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**Slang and identity in the LGBTQ+ community
and Generation Z**

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Abstract

Both the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z have a strong online presence, but also a strong desire to communicate their identity and differentiate themselves from non-members of their groups, which they do through their language use. LGBTQ+ language use has shifted greatly throughout time; their once secretive language was no longer of use with the growing acceptance of their identity, and today only words and phrases that signify their identity remain. Generational slang, on the other hand, has never had the need to be secretive, so has never evolved beyond loose words and phrases. The main aim of this thesis was to find out whether the use of such an ingroup language had an effect on feelings of identity. In the survey conducted for this thesis, the participants (N=40, 4 LGBTQ+, 18 Generation Z, 18 both) had to answer questions on their slang knowledge and usage and how strongly they identify with the subgroups they are a part of. By comparing participants' results on the identity measures to their knowledge of slang, it was found that there is a positive correlation between slang use and feelings of identity in the LGBTQ+ community as well as Generation Z.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ community, Generation Z, slang, LGBTQ+ slang, Generation Z slang ingroup language, online language, online slang, identity

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Introduction

Technological advancements have skyrocketed in the last two decades. One of the most influential advancements of all is the rapid rise of the internet. Nowadays, no one bats an eye on the ability to find information on any possible topic in mere seconds or to make live contact with people on the other side of the planet with minimal delay. Although the emergence of this globalised civilization had brought about many advantages, it has also left many of its citizens looking for ways to stand out. Because of this desire, many online subgroups have emerged in recent years. Some of these groups are based upon shared interests or hobbies, while other subgroups are based around an identity.

According to Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory, these subgroups have a strong drive to distinguish themselves from those outside their group. An example of such behaviour is all members having a specific dress sense, as can be seen in goths or punks. Another common manner of signalling one's affiliations with a group is through language: communities will invent new words or give new meaning to existing words and only those within the group should be aware of its true meaning. This mainly happens on a word-level, but it can also be seen in collocations, abbreviations, and overall style. While these expressions would only be known and used by a small group of people in the previous century, the rise of the internet has spread their use around the globe. Especially social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have helped in the spread of these ingroup slang terms. Two groups whose strong internet presence has contributed to the widespread use of group specific slang are Generation Z and the LGBTQ+ community.

Generation Z, often shortened to Gen Z, consists of those born between 1997 and 2012, although there is much discussion of when its preceding generation, Generation Y or the Millennials, ended and where Gen Z began (Dimock, 2019). The oldest Gen Z'ers were merely ten years old when the first iPhone was launched, so it is no surprise this generation's presence on the internet is unprecedented by any of their predecessors. Apps such as TikTok, which has exploded in popularity in the last year, are great contributors to the rise of a common youth culture in areas such as clothing and music, but it also contributes to the spread and familiarisation with ingroup terms (Zuo, 2019).

LGBTQ+ people, on the other hand, have been around throughout history, although the global community aspect as we know it today came into existence during the social movements that started in the 1950s. As time progressed, this community became more and more accepted and therefore also more present. The acronym, which stands for 'lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, queer, and more' has also expanded over the years with the emergence and increased acceptance of numerous different sexual and gender identities. Whereas older generations of people with different gender and sexual orientations had to hide their true identity, in some cases going as far as creating secret languages to identify and communicate with one another, today's LGBTQ+ people are able to openly celebrate who they are, and this trend has only increased with the rise of the internet. The once secretive terms to identify others with 'deviant' sexual orientations have made place for a prolific, open vocabulary, and due to its use on popular shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, its use was spread around the internet.

Although it is for different reasons, both these groups have a big ingroup vocabulary that is commonly used among group members. While some group members use these terms in all contexts, whether it be with other members or with outsiders, others make less or even no use of the ingroup slang. At the same time, there are non-members that are becoming familiar with these terms due to their increased use online and start to incorporate these words into their own vocabulary. As Tajfel and Turner (2004) suggested, language is one of the ways for group members to outwardly express their identity to both other members and outsiders. *This paper will investigate whether there is a connection between the use of such ingroup slang terms and how strongly one identifies with said group, specifically in the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z.*

The expected findings are that feelings of identity in general are stronger in the LGBTQ+ community than in Generation Z, but that both groups will show a positive correlation between slang use and identity. A possible reason for this could be the history of oppression the LGBTQ+ community has, as they might be overcompensating by being very loud and proud about their sexual and/or gender orientation and show this through their language use. This will most likely not be the case for Gen Z'ers, as they do not have this long history of discrimination and oppression. They, however, will likely still show a correlation between these two factors, as they, especially the older members of this generation, might have a strong desire to show they differ from the generations that came before them.

The first chapter will look into previous research on language use in general and slang use specifically in the LGBTQ+ community and across different generations. The second chapter deals with the survey that has been conducted to answer this thesis's main question. In this survey, respondents had to answer some questions on slang terms from both the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z and, if they were part of either or both of these

groups, were also asked to rank a number of statements concerning the strength of their identification with said groups.

Two appendixes have also been added to the end of this paper. The first one is a glossary of all slang terms used throughout this paper, which have been printed in italics. The second is the full questionnaire, which will be discussed in further detail in the second chapter.

1 Research on slang in the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z

Slang is defined as “an ever changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large” (Eble, 1996). It can take many different forms, such as abbreviations, phrases, but most commonly just loose words. These words fall into two categories: new words or old words that are given a new meaning. An example of the former is *VSCO-girl*, which is a term named after the photo-editing application VSCO and is used to describe a certain hippie-like style and attitude in young girls. An example of the latter is *sick*, which refers to being ill in most contexts, but can also be used as a substitute for *cool* or *nice*. The trend of creating one’s own unique use of language can be seen in many subgroups throughout history. Modern technology has further enlarged the use of slang, as the internet allows for new subgroups to be created with ease and for existing ones to grow exponentially. New media also makes it much easier for the language used within these groups to spread further. This chapter will give a more detailed look into slang-use in the LGBTQ+ community and different generations and the research that has been conducted on the topic.

1.1 The past and present of LGBTQ+ slang

LGBTQ+ people have been around as long as humanity has, but the levels to which their existence has been accepted by society has fluctuated greatly over time. Where homosexual relationships were prolific and generally accepted in ancient Greek times, the rise of written religion caused it to become a taboo topic. This ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’-culture surrounding everything that had to do with same-sex attraction remained to be the main perspective in society until very recently, with change finally brought about by the rapidly growing support for the gay liberation movement, starting in the United States and swiftly spreading its seeds across the Western world. Up until this point in history, engaging in homosexual activity was punishable by law in close to all countries. A large step forward was made with the United Kingdom passing the Sexual Offence Act in 1967, which decriminalised homosexuality, leading many countries to follow into their footsteps. It, however, was only at the start of the twenty first century that LGBTQ+ people were truly starting to become equal to heterosexual citizen, with the recognition of LGBTQ+ marriages and the ability for same-sex couples to adopt since 2001 in the Netherlands, with, again, many countries following quickly.

