

# Semantic change and the cultural significance of lexemes: a case study of "king" and "queen"

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**Semantic change and the cultural significance of lexemes: a case study  
of *king* and *queen***

Master's thesis

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## 1. Introduction

This study focuses on semantic change and the cultural significance of the lexemes *king* and *queen*. It aims to examine the process of semantic change that the lexemes *king* and *queen* are undergoing, whereby their meaning encapsulates several different concepts. The study also aims to prove that the most recent change, where the meaning of these lexemes changed from *royalty* to a concept closer to *friend, bro, dude* (Cheesy on my Peeny, *Urban Dictionary* 2020), or *sister, sis, girl* (Theworldisflat.edu, *Urban Dictionary* 2018) was specialization based on metaphorization. This study looks into those concepts and follows the change throughout the history of these lexemes, with a focus on the contemporary changes and use of the lexemes. In order to do this, data was collected from the social media platforms Twitter and Tumblr. The data contains 100 posts, 50 exemplifying the use of the lexeme *queen* in its specialized meaning, and 50 containing the use of the lexeme *king* in its specialized meaning. The data was categorized based on the purpose it was used for and analyzed using the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework.

The earliest known meaning of the lexeme *king* is ‘an earthly king, king of the land’ (Bosworth 2014b). This is the meaning that has been connected to the lexeme throughout all of its history, even today. The lexeme *queen*, however, started out meaning “a young woman” (Bosworth 2014a). The meaning then became broader, namely “a woman” (Bosworth 2014a), then narrowed to “a wife” (Bosworth 2014a), until it narrowed even further and came to mean “a king’s or emperor’s wife, a queen, empress” (Bosworth 2014a). Throughout most of the history of the lexemes *king* and *queen*, they have been connected to the concept of royalty, rulers.

In recent years, the meaning of these lexemes changed further. Besides their meaning of royalty, they started to encapsulate concepts similar to those of lexemes such as *friend, dude, bro, or sister, sis, girl*. It is hypothesized that this new meaning, connected to love and admiration of people close to the speaker, came about through semantic change based on metaphorization. This study presents the findings of the analysis, starting with the theoretical framework which consists of five sections.

The first section of the theoretical framework discusses semantic change and metaphorization, as well as conventionalization and use of humour. Metaphorization is, alongside metonymization, one of the two most common mechanisms of semantic change

(Traugott & Dasher 2001: 26). The new meaning of the lexemes *king* and *queen* has been conventionalized, or continuously repeated and perpetuated (Grubišić 2017: 474), within two social groups: the Black community and the queer community.

Conventionalization of meaning is important to discuss in this context, because without conventionalization, the new meaning is only known to a small number of speakers in very specific instances and is, therefore, not relevant for broader linguistic discourse. Even though this new meaning of the lexemes *king* and *queen* has not become so highly conventionalized as to enter the Standard variety of the English language, it has still been conventionalized in the two aforementioned communities. Here, it is important to mention that any non-Standard variety of the English language follows its own rules and logic (Constantinou & Chambers 2020: 26), and the Standard English language is not superior to it; it is simply a different variation of the English language (Constantinou & Chambers 2020: 24). The discussion of Standard and Non-Standard varieties of the English language, as well as their connection to the lexemes *king* and *queen* is discussed in the second section of the theoretical framework.

Seeing as the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning are conventionalized within the Black and the queer community, they are used in those communities on a daily basis. Besides the sincere use of these lexemes as a way to refer to a close friend or an admired person, the analysis has also found that these lexemes are used in a humorous way, most commonly in an ironic way, within the communities in which these lexemes gained new meanings. Humour, sarcasm, and irony have always constituted an important part of human communication (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708). This use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* is further discussed in section 1 of the theoretical framework, as well as in sections 4.1.2. *Humorous use* and 4.1.3. *Ironic use of the lexemes king and queen as a reference to oneself*, and in sections 4.2.2. *Humorous use* and 4.2.3. *Ironic use of the lexemes king and queen as a reference to a friend or an admired person*.

The third section of the theoretical framework deals with language as a part of identity construction. A crucial aspect to consider while discussing the specialized meanings of the lexemes *king* and *queen*, which stem from the Black and the queer community, entering mainstream language is an issue of appropriation. The opinion that a language a person uses in some ways reflects and constructs their identity has been popular for a long time (Weiss 2005: 78). This can be related to any part of a person's identity, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or politics. While language use is performative (Weiss 2005: 76), gender

and sexual identity (Butler 1993: 15), as well as race, are not a performance. The linguistic items connected to those parts of identity therefore play an important part in outwardly constructing and showing a person's identity. There is a crucial difference between Black and queer identities that cannot be ignored. While queer theory suggests that gender and sexual identity are fluid and continuously constructed, which means that there cannot be any language that is exclusively queer (Weiss 2005: 79), Black identities cannot be constructed and changed in the same way. In short, this means that queer language cannot be appropriated because there is no language that is universally queer. The language of the Black community, specifically African American Vernacular English, to which the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning belong, can be appropriated, and its usage by non-Black speakers is not typically encouraged. In the fourth section of the theoretical framework, the history of the lexemes *king* and *queen* in Black culture is discussed, while the fifth section of the theoretical framework deals with the lexemes *king* and *queen* in the queer community.

The aim of this study is to explore what kinds of meanings are expressed by the lexemes *king* and *queen* in everyday language use, especially on social media. These lexemes have recently started to be used in new senses that indicate semantic change through metaphorization. It is expected that semantic change is allowing speakers to specialize the lexemes *king* and *queen* to carry senses important for a specific socio-cultural context, and that these specialized senses of the lexemes *king* and *queen* follow the socio-cultural changes of specific groups of speakers. Therefore, this study will explore the connection between semantic change and socio-cultural change through the use of the lexemes *king* and *queen*.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Semantic change and metaphor**

According to Haser (2003: 173) semantic change is a process in which "a lexical item A, hitherto associated with a semantic A, comes to associate with the new, but related (polysemous) semantic configuration A which may co-exist with, or replace, A". In other words, semantic change is a process in which a lexeme which has previously been connected to one specific meaning acquires a new specific meaning, or the old and the new understanding of the lexeme coexist. According to Traugott and Dasher (2001), there are two main mechanisms of semantic change, namely metaphorization and metonymization (Traugott & Dasher 2001: 26). For the purposes of this study, only metaphorization will be discussed.

Traugott and Dasher (2001: 24) argue that the main source of semantic change lies in pragmatics. The authors argue that the semantic changes that derive from pragmatics are “both cognitive and communicative”, meaning they depend both on the information contained in words (the agreed upon meaning of words) and also communicative, meaning agreement between two speakers (Traugott & Dasher 2001: 25). In other words, each lexical item is connected to a specific concept, and this connection is widely known and understood. This is what is above referred to as the “information contained in the words” (Traugott & Dasher 2001: 25). Any speaker of a language can connect this lexical item with a specific meaning to any other meaning, usually based on metaphorical transfer. However, in a conversation, both interlocutors must agree to connect the meaning of a lexical item to another concept besides its widely known meaning for the change to make sense within that conversation. In the words of Traugott and Dasher (2001: 25), “meanings have a starting point in the conventional given, but the course of ongoing interaction meaning is negotiated, i.e. jointly and collaboratively constructed”.

To avoid the confusion between the process of semantic change and the lexeme with a new meaning, Traugott and Dasher (2001: 27) suggest using the term *metaphorization* for the process of semantic change, and *metaphor* for the resulting lexeme. Metaphorization is widely “recognized as a central cause of semantic change” (Haser 2003: 174). Metaphorization is a process which occurs mostly on the basis of analogy, meaning that it involves “conceptualizing one element of a conceptual structure C1 in terms of an element of another conceptual structure C2” (Traugott & Dasher 2001: 28). Metaphorization is a process that is explained as operating between domains, meaning that it usually involves comparison between sources and targets in “different conceptual domains” (Traugott & Dasher 2001: 28). Metaphor, on the other hand, is the result of metaphorization. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 6), every metaphor is a metaphorical concept, because metaphors do not exist in language only, but are the fundamental way in which people conceptualize the world; thinking of one thing in terms of another. Every conceptual metaphor consists of a source domain and a target domain. Concepts in our heads structure “what we perceive, how we get around the world, and how we relate to other people” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3). In other words, concepts shape the way we think, act, and speak, and are tools we use to understand the world around us. The target domain is the real-world concept or experience that we try to understand in the terms of a source domain, or the conceptual domain. These concepts exist in the mind of every speaker (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3). Since they are the means through which speakers understand the world, these

concepts also allow the speakers to produce metaphorical expressions based on them (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). In short, concepts exist in the minds of speakers and allow speakers to produce conceptual metaphors based on those concepts. Semantic change influences the concepts and, by extension, the lexemes and expressions themselves, based on the needs of the language community. Because of the flexibility of concepts aided by metaphorization, speakers are able to modify the meanings of lexemes based on what they need to express.

For a lexical item to change its meaning, whether by metaphorization or some other process of semantic change, this new meaning must be continuously repeated. The process of continuously perpetuating a new meaning of a word is called conventionalization. This is a language mechanism closely connected to semantic change. For a new meaning of a word to be recognized by a large number of speakers, the word must be continuously used in a new way. If the new meaning appears once and is never repeated again, the process of conventionalization has not happened, and the meaning is only known to one specific speaker in one specific context. Thus, the new meaning is soon forgotten. Because of this, we cannot consider the word to have acquired a new meaning unless the new meaning has become relevant in a broader linguistic context (Plag 2003: 7). “Social interaction [...] does not exist in a vacuum: [it] is created by the members of a community through language use” (Grubišić 2017: 474). In short, the use of a specific word becomes conventionalized when it is used in the new way over and over again, “repeated over time” (Grubišić 2017: 475). If a specific speaker uses a word in a specific context and this new meaning of the word in this new context is repeated by many speakers over a period of time, the phenomenon created by the original two interlocutors has been conventionalized. Users of a certain language learn its grammar and lexicon, and then by continuing to use the language within various contexts they are active participants in conventionalizing different lexical items (Grubišić 2017: 476).

