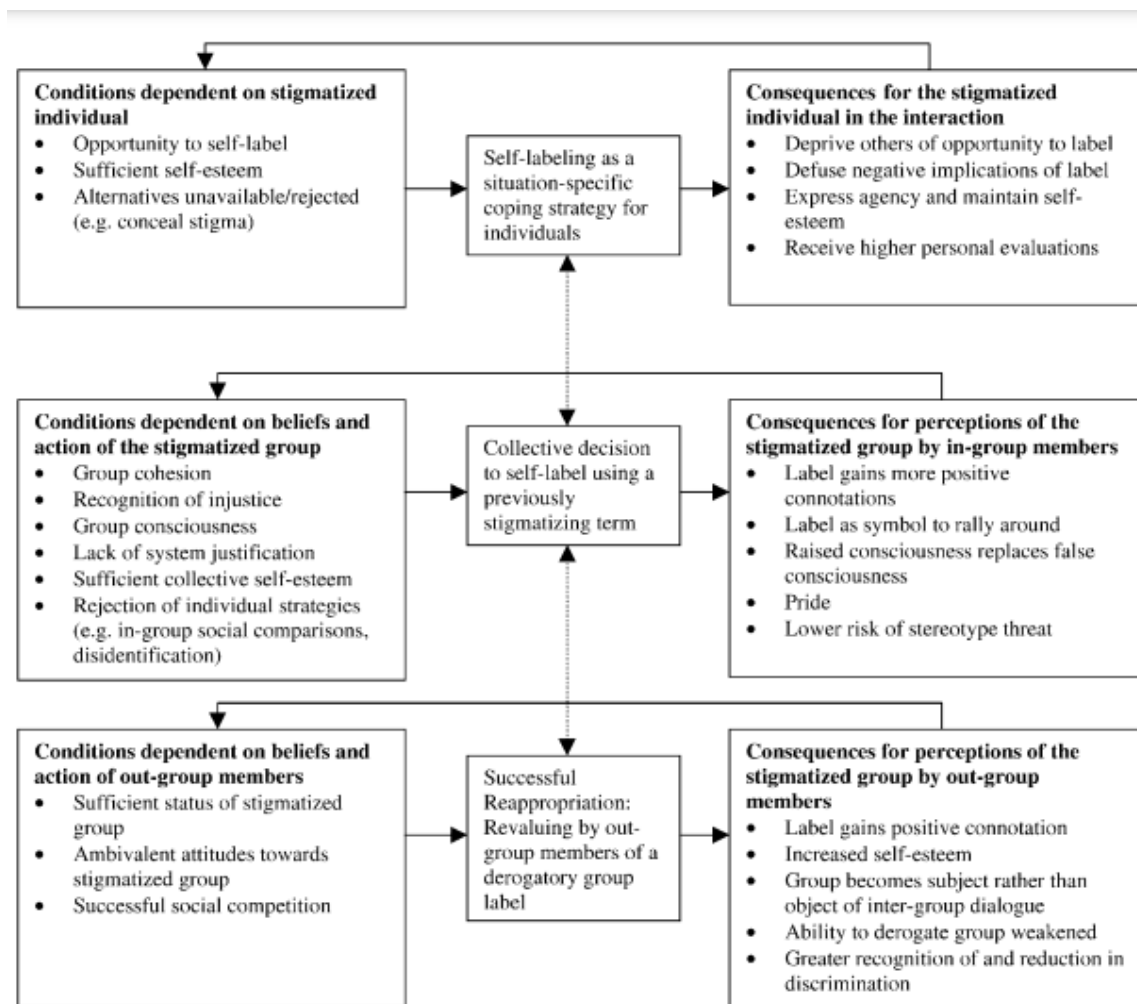
Through this figure it is easy to understand how reappropriation has a different effects if it is initiated by an individual or by a collective of the ingroup. It is proposed

that for an individual to use reappropriation of slur as a coping strategy, the subject needs self-confidence. It is also important to say that is used as a situation-specific mechanism and not a long term process. It is clear that self-labeling as an individual can have positive effect but only on the subject who is able to self-label and has found the condition to do so. On the other hand, through what Galinsky (2003:228) defines as "social creativity" it may be possible to overcome the negative implications of stigma. The reappropriation does not necessarily change the underlying meaning of the slur, but it negates the derogatory connotative meaning. In the case of the slur *queer* the denotative meaning of difference is kept but instead of implying deviance it highlights a difference that can and must be celebrated (2003:232).

Cervone et al.(2021:91) further support this through a polysemy perspective by affirming that

> "reclamation only takes place if several people use the new meaning, whereas according to the echoic perspective, small acts of reclamation are possible and can eventually lead to polysemy".

Additionally, the collective action of self-labeling can start a positive cycle in the ingroup, even for the people who initially wanted to distance themselves from it. Whitson et al. (2017:93) attest that group identification can stimulate self-labeling and self-labeling can strengthen group identification. Fink et al. (2003:297) state that the perception of power can have a major role in interpersonal communication as "those who are perceived as more powerful are less often challenged" and communicators are perceived as having more power than listeners. This affirmation can find empirical ground through Kaplowitz et al. (1998:103-119), as they were able to show that if the agent is perceived as having more power, the observers of the conversation are more likely to think that the target of the sentence will comply. Likewise targets that are seen as more powerful are seen as less likely to comply. Following this logic, self-labeling takes away the power from the outgroup and is redistributed to the ingroup. This new sense of power is perceived by both the ingroup but also the outgroup and the observers.