Research into this community, however, had begun much before the community's existence became accepted again. Early discourse and research into homosexuality was mainly concerned with the psychological aspects of sexuality. Theories surrounding the existence same-sex attraction was split in three directions (Drescher, 2008):

- 1) Theories of normal variation: Homosexuality is treated as a phenomenon that occurs naturally and people are simply born this way.
- 2) Theories of pathology: Homosexuality is treated as disease and a deviation from 'normal' heterosexual development. Atypical gender behaviours or feelings are symptoms of this disease. It is believed that this disease has a cause, for example excessive mothering, inadequate fathering or sexual abuse, and that it can also be cured.
- 3) Theories of immaturity: Homosexuality is treated as a normal step in adolescents development towards adult heterosexuality. Homosexuality in adults is regarded to be due to stunted developmental growth.

While the majority of Western society today believes the theories of normal variation to be true, the main beliefs held by researchers in the twentieth century were shaped by either pathology or immaturity. Sigmund Freud contributed to the rise of the immaturity theories in the early twentieth century, stating that "all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious," and suggesting all people are born with, what he called, 'bisexual instincts' (Freud, 1905).

Nevertheless, theories of pathology started gaining traction in the new generation of psychologists after Freud's death in 1939. These theories were believed to such a wide extent that homosexuality was listed as a classified mental illness in the first two editions of the DSM, the manual used by psychologists worldwide to diagnose illnesses and disorders, with diagnosable symptoms and a range of suggested treatments to cure the 'disease' (Drescher, 2015). However, with the simultaneous rise of the gay liberation movement, paired with the growing body of research disproving homosexuality to have pathological nature, these theories decreased in its acceptance, and homosexuality was removed from the third edition of the DSM in 1973. A study by Evelyn Hooker (1956), for example, made a large contribution to the removal of homosexuality from the DSM with her comparison of the psychological evaluations of both homo- and heterosexual men, suggesting that the average gay man is no more 'psychologically disturbed' than the average straight man is, as was previously believed.

In the wake of this decision by the publishers of the DSM, the area of research surrounding this community shifted. While there were still numerous studies being conducted into the psychological aspect of the LGBTQ+ community, the new topic of interest became gay language use. At the start of this new era of research, researchers were mainly concerned with establish a complete and comprehensive gay lexicon in a dictionary-like style. Kullick (2000) names four reasons for the desire to compose such a list: a ‘civilisation crusade’, a desire to ‘crack the code’, and both a philosophical or sociological interest in finding out more about this subgroup. The first of such lexicons was published in 1941 by Gershon Legman, and it consisted of 329 terms, 139 of which were described to be used exclusively by gay men. Although it was more of an enumeration than an actual analysis of the gay lexicon, it does include numerous terms that are still in common use today, such as *drag* and *straight* (see Appendix A on page 33 for definitions).

The first real analysis came ten years after Legman’s lexicon overview. In this analysis, Donald Cory (1951) argued that an exclusively gay lexicon was created by those within the community due to their desire for words that did not automatically denote them in a negative way. He, however, also stated that this lexicon was weakened by the fact that it had not been able to “develop in a natural way”, as it could only be used in secret due to the societal taboo surrounding it.

One of such languages that developed at the time and possibly the most popular one when it comes to research into gay language is Polari, which was mainly used in the UK gay scene during the 1940s and 50s. Its name, much like the majority of its lexicon, originates from Italian (*parlare* is Italian for talking). In the 18th and 19th century, Polari was mainly used in theatrical circles, from where gay actors spread its use into gay culture. Cox and Fray (1994) suggest that slang languages like Polari were developed with three things in mind: a need to express a common identity, self-protection, and secrecy. This is further supported by their study, showing that there is a correlation between gay speech and gay identity. Their results suggested that the higher the frequency at which gay men used LGBTQ+ slang, whether this was full Polari or just loose words derived from it, the more involved they were in the gay scene.

However, with the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK in 1967, the need to express a common identity in a self-protective and secretive way lost much of its strength. The veil of secrecy was drawn even further away due to the inclusion of Polari in *Round the Horne*, a popular radio show at the time. On top of this, due to the growing liberation movements across the world, LGBTQ+ people no longer wanted to hide and disguise their

attractions, thus unintentionally causing the death of Polari. A few words from this specific lexicon, such as *camp*, *butch* and *trade*, did stand the test of time and formed the basis for Gayspeak as it is still known today.

Aside from these remains of older codes, the largest contributor to the current gay lexicon is social media. This comes to no surprise; peer networks and involvement in the LGBTQ+ community are two of the main contributors to the well-being of LGBTQ+ youths, and what better place to fulfill these needs than on the internet, where even the most isolated gay kid will be able to find themselves a community (Chong et al., 2015; Higa et al., 2012). With the internet help, gay media is being spread around quicker and wider than ever before. This leads to the language use of LGBTQ+ people today being much more diverse than it was a century ago; a self-contained language such as Polari would not be able to exist today (Kulick, 2000). The lexicon is broadened seemingly on the daily, with new media being posted and reposted all over social media and the impact left behind by these new terms differs per entry. *To read* came into wide use after its use in the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning* and is still a commonly used term today. On the other hand, a term like *Vanjie* went viral after a contestant on *RuPaul's Drag Race* said it, but its popularity was short-lived. Furthermore, the internet has made these terms accessible and therefore usable to people outside of the community as well, adding their own new meanings and ways of usage.

Because of this decrease in pure LGBTQ+ language to investigate, research has turned to other aspects of gay language, such as the 'auditory gaydar', which refers to the ability to tell someone's sexual orientation through their language use and way of speech. According to Fasoli, Hegarty and Frost (2021), the auditory gaydar relies on the ideas that LGBTQ+ and heterosexual people have categorically different voices and that people can intentionally alter their voices to emphasise or conceal their sexual orientation. This is supported by a different study by Fasoli and colleagues (2018), in which they demonstrated that heterosexual men and lesbians described their own voices to be more masculine and lower in pitch, while heterosexual women and gay men described theirs to be more feminine and higher in pitch. Although the LGBTQ+ participants perceived their own voices to be more like that of the opposite sex, Barton (2015) suggests that this is more likely based existing and internalised stereotypes about how LGBTQ+ voices sound than based on how their voices actually sound.

In short, at the start of the twentieth century, it was most commonly believed for homosexuality to be a mental disorder. Conflicting research and the gay liberation movement, however, made the field of psychology change its theories from those of pathology to natural

variation. After this, a surge of interest arose in the area of LGBTQ+ language use. The secretive gay men's language Polari was an interesting topic at first, but with the decriminalisation and growing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, languages like these died down. The use of loose terms, both from these older languages and new ones coined online, did remain in common use. As this left research with less to investigate, they started focussing on other aspects of language, such as pitch.

1.2 The past and present of generational slang

Generation Z, in comparison to the LGBTQ+ community, is very new, with its oldest members being twenty four years old today. Research into them as a community is therefore much scarcer, let alone into their language use. Luckily, more literature exists that looks into Generation Z's predecessors.

The studying of the language use of different generations started with the Baby Boom Generation (1946-1964), but there are a number of generations that precede this one, the oldest of which is the Lost Generation. Its members were born between 1883 and 1900 and the name 'lost' stems from the general feelings of disorientation and directionlessness members of this generation were left with after World War I (Winter, 1977). They were followed by the Greatest Generation (1901-1927), those born during WWI and the Great Depression, and also the main generation to serve in World War II. They thank their name to the title of Tom Brokaw's 1998 book with the same name. The following generation is the Silent Generation (1928-1945), whose name was coined in a 1951 article in *Time Magazine* ("The Younger Generation", 1951).