In the case of the lexemes *king* and *queen* discussed in this study, the new, additional, specialized meaning has been conventionalized in specific communities, namely the queer community and the Black community. In these two communities, the new meanings of these lexemes, meaning *friend*, *bro*, *dude*, or *sister*, *sis*, *girl*, is used on an everyday basis, not only in the United States of America, but because of the internet, also across the world. It has become so conventionalized, in fact, that the new meaning has also entered official dictionaries. For example, the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines the lexeme *king* as:

“1a: a male monarch of a major territorial unit



especially : one whose position is hereditary and who rules for life

b: a paramount chief’

(Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)a)

The main definition of the lexeme king does not include the new meaning discussed in this study. However, in the section *further definitions*, it stands:

“a boy or man who is highly respected and very successful or popular”

(Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)a)

This definition coincides with the meaning of the lexeme *king* discussed in this study. In the case of the lexeme *queen*, the definition in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary is as follows:

“1a: the wife or widow of a king

b: the wife or widow of a tribal chief

: a female monarch

b: a female chieftain

3a: a woman eminent in rank, power, or attractions

b: a goddess or a thing personified as female and having supremacy in a specified realm

: an attractive girl or woman

especially : a beauty contest winner

7 slang, often disparaging : a gay man

especially : an effeminate one”

(Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)b)

The definition of the lexeme *queen* entered under section b in the online *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, ‘an attractive girl of woman’, partially coincides with the meaning of the lexeme *queen* discussed in this study. However, there is no definition of the lexeme *queen* that matches the definition of the lexeme *king*, ‘a boy or man who is highly respected and very successful or popular’, entered in the section *further definitions* of the lexeme *king* in the online *Merriam-Webster* dictionary. The definition of the lexeme *queen* focuses instead on the

physical appearance of the person ('an attractive girl or woman'), or the use of the lexeme as a derogatory term.

The definition of the lexeme *king* on *Urban Dictionary*, on the other hand, reads:

“A term of high respect and consolation used among (usually young) men. More personal and intense than simply bro. Likely arose as a logical reaction to young women referring to each other as queens.

A: My girlfriend just dumped me.

B: Hang in there, king. It'll get better.”

(Cheesy on my Peeny, *Urban Dictionary* 2020)

The definition of the lexeme *queen* on *Urban Dictionary* reads:

“A beautiful girl , who doesn't take disrespect from nobody! She's smart and does what she wants when she wants. She doesn't let nobody bully her and kicks-ass!

This girl is such a Queen!”

(she is so like that!, *Urban Dictionary* 2017)

Interestingly, this new definition of the lexeme *queen*, meaning ‘an admired woman, a female friend’, has been entered on *Urban Dictionary* in 2017, while its counterpart, the definition of the new meaning of the lexeme *king* was entered three years later, in 2020. The definition of the lexeme *king* on *Urban Dictionary* also suggests that its use stems from the use of the lexeme *queen*, even though the definition of the lexeme *queen* seems to also refer to the person’s physical appearance to some degree (‘a beautiful girl’), which does not exist in the definition of the lexeme *king* in *Urban Dictionary* nor in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary. Despite the suggestion on *Urban Dictionary* that the use of the lexeme *queen* has entered popular language first, the specialized definition of the lexeme *king* is present in *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, while the specialized definition of the lexeme *queen* is not fully addressed. This could be due to the fact that these lexemes have been used in their specialized meanings for many decades and have only recently reentered popular language. The definitions of their specialized meanings based on metaphor have, therefore, entered official dictionaries before they have been described on a platform like *Urban Dictionary*. It is possible that the specialized meaning of the lexeme *queen* has recently become popularized before its male counterpart, the lexeme *king*.

Since the specialized meanings of the lexemes *king* and *queen* have been formally included even into traditional dictionaries, it is important to analyze them further. This usage will be further discussed in the analysis section of the study.

## 2.2. Humour, irony, and sarcasm in the use of the lexemes *king* and *queen*

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the research process of this study uncovered many uses of the lexemes *king* and *queen* expressing new meanings for purposes of humor and irony. Therefore, this aspect of their use should be further explored.

Humour, sarcasm, and irony have always constituted an important part of human communication (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708). In the analysis, this paper primarily focuses on irony. The first reason for this is the fact that many authors (Van Hee et al. 2018: 709; Reyes et al. 2012: 240) label sarcasm as “verbal irony”. This label has been agreed upon because the attributes of irony and sarcasm are related so closely it becomes impossible to adequately define and describe the two in a way that clearly distinguishes them. However, one distinguishing difference that is often pointed out is that irony is less aggressive, often not directed at a specific person, and sometimes even occurs unintentionally (Van Hee et al. 2018: 711). The second reason for focusing primarily on irony is that within the above given definitions, irony applies to the subject of this paper much more closely than sarcasm does.

Irony involves a „speaker who intentionally says the opposite of what they believe“ (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708) or a speaker alluding to a negative attitude to a previous proposition (Reyes et al. 2012: 242). “Like most creative phenomena, irony is difficult to pin down in formal terms, and no single definition ever seems entirely satisfactory” (Reyes et al. 2012: 241). The use of irony affects all aspects of a speaker’s language, including pronunciation, syntactic structure, semantics, and conceptualization (Reyes et al. 2012: 240). As it runs through all aspects of language, irony can take many forms and doesn’t always occur within the same parameters. According to this, it is illogical to try and define formulations that could be pointed in speech or text to prove that irony is really occurring. The biggest marker of irony is pretense: „speakers craft utterances in spite of what has just happened, not because of it” (Reyes et al. 2012: 241). This pretense alludes to an expectation that the speaker had, but that has in some way been violated. Irony gives the speaker the means to simultaneously poke fun at their interlocutor and express the disappointment with an expectation that their interlocutor has not met, or even reproach them for their statements or actions (Reyes et al. 2012: 241). This kind of ironic use can be seen in these examples:

- a. lesbianrey. [A screenshot of a Gmail notification on an iPhone screen. The title of the email reads: “LISTEN TO PRESIDENT OBAMA”. The email reads: “*Barack Obama is so disappointed in you, Blythe.*”] “*the feeling is mutual **king***”. 16 October 2020. Tumblr post.
- b. muppethole. “*hey here’s arizona senator sinema (a democrat **queen!**) killing the \$15 minimum wage with a lil curtsy and probably doing an adorbs widdle pout behind her mask as she denies millions of workers a barely livable income, slayyy!*”. 6 March 2021. Tumblr post.

In both of these examples, the lexemes king and queen have been used ironically, showing that the speaker disagrees with the actions of the person they are referring to. This will be further discussed in the analysis.

A commonly found characteristic of irony is also that it evaluates something or someone (Van Hee et al. 2018: 710). The speaker may use understatements or exaggerations in order to communicate their (often negative) view of the situation which transpired (Van Hee et al. 2018: 710). It is important to note, however, that many of these linguistic strategies, such as understatements, exaggerations, or hyperboles are often used in speech without the implications of irony and are therefore not in themselves clear markers of it.

As for why irony is used, most authors (Van Hee et al. 2018; Reyes et al. 2012) see it as „a politeness strategy enabling its users to negate or criticize something in a face-protecting way” (Van Hee et al. 2018: 710). The examples of this kind of ironic use will be provided in the analysis.

### 2.3. Standard and Non-Standard English

In order to discuss the semantic change of the lexemes *king* and *queen*, we must look at the two groups that first started using the lexemes in their specialized meaning. These two groups are the Black community, as well as the queer community. To explain their part in the semantic change of these two particular lexemes, it is crucial to first define the framework within which we are looking at them. Firstly, this includes discussing the Standard English Language and the ways different social groups deviate from it. Confirming the validity and value of any form of the English language, not just the Standard English Language, is necessary for understanding the importance that different marginalized social groups carry in language-shaping processes.

The Standard English language has “a widely accepted and codified grammar” (Trudgill 2000: 7). It is also the variety of the English language taught in schools, both in English-speaking countries and as a second language (Constantinou & Chambers 2020: 24). The prevalence of this version of the English language, as well as the institutional support it receives often leads the speakers to adopt the standard language ideology (Forsberg, Ribbas, Gross 2020: 5). This refers to the belief that standard language is the most “correct, educated or careful form of the language” (Forsberg et al. 2020: 5). This belief is then often further supported by institutions such as the educational system or the media, leading many speakers to consider this belief to be “logical” or “common-sensical” (Forsberg et al. 2020: 5). Furthermore, linguistic hegemony is also reproduced in the classroom by the dominant class’s values. Linguistic hegemony refers to the belief that a language should only have one, unified form (Dunstan & Jaeger 2015: 781). This means, in other words, that the Standard English variety of the English language is the variety of the English language which is the most highly conventionalized. It means that the biggest percentage of speakers of the English language are made aware of the conventions of the Standard English language.

Seeing as Standard English is often seen as the best version of the English language, the assimilation ideology is spread. Assimilation refers to the idea that individuals should “be proud when [they] can ‘blend in’ with the others” (Alter 2016: 16), and in linguistic terms this means that speakers are encouraged to speak the Standard English language which is supposedly spoken by the majority of the population. A milder version of this ideology is the assimilation approach to language, where speakers are allowed to retain their version of the language, as long as they possess the ability to express knowledge and abilities “for participating in [the] mainstream society” (Alter 2016: 8). Those varieties of the English language which are not conventionalized to the degree of the Standard variety are seen as lesser, because they are not as widely used as the Standard variety.

However, Non-Standard language is also rule-governed and consistent, containing its own internal logic (Constantinou & Chambers 2020: 26). The Standard English language is not superior to it; it is simply a different variation of the English language (Constantinou & Chambers 2020: 24). Furthermore, different speakers may have different associations with a particular variety of the English language. Members of a community may see the Standard English language as the educated, sophisticated, best version of the English language, but they may also view it as pretentious, or connect it to the middle class, from which they may want to distance themselves (Forsberg et al. 2020: 5). In the case of the lexemes *king* and *queen*,

specifically their specialized meaning of *friend*, *bro*, *dude*, or *sister*, *sis*, *girl*, the association is often to the queer community or the Black community. Members of these communities may choose to use these lexemes in their specialized meaning to signify belonging to those groups.

Varieties of Non-Standard English language appear everywhere, within different communities, neighborhoods, states, and countries. Speakers often adapt the way they are speaking to either portray themselves as a part of a particular group and associate with it, or to distance themselves from a particular social group. This is referred to as the theory of audience design (Forsberg et al. 2020: 4). The theory of audience design means that speakers may use the specific language typically associated with a specific group in order to present themselves as a member of that group.

Both the Black community and the queer community have language varieties that are often associated with them. In this study, specialization of the lexemes *king* and *queen* from the meaning of *royalty* to carrying the meaning of *friend* is discussed. This specialized meaning first appeared in these two communities, and has since started slowly entering the mainstream language, especially on social media. This will be further illustrated in the analysis.

#### **2.4. Language as a part of identity construction**

In order to explain the importance of the two groups who started using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning, we must first explore the part language plays in identity construction. The opinion that the language a person uses in some ways reflects and constructs their identity has been popular for a long time (Weiss 2005: 78). This can be related to any part of a person's identity, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or politics. In this section, three specific identity markers will be examined in their relation to language, namely race, gender, and sexual identity. This will be looked at through the lens of sociolinguistics, a linguistic research field which has dealt with "stylization and manipulation of language in a performative context" (Eberhardt & Freeman 2015: 303) for decades. The ways in which language can convey identity, either "revealing or concealing" (Weiss 2005: 79) parts of a person's identity will be looked at.

The lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings based on metaphor that is discussed in this study have played an important role in two communities, the Black community and the queer community, either as a way to refer to close friends and loved ones, or as a way to express admiration. The specialized meanings of these lexemes are deeply embedded in the two aforementioned communities. As mentioned earlier, language reflects and constructs the

identity of the person using it (Weiss 2005: 78). Because of this, it is impossible to understand the semantic change of the lexemes used within these communities without first looking at the role language itself plays in identity construction.

Butler claims that “gender identity and gender construction” (1993: 15) are performative in some ways, but this does not mean they are a performance (Butler 1993: 15). According to Weiss, Austin (1911 – 1960) first defined the concept of performativity (Weiss 2005: 76), describing it as “doing something instead of saying something” (Weiss 2005: 76). Butler later describes all language as both performative and linguistic, expanding on Austin’s idea. According to Butler, “speech belongs exclusively neither to corporeal presentation nor to language, and its status as word and deed is necessarily ambiguous” (Butler 1999: 25). A person might use certain language to present themselves as a person of a specific gender or sexuality, as discussed above in connection to the theory of audience design. However, this does not mean their identity is a performance; it means they are using language in order to express their identity, thus performing it. This becomes especially evident in the context of queer culture.

A problem many researchers run into when talking about “queer language” is the assumption that queer language is somehow grounded in queer identities and examining it as if there are linguistic characteristics that only appear within this group (Weiss 2005: 79). When talking about queer language, it must be understood that it is a “resource available to everybody to use” (Weiss 2005: 79). This means that there are some aspects of language that might stereotypically be considered queer (Weiss 2005: 79). Gendered and sexual behavior is socialized and learned from childhood, so some behaviours and language are coded female or male, straight or queer (Preece & Bullingham 2020: 1).

Queer theory, however, suggests that gender identity and sexual identity are fluid and continuously constructed. There is no language that is specifically queer, because to call language specifically queer would mean the acceptance of a strict social binary, which queer theory rejects (Bartulović & Kušević 2020: 129). This is what Butler refers to as “the necessary error of identity” (Butler 1993: 174). Within queer theory, “identity categories are not accepted as *a priori* entities but are recognized as ideological constructs produced by social discourse” (Gray & Cooke 2018: 410). In other words, to label aspects of language as specifically queer would be going against the fundamentals of queer theory. So there is no queer language, only language that is typically used within the queer community.

Language of the Black community, on the other hand, can be described, at least as far as research in the United States goes. AAVE, or African American Vernacular English has been heavily studied and discussed by linguists since the 1960s (Labov 2010: 15). It is the variety of the English language primarily used by Black people in the United States, with its own standard variety, as well as many other varieties (Labov 2010: 15). Blackness is seen as its own social sphere, with its own history and traditions (Richardson 2013: 160). This does not imply that queer history and traditions do not exist. Rather, it explains that queerness is something a person can choose to either conceal or reveal, while Blackness is not something that can as easily be concealed. Any person might use language that typically appears within the queer community because any person might be queer, because queerness is not always visible.

While queer theory describes sexual and gender identities as fluid and constructed, race cannot be constructed in the same way. A speaker may use specific language in order to affiliate themselves with a specific group, but this does not necessarily make them a part of this group. Language is performative and can construct parts of a person's identity as far as it embodies "conventional forms of language that are already in existence before the speaker utters them" (Weiss 2005: 79). Any form or language can be used by anyone in order to affiliate themselves with any specific social group. This is where the question of appropriation must be considered.

Appropriation indicates "the transfer of ownership, use rights and control over resources that were once publicly or privately owned – or not even the subject of ownership – from the poor (or everyone including the poor) into the hands of the powerful" (Fairhead et al. 2012: 238). AAVE has been discriminated against, ridiculed, and even punished in schools when used by Black people. In the 1990s it became popularized amongst white teens, then in the wider public discourse (Bucholtz 1997: 1) and, in the end, worldwide. When it was used only by Black people, AAVE was considered to be "bad language" only. Once it spread to the wider, white population, it became common and everyday, fun and cool (Bucholtz 1997: 1).

There is a tendency in intersectional research to look at all identity markers equally, as if they affect a person's life in exactly the same way. There is also a tendency to "homogenize people inhabiting similar intersections" (Gray & Cooke 2018: 410). However, no social group is homogenous and different identity markers are viewed, explored, expressed, and performed differently (Gray & Cooke 2018: 410). Language is not ingrained in identity; rather, it is a tool for constructing it, which allows for continuous change. Different social groups and different



individuals within those groups want different kinds of treatments and therefore require different approaches.

### 2.5. Lexemes *king* and *queen* in Black culture

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) keeps a relatively “uniform sound system” which is based on modifying “Southern vowel patterns” (Labov 2010: 15). It is a variety of the English language that keeps developing and transforming, that has its own standard variety, as well as multiple other varieties (Labov 2010: 15). In the 1990s, AAVE became popular amongst white teens, making it a “popular topic of public discourse” (Bucholtz 1997: 1). Since then, thanks to the Internet, AAVE has spread worldwide. This pattern of “appropriation of Black culture is a common pattern in the United States” (Bucholtz 1997: 1). This is done through fashion and mannerisms, but AAVE is the most common way of appropriating Black culture (Bucholtz 1997: 2).

Using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings, similar to the lexeme *friend*, has been a part of AAVE for a long time. In *The Washington Post*, Musoni writes:

“Men calling each other king isn’t a new phenomenon. In the Black community, people have been calling one another kings and queens for decades as a term of endearment and to support the idea that Black people collectively descended from African royalty.” (Musoni 2018)

In the newspaper *The Root*, Young writes about the origin of this particular use of the lexemes *king* and *queen*:

“Now, the idea that we (Black people) descended from royalty isn't an uncommon one. It's a popular reference, found in countless songs, texts, and speeches as an understandably empowering juxtaposition to how Black Americans have historically been portrayed here. So popular is this reference, in fact, that many of us use *king* and *queen* as pronouns. It also has some historical merit, because there were actually kingdoms with kings and queens and unfathomable wealth.” (Young 2016)

Historically, however, it is very unlikely this sentiment is true. While Black African kings and queens did really exist, they were not the ones who were ever taken as slaves (Bennett 2018: 23). It is well documented that African royalty often “actively engaged in partnership with the European slavers” (Bennett 2018: 23).

When talking about the specific sentiment expressed in the lexemes *king* and *queen*, namely as a term of endearment referring to the shared past of Black people in the United States, it is important to note that the question of slavery had not only to do with race, but also privilege and wealth (Bennett 2018: 23). “The Atlantic slave trade was deliberately selective in its impact on the society” (Bennett 2018: 23) it was taking from. The privileged, ruling class protected itself and even profited off of their collaboration with the Europeans, exploiting the common people (Bennett 2018: 24). This pattern of the ruling class protecting itself and profiting at the expense of the unprivileged, common people was widespread throughout all of Africa (Bennett 2018: 24).

When Europeans arrived in Africa, they communicated and collaborated with the ruling class, and dealt with the common people through the ruling class (Bennett 2018: 23). Part of the responsibility for enabling the slave trade therefore lies with African kings and queens, tribal rulers and elites (Bennett 2018: 23). This historical fact is also recognized in Musoni’s article in *The Washington Post*:

“Despite the historical inaccuracy, calling each other *kings* and *queens* is simply a reminder of Black Americans’ history in Africa before slavery, something that many in this country don’t know much about.” (Musoni 2018)

After this, he continues with the explanation of the popularity of the lexemes *king* and *queen*, despite historical inaccuracies:

“My male friends are some of the most supportive and loving people I know. [...] But more than anything else, they have loved me and appreciated me. Which is why my male friends and I have been following the [...] trend among Black men to call one another *king*. [...] Sometimes *friend*, *buddy*, *pal*, or *bro* doesn’t suffice. *King* is a word that goes a step further than others in proclaiming your love and appreciation.” (Musoni 2018)

Similarly, in his article in *The Root*, Young writes:

“The *king* and *queen* references aren't meant to be taken literally. They're more terms of shared racial acknowledgement and endearment than anything else.” (Young 2016)

As for where and when this trend started, there are many conflicting theories, many of which rely on speculation. Seeing as most of the history of Black slaves depended on oral

traditions within the community (Busdiecker 2019: 191), it is impossible to find concrete evidence of this linguistic development.

However, there is a relatively contemporary tradition of crowning Black kings in Bolivia, with the most recent king crowned in 2007 (Busdiecker 2019: 191). As is with the case of the lexemes *king* and *queen*, it is impossible to exactly find out when this tradition started (Busdiecker 2019: 197). Since there are no written records, most of this story also relies on community memory (Busdiecker 2019: 191). The most precise timeframe for this tradition goes back to when the Spanish had “an important slave-holding hacienda” (Busdiecker 2019: 197) in Bolivia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Busdiecker 2019: 197). This facility existed up until 1953, when The Agrarian Reform<sup>1</sup> happened, and the exploitation of Black and indigenous peoples finally came to a stop (Busdiecker 2019: 197), at least in the legal sense.

According to oral retellings of the history of this community, the tradition started somewhere in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century when the son of an African king who was enslaved was recognized by the community (Busdiecker 2019: 197). A crowning ceremony was then held, even though it is unknown “weather this ceremony was arranged by the Black servants or the Spanish hacienda owners” (Busdiecker 2019: 197). The key point in this story is the implication of Europeans enslaving Black people without care for their social or political status (Busdiecker 2019: 199).

This oral retelling has since been disproven, and the “first crowned Black king in Bolivia” was in fact just an overseer who was respected (Busdiecker 2019: 200), which aligns with previously discussed historical facts. This story does, however, offer the start of the slave

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<sup>1</sup> The Agrarian Reform in Bolivia occurred in 1953 (Goudsmit 2008: 362). The political party behind the reform was *Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario* (MNR). The goal of the reform was to make the use and ownership of land fair, as well as to free the people forced to work on *haciendas* (Goudsmit 2008: 363). Before the reform, local landlords were able to turn their land into *haciendas* (Goudsmit 2008: 365), where local peasants were forced to work and live without being able to own any property of their own (Goudsmit 2008: 380). The reform transformed the community of peasants living on a *hacienda* into a corporate social group and allowed them to form labour unions. The landlords were now forced to have reciprocal responsibilities to the peasants and the peasants were able to organize their own work, earning fair wages and potentially allows them to purchase their own land (Goudsmit 2008: 365). Some historians argue that this was the reform that led to the demise of the landlord class (Goudsmit 2008: 362), while others argue that the landlord families were still able to exploit the resulting political and social changes more than the indigenous peasants (Goudsmit 2008: 362). For more information, see: Goudsmit 2008.

trade as a point at which *king* and *queen* became terms of endearment used by Black people as a form of empowerment (Busdiecker 2019: 202). Attaining the title of a *king* or a *queen* has nothing to do with the question of whether the individual that is being referred to has actual royal blood. It simply shows love and admiration of others within their community (Busdiecker 2019: 127). Even though the term became less popular over time, the meaning has still stuck, and the term made a resurgence recently.