These are many of the reasons for why group identification is fundamental in order for language reappropriation to work.

Group identification is different from cohesion as it is an action that starts from an individual. Bouas et al (1996:156) states that:

"Members of groups with strong group identity will readily identify themselves as members, will feel positively about their group, will enjoy interacting as a member of the group".

Furthermore the power that self-labeling can give to a group may increase "group consciousness". Usually this term is used regarding the political affiliation to a part. However, this term can also be applied to the sense of belonging to other social groups. Miller et al. (1981:495) define group consciousness as "a perceived self-location within a particular social stratum, along with a psychological feeling of belonging to that particular stratum". Galinsky (2003:240) affirms that group consciousness "requires recognition that stigmatization is a group-level, or social, phenomenon and not just an individual experience". For this reason group consciousness and group identification are two elements that have an influence on each other and which are both necessary in order to effectively reappropriate a label.

Chapter 2.3 The effects of linguistic reappropriation

Galinsky et al. (2002) conducted an experiment in order to provide empirical evidence on the effects of self-labeling. Participants were exposed to a scenario in which two individuals at high school came across each other in the school's hallway. It was previously suggested that new information had been discovered about one of the students. In the first scenario Tom labels Bill by saying "You're queer". In the other scenario Bill introduces himself to Tom saying "I'm queer". Following this scenario participants were asked to rate the different situations using different semantic differentials like weak-strong. This task has as an objective to reflect on the effect of self-labeling has on an individual level. Bill was evaluated positively when he self-labeled as queer. In this same experiment the same participants were given another task: rate following a scale of negative (-,--) or positive (+,++) evaluation a list of words. Participants rated the semantic associates to the word queer more positively after the scenario of self-labeling.

It is possible to observe that one of the main effects of language reappropriation is the effect that it has on observers. Witnessing self-labeling was able to influence the opinion of bystanders and have a positive impact on how they perceived the connotative meaning of the slur. Linguistic reappropriation can also be a tool that can help people to accept and normalize a certain condition for the individual. An example of this effect can be witnessed in the mental health area. Being diagnosed and treated for mental illness creates a stigma not only surrounding the individual but also inside the patience. This phenomenon is called the "fundamental paradox of self stigma" and people with mental illnesses will internalize the stigmas associated with their illness and are the cause for further effects on the subject like lowering self-esteem, depression and reluctance to seek help (Corringan et al., 2006:36).

Figure 2: The Paradox of Self-Stigma and Mental Illness (2006:38)

The study conducted by Moses (2009) gives an initial analysis on how self-labeling is linked to psychological well-being, particularly for adolescents. It appears that participants who began receiving treatment at a younger age were more likely to self-label (Moses 2009:577). This could be reasoned with the fact that these people had more

time to develop a stable sense of self and resist the changes in self concept. Moreover Corrigan (2002) states that:

> we would expect that persons with psychiatric stigma who identify with peers would show a greater sense of empowerment. Consistent with previous factor analyses on empowerment, this increment would correspond with increased self-esteem and righteous anger (Moses 2002:44).

It is easy to see the contribution that being able to identify with a community gives to people that are stigmatized in the society. Not having to hide and being detached from the community not only gives a sense of power to the person but helps eliminate the self-stigma imposed by the subjects themselves and alleviate them, from all the consequential negative effects like low self-esteem and depression. Lord et al (1985) describe people who are part of minority groups as "tokens": people especially in the workplace that are underrepresented and the only ones part of their social category (1985: 918). Being considered a token can dampen the normal cognitive capability as they are always under the pressure of being distinguishable by both the observer and themselves. However, the reappropriation of stigmatizing labels and being able to be appreciated by both the ingroup and the outgroup may facilitate the participation of the individual in the community and eliminate the cognitive burden deriving from the stigma (Galinsky, 2003:248). Furthermore the participation of all the individuals of the same group can enlarge the pool of information at disposal for the entire group, information that was unshared before because of the stigma. Lingen et al. (2013:3), through the studies of Chatman (1991), define the limited information around stigmas both in the outgroup and the ingroup as "poverty information" and affirm:

> social conditions of marginalization shape information practices in highly localized ways; she described the dynamics she saw as "information poverty." How people experience information poverty varies, but when people are information poor, they perceive a dearth of information resources that speak to their world view, are suspicious of information from outsiders, and engage in deception to maintain a sense of control over everyday life.

Reappropriation allows the individuals to share their experiences and information with the community even if these are "unique or disconfirming" (Galinsky, 2003:248). Additionally having these new pieces of information coming from within the community may relinquish skepticism towards them as information poverty is a result of doubt of information especially from outsiders.