Generations whose language use has been investigated more, were the Baby Boomers and their succeeding generation After the Baby Boomers came Generations X (1965-1980), Y, also known as the Millennials (1981-1996), and Z (1997-2012). The name 'Generation X' first appeared in a 1952 issue of *Holiday Magazine* to describe alienated youths, and the names have just been following the alphabet since, with the current generation, Generation Alpha (2013-now), having started at the beginning again (Dimock, 2019; Ulrich & Harris, 2003). As many of the members of these generations are avid social media users, it is much easier to examine their language use.

Contrary to the LGBTQ+ community, generations across time never had a need to be secretive of their identity, thus they did not develop a true slang language. Yet, every generation wanted to distance themselves from the previous generation and did so by

accentuating the differences between the two. Aside from their trend and general perspectives on life, a big way in which one generation could distinguish itself from the previous ones was through language. This never took the form of an actual language and happened more on a word-level. Because the used slang terms differed greatly per generation, most studies looking into this compare the language use between the generations.

The largest differences are logically found when comparing the oldest generation to the youngest ones. A study conducted by Sanders (2019), for example, asked Baby Boomers, Millennials and Gen Z'ers to name the slang terms they most commonly used to describe something good or favourable. The most used terms (awesome, cool, and nice) were the same for these three generations, but it got interesting when looking outside of their top threes. Baby Boomers have *neat* and *superb* as their respective four and five, and while the use of *superb* has completely fallen off both the Millennial and Gen Z charts and *neat* has sunk a number of spots. Millennials have *dope* filling up the fourth slot of their chart and have terms like *lit* and *sick* scoring just below *neat*. *Lit* and *sick*, however, take up the top spots for Generation Z. As can be seen here, many different terms are used across generations to describe just a single emotion.

With so many different words in use that share a common meaning, it is no surprise that the usage of all these variations can lead to some confusion, especially in the older generations. This plays a big part in the communication gap that has come to exist between the older and the younger members of society. Another unhelpful factor in this, is that Millennials and Generation Z communicate mostly online, while those of the Baby Boom generation and Generation X still hold great value to face-to-face communication. Subramaniam and Razak (2014) compared the online communication of Boomers to that of Millennials on topics they discussed, the use of non-standard language such as slang, and the use of multimedia applications. On the subject of the discussed topics, Baby Boomers' posts are more informative, direct and in order in comparison to Generation Y. Boomers are also more likely to respond to the comments that are placed under their posts, while Millennials are likely to only respond with an emoticon, if at all. On the subject of non-standard language, they found that Generation Y used a wide array of spelling innovations and capitalization, acronym and abbreviation, emoticons and punctuations, whilst the Baby Boomers followed the standard spelling conventions. It was also found that Generation Y posted and shared considerably more pictures and videos than the Baby Boomers did.

On top of this already existing gap in communications, the older generations do not always take kindly to the new terms coined by the younger generations. Some words and

sentences just do not make any sense to them due to the use of new words or old words with newly attributed definitions. Rosenthal and McKeown (2011) found that the younger a speaker is, the more slang they use, so the communication gap between the generations will likely only continue to grow. Furthermore, there are also phrases that have sparked a lot of anger in the older generations, such as *Karen* and *OK Boomer*, as they perceive them to be sexist and ageist attacks. So, while the use of ingroup language is a great asset to Generation Z themselves, as it helps them create their own identity, relate to their peers, and distinguish themselves from the previous generations, its effects are not solely positive.

In sum, language use has become an increasingly popular research topic in post-war generations. These studies have mainly been comparative in nature, looking at the differences between the slang used by the different generations. Because use of slang increases the younger a speaker is and society's reliance on modern technology, a communication gap between the older and younger generations has come into existence. Although this creates a disadvantage to the older generations, the young ones still greatly benefit from the use of slang, as it helps them distinguish themselves from the older generations and reinforces the relationship with their peers.

2 Slang and identity: The study

To find a further answer to the question of whether there is a connection between the use of slang terms and the strength of feelings of identity, a questionnaire has been set up and distributed on the internet. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix B on page 35.

2.1 Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: a part on slang knowledge which was filled out by all participants, a part on LGBTQ+ identity which was only filled out by those who identified as a part of the community, a part on Generation Z identity which was only filled out by those born between 1997 and 2012, and a section with demographic questions. The contents of the first three sections and the choices that were made in setting it up will be discussed below.

The two variables at discussion here are how knowledgeable the participants are on slang used within the LGBTQ+ community and/or Generation Z and whether they themselves use those slang terms too, and the strength of the participants' identification with said group they are part of.

2.1.1 Slang knowledge

In the first section of the survey, all participants were presented with ten slang terms, each accompanied by an example sentence containing the word. For each term, participants were asked to indicate whether they had seen or read the word before, were familiar with its meaning and if they used the term themselves, and if so, how often. Participants were also asked where they had first come across these terms, in what contexts they used the words themselves, and why they used them.

The five LGBTQ+ slang terms that were included, in order of their appearance in the questionnaire, were *to spill tea*, *to throw shade*, *butch*, *to snatch someone's wig*, and *ki ki* (see Table 1 below for definitions). These terms were chosen to fit into some of the different lexical areas of Gayspeak as distinguished by Farrell (1972): *to spill tea* and *ki ki* fall into the category of social activities, *to throw shade* and *to snatch someone's wig* are behavioural, and *butch* refers to physical appearances and sexual preference.

The five Generation Z terms that were included in the part on slang knowledge were *to slap*, *low-key*, *Karen*, *to yeet something*, and *dead ass* (see Table 1 for definitions). These terms have been derived from different places on the internet. Terms such as *to slap* and *low-key* became popular through their use in music. Chance the Rapper, for example, used *low-key* in his song “U Got Me Fucked Up” (Dictionary.com, n.d.-a). *Karen* and *dead ass* were commonly used terms among black communities, but became popularised through social media website Reddit (Dictionary.com, n.d.-a; Nagesh, 2020). *To yeet something* became a commonly used term after a video containing it went viral on the now defunct video-sharing platform Vine.

The terms from the two different groups were presented in a randomised order and not grouped together per community.

Table 1: Definitions of slang terms used in questionnaire

	Term	Definition
LGBTQ+	butch	a masculine lesbian
	ki ki	a party, often thrown with the purpose to catch up or gossip with others
	to snatch someone’s wig	to do something so amazing or unexpected that it surprises onlookers
	to spill tea	to gossip
	to throw shade	to judge something or someone discreetly and indirectly
Generation Z	dead ass	dead serious; for real
	Karen	a woman who is perceived as overly and unnecessarily entitled or demanding, often stereotypically used to describe middle-aged, white women
	low-key	secretly; with low emotional intensity
	to slap	to be a good, upbeat song
	to yeet something	to throw something, usually accompanied by yelling ‘yeet!’

2.1.2 LGBTQ+ identity

The second section starts off with the question “Do you consider yourself to be part of the LGBTQ+ community?”. Those who answered “no” were redirected to the third section, while those who answered “yes” continued on to the questions on how strongly they identify with the community. This was done so only data from respondents who fit into this group would be collected.

