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► To cite this version:

Steven M Kaplan. The role lexicographers can play in helping to vanquish insensitivity, brutality, othering, and wilful ignorance. 25th International AFRILEX (African Association for Lexicography) Conference, Jun 2021, Stellenbosch, South Africa. hal-03898094

HAL Id: hal-03898094

<https://hal.science/hal-03898094v1>

Submitted on 14 Dec 2022

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The role lexicographers can play in helping to vanquish insensitivity, brutality, othering, and wilful ignorance

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0. Abstract:

Similarly to the way that people learn to discriminate, denigrate, and other through language, they can learn to accept, affirm, and cherish through it as well. People trust what dictionaries have to say, so lexicographers have an enormous responsibility to their users. Regular general English dictionaries are not doing an adequate job of alerting users to biased expression, which essentially legitimises such usage.

This paper will explore some of the ways in which lexicographers can meaningfully help eradicate insensitivity, brutality, othering, and wilful ignorance. These will include suggestions on ways to improve the paraphrases of meaning (the definitions,) enhanced usage labelling of lemmas (headwords,) and recommendations on how to make users better aware of insightful usage notes, such as alerts to them right in the paraphrase of meaning.

Five examples will be explored: *anthropocentrism*, *third world*, *nigger*, *bitch*, and *squaw*. Each will illustrate how the incorporated othering and oppression can be much more fully identified and explained in dictionary articles (entries.) The regular general English dictionaries by and large continue to promote and defend traditions and beliefs which encourage and uphold sexism, racism, xenophobia, heterosexism, colonialism, and speciesism, among other forms of oppression and othering. This paper makes some suggestions on how to improve matters.

Keywords:

social justice, bias-free and inclusive usage, biased and exclusive usage, culturally-aware lexicography, inclusive lexicography, dictionary culture, sociolinguistics, egalitarianism, interdisciplinary collaboration, anthropocentrism, bitch, nigger, squaw, third world

1. Introduction:

Real inclusion is found in authentic regard, where there is genuine respect, tolerance, and consideration. Linguistic othering and oppression can only be eradicated from the inside. All forms of oppression and othering are connected, and each time that othering language is utilised and/or othering actions are perpetrated, further othering language and othering actions are promoted.

No one is born a patriarch, sexist, racist, xenophobe, or otherwise hate-filled and othering person. Fearing, hating, demonising, oppressing, brutalising, and exploiting “others” is learned through society, culture, and language. This is accomplished mostly through social and cultural constructions including races, genders, gender roles, religions, and whatever is uncritically believed to be “normal.” Since language, culture, and society are inextricably intertwined, if a language is not inclusive, then how could the society that uses it be? Similarly to the way that people learn to discriminate, denigrate, and other through language, they can learn to accept, affirm, and cherish through it as well.

Since most people trust what dictionaries have to say, lexicographers who understand their role in a society that is dependent on reliable information have an enormous responsibility to their users. Many words and phrases have bias and exclusion incorporated into them, yet regular general English dictionaries are not doing an adequate job of alerting users to this usage. These lexicons are usually ignoring or mischaracterizing such usage, which essentially legitimises biased expression. Consequently, regular dictionaries do not give their users insight into how inequality, othering, and victimisation work through language.

This paper will explore some of the ways in which lexicographers can meaningfully help eradicate insensitivity, brutality, othering, and wilful ignorance, so that we can hopefully all benefit through living in a safer, more inviting, perhaps even nurturing environment. Five examples will be explored, namely: *anthropocentrism*, *third world*, *nigger*, *bitch*, and *squaw*.

First, there will be some real-life illustrations and consequences of the oppressing and othering incorporated into each of these expressions, followed by an assessment of the corresponding articles in regular English dictionaries. It will be shown to what extent each of these lexicons promote further othering and oppression, or how they simply remain silent on the matter.