**Chapter 2.4 The debate over language reappropriation**

The debate over language reappropriation is to this day very controversial. De Lameter (1968:454) affirms that "[S]elf labeling may produce as much of a self-fulfilling prophecy as does labeling by society's agents." meaning that stigmatized individuals simply come to terms with their negative status and learn to live with the shame and guilt as they are not able to escape from the negative connotation and stereotypes surrounding their community. This view is for example completely different from the results of language reappropriation shown by Galinsky (2003). Language reappropriation can be seen as a tool for stigmatized communities to reclaim their identities but it is not a smooth process. In order for it to achieve significant importance it needs a cohesive community, group identification and individuals who are willing to self-label. All these requirements may be met and still not be able to start a process of true reappropriation. Brontsema (2004:5) represents two different diagrams that can easily explain how the discourse is divided.

Figure 3: Traditional Representation of the Debate over Linguistic Reclamation (Brontsema 2004:5)
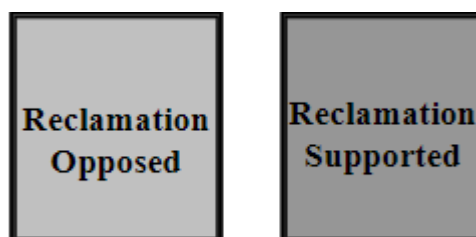
In this representation of the debate, we can see a clear division between those who are against the reappropriation of discriminatory language (Reclamation Opposed) and those who are in favor of the reappropriation (Reclamation Supported). However this debate can be further analyzed and this division becomes less polarized.

Figure 4: Reconceptualization of the Debate over Linguistic Reclamation
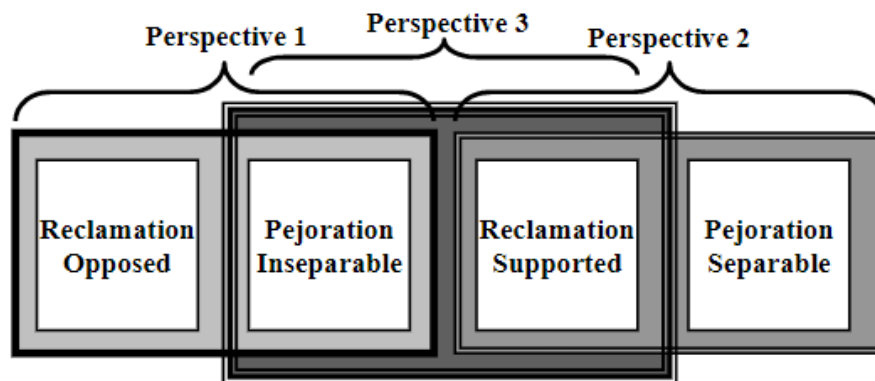
With this new vision of the debate, it is possible to witness the addition of one new view. The first perspective, Pejorative Inseparable: Reclamation Opposed, is the idea that it is impossible to discern the slur from its pejorative meaning and it should not be used. As stated by Brontsema (2004:6)

> The pejoration cannot be removed from the word; indeed, the word and its pejorative meaning are indistinguishable. The hate, the pain, the violence is locked in that word forever, and therefore the word itself must be locked away in the attic of a collective linguistic memory. Bringing out the word would necessarily bring out the pain

This view is usually supported by those who have suffered the discrimination and hate that slurs bring. For this reason there is a clear division due to age difference. For example "[They] still lick the psychic and physical wounds inflicted by the word 'Queer'" (Sillanpoa 1994:57)". Pain was inflicted by the outgroup, it is not endogenous of the ingroup and it cannot be reclaimed. In the second perspective, Pejorative Inseparable: Reclamation Supported, there is the idea that the pejorative meaning of the word cannot be changed; however there is still the desire on the part of the stigmatised community to reclaim the slur. The stigma should remain and be underlined as a means to challenge what the outgroup considers the status-quo. It is transformed into an instrument to

challenge what society thinks is normal. For this reason the stigma is needed, as without the pejorative meaning it loses its power, its ability to cause discomfort and get the attention. The third perspective is Pejorative Separable: Reclamation Supported. In this last view, it is argued that it is possible to separate the slur from its pejorative meaning.

Through the process of reappropriation it is possible to change the meaning to a neutral or even positive meaning. This view is in total contrast with the first persepective (Figure 4). Those who support this view are a younger base; they did not suffer the injuries both physical and emotional of the slurs. This also completely differs from the second perspective as its main objective is for slurs to lose their power. Through the neutralization of the slurs, the word becomes void and is then forgotten. On the other hand, the objective may be to make it acquire a positive meaning (value reversal). All three views have their own reasoning and their problems. Pejorative Inseparable: Reclamation Opposed does not recognize the ability of language to mutate and continually change. It also implies that power and ownership on wors cannot change. Pejorative inseparable Reclamation Supported is based entirely on the belief that the group is able to control the use of the slur. It is impossible to predict how the words will be used in the future and with which connotation. Pejorative Separable: Reclamation Supported fails to realize that it is exactly the pejorative meaning that fuels the process of reappropriation. The change in value of the slur cannot be completely upturned as it still brings the scars of the violence it has brought in the past.