To establish how strongly the participants identified with the LGBTQ+ community, twelve statements on attitudes on the community and activities within it had to be ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, with a score of 1 meaning the participants strongly disagreed with the statement and a 5 meaning they strongly agreed with it.

The statements used in this section were based upon the Multigroup Ethical Identity Measure (Roberts et al., 1999). This measure was created to measure ethnic identity on the basis of three subscales: affirmation and belonging (sense of group membership and attitudes toward the individual’s group), ethnic identity achievement (the extent to which a person has achieved a secure and confident sense of his or her ethnicity), and ethnic behaviors (activities associated with group membership). No such measure has been created for LGBTQ+ identity specifically, so the statements from this measure were borrowed for this survey. The wording of these statements was slightly altered to address the LGBTQ+ community specifically, rather than an ethnic group.

Statement 10 from the original measure (“I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.”) has been excluded from this part of the questionnaire, as it is not applicable to the LGBTQ+ community. An additional statement that was not part of the MEIM was added at the end of the survey, namely the question whether the participant was open about their sexuality and/or gender orientation to those around them. This statement was added, because a study by Corrigan and Matthews (2003) showed that whether someone is out of the closet or not has a strong effect on their engagement with the community. If it had just been assumed that every participant was open about their gender identity and sexuality, it could have affected the results.

2.1.3 Generation Z identity

Like the section on LGTQ+ identity, this section begins with a question to determine who is part of Generation Z and who is not. Those who said they were born before 1997 were redirected to the final section about demographics, but those who answered they were born

between 1997 and 2012 were shown the statements on Gen Z identity. Again, this question was included to make sure only data from the group of interest would be collected.

The identity measure consisted of ten statements, which the respondents had to be ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, with a score of 1 meaning they strongly disagreed with the statement and a 5 meaning they strongly agreed with it. These statements were also based upon Roberts and colleagues' MEIM (1999). Here, the statements were reworded to address the Gen Z'ers, rather than an ethnic community or the LGBTQ+ community.

Two statements from the originals measure were excluded from the Gen Z identity measure, namely statements 1 ("I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.") and 10 ("I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs."), due to them not being applicable to this specific group. No additional statements outside of the MEIM were added, like was the case for the LGBTQ+ identity section.

2.2 Procedure

The questionnaire was in written form and was distributed online. This form was chosen as the best way to collect data, as it is the easiest way to reach a large number of participants from the different groups that are at the centre of this study. This was also the easiest way to also reach some native speakers of English, as their slang use might differ from Dutch participants who only speak English as a second language.

Respondents were recruited by distributing the survey online on social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn and were sent around to friends and peers, also asking them to send it along to anyone else they thought might be interested in completing it. Participants were not given any reward for completing the questionnaire, as it was done on a voluntary basis.

Respondents were told in the introduction to the survey that its purpose was to investigate the effects of slang use for a thesis, but were not explicitly told about the what the slang-usage could affect and what groups were of interest, although this would be easy to figure out due to the opening questions of the second and third section.

2.3 Respondents

The survey was completed by a total of 40 people, 23 of which were Dutch and 17 were Australian. 8 of the participants were male, 29 were female, and 3 identified as non-binary. The mean age of all respondents was 22.5.

24 of the participants identified as something other than heterosexual and cisgender. However, on the question of whether the participant considered themselves to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community, only 22 of them answered 'yes'. Those who did say they were not heterosexual and/or cisgender but did not consider themselves to be part of the community, were not directed to the questions of LGBTQ+ identity, so their responses will not be used in the results. The LGBTQ+ participants' ages ranged between 19 and 51, with 24.1 being the mean age. Of the 22 LGBTQ+ participants, 5 were cisgender men, 14 were cisgender women, and 3 participants identified as non-binary. 10 participants were solely attracted to the opposite sex (gay/lesbian), 7 were bisexual, 3 were pansexual, and 2 were asexual.

Of the 40 participants who completed the survey, 36 stated they were born between 1997 and 2012, thus making them members of Generation Z. Their ages ranged from 19 to 23, with 20.6 being the mean age.

18 participants identified as LGBTQ+ and were also born between 1997 and 2012, making them part of both groups of interest. This also means there were only 4 participants who were solely LGBTQ+ and 18 who were only part of Generation Z. None of the respondents fell outside of both groups.

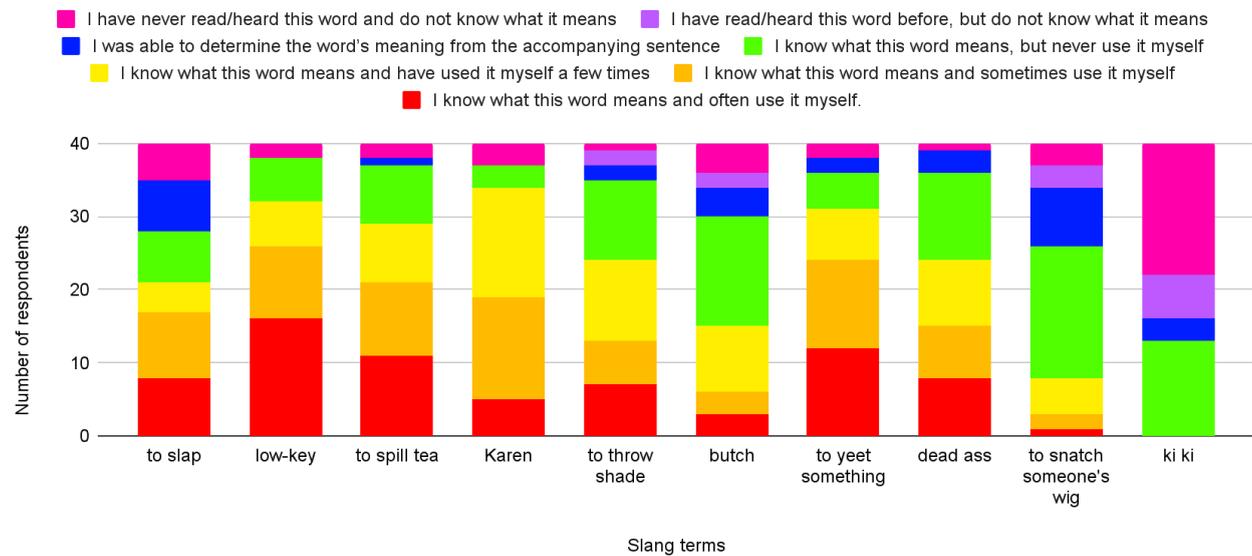
2.4 Results

2.4.1 General slang knowledge across participants

The first section of the questionnaire, which asked participants to indicate their knowledge on a number of slang terms drawn from both the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z, was filled out by all respondents, no matter their age or sexual orientations. Figure 1 below shows how the 40 participants responded to each of the slang terms in the order in which the terms were presented in the survey.

Participants were also asked to indicate where they had come across these terms. 95% of the respondents answered that they had first seen them online, specifically social media platform Instagram. 50% of participants had also first heard of them used by friends or peers. The participants also answered that they most commonly use these terms while talking to

Figure 1: Slang knowledge across participants



friends both face-to-face and online (both 80%), and also use them in their social media posts, though to a lesser extent (40%).