This will be followed by suggestions on how to improve what lexicographers are offering their users, covering all aspects of the articles, including the usage labelling of lemmas, the paraphrases of meaning, and usage notes. It will be shown how lemma labelling ought to be more precise, paraphrases of meaning should be bias-free and inclusive, and usage notes should address the needs of the victims by being written from an egalitarian perspective, and *not* to serve as a “social apology.”

Finally, there will be further discussion and conclusions, along with additional consideration of relevant metalexicographical aspects.

othering *n* – The classification of people as superior or inferior, based on dogmatically categorizing them as a part of an *in-group* or *out-group*. The discriminators consider themselves to belong to the superior-dominant-similar *in-group*, while the *others* are relegated to the inferior-subordinate-different *out-group*. For example, a religiously intolerant person may view people who have different (or no) religious beliefs as being immoral, savage, unenlightened, or otherwise *inferior*. This *othering* customarily has deleterious consequences, such as exclusion and violence, and serves to “justify” their intolerance and oppression of *others*, since to them *they* are “lesser” beings. Those victimized by *othering* are *others*. *Othering* may also be applied to the relationship humans have with non-human animals, and to nature as a whole.¹

¹ Kaplan, 2020:13.

2. Example One – *anthropocentrism*:

Nature has no human voice, and in an *anthropocentric* society and culture, it is only human voices that matter.

Katz (1999:377-378) defined *anthropocentrism* as:

“The idea that human interests, human goods and/or human values are the focal point of any moral evaluation of environmental policy and the idea that these human interests, goods and values are the basis of any justification of an environmental ethic.”

What is “preordained by a god” has been exploited innumerable times, to “justify” pretty much anything, such as the US American *manifest destiny*. Kutler (2003:222) quotes John L. O’Sullivan², who proclaimed that:

“the conviction that the United States was preordained by their god to expand throughout North America and exercise hegemony over its neighbors.”

Around the time of O’Sullivan’s writing, the United States saw an extraordinary territorial growth of 1.2 million square miles, an enlargement of more than 60 percent. Most of this growth occurred at the expense of the newly independent Mexico and the Native American nations. The invading white supremacists deemed the non-whites to be subhuman, so the stealing of the land, the raping, murdering, and exploitation were “justified” on anthropocentric and religious grounds.

Grasse (2016) emphasises the following based on the Christian Bible:

“In one of the biblical creation accounts, Genesis 1:27, provides the foundation for two key anthropocentric beliefs among Christians: the doctrine of *imago dei*³ and the doctrine of dominion over creation. The belief that humans have God-given dominion over creation is clearly anthropocentric –all of nature is under the authority of humankind according to this view. The doctrine of *imago dei* further establishes this special, elevated status of humanity. No other species is specifically said to be made in the likeness of God; this reinforces the idea that humankind is superior to the rest of creation. How to interpret what exactly “dominion” means has been a source of controversy, but the general consensus in Christianity throughout history has been that humans have the right to use nature to meet their needs, and that’s part of nature’s intended purpose.”

As per Mason (2017), tens of thousands of years ago our evolutionary ancestors lived in harmony with animals, plants, the environment, and nature in general. Once the domestication of non-human animals began, they quickly proceeded from being awe-inspiring and spiritual beings like us, to an inferior *other* to be ruthlessly exploited.

Anthropocentrism, white supremacy, patriarchy, incarceration, structural violence, racialised violence, institutional racism, animalisation, capitalism, and non-human animal confinement and

² According to *The American yawp: a massively collaborative open U.S. history textbook* (Locke & Wright, 2019), O’Sullivan was a “popular editor and columnist” at the time.