The difficulty in recognizing reappropriation continues also in legal matters. It may be difficult for the law to recognize if the use of slurs uses the purpose of reclamation or if it is used with a pejorative meaning. For example the Section 2(a) of the Lanham Act bars the United States Patent and Trademark Offtice (PTO) from registering trademarks that may disparage a group of people. In this case the act does not account for trademarks that are part of the process of reappropriation. The mark "DYKES ON BIKES" was stopped from being registered by attorney Sharon A. Meier as the word "dyke" is a slur used to identify lesbian and it was seen as disparaging. The mark was submitted by members of the lesbian community, offering products and services targeted towards lesbians. The president of the organization explained that "[They] self-identify as dykes on bikes". Examining attorneys usually do not take into consideration the applicants' self-identity. Anten (2006:391) argues that "This formal neutrality, however,

has resulted in inconsistent and contradictory evaluations of self-disparaging marks". Anten then proceeds to explain how the disparaging marks must be contextualized and the approach of the attorneys must take this into consideration when refusing or approving the mark.

Disparaging marks are then divided in three categories (Anten, 2006:411): contextually disparaging marks, intrinsically disparaging marks and self-disparaging marks. Contextually disparaging marks are marks that become offensive based on who uses them and how. An example can be the use of the word "Black" in Black Tail, an adult entertainment magazine, as it is linked to the constant sexualization of African-American women. Intrinsically disparaging marks on the other hand are offensive in any context. An example can be Jap, a brand of clothing, which is a slur which refers to Japanese people. Finally there are self-disparaging marks which are "marks that an examining attorney would usually consider to be intrinsically disparaging based on the mere presence of a slur, but for the fact that the applicant is a member of the allegedly disparaged group" (Anten 2006:412). These marks are usually treated like the other categories. However in the last years they have been going through a revision in order to allow their registration as they are seen as a badge of self-approval by those that are part of stigmatized communities. It is clear to see that reappropriation of slurs has reached legal authorities and has been recognized as an instrument of liberation and pride although the road for complete reappropriation is still long it is possible to witness this change in our contemporaneity.

In conclusion in this chapter the possible methods that people from stigmatized groups can use to protect themselves from hate and approach stigma have been analyzed. Through this analyses it is relevant to recognize how the reappropriation of a slur is able to empower both the individuals inside these communities and the community as a whole. Fundamental for this process of reappropriation is the presence of a group that is cohesive and individuals that have group consciousness and group identification. The effects that reappropriation has on both individuals and the community as a whole have been mentioned. Finally the debate over language reappropriation is investigated by considering all the parties, their ideologies and problems.

Chapter 3
Analysis and evolution of the slur "queer"

The aim of this chapter is to explore the history of the word *queer* and how its connotation has changed over time. I will investigate this evolution from a diachronic point of view and the research will include the use of the word today on social media with the objective to see if the reappropriation of the slur has been effective.

3.1 History of the word *queer*

The word *queer* its first appearance at the end of the 14th century as a verb and it meant "to ask, to inquire" and according to the Oxford English dictionary it is a product of putting together French, Latin and English. Its spelling was also different as it could be found written both as "to quere" or as "to quire". It was at the beginning of the 16th century that it was introduced into the English language as an adjective with the meaning of "strange, odd, peculiar". It is said to derive from the German word *quer,* which means "oblique, perverse" but it is not a confirmed theory (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018)

The first written example of the word *queer* used as a slur can be seen in 1894 after John Douglas the 9th Marquess of Queensberry accused Oscar Wilde of being a "Posing somdommite". Being gay was a criminal offense at the time and in order to protect his reputation Oscar Wild sued Queensberry for defamation. In the original letter, the Marquess describes gay men as "Snob Queers", affirming the word *queers* as a slur. Immediately after American newspapers adopted the term as it underlined oddity and distortion from the norm (Morgan, 2019:12).

The term *queer* was later reclaimed during the AIDS epidemic. During the many protests that took place at the time, one of the most popular cries during the rallies was "We're here, we're queer, we will not live in fear". In the late 1980s and early 1990s, activists reunited to create safe spaces for their communities and form organizations. One of the most notable examples is "Queer Nation". It was founded in 1990 by activists from ACT UP New York (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) after the escalation of violence against

LGBT people in New York (Queer Nation NY, 2016). The name Queer Nation was chosen as "the most popular vernacular term of abuse for homosexuals" (Dynes 1990: 1091). Moreover the word *queer* was used as it was not exclusionary and assimilationist like other terms like lesbian or gay. It was more inclusive as it did not put any restriction on either gender nor sexuality. During the same period of time Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones published the first edition of J.D.s, which would coin the term "queercore", a term used to describe queer punk music. The slur *queer* was purposely chosen to confront the homophobic use of the word. These are some of the reasons that made the early 1990s the start of the reappropriation of the slur *queer*.