Respondents were also asked to describe why they used these slang terms. The most common answer to this (33%) was that people heard those terms being used around them and started using them too, either consciously or unconsciously. Another commonly named reason (30%) was that in many cases it is a more fun way to get a message across, with some participants even stating that these terms have become an easier way to express themselves than using standard vocabulary. Four participants, three from the LGBTQ+ community and one Gen Z'er, even directly stated that they use these terms to conform to the subgroups they are a part of.

No significant differences in slang use or feelings of identity were found between Dutch and Australian participants, so the following sections will not make any distinctions between the two groups.

2.4.2 LGBTQ+ slang and identity

Of the 40 participants, 22 consider themselves to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. These 22 respondents were asked twelve statements and the participants had to indicate how strongly they (dis)agreed with the statements. The twelfth statement was somewhat separated from the other eleven, as it was not part of Roberts and colleagues' (1999) original identity measure, so it will be analysed separately.

Figure 2 shows how strongly the participants identified with the LGBTQ+ community. The mean score of each participant has been calculated by taking the average score on the eleven statements. The higher the score, the stronger the participant identifies with the community. From the LGBTQ+ participants, 4 were solely members of the LGBTQ+ community and were not part of Generation Z, while the remaining 18 participants were part of both groups. Their scores have been depicted separately in the graph. No participant had an average score below 2, so this has been omitted from the figure. The mean score across all LGBTQ+ participants was 4.0, with the lowest score being a 2.7 and the highest being a perfect 5. The mean score of the group who is only part of the LGBTQ+ community is 3.9, with the highest being a 4.4 and the lowest a 3.5.

Figure 3 on the previous page depicts how open the participants are about the sexuality and/or gender identity to those around them, with a score of 1 being fully closeted and 5 being fully open.

Figure 2: Scores on LGBTQ+ identity measure

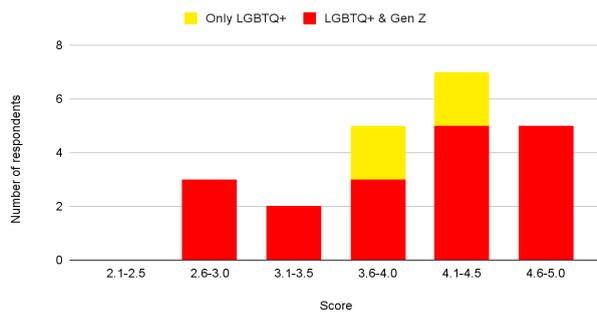


Figure 3: Openness about sexuality/gender identity

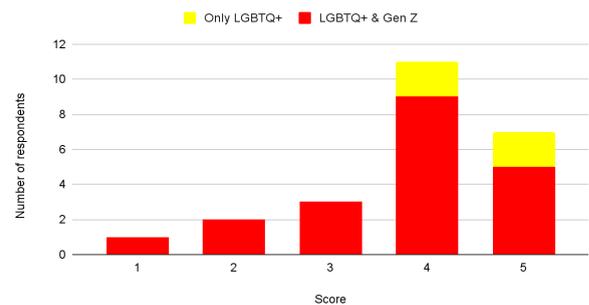
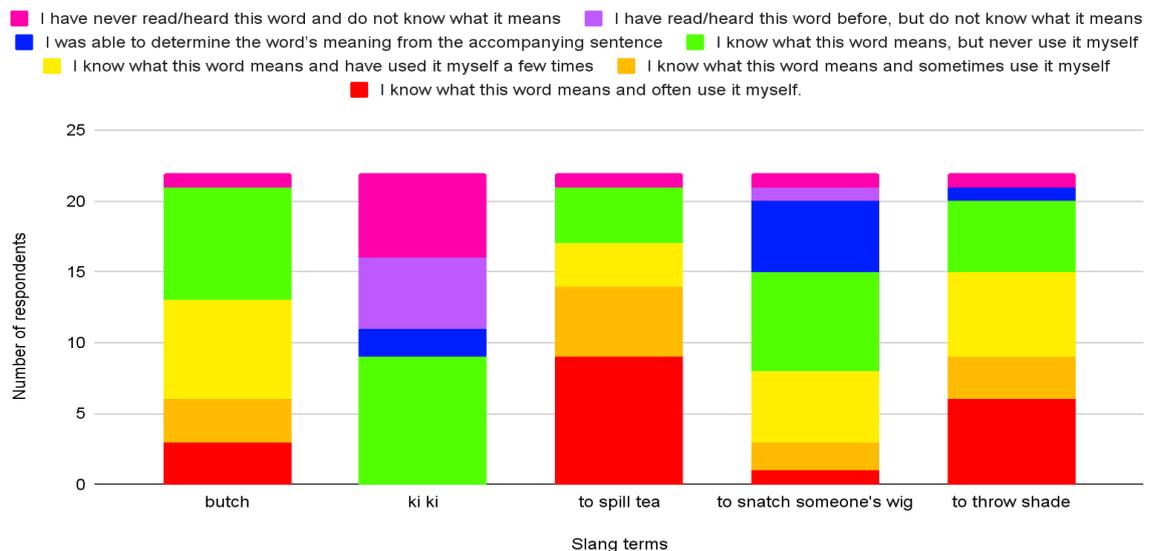


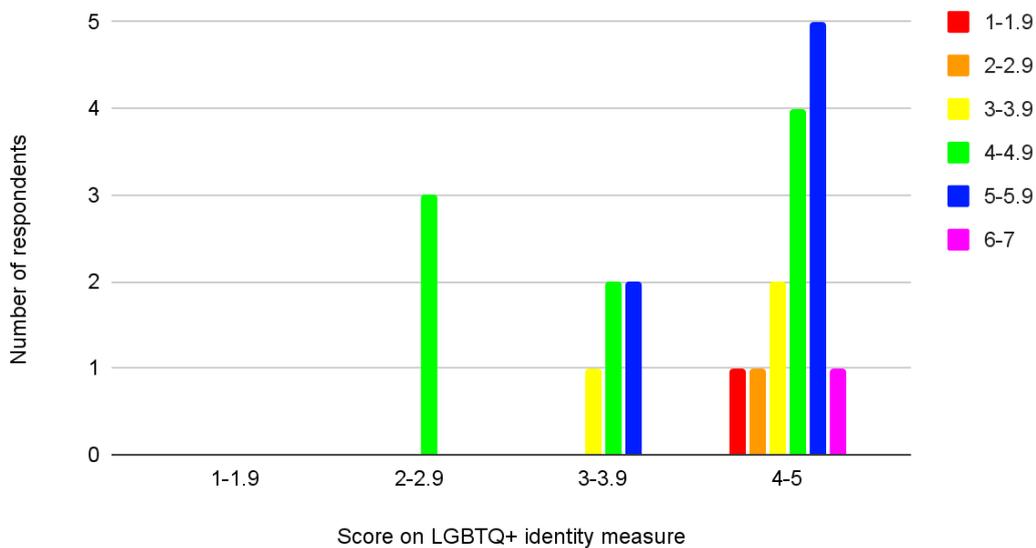
Figure 4 shows what has already been represented in Figure 1, but narrowed down to the LGBTQ+ terms and shows only the responses of community members.

