

# AMONG THE NEW WORDS

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FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, the American Dialect Society made its Word of the Year selection for 2021 in a virtual setting, as the annual conference was once again moved online due to Covid concerns. When the deliberations were held on January 7, 2022, via Zoom, more than three hundred attendees took part in the discussion and voting, with many more viewing the live stream (which has been archived on the American Dialect Society's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oboHCWw4hGY>).

Not surprisingly, coronavirus-related terms often dominated the discussion, much as in 2020 when the overall Word of the Year choice was *Covid*. As in 2020, a special Pandemic-Related Word of the Year category was added (along with the additional special category of Financial/Economic Word of the Year). In the lead-up to the voting session, nominations were fielded from the public via the online registration form, as well as via Twitter and the American Dialect Society's email address. As data czar for the ADS New Words Committee, Kelly Wright collated the responses, consisting of more than two hundred distinct lexical items. Based on the nominated words, it appeared that the early front-runners were Covid-related: *variant* and *vax(x)ed*, with 15 and 13 nominations, respectively. *Boosted* and *omicron* were also frequently nominated by the public.

But after deliberating on the Zoom session, the WOTY voters opted for a more political choice as the overall winner: *insurrection* (which had followed *variant* and *vax(x)ed* with 12 nominations from the public). More than a year after the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the selection of *insurrection* demonstrated that Americans are still coming to grips with what happened that day. At the time, words like *coup*, *sedition*, and *riot* were used to describe the disturbing events at the Capitol, but *insurrection*—a term for a violent attempt to take control of the government—is the one that many felt best encapsulated the threat to democracy experienced that day, with its lasting effects reverberating for years to come.

For ATNW, we will consider a selection of nominated words in the American Dialect Society's 2021 WOTY proceedings in two installments, with the first one covering the alphabetic range from *antiwork* to *Great Resignation*.

The winners for 2021 in the various categories are listed below, with the runners-up included in parentheses:

- POLITICAL WORD OF THE YEAR: *insurrection* (*Big Lie*; *CRT/critical race theory*; *mandate*)
- DIGITAL WORD OF THE YEAR: *#FreeBritney* (*bones day/no bones day*; *horny jail*; *para-social*)
- PANDEMIC-RELATED WORD OF THE YEAR (special 2021 category): *boosted* (*break-through*; *Delta/Omicron*; *long Covid*; *variant*; *vax/vaxx*)
- FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC WORD OF THE YEAR (special 2021 category): *supply chain* (*Great Resignation*; *NFT*; *SPAC*; *stimmy*; *stonk*)
- MOST USEFUL: *hard pants* (*bussin'*; *tone indicator*; *vibe*)
- MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED: *antiwork* (*endemic*; *Great Resignation*; *mid*; *NFT*; *sigma male*; *shrinkflation*)
- INFORMAL WORD OF THE YEAR: *yassify* (*cheugy*; *down bad*; *flop era*)
- MOST CREATIVE WORD OF THE YEAR: *Fauci ouchie* (*chin diaper*; *copium*; *-core*)
- EUPHEMISM OF THE YEAR: *unalive* (*election integrity*; *glizzy*; *Let's Go Brandon*; *TFG*)
- WORD OF THE YEAR: *insurrection* (*antiwork*; *Big Lie*; *Great Resignation*; *long Covid*; *Omicron*; *variant*; *vax/vaxx*)

Details of the voting and lists of past winners are available at the ADS website (<https://www.americandialect.org/woty>). The results for the WOTY votes from 2021 are also included as supplemental material to the online version of this installment (<https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-9940564>).

As noted in our introduction to last year's May installment of ATNW (AS 76, no. 2), major dictionary publishers have lately been more agile in keeping up with lexical developments, particularly for terms related to the coronavirus pandemic. Below we have focused on terms that have not yet received lexicographical treatment from the leading English-language dictionaries.

As in recent installments of ATNW, each headword is provided with its own brief discursive assessment. Full lexicographical treatments with citational evidence are available as supplemental material to the electronic form of the journal (<https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-9940564>).

This new presentation of ATNW allows us to continue our efforts to encompass a wider array of voices in the evaluation of lexical items. As with our previous installment, contributions by the coeditors of ATNW are identified by their initials: Benjamin Zimmer [BZ], Kelly E. Wright [KW], Brianne Hughes [BH], and Charles E. Carson [CC]. We have also called on

additional contributors to provide coverage of some terms, based on their participation in the WOTY discussions. We are pleased to include write-ups below from Emily Brewster (for *girlboss* and *Great Resignation*), Katie Carmichael (for *#FreeBritney*), Nancy Friedman (for *Big Lie*), Nicole Holiday (for *cheugy*), Ayesha Malik (for *antiwork* and *down bad*), Sonja Lanehart (for *CRT/anti-CRT*), and Mark Peters (for *chin diaper*).