In 1999 the reclamation of the word *queer* reached mainstream representation through the show "Queer as Folk"(Dazed, 28th July 2016). The show gained much criticism for its explicit format and uncensored topic and mainly focused on white cisgender gay men. However it can be seen as the starting point for queer representation on a platform that could reach a large number of people. Today the word *queer* is linked to its use in academic contexts. Queer theory and queer linguistics use the contemporary connotation of the slur highlighting the study through a non-heteronormative lens and detaching themselves from social constructs of sexual orientation and gender (Zosky et al., 2016:600). Queer theory focuses on the deconstruction and debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities and considers one's identity not as a binary aspect, both in gender and in sexuality, but as a "constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (Jagose, 1994). Moreover it is able to trace back through an historical lens how:

> [...] certain identities (such as the homosexual) were attached to individuals instead of acts/behaviours, and these individuals were then constituted as an object of knowledge (through scientific statements about 'types' and 'traits') and thus subject to disciplinary power (Watson, 2005:70)

Meanwhile queer linguistics is the study of how "language enables (and at times disguises) the intersections of sexuality, gender, race, class, and other forms of social inequality" (Leap et al., 2015:661). The need for queer linguistics is justified in the introduction of Sedgwick's book "Epistemology of the closet" (1990). Sexuality is considered as an ever present element of humans' lives and can be found in every aspect

of their social life, including language. For this reason not considering sexuality in discourse analysis would deprive the study of a fundamental aspect.

3.1.1 Other uses of the word *queer* today

Brontsema (year) affirms that various modalities of the use of the word queer co-exist in our society. This phenomenon is indicative of the extensive possibilities the reappropriation of the word *queer* can create. For example those who are self-identified queers do not use the slur as a replacement for either *straight* or *gay*. They see in the term *queer* a more inclusive term for sexualities that are different from heterosexual and genders other than cisgender. However this distinction includes non-normative sexual practices such as "

Queer straights, sadomasochists, fetishists, etc.—any non-normative sexuality or sexual practice could theoretically claim queerness" (2004:12).

In this case, society has failed to recognized the real use of this word for the ingroup and has modified it at its core. This goes to demonstrate how the intent behind reappropriating can be misunderstood or even betrayed. Another misuse of the term *queer* is perpetrated by media like pop television. The inclusiveness that the word tries to portray is often ignored by the media and is used to identify gay men. For example "Queer eye for the straight guy" is an American reality show aired in 2003. The aim of the series was to perform a "makeover" of the lifestyle of a straight man. The team that worked towards this objective was called by the "Fabfive" and was composed of five gay cisgender men even if the title suggests a more diverse group. This can be considered one of the many examples of the distorted use of the word *queer* by the media as a synonym of gay men, ignoring its original meaning of inclusiveness.

3.2 A diachronic analysis of the word *queer*

It is possible to recreate a straightforward and clear analysis of the use of the word *queer* through the use of different tools. In order to track the evolution of the word *queer* through

history one of the sites that can be helpful is COHA: the Corpus of Historical American English. COHA is the largest structured corpus of historical English. The corpus offers an overview of American English from the 1820s to the 2010s and is divided into each decade. It is also possible to see how commonly used the word was by looking at the intensity of the color blue of each cell.

	ALL	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
QUEER	9584	22	93	129	292	273	554	592	703	954	1272	1287	1033	740	490	348	216	163	138	122	163

It is clear that it is during the 1850s that the word started to be more commonly used. During this time the word *queer* still had a connotative meaning of weird, unusual, and peculiar. There are many examples but in particular, it can be seen often in the work of Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" or "The Whale" from 1851. For example:

Still New Bedford is a *queer* place. Had it not been for us whalemen, that tract of land would this day perhaps have been in as howling condition as the coast of Labrador.

It is possible to confirm with which intent the word *queer* is used by looking at its translation in the Italian edition. In fact, this passage is translated as follows:

Nuova Bedford è ancora un luogo *strano*. Se non fosse stato per noi balenieri, quel tratto di terra sarebbe oggi forse nella stessa desolata condizione della costa del Labrador

The use of the word *queer* in the media still maintains its meaning of peculiar without the derogative connotation as in the 1940s. A clear example is given by the movie "Seven Sinners" (1940). The movie is an American drama romance film directed by Tay Garnett.

I've raised Susie from an egg, Doc. I've seen some *queer* riffraff.

The use of the pejorative and derogative meaning of the word *queer* can be witnessed starting from the 1970s. The animated movie "Heavy traffic" for example is a live-

action/animated comedy-drama film written and directed by Ralph Baksh in 1973. This animation is oriented toward an older audience and uses very crude and explicit language.

> A lousy, no-good *queer*! Oh, Fantastic! Oh, Fantastic! A *queer*! I'll kill ya, cocksucker! Fuckin fag!

The use of the slur continued in the 1980s. It is used in the book "The Dean's December" (1982) by Saul Bellow. In one of the passages:

> Leo's hips... that perfectly sculpted little butt she had wiped and powdered... and once, in London, in an ecstasy of mother love, had planted kisses all over before stopping herself: she didn't want to turn him into a *queer* or something. It made her sick, the thought of Leo and Cookie Cunningham. Not that she didn't want her son to be normal, but somehow Lydia prayed that his initiation into sex had not been with that manipulative girl.