Figure 4: Slang knowledge in LGBTQ+ respondents



Finally, figure 5 depicts the relationship between slang knowledge and identity. For this figure, the multiple choice answers that the participants could give have been transferred into numbers with “I have never read/heard this word and do not know what it means” being a score of 1, “I know what this word means and often use it myself” being a 7, and all answers in between being numbered accordingly. The final slang knowledge score is the average of the scores on the 5 terms.

Figure 5: Score on LGBTQ+ slang knowledge

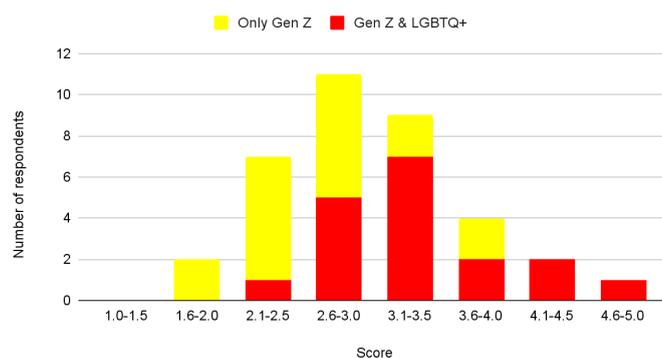


2.4.3 Generation Z slang and identity

36 of the 40 respondents are part of Generation Z. They were shown ten statements and had to indicate how strongly they (dis)agreed with them. The mean score of each participant was calculated by taking the average score on the ten statements. The higher the score, the stronger the participant identifies with the community. Exactly half of the Gen Z participants are also part of the LGBTQ+ community. Figure 6 shows the scores on the Generation Z identity measure.

The average score on the Generation Z identity measure across all participants is 3.0, with the lowest score being 1.6 and the highest 4.7. For the 18 participants that are solely part of Generation Z, the mean score was 3.0 with a high of 3.8 and a low

Figure 6: Scores on Gen Z identity measure



of 1.7. The mean score of participants that are part of both subgroups is 3.5, with a high of 4.7 and a low of 2.3.

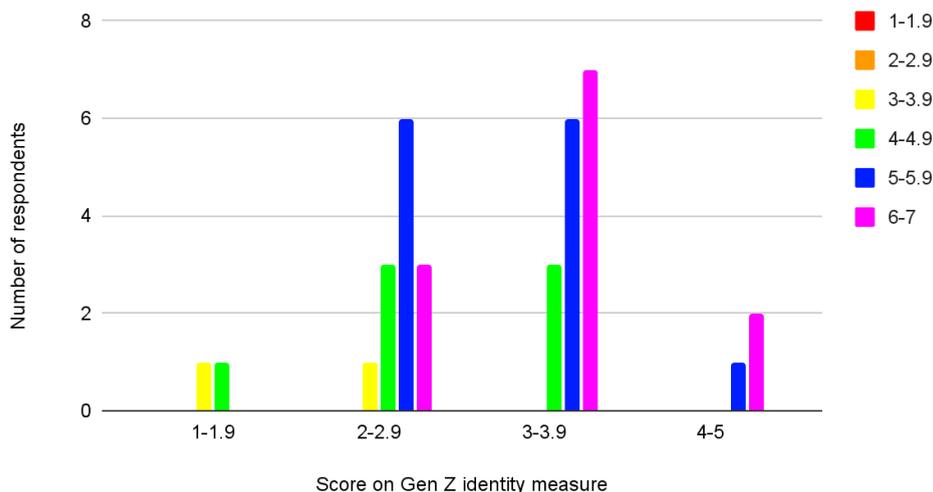
Figure 7, like figure 4, shows the participants' knowledge on the slang terms from the first section of the questionnaire, but specified to the Generation Z terms and participants. The multiple choice option 'I have read/heard this word before, but do not know what it means' has not been selected for any of these terms, so it therefore is not represented in the graph below.

Figure 7: Slang knowledge in Gen Z respondents



Lastly, figure 8, similarly to figure 5, compares respondents' scores on the identity measure to how well they know the slang terms associated with this group and whether they use them or not. Again, the score on slang knowledge has been calculated by giving each of the multiple choice answers a score from 1 to 7 and taking the average score across the five slang terms.

Figure 8: Score on Generation Z slang knowledge



2.5 Discussion

While previous research has established that the use of group-specific slang has a positive effect on the group's members, it has not yet been established whether there is a correlation between the use of these slang terms and how strongly its users identify with said group. The point of this survey was to try to get more insight into whether this correlation exists or not. The results of the questionnaire were expected to show that such a correlation does exist and that it would be stronger in the LGBTQ+ community than in members of Generation Z. A possible reason for this could be the history of oppression of the LGBTQ+ community, which has led to its members having stronger feelings of community in general and also more commonly expressing this through their language use.

As expected, the results show that people have stronger feelings of identification with the LGBTQ+ community (mean score of 4.0) than with Generation Z (mean score of 3.0). The answers to the questionnaire can not give a definite answer as to why this is. A possibly contributing factor might be the fact that for most members of the LGBTQ+ community, their sexuality or gender orientation very overtly affects their lives, as they are reminded of the oppression of the past and might still face it today, they might be affected by a lack of representation in the media, they have to come out of the closet, and pride events are prominent throughout the year. These factors could all contribute to a stronger feeling of community. Generation Z, on the other hand, is not necessarily consciously aware of their differences from older generations and most certainly have not faced oppression to the same extent as LGBTQ+ people have because of it.

This seems to also have an effect on how LGBTQ+ people identify with other groups they are a part of: in comparison to their peers who are only Gen Z and not LGBTQ+, those who are part of both communities also have a stronger feeling of identity with Generation Z than those who are solely part of Gen Z (see figure 7).

The Generation Z slang terms, on the other hand, are the most commonly known ones, with an average of 35 participants across the five terms knowing them, while this is only the case for an average of 28 participants across the five LGBTQ+ terms (although *ki ki* greatly decreases this average, as only 12 respondents knew the word's meaning and none of them actively use it). This is most likely due to the fact that there were more Generation Z (N=36) participants than LGBTQ+ ones (N=22). None of the Gen Z participants, however, had a slang knowledge score below 3, so all participants were relatively familiar with the

terms, while this was not the case for all LGBTQ+ participants and their knowledge on their ingroup language.

These results, however, also show that the LGBTQ+ slang terms are more widely known outside the community than the Gen Z terms are, as there are more people that know and use the LGBTQ+ terms than there are LGBTQ+ respondents, while these numbers are roughly the same for the Generation Z terms and participants. Why this is the case is not explained by the results of the present survey. A possible explanation for these results is that, while Generation Z slang is not necessarily applied in conversations with older generations, hence why the participants that are LGBTQ+ but not part of Generation Z did not know or use these terms, but LGBTQ+ specific language is used across generations, so also in Gen Z communities. The strong presence of LGBTQ+ media online and non-LGBTQ+ Gen Z'ers engaging with peers that do belong to the community could cause the spread of LGBTQ+ slang, thus leading to outsiders also being aware of and using these terms.

Within LGBTQ+ community members, there also seems to be a strong effect of openness about one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Respondents that indicated that they were not (fully) open about their sexuality to those close to them, also scored lower on the LGBTQ+ identity index (see Figures 3 and 4). On the subject of slang terms, these individuals indicated that they were aware of the words' meaning, though never or rarely used them themselves, which suggests that there indeed might be a connection between slang use and feelings of identity.