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jaidan McLean and Lynn Zhang (张笛菲) in the preparation of this article.

## THE WORDS

**ANTIWORK.** There has been a definite paradigm shift about the value of our collective labor in late-stage pandemic capitalism—away from our bodies, minds, and time being dispensable for someone else’s bottom line. Nominated in the overall Word of the Year and Most Likely to Succeed (of which it was the ultimate winner), *antiwork* was reflected in insane staffing shortages, massively effective strikes, and the Great Resignation in the year 2021. In November 2021, 4.5 million people voluntarily quit their jobs in the United States—an all-time high (Reuters 2022). Businesses don’t run without people working in them, regardless of what they tell you about the robots replacing us. Empty shelves and long lines force us to think about the people that make things happen—more than the unnecessary label *essential worker* ever did. Despite the *anti-* prefix, it’s not about not wanting to work. It’s more that no one wants to work for inadequate wages and at the cost of their sanity. It’s about work and life being in balance. It’s not hard to find people willing to work. On the contrary, it’s just getting harder to find people willing to be exploited. Other nations have already legislated worker protections, such as the “right to disconnect” and the four-day work week. Why can’t we also embrace the idea that a paycheck does not mean an employer owns you?

Being antiwork is about the reclamation of your time and being productive on your own terms. Ultimately, being antiwork is saying they need you more than you need them. This might change when student loan payments start back up and tax credits end as we (seemingly) near the end of the pandemic, but it’s still remarkable that the antiwork movement in 2021 was able to empower the overworked and underpaid this way. The movement found an online home on Reddit, where the *r/antiwork* subreddit brought more than a million subscribers together under the slogan of “Unemployment for all, not just the rich!” (McMenamin 2021; Whang 2022). The subreddit originated in 2013, but “antiwork politics” had

already been receiving scholarly attention, as in the work of Kathi Weeks (2011), who wrote of “marshaling antiwork activism and inventing post-work alternatives” (4). This activism has foregrounded pressing concerns: it’s about time we get a raise on the minimum wage, and it’s time to rethink the 40-hour work week. [Ayesha M. Malik]

**BIG LIE.** Nominated for Political Word of the Year and overall Word of the Year, *Big Lie* is closely related to the 2021 Word of the Year, *insurrection*. The false assertion that Donald Trump won the 2020 presidential election is what spurred hundreds of protestors to storm the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, and it continues to cast a threatening shadow over American society. The term isn’t new—it’s a translation of “große Lüge,” which Adolf Hitler is said to have coined in *Mein Kampf* (1925, 335, 524)—and its meaning remains unchanged: a gross distortion of the truth, often used for political propaganda. The day before the Capitol protests, *New York Times* opinion columnist Thomas Friedman (2021) used *Big Lie* in a Trumpian context: “[W]e the people’ need to fight the Trump cult’s Big Lie with the Big Truth.” Two days later, historian Timothy Snyder (2021) tweeted, “The claim that Trump won the election is a big lie,” which he followed with definitions in a series of tweets: “A big lie changes reality,” “A big lie demands conspiracy thinking,” “A big lie must bring violence, as it has.” *Big Lie*, usually capitalized, became shorthand in headlines for an untruth that went far beyond a grifter’s misrepresentations or a politician’s quotidian fibs. In the Big Lie, as the original German source put it, “there is always a certain force of credibility” (“immer ein gewisser Faktor des Geglaubtwerdens liegt,” 252). Millions of Americans accepted the Big Lie not as truthiness—the ADS’s 2005 word of the year—but as truth, and have shown they are willing to endorse it with violence. [Nancy Friedman]

**BONES DAY; NO BONES DAY.** What kind of day will today be? Thankfully, we can now know the truth through TikTok videos in which Noodle, an elderly pug oracle, is gently lifted up from his nap into a sitting position. If Noodle remains upright, it’s a Bones Day, but if Noodle falls over back into his soft bed, it’s a No Bones Day. Regardless of Noodle’s prophecy, his owner always takes it as a sign of a good day: either to treat yourself, seize opportunities, and try new things, or to take care of yourself and rest. Osteomancy is an ancient art, and Noodle follows in a long line of both prophetic animals (Punxsutawney Phil for the end of winter and Paul the octopus for FIFA 2010 matches) and internet-famous animals (Grumpy Cat, Boo the Pomeranian, Harambe, Fiona the hippo, and buttered Jorts)