In this passage, it is even clearer that the use of the word *queer* has a specific role. The word *queer* is linked to the role of two men in a sexual relationship. As stated by Stephen (2002:103):

> those men who took the passive or feminine role were considered 'queer.' A man who took the 'active role,' who inserted his penis into another man, remained a 'straight' man, even when he had an on-going relationship with a man who took the passive role.

In the 1990s it is possible to witness the coexistence of the various possibilities of the use of the word *queer*. The original meaning of the word as an adjective for something weird is still in use, but however it can be considered an outdated word. In the collection of stories by Harry Harrison "Stainless Steel Vision" (1993):

> She did not want to wake up in the morning to all the pleasure that Liz had promised her and have the day spoiled by a *queer* feeling of incompleteness.

Despite this, the use of the word *queer* in a derogatory sense is more common than before. In the movie "The cure" (1995) for example:

> When he fell of the Jungle Jim at school, Daddy take him to the hospital, he could've caught something in... Yeah, but he didn't... But he could've! Then everybody be calling him faggot and *queer*, and he'd get sick and die! And you got homo on his headstone, and when your mother went to bring him flowers

Likewise the word can be found in the fantasy and science fiction "The vessel" (1999) by Orson Scott Card:

> Their eyes met. Deckle walked around the pool toward him. "I wasn't doing anything, you *queer*," said Deckle. "And what were you doing watching, anyway, you queer? "The words struck home.

Simultaneously, the use of *queer* as a term for group identification was gaining more popularity, even on the small screen. The American sitcom "Will & Grace" (1998) can be taken as an example. The story follows the friendship of Will Truman, a gay lawyer, and Grace Adler, a straight interior designer. Despite the criticism that this show faced as it portrayed gay characters in a stereotypical way, it is considered to this day to have had an important role in improving public opinion of the LGBT community.

> I'm acting like a straight guy, and it's making me sick. I took an oath in front of God, and my mother! I'm here, I'm *queer*, get used to it.

Another example is given by the collection of novels by Brian Bouldrey titled "Beast American gay fiction" (1996). The objective of this collection is to reflect the emotional and literary diversity of gay writing in the 1990s.

> Here is a way that *queer* writing is queered in a more subtle way: not just in showing gay men in gay sexual situations, but in providing a means of looking at the whole world through pink-coloured glasses.

In the 2000s the use of *queer* as an adjective to indicate something weird fell even more into disuse. What did continue is the coexistence of the use of *queer* as both a slur and an "umbrella term" to identify LGBT people.

In the American medical drama "ER" (2001) there is a scene of very intense verbal abuse directed towards one of the characters:

-Stay the hell away from me, you *queer*.

- Carl, let me drive you home.

- I don't dig penises, okay?

- I have only one more operation.

- Touch me, I swear

-Hey. You need to calm down.

-Calm down? This thing makes me look like some twisted fairy

In the book "Rainbow Boys" by Alex Sánchez (2001) one of the characters self identifies as queer to another character as a *queer*:

Let's get this out. You know I'm *queer*, I know you're *queer*. Get over it. " He turned and started to walk away. Kyle felt a rush, like he'd burst from the water after a high dive. He was no longer alone.

One can observe how this word is able to create a sense of bonding and safeness between the two characters, based on the knowledge that both have experienced the same shame in their lives. The use of the word that Kyle feared would be directed at him with disgust and hate is used by the other character without ill intent and as a term that entails the sharing of the same struggles and fears.

In the 2010s the reclaiming of the word continued and can be seen more often. It is used as a term to identify LGBT communities also by the outgroup. The word *queer* became an umbrella term. *Queer* is able to include lesbians and gay but also bisexual people and other different sexualities. Moreover the term is used not only for sexualities but also gender identities that are not cisgender, such as transgender and non-binary. The Huffing Post in one of its articles from 2017 entitled

"Adressing the rise of Islamophobia in Trump's America" uses the term to include all the communities that are victims of a rise of state violence:

> we intend to organize against the proposed expansion of state violence targeting people of color, undocumented people, *queer* communities, women, Muslims, and many others. On that day, we intend to resist the institutionalization of ideologies of separation and subordination, including white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia, Islamophobia, and virulent nationalism.

The process of reappropriation is still ongoing, however, as it is still possible to witness the use of queer as a slur.

What spray shit did you put in it? It ain't spray. I'm not fucking *queer*. There's gel on it, you fucking prick. - You sure you're not... - Yeah, the guy... - a little bit of a queer? - that out it gave me the stuff. For example in the neo-noir crime American movie "Killing them softly" (2012)

Nevertheless the meaning of the word *queer* in younger generations is the umbrella term. This can be seen by a quick search on the Google engine. Google suggests the most relevant and most often used terms and this is the result for the word queer

Figure   1:   Search   on   google.com   of   the   word   queer

Even if the reclaiming of this slur is still in progress and the original goal may be misinterpreted by those outside the ingroup it is possible to see the effects reappropriationriation both the inside and the outside group. The attitude towards this word has changed and it is still changing. People from the LGBTQ+ community are able to use this term confidently to address all the people from their community and without excluding for example bisexuals or transgender people. This can seen

on the online site of the non-profit organisation "GLAAD". In the introduction for their sites they are defined as "the world's largest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization – increases media accountability and community engagement that ensures authentic LGBTQ stories are seen, heard, and actualized."