³ Latin for “image of God.”

exploitation are all a part of the “whiteness as humanness” **BS**⁴. Gillespie (2018) witnessed how a rodeo brings together racialisation, anthropocentrism, and colonialism. Here are some of her observations:

- The Louisiana State Penitentiary is the largest maximum-security prison in the USA. It is known as Angola, since many of the people enslaved in this region came from this country, and this prison “fittingly” is now on the land formerly occupied by the Angola Plantation. Before this, in order to establish a plantation, the land had to be taken from the Indigenous Peoples; this land was “cleared.”
- The prison encompasses the legacies of the racial injustice and abject dehumanisation seen in plantation slavery and settler colonialism, which is currently manifested as mass incarceration, especially of non-white people.
- White supremacists dehumanised and othered non-whites to “justify” the enslavement and genocide of Blacks and the Indigenous Peoples. This is what the USA was built upon.
- Non-whites and animals have their freedom violently taken, are commodified, and ruthlessly exploited, to further capitalism and white supremacy.
- Like animals, non-whites were deemed to be “less than human,” and their bodies and lives were exploited, commodified, and disposable. The message is: to be white is to be human.
- Racialisation and anthropocentrism have been intimately interlinked for centuries, and are still going strong where subordination and exclusion are concerned.
- The rodeo cowboys, racialised as white, show the spectators once again what “real men” are supposed to be, and what they do to animals.
- The farm animals at Angola are raised to be exploited as labour and killed for food, and on “rodeo day” also get to entertain a patriotic and nostalgic audience as expendable wild creatures that are dominated and mistreated.
- “In addition to these forms of racialised and colonial violence, anthropocentrism is enacted in and through the cowboy, who violently renders the animal colonised, domesticated and subordinate.” (Gillespie, 2018:6)

Rodeos are a “palatable” demonstration of how many people continue to oppress and other non-whites and non-human animals. During, and after the “show”, the gawking spectators are filled with pride, secure in their knowledge that the established order of domination, confinement, and exploitation of those deemed to be subhuman continues strong. In a rodeo violence is normalised, even serves as entertainment, and in a prison setting the “gaze” of the spectators further others and oppresses the prisoners. Caged people are like caged animals, and prison tourism is not unlike zoo tourism. Families bring their children along, to enjoy the “patriotic” and “man over beast” “fun,” which also serves to indoctrinate from an early age, similarly to the way that circuses do.

⁴ Bullshit. Or as Loewen (2018) would put it: “**Bad Sociology.**”

Cañete Villafranca and Brito Pérez (2020:33) stress that humans, on account of their intellectual development, proclaimed themselves as masters over nature, and “the centre of everything⁵.” They go on to say that this *anthropocentrism* “dictated a human behaviour that not only threatened their own existence, but also that of other living beings, and the planet itself⁶.” They emphasise that “the immoral essence of anthropocentrism is that humans have exploited nature far beyond their real needs⁷.” They go on to contrast *anthropocentrism* with *biocentrism*, the latter providing for a harmonious existence on our planet, where humans, all other beings, and the planet itself exist in equilibrium, as one. This biocentric approach is called *buen vivir*, which would be *good living* in English.

Next, let us see how three popular general English dictionaries handle this expression, along with comments on the paraphrases of meaning, and suggestions for improvement.

2.1 The online version of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, as permalinked from their website on 19 February 2021^{8,9}:

(Users are redirected to *anthropocentric* when entering *anthropocentrism*.)

“1 : considering human beings as the most significant entity of the universe

2 : interpreting or regarding the world in terms of human values and experiences ”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as an adjective, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are recent example sentences from the Web.

Brief analysis of the paraphrase of meaning:

The paraphrase of meaning is concise, accurate, and free of bias. Nonetheless, the concept of *anthropocentrism* reflects a great deal of selfishness, ignorance, and insecurity.

Anthropocentrism is selfish, since humans have been, and continue to live at the expense of the environment and nature in general. Ignorant, since the universe has existed for billions of years, and humans have been around for a comparatively immeasurably small amount of time, and it is exceedingly unlikely that “human beings are the most significant entity.” Insecure, since only those who know deep down that they are of little worth try to compensate by giving themselves the importance that they lack. To consider themselves “the most significant entity of the universe” shows monumental insecurity. Furthermore, in order to “prove” that they are the most important, and that only their own values and perspectives matter, they overcompensate by subjugating other people, non-human animals, and nature in general. There are many indigenous cultures who have lived in harmony with nature, so exploiting it as much as possible is a “Western and ‘developed’ nations” thing. More on this in the *third world* example.