that affect society and the lexicon. This daily horoscope has lifted the spirits of internet people since August 2021 (see 2021 Aug. 13 quot.), giving them a reason either to take charge or to relax and recuperate. More often than not, Noodle responds with a gentle flop back into his padded dog bed, which causes his owner to lay his head and hands on the pug, fully in love with his choice to not participate in the day. Noodle was adopted by Jonathan Graziano (@jongraz on TikTok) in 2016, when the pug was seven years old (Kircher and Hampton 2021). They've continued to make nearly daily videos into spring 2022, including a video in which Noodle correctly predicts the winner of the Super Bowl—spoiler alert: it was the Rams over the Bengals (see 2022 Feb. 13 quot.). The tags #nobonesday and #bonesday are still in use on social media to imply the vibe of the day (regardless of Noodle's oracular prediction) and apply the binary outcome to new trends. For example, a person's ability to complete the daily Wordle quickly (or at all) can be an indication if it's a bones day (see 2022 Feb. 3 quot.). [BH]

**BOOSTED.** In the fall of 2021, the Food and Drug Administration began approving COVID-19 booster shots for people 65 and older and other high-risk adults, if they had already received two doses of vaccines from Pfizer or Moderna. Booster shots were soon made available for all, and the word *booster* got a boost in the process (Oxford Languages 2021; Zimmer 2021a). In the context of immunology, a booster shot, or booster for short, is simply an extra dose of a vaccine to extend its effectiveness at warding off illness caused by a virus and its variants. Before Covid, people already got booster shots for contagious diseases such as polio, tetanus, and whooping cough. The name implies that extra shots can “boost” immunity when the protection provided by initial doses begins to wane. The usage of *booster doses* or *booster shots* goes back to the 1940s. A 1942 article in the *American Journal of Nursing* explained that when an additional dose of a tetanus vaccine is administered, “this so-called follow-up (‘booster’) dose of toxoid” is enough to prevent the appearance of the disease (Spaeth 1942, 1158). But the wide availability of Covid booster shots brought about a rapid shift in usage. Health officials, from Anthony Fauci on down, implored people to get the booster shots by telling them to “go get boosted” (Breslin 2021). The verb *boost* meaning ‘administer a follow-up dose of a vaccine to (someone)’ became popular, typically in passive constructions (*get boosted*) or as a participial adjective (*boosted population*). *Booster* has also been treated as a verb, as in the passive *get boosted*, but in American usage, at least, *boosted* has won out as the favored form of denoting the condition of being on the receiving end of a Covid booster shot. [BZ]

BUSSIN. *Bussin* (without the apostrophe, please) is controversial because it comes from African American Language (or, as some people call it, AAVE) and is an adjective used to describe good tasting food. *Bussin* rose to prominence in March of 2021 when Black TikTok @rondeucedeleuche took a video from Keto food blogger Janelle Rohner using a green bell pepper as the “bread” in a sandwich and stated sarcastically, “Wow. That looks really good, Janelle. Is it bussin?” (see 2021 Mar. 3 quot.). If you know anything about TikTok, you know that part of how trends work on the app is that once a video becomes popular, new users make their own versions of the video, riffing off of it. The first waves of riffs, by users of all races, were reportedly in reference to food, but very soon the use of *bussin* (or more specifically *Is it bussin(g), Janelle?*) began to rapidly spread to other semantic domains. And many Black folks started to get heated as the adjective became popular on TikTok in 2021 because they observed *bussin* being applied to things like outfits and dances. Now, the lexicographer in me is not the one to put a kibosh on semantic extension, that being a natural process of language evolution and all. But the Black woman in me is absolutely understanding of community members wanting to pump the brakes on this *typa* cultural misappropriation. Reflecting on such trending semantic extensions, Twitter user @mctwtpaper came with all the caps in March 2021 saying “bussin is not a trend, a meme, a joke. it is AAVE. AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH. IT HAS BEEN AROUND SINCE SLAVE TIMES AND IT IS MADE [by] BLACK PEOPLE. this is VERY serious thing that needs to be talked about more cause as a black person i can tell you right now” (see 2021 Mar. 13 quot.; read the whole thread—it’s important). Once *bussin* had gone mainstream, it also very unfortunately collided with the phonologically similar (and Black-originated) *buss it*; Erica Banks’s 2020 single “Buss It” accompanied a 2021, cross-platform, timeline-saturating, TikTok challenge. In this song *buss it* means ‘twerk’; it is not sexually explicit. However, the etymological history of *buss it* and its cousin *bust it* do refer to various sex acts, involving different moves, body parts, and where they’re put, depending on who you ask. What is important for our purposes is that *bussin* is a different word, with its own history, which just so happens to sound similar to these others and also originates from innovative usage in the Black community. [KW]