Looking at their most recent works it is possible to witness the use of *queer* as an umbrella term to include all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender black people. This space is titled "Black queer voices". The latest article is from 20th November in 2020 and is called "Black Bixa: bein black and queer in Brazil in 2020". The article itself was written by another queer activist and filmmaker named Dominique Griffith.

In conclusion the history of the word *queer* is easy to observe on paper thanks to its use in literature and the modern day media. Through this diachronic analysis it is possible to witness the change in the meaning of the word *queer* but also the different stances that people from the LGBTQ+ community have on the reappropriation based on the violence and hate that they have faced in their lives. Nevertheless in the minds of the general public the meaning of the word has assumed various denotative and connotative meanings that coexist.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how the reappropriation of derogatory language can change how both the people inside the stigmatised group and the people outside it. The role that derogatory language has in our society has been to maintain an already existing imbalance in power between what is considered the norm. The effects that derogatory language are clear to see but due to the too frequent exposure to these vile acts people have been getting used to it and ignore the mas they do not affect them directly. The legal actions that can be taken are still limited and oftentimes clash with the efforts of the stigmatised community as seen with the Section 2(a) of the Lanham Act but the will to expand the legal framework that works against the use of derogatory language is growing each year.

Linguistic reappropriation can help the stigmatized communities to take back some of the power of the same words that caused them pain in the past. However the debate regarding language reappropriation is still controversial as the wounds caused by slurs the memories of shame and fear are still intact in some of the people victims of this verbal abuse. Moreover reappropriation can lose its intended meaning and goal when misused for example by people from outside the community.

The word queer is one example of a still continuing but successful attempts of language reappropriation. It's history is clearly documented in both literature and mass media like movies and TV series as its denotative meanings are able to coexist in the minds of the general public. Even though the original meaning of "peculiar, weird" has now fell in disuse, it has still the double meaning of a hurtful slur and an umbrella term.

The history and the pain that this word has caused is still fresh and is still very powerful when it is used with malicious intent however, in the younger generations its preferred use does not cause harm. It creates a safe and inclusive environment for all those people who were forced to be ashamed to be who they are and now can find peace and strength with those who are like them.

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Riassunto

L'obiettivo di questa tesi è cercare di capire se la riappropriazione è realmente uno strumento che può avereun impatto reale sulla vita dei gruppi vittime del linguaggio dispregiativo e target in particola di offese basate sull'odio verso l'altro chiamato *hate speech*. La tesi si divide in tre capitoli principali.

Nel primo capitolo si va ad analizzare cos'è il linguaggio dispregiativo. Questo tipo di linguaggio non comprende solamente l'utilizzo di epiteti ma anche la manipolazione della lingua con l'obiettivo di creare disparità tra gruppi. Giles definisce questa come CAT, ovvero Tesi sulla Comunicazione-Accomodamento. In questa tesi si va a dimostrare che il linguaggio può essere modificato con l'obiettivo di creare similitudini tra i protagonisti del discorso (convergenza) o creare differenze (divergenza). Questo è solo uno dei vari esempi delle discriminazioni più implicite e nascoste create attraverso la lingua. Tra gli esempi di discriminazione più palesi invece si può trovare l' *hate speech*, un fenomeno molto comune soprattutto nelle comunità online. La possibilità di mantenere l'anonimato fa in modo di permette ad alcuni gruppi che incitano all'odio di poter operare indisturbati, evitando facilmente le contromisure adottate dai siti web che loro utilizzano. Inoltre la censura di queste parole solleva un'ulteriore dibattito dato che la totale censura di queste parole andrebbe ad intaccare il diritto di parola ed espressione, diritto protetto dalla democrazia. Nonostante ciò sono già iniziate le azioni legali da parte di enti internazionali per proteggere le vittime di *hate speech* ed impedirne la diffusione. Gli effetti che il linguaggio dispregiativo ha è chiaro da vedere. Allport è in grado di riportare in maniera schematica il ruolo che ha avuto il linguaggio agli inizi del regime nazista. Questa viene chiamata la scala del pregiudizio di Allport: l'anti locuzione, ovvero l'esplicita espressione di odio verso un gruppo esterno al proprio, l'evitare coloro che appartengono all'*outgroup,* la discriminazione, ad esempio negando all'*outgroup* servizi e beni ed infine lo sterminio dell'*outgroup*. L'utilizzo del linguaggio dell'odio oltre che sull'idea che I componenti dell'*ingroup* hanno su quelli dell'*outgroup* ha effetti devastanti anche sulla mente di coloro stigmatizzati dall'*ingroup.* Ad esempio il *National Library of Medicine* riporta che la percentuale di tentato suicidio delle persone transgender va dal 32% al 50%. Purtroppo l'utilizzo di questo linguaggio è così normalizzato all'interno della nostra società che chi ascolta ormai non ne è più affetto.

Questo fenomeno prende il nome di desensibilizzazione e i rischi che questo comporta potrebbero essere ad esempio la mancanza di riconoscere crimini di odio come disumani ma di vederli come la norma.