In recent years, starting around 2018 (Musoni 2018) the use of the lexemes *king* or *queen* as terms of endearment entered popular culture, first gaining more popularity within the Black community. This first started on the popular microblogging platform *Twitter*, and later spread both on the Internet and in real life. In his article in *The Washington Post*, Musoni writes:

“In the past year, *king* as a term of endearment among Black people has become more popular and taken center stage on Twitter. [...] However, with the resurgence of *king*-calling, it is understandable that some Black people are not pleased that non-Black men have co-opted the term.” (Musoni 2018)<sup>2</sup>

The term has not, however, gotten a resurgence without a reason. The year 1969 is generally seen as the year in which the LGBT rights movement first started, at the Stonewall riot<sup>3</sup> (De Oliveira 2018: 172). The two individuals credited with starting the movement are “Marsha P. Johnson, a Black trans woman and Sylvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican trans woman” (De Oliveira 2018: 172). Trans women of colour have always inhabited two specific marginalized groups, the Black community and the LGBT community. They have also historically been excluded from both of them (De Oliveira 2018: 173). Before Stonewall, there

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<sup>2</sup> Musoni also criticizes the use of these lexemes in their new meaning (referring to a close friend) by non-Black speakers: “We live in a patriarchal society where white men are the most privileged. They have been looked at as kings for centuries, and at this point I’m just not in the mood anymore to say what has already been said systemically. I would rather devote my time and breath to telling those among my male friends who will always live in a world that really doesn’t want them that they have that sauce and are the masters of that sauce.” For the full text, see: Musoni (2018)

<sup>3</sup> The Stonewall riots started in a small bar in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in New York. The riots were a conflict between the New York Police Department and the members of the local LGBT community who were, at the time, visiting a gay bar. The events started on June 28, 1969 and lasted for five days, but they ignited a social movement calling for the rights and equal treatment of the members of the LGBT community that spans over decades and continues today (Halkitis 2019: 851). For more information, see: Halkitis 2019.

have been two movements, The Black Movement, and The Homosexual Movement (De Oliveira 2018: 171), both of which denied trans women of colour access to their circles (De Oliveira 2018: 171).

With the beginning point around the time of Stonewall, trans women of colour began founding Houses (Richardson 2013: 159), which were an integral part of ballroom culture<sup>4</sup> (Horowitz 2013: 106), where the lexemes *king* and *queen* took on an important role. The role which the LGBT movement and the queer people played in the popularization and semantic change of the lexemes *king* and *queen* are discussed in the next section.

## 2.6. Lexemes *king* and *queen* in queer culture

At first glance, talking about intersectionality and queer identities may seem like a paradox, since intersectionality deals with the overlap of different social categories, while queer theory rejects any social categories and is distrustful of them (Gray & Cooke 2018: 409). This tendency to reject social categories, however, led to certain groups of people being overlooked in queer history, as well as their contributions being attributed to others (Gray & Cooke 2018: 411). This is most notably seen in the erasure of trans women of colour, especially Black trans women, from queer history, which has only been rectified in recent decades (De Oliveira 2018: 160).

Queer theory, therefore, has to accept some social categories in order to look at the problems different queer people face. This ultimately also leads to fighting against the idea of the queer community as a homogenous group of people.

As mentioned in the section above, trans women of colour are often seen as belonging to two separate worlds, while also often being rejected from both (De Oliveira 2018: 173). Because of the experience of constant rejection, Black trans women started to form communities in which those who were rejected by society could take shelter and find support; they started forming what is known as *Houses* (Richardson 2013: 159). In the 1970s and 1980s

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<sup>4</sup> Ballroom culture is, together with the House culture, a part of what is known as the Ballroom scene or community. This is a community which works to provide support and take care of members of the LGBT community, most often poor and homeless members, who are often people of colour. Ballroom culture consists of underground competitions focusing on dance, gender expression, fashion, and athletics. These competitions originate from 1920s Harlem, where it most commonly involved young Black men under the age of 30 (Kuberick et al. 2013: 1525). For more information, see: Kuberick et al. 2013.

*Houses* housed a large number of Black people who faced homelessness due to being gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender (Horowitz 2013: 106). Each *House* had a *House Mother*, an established member of the community who sheltered these young people (Horowitz 2013: 106). During this time, ballroom culture was born (Horowitz 2013: 106).

The use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* is prominent in the community, especially in ballroom culture. These lexemes are used by the members of ballroom culture as a way to reject their societal status and reinvent themselves (Rowan et al. 2013: 190). Ballroom culture is about members of the queer community dressing up in various performance costumes and indulging in the fantasy of opulence and acceptance (Rowan et al. 2013: 188). As members of a marginalized community living on the fringes of society, these people often worked low-paying jobs or as sex workers during the day (Rowan et al. 2013: 188), waiting for a ball which presented a fantasy in complete contrast with their harsh reality (Rowan et al. 2013: 189). The act of self-fashioning during a ballroom performance is, according to Moore, a “utopian space where queer personhood, personality, creativity and innovation can be claimed” (Moore 2017: 155).

The performers at a ball are drag kings and queens (Kidd 2016: 49), and the practice of drag itself offers a way to reject the notion that there is such a thing as “original gender” (Butler 199: 144) by dressing up in exaggerated costumes of hegemonic femininity or masculinity (Butler 199: 146). This process of reinventing oneself by combining, altering, and reimagining fashion is referred to as *cultural bricolage* (Hebdige 1979: 105-106). Furthermore, drag queens and kings know the impact of racism and homophobia on their chances for upward mobility in capitalist economy, and their performances exhibit a profound knowledge of the workings of class and class division (Kidd 2016: 49). Ballroom culture exists within the queer community today (Bailey 2011: 367). It still represents a community and a network of mostly queer people of colour (Bailey 2011: 367).

The usage of the lexemes *king* and *queen* in queer culture is not exclusive to the English language.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to Sinnott (2012), they are also popular terms in the Korean queer community (Sinnott 2012: 454). The terms stem from the popularization of “soft masculinity” in male queer spaces, as well as in female queer spaces later on, where women would style themselves in highly masculine fashion (Sinnott 2012: 454). Soft masculinity became connected to the lexemes *king* and *queen* (Sinnott 2012: 454). Thai gay male communities were already using the lexemes *king* and *queen*, although there they were used in sexual situations (Sinnott 2012:

In recent popular culture, the lexemes *king* and *queen* as used by the queer community became available to a wider population through two popular television shows: *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Brown 2018, 63) and *Queer Eye* (Vargas 2010).

Queer Eye is a television “makeover/reality” show (Weiss 2005: 73) that features five gay men (Vargas 2010: 1) helping straight men “fix” their lives in five different areas (Vargas 2010: 2). The show has two iterations. It first premiered in 2003 and it quickly became one of the most popular and profitable shows for NBC (Vargas 2010: 1). The show was revived on its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, bringing new seasons with the new main cast to Netflix (Polus 2018). In this iteration of the show, the cast focuses on helping both men and women (Polus 2018). RuPaul's Drag Race first premiered in 2009 on a small queer television network, and later moved to more visible, bigger platforms (Brown 2018: 63). Both shows brought queer language, including the use of the lexemes *king* and *queen*, into popular culture (Vargas 2010: 22).

### 3. Methodology and data

This study focuses on semantic change and the cultural significance of the lexemes *king* and *queen*. In the center of this study is the semantic change of these two lexemes, whereby their meaning specialized from referring to men and women who are rulers of a country to a meaning closer to the lexemes *friend*, *dude*, or *bro*, or *sister*, *sis*, *girl*.

The data for this study was manually collected from Twitter and Tumblr over a period of three months (February of 2021 to May of 2021). By using Twitter's search function, the words *king* and *queen* were searched, and the same process was repeated on Tumblr. Tweets and posts were selected randomly from various accounts and no data was collected from accounts that were made private, meaning accounts with restricted access (private profiles). The data from Twitter and Tumblr was collected in this way in the interest of finding example tweets that best fit the topic of the paper and the discussed linguistic issues. The list of compiled examples was limited and contained 100 posts, 50 exemplifying the specialized use of the lexeme *king*, and 50 exemplifying the specialized use of the lexeme *queen*.

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454). Now, the terms became connected to the lesbian community, where they are used to play with the existing gender binaries (Sinnott 2012: 455). The lexemes *king* and *queen*, therefore, have the meaning of *partner*, *boyfriend*, or *girlfriend* within this community. For more information, see Sinnott (2012).

Different instances of this specific use were looked through and then categorized based on the purpose each instances of the used lexeme had. The example tweets and Tumblr posts are further discussed based on the purpose of the use of their specific form.

The phenomenon is discussed within the previously described theoretical framework.

#### **4. Results**

In this section, the examples that have been collected will be analyzed. The results are divided into three sections: *Lexemes king and queen as a reference to oneself*, *Lexemes king and queen as a reference to a friend or admired person*, and *Short king*. The data was categorized based on the purpose it was used for and analyzed using the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework.

The opinion that the language a person uses in some ways reflects and constructs their identity has been popular for a long time (Weiss 2005: 78). This can be related to any part of a person's identity, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or politics. In this section, the importance of the lexemes *king* and *queen* as a tool of identity construction within the Black and the queer community is illustrated, as well as the everyday use of these lexemes by speakers outside of either of these communities. As was mentioned above, a problem many researchers run into when talking about "queer language" is the assumption that queer language is somehow grounded in queer identities and examining it as if there are linguistic characteristics that only appear within this group (Weiss 2005: 79). When talking about queer language, it must be understood that it is a "resource available to everybody to use" (Weiss 2005: 79). This means that there are some aspects of language that might stereotypically be considered queer (Weiss 2005: 79). However, there is no such thing as universal queer language, which means that the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor, as they are used within the queer community, can be used by anyone.

Language of the Black community, on the other hand, can be described, at least as so far as research in the United States goes. AAVE, or African American Vernacular English has been heavily studied and discussed by linguists since the 1960s (Labov 2010: 15). Using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings, similar to the lexeme *friend*, has been a part of AAVE for a long time. In *The Washington Post*, Musoni writes: "Men calling each other king isn't a new phenomenon. In the Black community, people have been calling one another kings and queens for decades as a term of endearment and to support the idea that Black people



collectively descended from African royalty” (Musoni 2018). Based on this, these lexemes are important tools of identity construction within the Black community.

The examples collected here include both examples using Standard English, as well as examples written using Non-Standard English. Varieties of Non-Standard English language appear everywhere, within different communities, neighborhoods, states, and countries. Speakers often adapt the way they are speaking to either portray themselves as a part of a particular group and associate with it, or to distance themselves from a particular social group. This is referred to as the theory of audience design (Forsberg et al. 2020: 4). The theory of audience design means that speakers may use the specific language typically associated with a specific group in order to present themselves as a member of that group. Some examples deal with speakers using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning as a way to present themselves as members of a specific social group.