CHEUGY. *Cheugy* has become self-referential. Most readers will likely have become familiar with the term in an April 2021 piece in the *New York Times* by Millennial author Taylor Lorenz. In the piece, Lorenz quotes Gaby Rasson, a 23-year-old who says she coined it in 2013 to refer to people who were “slightly off-trend.” *Cheugy*’s didn’t appear in the *Urban Dictionary* until

2018, where it was defined as “[t]he opposite of trendy,” “[u]sed when someone still follows these out-of-date trends” (see 2018 Nov. 8 quot.). Ironically, Lorenz’s *New York Times* piece seemed to usher in the cheugification of cheugy itself, given that its popularity on TikTok (known for its Zoomer users) seems to have consistently been eclipsed by its use on Twitter (a Millennial hot spot) and even in the mainstream press (a truly cheugy place where the olds hang out). An article in *Rolling Stone* in late April 2021 describes the term as “yet another weapon in the ongoing culture wars between Millennials and Zoomers,” noting how today’s teens make fun of Millennials for their “side parts, skinny jeans, [and] unironic use of the term ‘doggo’” (Dickson 2021). But given that a primary touchstone for the term has now become an article by a 35-year-old writer for the *New York Times*, accusations of cheuginess, at least ones that use *cheugy* itself, may not be coming from the Zoomers. Indeed, a May 2021 article on trend-spotting site Inside Hook claims “Millennials Are Desperately Trying to Make ‘Cheugy’ Happen. It Won’t” (Magan 2021). So perhaps the cheugiest thing of all is that any of us are still using the word at all. [Nicole Holliday]

CHIN DIAPER. Along with variants, arguments, sickness, and death, the ongoing pandemic has produced one innocuous thing: new words, including *chin diaper*, a term for a mask worn uselessly on the chin. A tweet by Shawn Salazar (@BigWoodSalazar) sums up the exasperated feelings of many: “Why you even got a mask if you’re just gonna use it as a chin diaper???” (see 2022 Feb. 8 quot.). *Chin diaper*, almost certainly a 2020 coinage, has been on *Urban Dictionary* since September 30, likely spurred by its use in a *South Park* episode that aired on that date. In “The Pandemic Special,” Randy Marsh is approached by a delivery man, wearing a mask on his chin, who nervously asks Randy, “Oh, hey hey, if you’re going to come any closer, would you mind wearing a, you know, chin diaper?” Randy idiotically complies, a compliance that does nothing to protect anyone. I reckon *chin diaper* is a bit of a dysphemism, the euphemism’s evil twin from the honestyverse. Dysphemisms rub reality in our faces rather than dumping buckets of sugar on the facts. So *chin diaper* works as a sharp lexical stick, offering catharsis for the frustrated with none of the complications associated with getting literally stabby. Diapers, like binkys, ba-bas, blankies, and tantrums, are synonymous with actual babies and thus the perfect ammunition for discussing the full-grown sort, hitting inept maskers smack-dab on the soft spot of their heads. Of course, the biggest babies are those who won’t wear a mask at all, but you take your word weapons where you can find ’em. [Mark Peters]



**COPIMUM.** In 2003, Oakland rapper Keak da Sneak (who also coined *hyphy*) released the song and album *Copium* (where it stood for ‘Counting Other People’s Money’). However, the word only gained traction on 4chan in 2019 in memes with Pepe the Frog wearing an oxygen mask connected to a tank labeled “copium” (see 2019 July 5 quot.). That meme was used to call out other users who had been defeated but were pretending they had won. In the summer after the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the original Pepe copium image was modified with a MAGA hat to depict Trump supporters that were still fighting the election results with ludicrous conspiracy theories (see 2020 Sept. 30 quot.). In addition to using the term *copium* to call out others in denial of reality, speakers can refer to themselves as being “on copium”—aware that they are willfully ignoring reality and probability in favor of their desired outcome (often in reaction to teaser announcements or vague evidence that may support their personal fan theories). That can also be called *hopium*, in an attempt to convince others that they are not just supporting a lost cause but that there is reason to believe. (*Hopium* predates *copium* and was previously used to taunt Barack Obama supporters beginning in 2008, referencing his “HOPE” slogan.) *Copium* can appear as a parenthetical discourse marker, as a hashtag, or as a replacement for traditional drugs in common phrases (*high on copium*, *pass the copium*, *high-grade copium*, *copium addiction*, *OD on copium*). Hey man, whatever you need to tell yourself to sleep at night. [BH]