The rest of the results of the survey support this suspicion, as well as the previously mentioned hypotheses. Figure 6, which depicts the scores of the LGBTQ+ respondents on slang knowledge and usage separated by their scores on the identity measure, clearly indicates that the stronger one identifies with the community, the higher their slang knowledge and usage. The participants with the lowest identity score (between 2-2.9) all had a score between 4 and 4.9 on slang knowledge and usage, and as the identity score gets higher, so does slang knowledge and usage.

Yet, a few of those with the highest score on the identity measure had the lowest score on slang knowledge. The two lowest averages on slang knowledge and usage are both given by respondents who had an identity score between 4 and 5. These two respondents were part of the LGBTQ+ community, but of an older generation (Generation X to be specific). As the slang terms used in this survey were selected for their presence in online communities and as members of Generation X still tend to favour face-to-face communication over online

communication, this might have caused the terms to be unknown to the respondents, even though they do identify with the community very strongly.

A similar connection can be found in Generation Z members, as figure 9 shows that slang knowledge and usage is higher the stronger a participant identifies with the group. Here, results peak slightly earlier than was the case for the LGBTQ+ participants, but this is the case because Gen Z'ers in general identify with their subgroup less strongly than the members of the LGBTQ+ community do. There also are no scores on slang knowledge below 3, while this was the case for the LGBTQ+ community. As previously stated, the terms were selected from different online media, and because Gen Z'ers generally have a strong affinity to online spaces, the use of these terms might come more naturally to them than it does for the average LGBTQ+ community member.

Although the results of the survey support the hypotheses, there are still some additional factors that need to be considered, such as the method in which participants were recruited to fill in the survey. As the survey was directly sent to friends and peers, the social groups that the participants are a part of overlap greatly. Because of this, it might be so that one of the terms used in the survey is commonly used within the group, thus leading to it being well known and often used among a large number of respondents, while the opposite will be true for words that are not of common usage within the social group. It is known that the four participants who are part of the LGBTQ+ community but not of Generation Z are all good friends and that all the Australian respondents are part of two social groups with at least one person, the one who recruited the Australian participants, being part of both groups.

On top of that, the survey asked participants to indicate whether they were aware of the meaning of several slang words, though it was not checked if participants actually had the right meaning in mind. For example, they could have perceived *to slap* to mean 'to hit someone', rather than its slang meaning 'to be a good, upbeat song'. The example sentences were present to avoid ambiguity, though participants still could have misinterpreted the terms.

The participants were also asked to indicate how often they used the terms themselves, and the multiple choice answers given to indicate this could have also been interpreted differently by different participants. They could answer with 'never', 'a few times', 'sometimes' or 'often', and while one participant might think using a certain term five times a week would fall under 'often', another might categorise the same amount of uses as 'sometimes'.

Finally, while the results do show that there is a connection between slang knowledge and use and the degree of identification, it is unclear in which way the effect works: does

increased use of slang lead to stronger identification with the subgroup, or does a strong identification with the subgroup lead to increased use of its slang? The current study fails to answer this question, as this was not kept in mind clearly enough while setting up the survey.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to find out more about a possible correlation between slang use and feelings of identity in the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z through a literature review and a questionnaire. The expected findings were that a correlation between slang and identity would be found in both communities, although it would likely be stronger in the LGBTQ+ community due to their identity being a more active part of their lives than in those of Gen Z'ers.

Previous research into the LGBTQ+ community concerned two main topics: psychology and language. For a long time, homosexuality was deemed a mental illness and thus was treated as such. At this time, much of the research surrounding the community looked into whether homosexuality was truly a case of pathology or one of natural variation. The latter theory became the most commonly accepted one near the end of the twentieth century, further supported by the growing gay liberation movement. Another topic of interest at the time was the gay men's language use. The secret queer language used in the UK in the 1940s and 50s, Polari, became a well-researched topic, but with the dying need for such a language, all researchers were left with near the end of the century with slang terms and phrases. While these were continuing to be researched, other aspects of language, such as pitch, also sparked new areas of interest.

In comparison, the body of literature on Generation Z language use is very limited, as the oldest members of this generation are only 24 years old. The use of language, and slang specifically, by previous post-war generations, however, has been studied. These have mainly been comparative studies, in which the language use of one generation is compared to that of another. While all generations had their own ways of expression which could cause problems in communication between generations, recent technological developments have further increased this communication gap. With Generation Z doing a large portion of their communication online, new slang terms are quickly learned and spread, and due to the technological illiteracy of many members of older generations, it has become increasingly difficult for the oldest and youngest generation to communicate.

Next to the review of previous literature, a questionnaire was also conducted, in which the respondents (N=40, 4 LGBTQ+, 18 Gen Z, 18 both) were asked about their knowledge and usage of ten LGBTQ+ and Generation Z slang words. If they were part of one or both of these communities, the respondents also had to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements on their LGBTQ+ and/or Gen Z identity, such as "I

am active in organisations and/or social groups that include mostly members of the LGBTQ+ community/Generation Z". The statements used for this were taken from Roberts and colleagues' (1999) Multigroup Ethnical Identity Measure. At the start of the survey, the participants are told that the topic is slang usage, but the connection to identity was not disclosed to them, so this would not influence the answers given by the respondents.

As predicted, the results showed that members of the LGBTQ+ community have a generally stronger sense of identification with their subgroup. This was the case within the LGBTQ+ community, but members of this community showed to also identify stronger with Generation Z than Gen Z'ers who are not LGBTQ+.

On the other hand, the results show that the Generation Z slang terms, such as *dead ass* and *to yeet something*, are more well-known and used among the responders than LGBTQ+ terms like *to throw shade* or *ki ki*. Yet, the LGBTQ+ terms are better known by the Gen Z'ers that are not LGBTQ+ than the Generation Z terms are known among those who are queer but from an older generation.

The results did provide a positive answer to the question that is at the centre of this thesis: there is a correlation between slang use and feelings of identity in the LGBTQ+ community and Generation Z. A comparison between the respondents' scores on slang knowledge and usage and the average scores on the identity measures showed that the higher a participant scored on the identity measure, the more knowledgeable they were about the slang terms used in that community.

Despite its positive results, the questionnaire also has its flaws. Many of the respondents are part of the same social circles, which could have influenced the results of the survey due to a certain word being used often by all members of a group, while others are rarely used, thus leading some terms to spike in usage and others staying behind. How participants interpreted the answers to the multiple choice slang questions could also differ across respondents, as some of the slang terms have multiple meanings and the adverbs of frequency used in the answers could be interpreted differently. It also was not checked whether participants actually knew what a term meant when they answered that they were aware of its meaning. Lastly, the results of the survey can not show in which direction the correlation works, so if a high frequency of slang use leads to increased feelings of identity or the other way around.

These flaws, however, could be a good starting point for future research. Especially the still unanswered question of whether slang use affects feelings of identity or feelings of identity affect slang use could lead to some interesting new insights to add to the results

found in this survey. To find out more about how this connection works, a perhaps interesting section to add would be to look into whether people started using the slang before they accepted themselves as part of the subgroup or whether they found out about the slang terms due to their membership of the group. This, however, would not work as well with a group like Generation Z, as there is not 'acceptance' of one's membership of this group, you either are or are not by birth. Other flaws of the present survey, such as ambiguous answers, could also be avoided in a new questionnaire, thus leading to even clearer results.