#### 4.1. Lexemes *king* and *queen* as a reference to oneself

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to oneself are analyzed.

##### 4.1.1. Sincere use

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to oneself are analyzed. The focus is on the sincere use of these lexemes, meaning use without humour or irony. These examples clearly illustrate the specialized meaning of the lexemes *king* and *queen*.

- a. Allu rajesh kumar (@Rajeshk14401205). “I am **King** of Social Media AA @alluarjun @Alluprashanth9 @AlluArjun\_Army @TeamAAArmy”. 25 May 2021. Tweet.

In example **a**, the speaker is referring to himself as ‘*king* of social media’. Here, the speaker is utilizing a widely known concept, the concept of royalty, and specializing the meaning of the lexeme *king* to apply to himself in the context of social media. A concept that exist in the mind of every speaker (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3) is used in a specialized way. Since these well-known concepts are the means through which speakers understand the world, these concepts also allow the speakers to produce metaphorical expressions based on them (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). In short, the concepts that exist in the minds of speakers allow speakers to produce conceptual metaphors based on those concepts. Semantic change influences the concepts and, by extension, the lexemes and expressions themselves, based on the needs of the language community. Because of the flexibility of concepts aided by metaphorization, speakers

are able to modify the meanings of lexemes based on what they need to express. In this case, the concept of a ruler is specialized to refer to ‘a boy or man who is highly respected and very successful or popular’ (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)a). The use of the lexeme *king* illustrated here also coincides with the *Urban Dictionary* definition, ‘a term of high respect and consolation used among (usually young) men’ (Cheesy on my Peeny, *Urban Dictionary* 2020). In this example, the user is referring to his success or popularity on social media, which he is explaining through the concept of royalty. As royals have power over a certain group of people, this popular social media user has some degree of power or popularity amongst his followers.

- b. BlueBird\* (@krayKMBA). “I’m the **queen** of dad jokes or maybe I’m just plain corny, but I love it here”. 18 May 2021. Tweet.
- c. Society understander (@vaccinista). “just found the exact pair of black vintage cowboy boots I wanted for \$30 I am the **queen** of ebay”. 18 May 2021. Tweet.

In examples **b** and **c**, the users are utilizing the same tools that were utilized by the speaker in example **a**. ‘Queen of jokes’ in example **b** refers to the user’s ability and success in coming up with jokes. In example **c**, the phrase ‘queen of ebay’ is used, referring to the user’s ability to navigate the site successfully and get what she wants. In this case, the *Urban Dictionary* definition partially applies. The definition reads: ‘a beautiful girl , who doesn't take disrespect from nobody! She's smart and does what she wants when she wants. She doesn't let nobody bully her and kicks-ass!’ (she is so like that!, *Urban Dictionary* 2017). While the second part of the definition applies in both examples **b** and **c**, we have no knowledge of the either of the speakers’ physical appearance, which makes the first part of the definition, ‘a beautiful girl’, irrelevant. The examples presented here match the definition of the lexeme *queen* presented in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, because the examples here pertain to ruling or governing within a specific context; the meaning is metaphorical.

#### 4.1.2. Humorous use

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to oneself are analyzed. The focus is on the humorous use of these lexemes.

- d. Dingus (@tenfreakinglee). “nothing makes me feel more powerful than when the pepsi max I just poured almost fizzes over and I slurp that shit up before it even has a chance to touch the table. Just **queen** shit”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.

- e. kristenwiiggle. “*im glad fergie is consistently spelling out words like delicious, glamorous and independent for me, queen of spelling. **Queen** of the english language. **Queen** of syntax*”. 2 July 2019. Tumblr post.

In examples **d** and **e**, the lexeme *queen* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to oneself is used in a humorous way. Research has not found any examples of the use of the lexeme *king* in this way. In both examples, the situations described are situations that are not usually considered to be commendable or admirable, causing a humorous effect.

#### 4.1.3. **Ironic use**

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to oneself are analyzed. The focus is on the ironic use of these lexemes.

- f. 100493503004422. “*I am the **queen** of misplaced anxious guilt*”. 25 August 2019. Tumblr post.
- g. dy(die) (@dynuhstee). “*I’m the **queen** of making the wrong decisions. Literally dumb bitch juice 24/7*”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.

In examples **f** and **g**, the lexeme *queen* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to oneself is used in an ironic way. Research has not found any examples of the use of the lexeme *king* in this way. In examples **f** and **g**, irony is used. Irony involves a „speaker who intentionally says the opposite of what they believe“ (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708) or a speaker alluding to a negative attitude to a previous proposition (Reyes et al. 2012: 242). In example **f**, the user refers to herself as ‘the *queen* of misplaced anxious guilt’. As shown in previous examples, the lexeme *queen* in this meaning has a positive connotation, while the speaker here is referring to ‘misplaced anxious guilt’. Here, the speaker is saying “opposite of what they believe” (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708), referring to a negatively connotated concept using a positively connotated concept. The same tools are utilized in example **g**.

### 4.2. **Lexemes *king* and *queen* as a reference to a friend or admired person**

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to a friend or an admired person are analyzed.

#### 4.2.1. **Sincere use**

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to a friend or an admired person are analyzed. The focus is

on the sincere use of these lexemes, meaning use without humour or irony. These examples clearly illustrate the specialized meaning of the lexemes *king* and *queen*.

- h. larkstonguesinaspicpart1. “you know how people call other people like “**king**” or “**queen**” endearingly? Do you think we’ll be like “omfg CEO” in a post-capitalist future”. 3 March 2021. Tumblr post.

In example **h**, the speaker acknowledges the use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* as an ‘endearing’ way to refer to others and draws the comparison between royalty in times of monarchies and CEOs in a capitalist society. This shows the metaphoric aspect of this use of the lexemes *king* and *queen*: the ‘endearing’ use is based on the high societal position of *kings* and *queens*, which is then metaphorically transferred to the high position of a person in the speaker’s mind. This illustrates the metaphoric aspect of the meaning, how one concept is understood in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 10). It also shows another aspect which is, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), important when talking about metaphors. It shows how a metaphorical concept keeps us from “focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with the metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 10). In this metaphor, kings and queens are seen as strictly positive figures due to their high societal position. This societal high societal position is then used to describe having a high opinion of someone. However, this metaphor ignores any negative opinions one might have of royalty and paints them as singularly positive historical figures.

- i. Dark (@trillbttm). “I’m tired of seeing my black **kings** fucking white people”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.

In example **i**, the speaker refers to Black men as ‘Black *kings*’ and comments on their involvement with ‘white people’. In this example, the use of the lexeme *king* as a way to refer to Black friends or other admired people is illustrated. Using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings, similar to the lexeme *friend*, has been a part of AAVE for a long time. In *The Washington Post*, Musoni writes: “Men calling each other *king* isn’t a new phenomenon. In the Black community, people have been calling one another kings and *queens* for decades as a term of endearment and to support the idea that Black people collectively descended from African royalty” (Musoni 2018). Furthermore, Musoni (2018) writes: “Sometimes *friend*, *buddy*, *pal*, or *bro* doesn’t suffice. *King* is a word that goes a step further than others in proclaiming your love and appreciation” (Musoni 2018). Similarly, in his article in *The Root*, Young writes: “The *king* and *queen* references aren’t meant to be taken literally.

They're more terms of shared racial acknowledgement and endearment than anything else.” (Young 2016).

- j. julius-novachrono. [Screenshot of a tweet: Atlanta Black Star (@ATLBlackStar). “*Danny DeVito Doubles Down on His Criticism of America: “It’s a Racist Country Built on the Boards of Genocide”*”. 30 December 2017. Tweet.]. “*what a **king***”. 3 January 2021. Tumblr post.
- k. whitepeopletwitter. [screenshot of a tweet: Stella Parton (@StellaParton). “*If a little hillbilly singer like my big sister Dolly can invest in the vaccine then why the hell can’t some of you old moldy politicians pitch in a few million yourselves? I noticed you started getting vaccinated right away while people are starving and dying you Assholes*”. 20 December 2020. Tweet.]. 20 December 2020. Tumblr post.  
RESPONSE:  
dantescandlestick. “*nothing but pure **king** shit in the parton family I see*”. 20 December 2020. Tumblr post.
- l. profusedinmelancholy. “*Bisexual **Queen** Angelina Jolie talking about dating women and confirming Laura Croft is a lesbian*”. 18 December 2020. Tumblr post.
- m. DO IT (@slimzyhimsself). “*You have a uniquely beautiful outlook on life that’s truly inspirational. A true African **queen** I stan! Happy 60<sup>th</sup> birthday @YeniAKuti. #YeniKutiAt60*”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
- n. thundergrace. [a screenshot of a tweet: The DRS (@iChopTweets). “*Sudanese model, Nyakim, enters Guinness book of records for having the darkest skin tone on Earth*”. 29 April 2020. Tweet] “*Oh my God! You dropped this **queen***”. 29 April 2020. Tumblr post.

In examples **j**, **k**, **l**, and **m**, speakers are seen using the lexemes *king* and *queen* to refer to celebrities. In examples **j**, **k**, and **l**, speakers are using these lexemes to talk about celebrities specifically in situations when they have said or done something that the speaker agrees with or supports. In example **m**, the speaker is referring to more than just a specific instance of agreeing with a celebrity and is instead using the lexeme *queen* to declare their general support of the celebrity. In example **n**, the speaker is referring to a beautiful woman as a *queen*, which is consistent with the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary’s definition of the lexeme, ‘an attractive girl or woman, especially a beauty contest winner’ (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)b).

Referring to celebrities a person agrees with using the lexemes king and queen shows the popularity of these lexemes in popular culture. In recent years, starting around 2018 (Musoni 2018) the use of the lexemes *king* or *queen* as terms of endearment entered popular culture. This first started on the popular microblogging platform *Twitter*, and later spread both on the Internet and in real life. In his article in *The Washington Post*, Musoni writes: “In the past year, *king* as a term of endearment among Black people has become more popular and taken center stage on Twitter” (Musoni 2018).

- o. SabigirlCloset (@Enkayakanbi). “Dear **queen**. Be intentional about yourself this week. Spoil yourself with one or more of these gowns. You totally deserve it. price ranges from 6k- 11k, available in Sizes 10-14. Delivery is immediate to any location. But free within lagos if you buy 3gowns and above. Order via DM”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.

In example **o**, the speaker is using the lexeme queen to refer to customers. This commercial use of the lexeme *queen* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor also shows its popularity. In this context, when talking about luxurious gowns, the use of the lexeme queen is also reminiscent of the way it is used within queer community, specifically in ballroom culture. These lexemes are used by the members of ballroom culture as a way to reject their societal status and reinvent themselves (Rowan et al. 2013: 190). Ballroom culture is about members of the queer community dressing up in various performance costumes and indulging in the fantasy of opulence and acceptance (Rowan et al. 2013: 188).