**-CORE.** The combining form *-core* has maintained its prominence this year, gaining popularity in the shiny aesthetics movement. This libfix, as Arnold Zwicky (2010) calls such forms that have been liberated from their original lexical homes to become new word-forming elements, was once covered in the pages of ATNW relating to terms like *deathcore* and *crunkcore* in our special installment on music (*AS* 87, no. 2 [Summer 2012]). Long diverged from the sense covered in that ATNW edition, *-core* is having a moment, especially in the fashion world as new trends, like the popular cottagecore and lametable normcore, have the combining form attached to them. Younger generations like niche aesthetics, and having the combining form to mark and collect what belongs within and without those aesthetics groupings has proven fruitful. Responding to a question posed by u/Anarchoscum on Reddit regarding a potential new usage of the *-core* suffix, user u/18-furbies-and-a-cat posted, “oh absolutely, adding ‘[thing]core’ means ‘[thing] aesthetic’. other examples are ‘nightcore’, ‘cottagecore’, ‘glitchcore’, even ‘traumacore’. there’s a recent little trend on tiktok called ‘americacore’ that is just americana, but ppl use ‘-core’ to show it’s in the same category as other aesthetics that are popular on the internet (like



the others listed)” (see 2021 July 16 quot.). In the 2021 WOTY proceedings, *-core* made our nominee list due to some notable forms, specifically *goblincore*, *gorpcore*, and *emancicore*. Goblincore is the less adorable cousin of cottagecore: more mud pie than pie pie, but still fanciful. You know, mushroom, not toadstool? You get it. As Twitter user @claireeramirez remarked, “I’m not elegant enough for cottagecore, I’ll just be goblincore instead” (see 2021 Dec. 28 quot.). *Gorpcore*, combining the well-worn acronym *gorp* ‘granola, oats, raisins, and peanuts’ (see Brown 2020) with our lovely libfix, marks the recent fashion trend of wearing legit, not high-fashion, outerwear brands like Columbia and Teva atop layers. The look, first identified in early 2017 and named by Jason Chen at *New York Magazine’s The Cut*, became the functional and accessible successor to normcore. *Emancicore* marks an aesthetic that celebrates both freedom of movement (#softpants) and a freedom from colonial and consumerist modes of production. Far from being merely handmade, sustainably sourced garments, the items that fall under an emancicore aesthetic have been freed from globalism in such a way that those who participate in the subculture feel themselves to be immune from accusations of cultural appropriation because they do not ascribe to the concept of borders or nations. [KW]

CRT; CRITICAL RACE THEORY. *CRT*, an abbreviation for *Critical Race Theory*, was nominated for Political Word of the Year at the 2021 WOTYs (losing the category to *Big Lie*, *mandate*, and overall WOTY winner: *insurrection*). *CRT* is a civil rights, social justice movement that studies and interrogates race, racism, and power in law, originally, and now in a variety of disciplines that intersect with law as a social actor. Formalized critical engagement with the inherent racial bias in our legal system began in the 1980s, led by Derrick Bell, the first Black tenured law professor at Harvard (Delgado and Stefancic 2011). In a 1980 *Harvard Law Review* article, Bell introduced the concept of interest convergence while critiquing *Brown v. Board of Education*, demonstrating that U.S. Black communities most often advance when their interests converge with White society. The phrase *Critical Race Theory* was coined by the organizers of the first CRT workshop (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Neil Gotanda, Theresa Miller, and Stephanie Phillips), held at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Law School, July 7–12, 1989 (Crenshaw et al. 1995, xxvii; Greene 1999, 170n33). CRT departs from traditional U.S. legal scholarly practice by starting with the basis that inherent racial bias is present in the foundation of the U.S. legal system and by interrogating the operation of that system’s function and influence on social and cultural institutions and practices. CRT as a social justice movement outside of traditional legal thought seeks to expose institutional power and

privilege gained through historically racist and unchallenged practices and then works to redress them and mitigate their impact. In the wake of the 2021 goings on that led to CRT's competitors for Political WOTY, racial tension in the U.S. flared to an all-time high and right-wing conservative cry against CRT activism were raised ever louder. Anti-CRT activists advocate against the idea that racism is woven into the fabric of the U.S. Constitution and legal system and often argue, more broadly, that racism itself does not exist. Because they believe that racism is not real, CRT, therefore, is, in their opinion, based on lies from left-wing propagandists from whom they must shield their children, education, and society. This is evidenced in anti-CRT lobbying efforts throughout 2021 (and in the current run-up to the 2022 midterm elections) in a number of U.S. school districts and school boards, which have enacted new waves of censorship of thought and speech more draconian than this nation has witnessed since the 1798 Sedition Act, banning the teaching of large swaths of U.S. history altogether and in some areas causing books to be burned (e.g., Gaynor 2022). The term *anti-CRT*—and the ways in which its practitioners use the term *Critical Race Theory* or *CRT*—is now viewed as part of a larger political movement of identity performance that counters what are viewed as false, liberal ideas regarding American society, from which White children must be shielded and not made to feel bad about the White architects and White architecture of U.S. history. [Sonja Lanehart]