Aside from correcting the flaws of the questionnaire conducted here, the study could also be broadened by looking into the correlation between slang and identity in other subgroups. The groups of interest here were both based on something the respondent has no say in, namely their time of birth, sexuality and gender identity. It would be interesting to also take a look at a group whose members do have a say in their membership, for example a group based on aesthetics, such as gothic or cottagecore.

Overall, the results of the survey in this thesis suggest that there is a positive correlation between slang use and feelings of identity in LGBTQ+ community members and Gen Z'ers. Further research could investigate in which way the effect between slang and identity works and correct some of the ambiguities that were present in the current survey, but it could also expand on the scope by looking at different subgroups in today's society and see how slang and identity correlate within that group.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Below, all slang terms that have been used in the main text (printed in italics) are presented with a short description of its meaning.

LGBTQ+ slang terms

butch	a masculine lesbian
camp	exaggerated; theatrical; effeminate
drag	the performance of masculinity, femininity, or other forms of unconventional gender expression (e.g. a drag-queen is a man cross-dressing as a woman)
ki ki	a party, often thrown with the purpose to catch up or gossip with others
straight	heterosexual
trade	sex; sex-partner
to read	to mock someone in a humorous way
to snatch someone's wig	to do something so amazing or unexpected that it surprises onlookers
to spill tea	to gossip
to throw shade	to judge something or someone discreetly and indirectly
Vanjie	used by Vanessa Vanjie Mateo when she was eliminated from <i>RuPaul's Drag Race</i> . What she originally meant by it is unclear, although the internet has attributed the meaning of 'removing oneself from a conversation' to it.

Generational slang terms

dead ass	dead serious; for real (Generation Z)
dope	good or favourable (Generation Y)
Karen	a woman who is perceived as overly and unnecessarily entitled or demanding, often stereotypically used to describe middle-aged, white women (Generation Z)
lit	good or favourable (Generation Z)
low-key	secretly; with low emotional intensity (Generation Z)

neat	good or favourable (Baby Boom Generation)
OK Boomer	a phrase used to end an argument with people from the Baby Boom Generation or older people in general (Generation Y/Z)
sick	good or favourable (Generation Z)
superb	good or favourable (Baby Boom Generation)
to slap	to be a good, upbeat song (Generation Z)
to yeet	to throw something, usually accompanied by yelling 'yeet!' (Generation Z)
VSCO-girl	a girl with a hippie-like style and attitude

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Page 1: Introduction

My name is Demi van de Ven and I am in my final year of the BA English Language and Culture at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. I am currently working on my thesis on the effects of slang use and would like to ask you to participate in this survey on this topic.

It will take about 10 minutes to fill in this survey. Participation will remain anonymous and no identifying data will be collected. All information will be used for research purposes only.

You are allowed to withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. For questions or comments, you can contact me here: demi.vandeven@student.ru.nl

Thank you for your time!

Page 2: Slang knowledge

Below are a few slang terms commonly used online, accompanied by a sentence in which this word is used. Please indicate whether you are aware of these words' existence, their meaning and whether you use them yourself.

1. *To slap*, "This song really *slaps!*"
 - a. I have never read/heard this word and do not know what it means.
 - b. I have read/heard this word before, but do not know what it means.
 - c. I was able to determine the word's meaning from the accompanying sentence.
 - d. I know what this word means, but never use it myself.
 - e. I know what this word means and have used it myself a few times.
 - f. I know what this word means and sometimes use it myself.
 - g. I know what this word means and often use it myself.
2. *low-key*, "I *low-key* enjoy sappy rom-coms."
3. *to spill tea*, "There is no drama between Bobby and me, so I have no *tea to spill.*"
4. *Karen*, "I spotted a *Karen* at work today and of course she wanted to speak to our manager."

5. *to throw shade*, “Nobody likes Erica, because all she does is *throw shade* at people.”
6. *butch*, “Edith would never fall for a *butch* like you; she’s a lipstick lesbian.”
7. *to yeet something*, “I’ll *yeet* this bottle into the trash bin after I’ve finished it.”
8. *dead ass*, “I scored an A on last week’s exam. I’m not lying, I’m *dead ass*.”
9. *to snatch someone’s wig*, “Gaga *snatched our wigs* with that performance.”
10. *ki ki*, “You won’t believe what Amy just told me. We need to have a *ki ki*.”

Page 3: context on slang use

If you answered that you already knew at least one of the terms mentioned on the previous page, do you remember where you first came across them? You can select multiple answers. If you did not know any of the terms on the previous page before seeing them here, you can skip this question.

- I read them online.
- I read them in a book/paper/etc.
- I heard someone I know use them.
- Other: _____

If you answered that you have used at least one of the terms mentioned on the previous page yourself, in what contexts have you used them? You can select multiple answers. If you have used none of the terms on the previous page, you can skip this question.

- I use them on social media.
- I use them while talking to people online.
- I use them while talking to people in real life.
- Other: _____

If you answered that you have used at least one of the terms mentioned on the previous page yourself, why did you start using them? If you have used none of the terms on the previous page, you can skip this question. _____

Page 4: LGBTQ+ identity

Do you consider yourself to be part of the LGBTQ+ community?

- Yes → continues to next question
- No → skips to page 5

On a scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 indicates 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicates 'strongly agree', please indicate how strongly you (dis)agree with the following statements.

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about the LGBTQ+ community, such as its history.
2. I am active in organisations and/or social groups that include mostly members of the LGBTQ+ community.
3. I have a clear sense of my LGBTQ+ identity and what it means to me.
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my LGBTQ+ membership.
5. I am happy that I am a member of the LGBTQ+ community.
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community
7. I understand pretty well what my LGBTQ+ membership means to me.
8. In order to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community, I have often talked to other people about it.
9. I am proud to be a member of the LGBTQ+ community.
10. I feel a strong attachment towards the LGBTQ+ community.
11. I feel good about my LGBTQ+ membership.
12. I am open and honest about my sexuality and/or gender identity to those around me.

Page 5: Generation Z identity

Are you a member of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012)?

- Yes → continues to next question
- No → skip to page 6

On a scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 indicates 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicates 'strongly agree', please indicate how strongly you (dis)agree with the following statements.

1. I am active in organisations and/or social groups that include mostly Gen Z'ers.
2. I have a clear sense of my Generation Z identity and what it means to me.
3. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by being born into Generation Z.
4. I am happy that I was born into generation Z.

5. I have a strong sense of belonging to Generation Z.
6. I understand pretty well what my Gen Z membership means to me.
7. In order to learn more about Generation Z, I have often talked to other people about it.
8. I am proud to be a Gen Z'er.
9. I feel a strong attachment towards Generation Z.
10. I feel good about my Generation Z membership.

Page 6: Demographics

In what year were you born? ____

What country are you from? ____

What is your gender identity?

- cisgender woman
- transgender woman
- cisgender man
- transgender man
- non-binary
- gender fluid
- Other: ____

What is your sexual orientation?

- heterosexual
- gay
- lesbian
- bisexual
- pansexual
- asexual
- queer
- Other: ____

Page 7: End of survey

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey. Your response has been recorded.