#### 4.2.2. Humorous use

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to a friend or an admired person are analyzed. The focus is on the humorous use of these lexemes.

- p. greatcomets. “like not to act like it’s 2014 but hamlet was written like a million years ago and people on here are still like “thats my friend Hamlet”. marveling at this and loving it”. 1 April 2021. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

greatcomets. “hamlet from the play hamlet: [insane little soliloquy]. average tumbler user: rest in peace **king** you would’ve loved iced coffee”. 1 April 2021. Tumblr post.

- q. ndiecity. “pets love eating meat flavored cereal with no milk”. 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

305xdisaster. *“dog food doesn’t taste like meat tbh”*. 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

ndiecity. *“it’s not for you **king**”*. 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.

In examples **p** and **q**, the lexeme *king* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor is used in a humorous way. In example **p**, the character *Hamlet* from the Shakespeare play of the same name is referred to as *king*. He is described as giving ‘insane little soliloquies’ and is then connected to ‘loving iced coffee’, causing a humorous effect. In example **q**, the speakers are having a discussion about the taste of dog food. The first speaker talks about pets eating dry food, and the second speaker responds talking about the taste of it. The first speaker then responds, calling the second speaker *king*, with the implication that the second speaker has tried eating dog food, which causes a humorous effect. In this example, the first user uses face saving irony (Van Hee et al. 2018: 710), even though it is here used to protect the face of the second speaker. Example **q** was chosen to be categorized under humorous use of the lexeme *king* and not ironic use because irony involves a „speaker who intentionally says the opposite of what they believe“ (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708) or a speaker alluding to a negative attitude to a previous proposition (Reyes et al. 2012: 242). Here, however, none of the speakers seem to be expressing the opposite of what they believe nor are they showing any negative attitudes.

- r. brunz. *“carly rae Jepsen is throwing bricks at my house but what am I gonna do, stop her?”*. 6 November 2020. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

targuzzler. *“shes just making it stronger by increasing the total amount of bricks. shes saving your life”*. 6 November 2020. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

brunz. *“**queen** of throwing bricks and saving my life”*. 6 November 2020. Tumblr post.

- s. citymod. [a screenshot of an advertisement for lipstick by Reba McEntire that reads: *“Mother’s Day Special! \$10 Georgia Deluxstick, AVAILABLE NOW AT REBA.COM.”*] *“miss reba got kylie SHOOK”*. 17 July 2019. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

plasticroyal. *“true but does she have a top lip”*. 17 July 2019. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

citymod. *“dismantling kyle’s entire makeup line with only one lip? **QUEEN!**”*. 17 July 2019. Tumblr post.

In examples **r** and **s**, humorous use of the lexeme *queen* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor is illustrated. In both examples, the speakers are using this lexeme to refer to celebrities. In example **r**, the speaker is talking about their support of a celebrity in a joking manner, implying their support even in the imaginary event of the celebrity ‘throwing bricks’ at their house. Another speaker responds to this, saying she is ‘making the house stronger’, to which the first speaker responds, calling the celebrity ‘*queen* of throwing bricks’, which causes a humorous effect. Similarly, in example **s**, the speaker refers to a celebrity as a *queen* for performing an action ‘with only one lip’, causing a humorous effect.

#### 4.2.3. Ironic use

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to a friend or an admired person are analyzed. The focus is on the ironic use of these lexemes.

- t. Honey (@gitmehandmiyy\_). “*he thought I looked at him with love.... the **king** of clowns*”. 25 May 2021. Tweet.
- u. lesbianrey. [A screenshot of a Gmail notification on an iPhone screen. The title of the email reads: “*LISTEN TO PRESIDENT OBAMA*”. The email reads: “*Barack Obama is so disappointed in you, Blythe.*”] “*the feeling is mutual **king***”. 16 October 2020. Tumblr post.

In examples **t** and **u**, the ironic use of the lexeme *king* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor is illustrated. In these examples, the speakers are using the lexeme *king* to refer to people they do not agree with or do not respect. This use is similar to one described in Merriam-Webster dictionary, where it reads: “slang, often disparaging. a gay man, especially an effeminate one” (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)b). In this case, the first part of the definition fits this use of the lexeme because the speakers are being disparaging towards the people they are referring to. However, the second part of the definition does not apply. The use is much more consistent with the opposite of the definition given on *Urban Dictionary*: “A term of high respect and consolation used among (usually young) men” (Cheesy on my Peeny, *Urban Dictionary* 2020). From this, it is obvious that this is the case of irony. Irony involves a „speaker who intentionally says the opposite of what they believe“ (Van Hee et al. 2018: 708) or a speaker alluding to a negative attitude to a previous proposition (Reyes et al. 2012: 242). The biggest marker of irony is pretense: „speakers craft utterances in spite of what has just happened, not because of it” (Reyes et al. 2012: 241). This pretense alludes to an expectation



that the speaker had, but that has in some way been violated. Irony gives the speaker the means to express the disappointment with an expectation that has not been met, or even reproach them for their statements or actions (Reyes et al. 2012: 241).

- v. lovlae. *“those glow-up posts where its like them at 16 wearing no makeup being a young teenager to them at 20 wearing a glam face like “I used to be ugly, there is hope” I’m like jihjkhlg;pt[fb I can’t get behind them!!!! And people are like “yes **queen**!! Icon!!” and I’m like huh jkhljknhlgy not wearing makeup and being like... 16 doesn’t make you ugly and I hate that young teenagers are seeing those posts like... oh I need to wear a full-face of makeup to “glow-up”.* 19 January 2019. Tumblr post.
- w. muppethole. *“hey here’s arizona senator sinema (a democrat **queen**!) killing the \$15 minimum wage with a lil curtsy and probably doing an adorbs widdle pout behind her mask as she denies millions of workers a barely livable income, slayyy!”.* 6 March 2021. Tumblr post.

In examples **v** and **w**, the ironic use of the lexeme *queen* in its specialized meaning based on metaphor is illustrated. In example **v**, the speaker is using the lexeme *queen* in a context where it is clear they agree this lexeme should not be used, thus making the use of it ironic. In example **w**, the speaker is using the lexeme *queen* to refer to a person whose actions they disagree with, thus making its use ironic.

#### 4.3. **Short king**

In this section, examples using the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning based on metaphor as a reference to a friend or an admired person or oneself are analyzed. In this section, a specific phrase is analyzed, ‘short *king*’. This phrase has been chosen to be analyzed separately because during the process of research, it has appeared numerous times. Because of this, it was concluded that it is important, and its use should be looked at and discussed.

- x. Natli (@natalieolivari). *“#Under5ft3Artists Hi I’m a 5’0.5 the half an inch is very important, I strive for my art to exude short **king** energy”.* 13 March 2021. Tweet.

In example **x**, the user is referring to themselves as a ‘short *king*’.

- y. Sharu (@justonedayism). *“when I say short **king** I am actually exclusively talking about bruno mars”.* 15 March 2021. Tweet.
- z. Chib (@chibleee). [a screenshot of the Google search engine. The text in the search bar reads: *“How tall was Jesus?”*. The answer reads: *“He may have stood about 166cm*

*tall, the average men's height at the time.*”] “LMAOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO”. 13 March 2021. Tweet.

RESPONSE:

slug (@SlugmanJesse). “*the original short king, amen*”. 14 March 2021. Tweet.

In example *y* and *z*, the speakers are talking about celebrities or well-known figures as ‘short *kings*’. In all of the examples, the speakers are using the lexeme within this phrase in a positive way. The phrase ‘short *king*’ is in these examples used to talk about a physical aspect of the person that is talked about, namely their height. The phrase is used in a positive way.

## 5. Conclusion

The use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings based on metaphor stems from two different, but connected, communities, the Black community and the queer community. Even though it is impossible to tell in which of these two communities this kind of use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* started, we do know that within the queer community, this specialized meaning came from the Black members.

Even though the lexemes are used similarly in these communities, there do seem to be some slight differences. In queer culture, this use stems from the allusion of richness which used to provide a temporary escape from poverty for marginalized, often poor queer people, who were often people of colour. This has been popularized through TV shows, such as *Queer Eye* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*. This use still has its significance in providing the illusion of power and wealth to the poor members of the community, but it is also used by those outside of the community.

The use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings based on metaphor is slightly different in the Black community. While it alludes to a shared “royal” past of a marginalized group, it is meant to be taken as a metaphor for respect and love, often used in the places of lexemes *friend*, *bro*, and *dude*, or *sister*, *sis*, *girl*. This kind of use of these lexemes has existed in the Black community for decades, but it has been newly popularized on social media

Within the ballroom culture, the lexemes are used similarly to pronouns. One fashions themselves as a *king* or a *queen* and others refer to them as such. In the Black community, others refer to a close person as a *king* or a *queen*, alluding to respect rather than power.

The use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings based on metaphor has also been added to official dictionaries, such as Merriam-Webster dictionary. While the use of the lexeme *king* matches the use of that lexeme in its specialized meaning within the Black community (and now also outside of it), the definition of the lexeme *queen* does not. The definition of the specialized use of the lexeme *queen* in official dictionaries focuses on the physical attributes of the person, instead of on the love and respect for the person. While the definition should encompass that aspect of the lexeme *queen* because research has found it being used in this way, the definition should be expanded to include other aspects, similarly to the definition of the lexeme *king*.

The semantic change of the lexemes *king* and *queen* described and discussed in this study illustrates the connection between semantic change and socio-cultural changes. As two communities, the Black community and the queer community, suffered historical oppression, they used these lexemes and changed them to fit their context and their societal position, and then used them to empower themselves and strengthen the community bond. This changed the way the lexemes *king* and *queen* are used within these two communities. Then, as society and culture changed and these two communities fought for their rights and their visibility, the semantic change of the lexemes *king* and *queen* spread outside of the communities themselves. As the social and cultural context in which a lexeme is being used changes, so does the meaning of the lexeme change. This illustrates the collaborative nature of language.

The scope of this study was small and only included 100 examples of the use of the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meanings based on metaphor. Furthermore, this study only focused on the use of these lexemes on social media. Further studies are needed to look at the use of these lexemes in their specialized meaning outside of social media, in writing and in speech. Furthermore, this study found some common collocations with the lexemes *king* and *queen* in their specialized meaning, such as ‘short *king*’. Further research is necessary to look at how prevalent these collocations are.

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## 6.2.Sources

Tumblr

Twitter

## 7. Appendix

### 7.1. EXAMPLES 1: Social media use of the lexeme *king*

#### A. King as a reference to oneself

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#### B. King as reference to a friend or an admired person

##### a. Sincere use

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Tumblr user cowboy.

RESPONSE:

cowboy. “How vague... I respect that”. 5 March 2021. Tumblr post.

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RESPONSE:

zaktan (@treestan1999). “LFG”. 14 March 2021. Tweet.