Il secondo capitolo analizza invece il processo dietro la riappropriazione del linguaggio da parte delle comunità stigmatizzate. I termini utilizzati per attaccare questi gruppi vengono ripresi e gli viene dato nuovo significato. Questo è uno dei vari approcci che un membro della comunità stigmatizzato può adottare per cercare di proteggersi dall'odio dell'*ingroup*. Esistono molto metodi di approccio allo stigma e si divido per categorie a seconda di chi si deve liberare dell'idea stigmatizzata dell'*outgroup*. Cook dividequesta ripartizione in tre livelli: strutturale,interpersonale e intra personale. Attraverso un intervento strutturale gli enti governativi propongono ad esempio disegni di legge per proteggere le minoranze. Con gli interventi interpersonali si cerca di creare un punto di collegamento tra la comunità stigmatizzata è quella non stigmatizzata. Infine attraverso gli interventi intragruppo si tenta di cambiare idee e comportamenti malsani adottati dai componenti dell'*outgroup* e liberarsi dai sentimenti di vergogna e odio verso se stessi, cercando invece di accettarsi. La riappropriazione del linguaggio parte proprio dall'interno del gruppo stigmatizzato e cerca di sottrarre potere allo *slur* a loro indirizzato. Perché ciò avvenga è però necessario che in gruppo vittima di questi abusi verbali sia coeso e che le persone non abbiano timore di identificarsi con esso. Come viene dimostrato da Galinsky gli effetti della riappropriazione linguistica sono molto più forti nel momento in cui l'intero gruppo partecipa a questo processo e non solo alcuni individui. Gli effetti della riappropriazione linguistica di posso invididuare sia nei membri dell'outgroup che in quelli dell'ingroup. Sottraendo potere allo *slur* anche nell'immaginario collettivo lo stigma che il gruppo porta diventa meno potente ed evidente. Per i membri dell'*outgroup* invece I benefici sono multipli. Con l'eliminazione dello stigma i membri sono più liber idi interagire tra di loro e condividere esperienze e problemi che hanno in comune. Nonostante ciò è tuttora in corso un dibattito sulla riappropriazione linguistica. Sono varie le posizioni prese ma principalmente ne possiamo osservare tre: coloro che sono contro la riappropriazione del linguaggio dato che il significato malevolo è inscindibile dalla parola, coloro che sono favorevoli alla riappropriazione consapevoli che la separazione tra significato e parola non è possibile e invece coloro che credono nella riappropriazione e nella separazione tra parola e

significato. Ciascuna di queste prese di parte ha una sua motivazione ma anche le sue mancanze.

Il terzo capitolo introduce l'analisi diacronica della parola *queer*. Questo termine al giorno d'oggi viene utilizzato come termine univoco per racchiudere tutti coloro che non si identificano come eterosessuali o cisgender. L'analisi parte con una ricerca sulla storia di questo termine. Compare all'inizio come aggettivo per determinare qualcosa di strano e peculiare ma singnificato viene stravolto. La prima apparizione di *queer* come epiteto si trova in una lettera del Marchese di Queensberry dove accusa il famoso autore Oscar Wilde di essere omosessuale. Da lì lo slur inizia a prendere piede sopratutto negli Stati Uniti. Possiamo trovare I primi tentativi di riappropriazione del termine queer negli nel 1990, durante la epidemia dell'AIDS. Oltre ai canti di protesta come "*We're queer,we're here, we will not live in fear!*" vi è la fondazione dell'organizzazione *Queer Nation*. Nel 1999 la riappropriazione di *queer* raggiunge il piccolo schermo con la messa in onda del programma *Queer as Folk* il quale, nonostante la limitata inclusione oltre a uomini gay bianchi, riesce a portare una rappresentazione veritiera e priva di stereotipi che invece si potevano vedere al tempo. Al giorno d'oggi la parola queer si può trovare anche collegato ad elementi più accademici come *queer theory* e *queer linguistics*. Purtroppo non è possibile avere il controllo su come la lingua viene utilizzata ed esistono vari esempi di come la riappropriazione del termine *queer* sia stata a volte male interpretata. Ad esempio con l'abuso dell'inclusivitá del termine da parte di persone che si auto definiscono *queer* nonostante siano eterosessuali e cisgender. Oppure I mass media che non utilizzano come sinonimo di uomo gay, ignorando la volontà di includere più sessualità e generi. Infine è possibile osservare un'analisi diacronica del termine *queer* partendo dal 1820 al 2020. La popolarità del termine aumenta durante il 1850 con il significato di strano, peculiare come è possibile vedere nell'opera di Herman Melville "Moby Dick". L'uso con il suo significato dispregiativo inizia a diventare comune nel 1970. Come ad esempio nel film di animazione per adulti del 1973 "*Heavy Traffic*". Con gli inizi degli anni 90 è possibile osservare la convivenza del valore negativo di *queer* contemporaneamente al suo utilizzo come termine "ombrello" per la comunità LGBT. Nelle nuove generazioni il significato di *queer* che salta per primo alla mente è con il suo valore riappropriato come è possibile vedere da una veloce ricerca su google.con.