DELTA. The “hot vax summer” of 2021 was swiftly derailed by a new coronavirus variant known simply as Delta. On May 31, the World Health Organization announced that it would be using letters of the Greek alphabet to label “variants of concern” (WHO 2021). The Greek letters did not replace the scientific names for the variants but allowed the WHO and health officials to discuss the variants with nonscientific audiences with terms that were deemed “easier and more practical” (Branswell 2021). *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Gamma*, and *Delta* were reserved for the first four “variants of concern,” with Delta swiftly taking prominence. Before the Greek letters were introduced, Delta was often called *the Indian variant* in the press, since it was first detected in India in 2020. The Greek-letter system thus provided a way to avoid stigmatizing countries where new variants were discovered. As the Delta variant was linked to a global surge in infections over the summer of 2021, the word *Delta* naturally accrued negative connotations. Unsurprisingly, this was a point of concern for Delta Air Lines. The company's chief health officer, Henry Ting, greeted the unwelcome associations with wry humor, tweeting, “We prefer to call it the B.1.617.2 variant since that is so much more simple to say and remember” (Zimmer 2021b). A

subvariant of Delta first detected in Nepal was popularly labeled *Delta Plus*, but that terminology was never embraced by health officials. While *Delta* may have seen like a strong nominee for 2021 Word of the Year over the summer, by November, it was eclipsed by an even more swiftly transmitted “variant of concern”: Omicron. [BZ]

DOWN BAD. If you just caught on to *thirsty*, in the words of great philosopher Fergie, you so 2000 and late. *Thirsty* is out. The new phrase for astronomical (sexual) desperation is now *down bad*, which was nominated in the Informal Words of the Year category. Popularized in 2021, the phrase itself originated from a 2019 single of the same name, released by Hip Hop label Dreamville and featuring JID, Bas, J. Cole, EarthGang, and Young Nuddy. However, in the song, the phrase does not refer to being so embarrassingly horny: JID raps repeatedly, “I was just fucked up, I was just down, down bad” (see 2019 June 12 quot.). The reference, here, is completely innocuous, with *down* being used generally to mean being depressed, in a funk, or at a low point—contrasting with the next lyric about getting it together enough to scramble your way out of the hole to eventually come out on top: “I had to tighten the fuck up, but I’m here for the crown, crown.” The ever-classic motif in Hip Hop about starting from the bottom and climbing up. But! That’s not what the phrase usually means to someone under the age of 25.

The more widely used meaning among the youths of *down bad* is as a self-proclamation for being so, so, so single that it isn’t even funny. It’s a Bat Signal for your intense desperation. Someone, come rescue: “I’m down bad (for x).” It’s almost worn as a badge of pride—there is no shame in the game of being down bad. The pathetic is flaunted. Shout it out loud because maybe the intended someone (or, in severe enough cases, anyone) will hear. You shoot your shot and the worst that can come of it is the light embarrassment of rejection. On the other hand, it can be used to describe someone else’s horndoggery, as in this tweet by @abcderinn: “omar’s tryna pick up bitches at albertsons he’s down BAAAD” (see 2020 Dec. 19 quot.) Emphasize *bad* according to the perceived level of thirst. You’re poking a little harmless fun at a friend’s hopeless romantic situation. [Ayesha M. Malik]

FAUCI OUCHIE. The rhyming nickname *Fauci ouchie* for a COVID-19 vaccine shot pays tribute to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and adviser to Presidents Trump and Biden. The phrase has occurred to many people, with one early example appearing on Twitter in December 2020, when the comedian Andrew Grose tweeted, “Americans tend to believe anything that rhymes. So I sug-

gest the U.S. name the vaccine after Fauci and then launch a ‘Get your Fauci Ouchie’ campaign” (see 2020 Dec. 3 quot.). A more popular origin story traces it to a six-year-old in Charleston, South Carolina: Emma Scott tweeted, “A 6-year old ballet student asked me today if I’m excited about getting my ‘Fauci Ouchie’ soon, and I will now be referring to the covid-19 vaccine as only that, because it’s the cutest thing ever” (see 2021 Jan. 21 quot.). That tweet was widely circulated, and soon thereafter “Got My Fauci Ouchie” T-shirts began appearing (Friedman 2021). The rhyming phrase was also used more pejoratively by conservative critics of Fauci and those who were skeptical of vaccination efforts. In July 2021, at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Dallas, Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., told the crowd: “Don’t come knocking on my door with your ‘Fauci ouchie.’ You leave us the hell alone” (Smith 2021). *Fauci ouchie* would go on to win WOTY’s Most Creative category, with proponent Dan Villarreal pointing out the word’s distinctly English enigmatic spelling: the rhyming portions use different allographs for the same three phonemes. [BZ]