RESPONSE:

Eye (@huiophi). “just tryna be like u **king** (praying hands emoji, nose blowing emoji)”. 14 March 2021. Tweet.

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10. Imhy (@bangtansebongs). “Let’s get it to 150k tweets! Drop the tags! SEVENTEEN PERFORMANCE **KINGS!**”. 13 March 2021. Tweet.
11. instanbul. [screenshot of an article written by Chris Radley titled “Karl Marx’s great-great-great grandson is doing parkour outside McDonald’s”] “**king**”. 28 December 2020. Tumblr post.
12. Jamal (@JBe11z). “**king** of making white people uncomfortable”. 19 May 2021. Tweet.
13. julius-novachrono. [Screenshot of a tweet: Atlanta Black Star (@ATLBlackStar). “Danny DeVito Doubles Down on His Criticism of America: “It’s a Racist Country Built on the Boards of Genocide””. 30 December 2017. Tweet.]. “what a **king**”. 3 January 2021. Tumblr post.
14. Kat (@kateeesc). “Portugal going from like last in the betting odds to top ten is just such **king** behaviour”. 20 May 2021. Tweet.
15. koobaxion. [Screenshot of a tweet: Star Wars Facts (@SWTweets). “When Harrison Ford was asked if Han Solo was a Force ghost in ‘The Rise of Skywalker’, his answer was ‘I have no fucking idea what a Force ghost is. And I don’t care’”. 26 December 2020. Tweet.]. “**King** shit”. 26 December 2020. Tumblr post.
16. larkstonguesinaspicpart1. “you know how people call other people like “**king**” or “**queen**” endearingly? Do you think we’ll be like “omfg CEO” in a post-capitalist future”. 3 March 2021. Tumblr post.
17. Lemon (@lemonsourjoong). “BTS GOT ALL AWARDS THEY WERE NOMINATED FOR!?? **KING** BEHAVIOUR”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.

18. Mafia's love (@minterfans). "*Q: we shouldn't define ourselves by sexual orientation, right? A: yes, we're likely to assume that someone is this or that. But have you ever known the real you? If you can't really know who you are, then why are you bothering judging others?*". 19 May 2021. Tweets.  
RESPONSE:  
GWEN (@PETEmyluve). "*Apo really woke up and chose to speak facts, **king** behaviour*". 19 May 2021. Tweet.
19. Makayla (@makaylathinks). "*I once worked with someone who told customers "sorry, it's my first day!" any time they messed up. For 2 years straight*". 19 May 2021. Tweet.  
RESPONSE:  
may (@pinkyoongibabe). "***king** behaviour right there*". 20 May 2021. Tweet.
20. Nils Kuiper Verberne (@Lithunium\_Snow). "*How are these girls that got a moustache tattooed on their finger in 2012 doing now?*". 16 April 2021. Tweet.  
RESPONSE: alan b. (@akabchrismont). "*I'm a man now*". 16 April 2021. Tweet.  
RESPONSE: Nils Kuiper Verberne (@Lithunium\_Snow). "*good for you **king***". 16 April 2021. Tweet.
21. Nochu (@vantebear). "*bts winning all 4 awards they were nominated for **king** behaviour*". 24 May 2021. Tweets.
22. Priscilla Page (@BBW\_BFF). [a screenshot from a video game. The caption on the pictures reads: "*If you work for a living, why do you kill yourself working?*"] "*We love an anticapitalist **king***". 13 March 2021. Tweet.
23. seflapod. [screenshot of a tweet: nope (@LilNasX). "*lmaoo just thought about how I used a frame from spongebob when I was writing the treatment for the video*". 27 March 2021. Tweet.] "*this is **KING** shit*". 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.
24. tilthat. "*TIL that Tolkien's dislike of Snow White led him to prohibit the Disney studio from ever producing his works*". 22 January 2021. Tumblr post.  
RESPONSE:  
eleveninch-conrad. "***KING***". 22 January 2021. Tumblr post.
25. whitepeopletwitter. [screenshot of a tweet: Stella Parton (@StellaParton). "*If a little hillbilly singer like my big sister Dolly can invest in the vaccine then why the hell can't some of you old moldy politicians pitch in a few million yourselves? I noticed you started getting vaccinated right away while people are starving and dying you Assholes*". 20 December 2020. Tweet.], 20 December 2020. Tumblr post.  
RESPONSE:

dantescandlestick. “*nothing but pure **king** shit in the parton family I see*”. 20 December 2020. Tumblr post.

26. Wooyoung pics (@wyarchive). [a video of a young male artist performing a song] “***king** of powerful expressions*”. 12 March 2021. Tweet.

**b. Humorous use**

27. chromatiqua. “*really love how we all love howl for his worst qualities like yes go **king** give us cowardice vanity and unnecessary drama*”. 6 August 2020. Tumblr post.

28. cum-rade. “*every day i mourn the boulder cheesecake factory. come back **king** feed me asparagus*”. 3 March 2020. Tumblr post.

29. dashdrive-deactivated20131218. “*\*clicks play\* \*video is longer than 6 seconds\* yeah no thanks **king***”. 7 May 2020. Tumblr post.

30. greatcomets. “*like not to act like it’s 2014 but hamlet was written like a million years ago and people on here are still like “thats my friend Hamlet”. marveling at this and loving it*”. 1 April 2021. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

greatcomets. “*hamlet from the play hamlet: [insane little soliloquy]. average tumbler user: rest in peace **king** you would’ve loved iced coffee*”. 1 April 2021. Tumblr post.

31. Janelle Monáe, Cindi Mayweather (@JanelleMonae). “***Kings**, put on a little eyeliner .*” 16 December 2019. Tweet.

32. merriweatherpostpaviliontshirt. “[a picture of an orange cat with a shaved tail] “*My cat had surgery look at his tail*”.

RESPONSE:

ooortcloud. “*can’t stop thinking about this **king***”. 27 December 2020. Tumblr post.

33. ndiecity. “*pets love eating meat flavored cereal with no milk*”. 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

305xdisaster. “*dog food doesn’t taste like meat tbh*”. 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

ndiecity. “*it’s not for you **king***”. 27 March 2021. Tumblr post.

34. Olivia (@livstadler). “*therapist: you don’t love yourself | Me: so true **king**. Here’s \$80*”. 5 February 2021. Tweet.

35. powerpuff. [screenshot of a tweet: Deedra (@DopeMixedChick). “*Naruto Scott Murphy, 7lb 10 ½ oz, June 9<sup>th</sup> 2016*”. 9 June 2020. Tweet.]

## RESPONSE

- cowboy. "*happy birthday **king***". 9 June 2020. Tumblr post.
36. radiohead2. "*death note is soooooo funny light gets the death note and immediately goes "damn I wish all these random people around me would die :/" okay **king***". 21 December 2020. Tumblr post.
37. sexhaver. [[a screenshot of a text conversation] PERSON A: "*hmu if you want weed. Got an oz.*" PERSON B: "*Forsure bro, ilyk*" PERSON A: "*ily2*"] "*ilyk stands 4 I love u **king** <3*". 24 December 2020. Tumblr post.
38. SirFappingtonTheFirst (@FappingtoThe). "*it was a fucking soda bottle in a plastic bag but go off **king***". 27 August 2020. Tweets.
39. sketiana. "*to this day I cannot BELIEVE aang called up and blew off like nine avatars just because they didn't offer any vegan options to ending the war. **King***". 22 May 2021. Tumblr post.
40. tilthat. "*TIL Arnold Reuben, the man who invented the Reuben sandwich, is also the inventor of the New York style cheesecake via reddit.com*". 23 February 2021. Tumblr post.

## RESPONSE

himbofisher. "*i hope this **king** had sex every day until he died*". 23 February 2021. Tumblr post.

### c. Ironic use

41. Honey (@gitmehandmiyy\_). "*he thought I looked at him with love.... the **king** of clowns*". 25 May 2021. Tweet.
42. lesbianrey. [A screenshot of a Gmail notification on an iPhone screen. The title of the email reads: "*LISTEN TO PRESIDENT OBAMA*". The email reads: "*Barack Obama is so disappointed in you, Blythe.*"] "*the feeling is mutual **king***". 16 October 2020. Tumblr post.

## C. "Short king"

43. A cute catgirl (@FemboyFinance). [a screenshot of the trending list on Twitter. The tag #notallmen is. Trending. (*not all men/ no tall men*)] "*it's short **king** appreciation day on the bird app*". 11 March 2021. Tweet.
44. Chib (@chibleee). [a screenshot of the Google search engine. The text in the search bar reads: "*How tall was Jesus?*". The answer reads: "*He may have stood about 166cm*".

*tall, the average men's height at the time.”] “LMAOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO”. 13 March 2021. Tweet.*

RESPONSE:

slug (@SlugmanJesse). *“the original short **king**, amen”*. 14 March 2021. Tweet.

45. Lu (@purpurlumi). [a screenshot of a Wikipedia page. The picture reads: *“Froy Gutierrez. Height: 1.78m”*] *“short **king** I’m gonna give him a lil kiss on the forehead”*. 15 March 2021. Tweet.

46. Natli (@natalieolivari). *“#Under5ft3Artists Hi I’m a 5’0.5 the half an inch is very important, I strive for my art to exude short **king** energy”*. 13 March 2021. Tweet.

47. Pesto (@PEAS99). *“The yearn I have to slow dance with a short **king** and have him stand on my feet is catastrophic and immeasurable!”* 14 March 2021. Tweet.

48. Pete Blackburn (@PeteBlackburn). *“Bruno Mars a true short **king** idol”*. 15 March 2021. Tweet.

49. Sharu (@justonedayism). *“when I say short **king** I am actually exclusively talking about bruno mars”*. 15 March 2021. Tweet.

50. virginalbehemoth. *“Every day I think about the redditor who felt betrayed when he found out Jensen Ackles isn’t a short **king**”*. 26 December 2020. Tumblr post.

## 7.2. EXAMPLES 2: Social media use of the lexeme *queen*

### A. Queen as a reference to oneself

#### a. Sincere use

1. AshCa\$h (@AshLeCash\_). *“I got 4 pair of Nike shoes at Grapevine for \$100.. don’t talk to me, I’m the **queen** of #deals Bueno, bonito, y barato is my preference”*. 23 May 2021. Tweet.

2. B|ueB!rd\* (@krayKMBA). *“I’m the **queen** of dad jokes or maybe I’m just plain corny, but I love it here”*. 18 May 2021. Tweet.

3. holyunholy. *“**queen** of being kind of bad at most things and a bit good at some others”*. 16 April 2021. Tumblr post.

4. Nor Dodds (@NornorDodds). *“my supervisor told me I’m the **queen** of the floor so basically I’m a big deal...”*. 18 May 2021. Tweet.

5. Society understander (@vaccinista). *“just found the exact pair of black vintage cowboy boots I wanted for \$30 I am the **queen** of ebay”*. 18 May 2021. Tweet.