FLOP ERA. The careers of pop stars are often broken down into periods associated with their stylistic and fashion choices or with a specific album—for example, Dowling (2019) identifies 10 such phases during Madonna’s 30 years on stage. Fans hotly debate the merits of each of a performer’s career stages, with the label *flop era* appearing around 2010 among those in the online stan community (so named after the obsessive, homicidal fan in Eminem’s 2000 song “Stan”). As defined by Harron Walker (2021), *flop era* “refers to the more fallow period of a pop star’s career, one in which she—and we’re almost always talking ‘she,’ here—fails to replicate the success found in earlier parts of her run.” Walker is also perhaps one of the first to use *flop era* self-referentially, tweeting “for everyone who followed me for my writing.....thank you for bearing with me during my flop era” (see 2020 Sept. 25 quot.). The phrase rose to prominence in 2021 after Billie Eilish struck back at its use by her haters on TikTok (see 2021 July 12 quot.). By the end of the year, its use to label others had grown to include everyone, including Queen Elizabeth (2021 Dec. 4 quot.), and everything, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (see 2022 Mar. 13 quot.), and its self-referential use had expanded beyond artistic endeavors to include, for example, academic performance (see 2021 Dec. 9 quot.) and mental health (see 2021 Dec. 21 quot.). But to everyone in their flop era, whether self-described or stan-defamed, there’s implied hope; every era comes to an end. After all, it’s just a phase. [CC]

FLURONA. The *-rona* combining form, previously treated in our coverage of Word of the Year nominees from 2020 (*AS* 96, no. 3 [Aug. 2021]: 376–77), continues to spawn new coronavirus-related neologisms. One such coinage is *flurona*, referring to sickness from a combination of the influenza virus and the coronavirus. While *flurona* received consideration in the 2021 Word of the Year voting, it first started making an appearance at the very end of the calendar year. On Dec. 30, 2021, the English-language edition of the Israeli newspaper *ידיעות אחרונות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*) reported that “Israel has documented its first case of the so-called ‘flurona’—a simultaneous coronavirus and influenza virus infection” (Yanko 2021). The “flurona” news rolled into the new year, attracting worldwide coverage. As the *Washington Post* reported (Hassan 2022), the news out of Israel led many to search for more information about “flurona,” with the coinfections feared to be the makings of a “twindemic,” to use another timely blend. Ultimately, the “flurona” reports did not amount to a major concern for epidemiologists. [BZ]

#FREEBRITNEY. Pop icon Britney Spears has arguably never left the spotlight; however, for 13 years she was under tight control by the conservatorship set up on her behalf by her father, Jamie Spears. Thus the #FreeBritney movement existed before 2021, though as more of a fringe interest group of Spears’s superfans, who dissected all her social media posts for evidence of her distress. The year 2021 was a turning point for the movement, however, first via the release of the *New York Times* documentary *Framing Britney Spears*, which brought many of the suspicious behaviors and the timeline of the abusive conservatorship into the public eye. This was followed by Spears’s seeming reclamation of her social media accounts and a number of court appearances in which she confirmed publicly for the first time that the conservatorship had controlled her movements, communication, and even her reproductive choices. By the end of 2021, the conservatorship had been dissolved. Justin Timberlake had apologized for the way he used their breakup to advance his career, further feeding negative media representations of Britney. And Britney’s online presence had expanded to include nude selfies, drawn out reflections and rants about her relationships with family members, and an engagement announcement—all forms of self-expression that had been denied to her before. More broadly, we saw a post-#MeToo reckoning for the many other victims of misogynist critiques throughout the 1990s and 2000s (e.g., Christina Aguilera, Janet Jackson) and a wave of disability activism as the legal use of conservatorships has been further called into question. Thus #FreeBritney was a success for

Britney and will have long-standing repercussions for many marginalized voices beyond 2021. [Katie Carmichael]

GIRLBOSS. *Girlboss* was a marginal contender for Digital Word of the Year, taking only 8% of votes and ultimately losing to the *#FreeBritney* hashtag. There's some evidence of the word *girlboss* dating all the way back to at least the early years of the current century (see 2002 Mar. 8 quot.), but Sophia Amoruso, the entrepreneur who founded the Nasty Gal former-fashion-empire-now-mere-retailer, is typically credited with coining the word, and there's no doubt that her 2014 memoir *#Girlboss* established the word in the lexicon. Amoruso was a millennial analogue to Sheryl Sandberg (see LEAN IN, ATNW, AS 89, no. 3 [Fall 2014]: 365–66), inspiring young women to pursue success not just for its own sake but also as a means to equality (Mull 2020). But as tales spread of (almost universally White) *girlbosses* behaving badly and reaping the consequences (Mukhopadhyay 2021; Oliver 2022), the word was increasingly used to criticize women who cynically combine feminism with careerism, exploiting their underlings even as they're lauded for wielding authority (see 2021 Oct. 1 quot.). Reports of *girlbosses* running racist and toxic workplaces met a public whose tolerance of either was diminishing as the *#BlackLivesMatter* and *#MeToo* movements grew; and by the end of the relentless year that was 2020, the public's focus was on racist police violence and the death, unemployment, and homelessness wrought by the pandemic. No one seemed to have a stomach for the privileged, profit-driven *girlboss* who, it turned out, was really just a regular boss and not a solution to deep flaws in the system (Abad-Santos 2021). The demise of the *girlboss* has been much discussed (Stein 2020; Berman 2021), but in its supposed (and likely exaggerated) death throes *girlboss* has managed to stretch semantically, developing verb use often in the company of the words *gaslight* and *gatekeep*. Stepping into the meme-and-decor territory that "live, laugh, love" has inhabited for some time now, calligraphic renderings of phrases like "Gaslight every moment, Gatekeep every day, *Girlboss* beyond words" highlight the word's evocation of exploitative White feminism (Abad-Santos 2021). [Emily Brewster]

GLIZZY. *Glizzy* was nominated in WOTY's 2021 euphemism category because of the numerous memes and videos inspired by its meaning 'hot dog' and its predictable phallic innuendo. The exact origin is unknown, though it seems to have originated in the Washington, D.C., area's African American community. References started appearing on Twitter and YouTube around 2013, but it went viral when Georgetown student Vashti Williams (@vashti\_adena) retweeted Pubby Longway's humorous re-narration of a Tasty video



featuring regional preparations of hot dogs (see 2019 July 4 quot.). The resulting often not-safe-for-work memes and videos that popped up on social media also brought us the alliterative *glizzy gladiator*, *glizzy gobbler*, *glizzy gulper*, and *glizzy guzzler*, used to caption, for example, politicians awkwardly eating hot dogs in failed attempts to demonstrate their everyman status or teen boys making no-homo jokes while aggressively consuming hot dogs.

But *glizzy* has an older meaning that some have suggested is related to the new ‘hot dog’ sense. Svetz (2020) notes that *glizzy*’s use to mean ‘handgun’, from Glock, is the source of the ‘hot dog’ sense because “an extended clip (a glick) [is] comparable in length to the barbecue favorite.” *Glizzy* meaning ‘handgun’ first appeared in “New York Giants” and “It’s So Hard” on the 2000 album *Yeeeah Baby* by New York rapper Big Pun (aka Big Punisher), who may have coined the term to fit the rhyme in the latter song: “Got the Glizzy locked in the stizzy / Pop the clizy, goin’ 60 down the one-wizy.” *Glizzy* has since appeared in the lyrics of other artists from around the country, but it became most strongly associated with D.C. after it was adopted by local rapper Marquis Armonite King as part of his stage name, Sly Glizzy, and later his label, Glizzy Gang, inspired by his fondness for the Glock brand (Breen 2020). [CC]

GREAT RESIGNATION. Society members nominated the term *Great Resignation*, glossed as ‘pandemic-era phenomenon in which workers are leaving their jobs in large numbers’, in three categories, but it failed to win in any. It lost to *supply chain* in the Financial/Economic Word of the Year category (a special category for 2021); to *antiwork* in the Most Likely to Succeed category; and to *insurrection* in the top-billed Word of the Year category. *Great Resignation* echoes two terms, the first being of course *Great Depression*, which as early as 1930 was being used to refer to the period beginning in 1929 and lasting throughout the 1930s when deflation and widespread high unemployment rates resulted in severe worldwide economic decline. *Great Recession* is applied to the economic recession that began in late 2007 and lasted through much of 2009—the longest and deepest economic downturn since the Great Depression. *Great Resignation* is a bit of a departure from these semantically, as it refers not to a period of time marked by particular economic conditions, but to a widespread reaction to economic and social conditions: millions of people are leaving their jobs during a pandemic that has caused and continues to cause tremendous hardship and upheaval. In November 2021, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 4.5 million people had quit their jobs. News of the Great Resignation began to circulate months before that remarkable statistic. As early as May 2021, Anthony Klotz, a Texas A&M University professor, was predicting



that a “great resignation” was on its way (see 2021 May 10 quot.). The term appears to be Klotz’s coinage. Other terms have been suggested for the same phenomenon, including *Great Reshuffle*, *Great Renegotiation*, *Big Quit*, and *Turnover Tsunami*, but none have caught on nearly as well. [Emily Brewster]

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