6. Lexis. (@kinglexxx\_). *"I'm the **queen** of missing flights & going to the bar to get drunk til the next one"*. 22 May 2021. Tweet.

**b. Humorous use**

7. binkybodd (@binkybodd). *"I was having stuff done on one of my canine teeth and I told my dentist that I really don't manage pain well and so she was like "don't worry I gotchu" and injected so much local anesthetic into my gum that my right nostril is temporarily paralysed... **queen** behaviour"*. 20 May 2021. Tweet.
8. Dingus (@tenfreakinglee). *"nothing makes me feel more powerful than when the pepsi max I just poured almost fizzes over and I slurp that shit up before it even has a chance to touch the table. Just **queen** shit"*. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
9. kristenwiiggle. *"im glad fergie is consistently spelling out words like delicious, glamorous and independent for me, queen of spelling. **Queen** of the english language. **Queen** of syntax"*. 2 July 2019. Tumblr post.
10. medusabraids. *"me watching brokeback mountain trying to stop myself from crying: keep your head up **queen** your cowboy hat is falling"*. 23 October 2020. Tumblr post.
11. venuskissed-deactivated20170930. *"**queen** of getting thru it!! even if I gotta cry along the way....bitch imma get through it!!!!"*. 19 November 2019. Tumblr post.
12. willow. *"me: **queen** of having had enough"*. 16 December 2019. Tumblr post.

**c. Ironic use**

13. 100493503004422. *"I am the **queen** of misplaced anxious guilt"*. 25 August 2019. Tumblr post.
14. 100493503004422. *"**queen** of avoiding people who like me & being a fucking asshole"*. 9 August 2019. Tumblr post.
15. Coco (@TheeGlen\_Coco). *"I'm the **queen** of starting self help book I never finish"*. 22 May 2021. Tweet.
16. dy(die) (@dynuhstee). *"I'm the **queen** of making the wrong decisions. Literally dumb bitch juice 24/7"*. 24 May 2021. Tweet.

**B. Queen as reference to a friend or an admired person**

**a. Sincere use**

17. 12bees. *"just saw a girl in high heels long boarding to class. Godspeed, my **queen**."*. 16 October 2019. Tumblr post.

18. Alyssa Page (@AlyssaOnTheEnd). *“Don’t be a drag, just be a **queen!** Happy 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary @ladygaga #BornThisWay”*. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
19. ANNE-MARIE (@AnneMarie). *“All I’ve eaten today is cake”*. 21 May 2021. Tweet.  
RESPONSE:  
eremy (@tpwkolvia). *“as u should tbh, **queen** stuff”*. 21 May 2021. Tweet.
20. Bruno (@euro\_bruno). *“our english prof ended her lecture 30 mins earlier than usual today which I’m going to assume was because she’s so excited for the jury show tonight,,, yas **queen**”*. 19 May 2021. Tweet.
21. Cyrus Nate (@cyrusnat0218). *“I’m beautiful in my way ‘Cause God makes no mistakes | I’m on the right track, baby I was born this way” | Happy tenth-year **queen** | @ladygaga #BornThisWay”*. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
22. DO IT (@slimzyhimself). *“You have a uniquely beautiful outlook on life that’s truly inspirational. A true African **queen** I stan! Happy 60<sup>th</sup> birthday @YeniAKuti. #YeniKutiAt60”*. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
23. fakethenip. [screenshot of a text that reads: *“my mom and I would sit and meticulously go through Leonard Cohen and Jodi Mitchell lyrics together. Even from a young age I remember her being like, “I’m playing this Leonard Cohen song called ‘Famous Blue Raincoat’ and when it’s done I want you to tell me what’s going on in it.” She would give me like a fake glass of wine when I was 8, and I would listen and be like, “I think there was an affair.”*] *“me as a mom”*. 10 February 2021. Tumblr post.  
RESPONSE:  
blairwitchapologist. *“I feel like it needs to be said that this is a quote from carly rae Jepsen. What a **queen**...”*. 10 February 2021. Tumblr post.
24. Fathima Zahra (@FathimaZahra\_P). *“and the little hair flip when she finishes the combo and everyone is dropping dead. Like “thank u, next” **queen** behaviour “*. 19 May 2021. Tweet.
25. hourly wheein (@Hourly\_Wheein). [a picture of a young woman] *“Step on me **queen**”*. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
26. imanes. *“I love this trend of calling ppl “**queen** of...” its so positive I hope it never dies”*. 20 May 2020. Tumblr post.  
RESPONSE:  
chessys. *“**queen** of positive meme discourse”*. 20 May 2020. Tumblr post.

27. Isabel (@isabelhercai). “Nature **Queen**!! I missed her beautiful face and her elegant way of responding to criticism and rumors. Always **Queen** #EbruŞahin”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
28. Joshua (Taylor’s Version) (@TSlifestyle13). “can we also just appreciate the fact that not only is olivia an incredible performer AND songwriter but she also knows how to select singles? **Queen** shit #SOUROlivia”. 21 May 2021. Tweet.
29. Laibs (@laibs\_w). “respecting your values and opinions and prioritizing them over anything... **EXACTLY QUEEN STUFF**”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
30. mikaeled. [a screenshot of a TV interview with Megan Fox. The subtitles on the interview screenshots read: “There was a period of time, before I had kids, | when I was really addicted to Halo.”] “wow **queen**”. 26 July 2020. Tumblr post.
31. n1kos (@n1kosaries). “**queen** of inspiration!! We are on the right track baby!! @ladygaga #BornThisWay10 #BornThisWay”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
32. profusedinmelancholy. “Bisexual **Queen** Angelina Jolie talking about dating women and confirming Laura Croft is a lesbian”. 18 December 2020. Tumblr post.
33. radiohead2. “remember when miss carly rae did **THAT** will the call me maybe music video? that was the first time a gay person was in any media ever. thank u **queen**”. 25 December 2021. Tumblr post.
34. SabigirlCloset (@Enkayakanbi). “Dear **queen**. Be intentional about yourself this week. Spoil yourself with one or more of these gowns. You totally deserve it. price ranges from 6k- 11k, available in Sizes 10-14. Delivery is immediate to any location. But free within lagos if you buy 3gowns and above. Order via DM”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
35. Shaz (@SolidusShaz). “moms dropped outta college when she had me. 40 years later, she went back and handled her business. **Queen** shit”. 22 May 2021. Tweet.
36. sketiana. [a question from an anonymous user that reads: “really respect you keeping anon on for us shy people. Love you, **queen**”] “dhshhs thats literally why I promised to keep it on 4ever in the first place nice”. 22 May 2021. Tumblr post.
37. sonia (@tiffany\_expert). “Roxie **queen**! I love her @tiffanyyoung #TiffanyYoung #TiffanyRocksChicago #RoxieHart #RoxieHwang #RoxTy #YoungOnes”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.
38. TheSessa (@TheSessa\_tv). “Birthday girl, bathroom model, belly rub lover, my **queen**. 7 years today! #CatsOfTwitter. [a picture of a black and white cat sitting on the edge of a bathtub is included]”. 24 May 2021. Tweet.



39. thundergrace. [a screenshot of a tweet: The DRS (@iChopTweets). “*Sudanese model, Nyakim, enters Guinness book of records for having the darkest skin tone on Earth*”. 29 April 2020. Tweet] “*Oh my God! You dropped this **queen***”. 29 April 2020. Tumblr post.

**b. Humorous use**

40. alphabet-san (@alphabet\_san). “*the windows logo gives me life. Like, Yas, **queen***”. 22 May 2021. Tweet.

41. brunz. “*carly rae Jepsen is throwing bricks at my house but what am I gonna do, stop her?*”. 6 November 2020. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

targuzzler. “*shes just making it stronger by increasing the total amount of bricks. shes saving your life*”. 6 November 2020. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

brunz. “***queen** of throwing bricks and saving my life*”. 6 November 2020. Tumblr post.

42. citymod. [a screenshot of an advertisement for lipstick by Reba McEntire that reads: “*Mother’s Day Special! \$10 Georgia Deluxstick, AVAILABLE NOW AT REBA.COM.*”] “*miss reba got kylie SHOOK*”. 17 July 2019. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

plasticroyal. “*true but does she have a top lip*”. 17 July 2019. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

citymod. “*dismantling kyle’s entire makeup line with only one lip? **QUEEN!***”. 17 July 2019. Tumblr post.

43. ghc-deactivated20190415. “*pick up your belt **queen**..... The big iron on your hip’s falling.....*”. 14 July 2019. Tumblr post.

44. leerings. [a screenshot of a tweet: Dolly Parton (@DollyParton). “*Fiddle me this! That was joke y’all. Hope I made ya laugh!* [picture of dolly parton holding a fiddle is attached]” 24 January 2018. Tweet.] “***queen** of humour*”. 17 February 2020. Tumblr post.

45. nogf. [a screenshot of a BBC News article that reads: “*Greta Thunberg apologises for ‘put leaders against the wall’ comment: ‘That’s what happens when you improvise speeches in a second language’*”] “*dont ever apologise **queen***”. 16 December 2019. Tumblr post.

46. taxevaderoftheday. “*today’s Tax PAYER Of The Day Is: **Queen** Of Paying Her Taxes, Carly Rae Jepsen! You Can Rest Soundly At Night Knowing The Money She Made On*

*Her Hit Album E•MO•TION Available Now On iTunes Was Properly Documented!*  
:O”. 28 September 2020. Tumblr post.

47. teendotcom. [a link to an article titled: “*Carly Rae Jepsen Throws Worst First Pitch of All Time.*”]. 4 November 2020. Tumblr post.

RESPONSE:

canadianslult. “*Queen of rejecting American patriarchal pastimes*”. 4 November 2020. Tumblr post.

48. theocseason4. [a screenshot of a tweet: Page Six (@PageSix). “*Wendy Williams appears to burp and fart simultaneously live on-air trib.al/Ya5Nu9X.*” 16 March 2021. Tweet.] “*queen*”. 16 March 2021. Tumblr post.

**c. Ironic use**

49. lovlae. “*those glow-up posts where its like them at 16 wearing no makeup being a young teenager to them at 20 wearing a glam face like “I used to be ugly, there is hope” I’m like jihjkhlg;pt[fb I can’t get behind them!!!! And people are like “yes queen!! Icon!!” and I’m like huh jkhljknhlgy not wearing makeup and being like... 16 doesn’t make you ugly and I hate that young teenagers are seeing those posts like... oh I need to wear a full-face of makeup to “glow-up”.* 19 January 2019. Tumblr post.
50. muppethole. “*hey here’s arizona senator sinema (a democrat queen!) killing the \$15 minimum wage with a lil curtsy and probably doing an adorbs widdle pout behind her mask as she denies millions of workers a barely livable income, slayyy!*”. 6 March 2021. Tumblr post.