⁵ Translated from Spanish by me.

⁶ Translated from Spanish by me.

⁷ Translated from Spanish by me.

⁸ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/FPjHI>

⁹ Please note that there will be permalinks to all dictionary articles examined here, so that readers may see for themselves a current snapshot of the lexicographical treatment of these expressions (words or phrases.)

Suggested improvements to this article:

Merriam-Webster might consider adding wording to the effect that when referring to the environment and nature, that *anthropocentrism* can be contrasted with *ecocentrism* and/or *biocentrism*. (Perhaps when we have restored nature to its former awe-inspiring status, we can start seeing that “most significant entity of the universe” “status” as a “slight” exaggeration.)

There might also be a *usage note* added, providing some insight into how *anthropocentrism* has, and continues to do irreparable damage to our planet.

2.2 The online *Macmillan Dictionary*¹⁰:

(Users are redirected to *anthropocentric* when entering *anthropocentrism*.)

“considering that people are more important than anything else in the world”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as an adjective, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there no example sentences.

Brief analysis of the paraphrase of meaning, and suggestions:

Macmillan scales the bravado back to encompass “only” the world.

The analysis and suggestions would be similar to those for *Merriam-Webster*.

2.3 The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*¹¹:

(Users are redirected to *anthropocentric* when entering *anthropocentrism*.)

- “1 regarding the human being as the central fact of the universe.
- 2 assuming human beings to be the final aim and end of the universe.
- 3 viewing and interpreting everything in terms of human experience and values.”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as an adjective, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are example sentences from the Web.

Brief analysis of the paraphrase of meaning, and suggestions:

Random House ratches it up, and the bit on “assuming human beings to be the final aim and end of the universe” makes it sound as if the universe worked its way up to us, and now that we, the ultimate aim has been achieved, then why bother with anything else? The suggestions would be the same as for the other dictionaries.

2.4 Further commentary:

As a whole, from the bias-free and egalitarian viewpoints, the lexicons would better serve their users by suggesting contrasting *anthropocentrism* with *ecocentrism* and/or *biocentrism*. In

¹⁰ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/xJWzR>

¹¹ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/VmTPg>

addition, a *usage note* that mentions that the self-proclamation of being the “most important entity in the universe” reflects a considerable amount of bias, egocentrism, insecurity, and an almost puerile bravado.

Since this also represents the ultimate in self-aggrandisement, perhaps *anthropocentrism* is the original source of all *othering*. White supremacists who fear and hate any people who are not also white are obviously self-aggrandising racists. Males who fear and hate females are clearly self-aggrandising sexists and misogynists, and so on.

3. Example two – *third world*:

The expression *third world* incorporates patriarchal, colonialist, racist, and classicist mindsets, along with the glorification and justification of “Western values.”

Stănescu (2016) demonstrates how a “documentary¹²” prepared by the USA fast food chain *Burger King*¹³, serves for little more than marketing, while evidencing how yet again the “superior” Western countries pontificate on how “inferior” “third-world” countries are. The “documentary” unequivocally conveys the following messages:

- The “poverty,” and lack of technology that “third-world” countries suffer from are due to an insufficient consumption of red meat. (Which can be conveniently remedied by visiting the nearest Burger King outlet.)
- The underlying message, “God given right to a juicy hamburger,” encompasses several key messages, including that it is the paternalistic duty of advanced nations to educate those that are less fortunate and inherently “inferior.” (The globalised fast-food chains “unselfishly” help towards this end.)
- The “documentary” supported the “effeminate rice eater” trope, in which meat-eating colonisers easily conquered their victims, on account of the latter not consuming enough meat. He quotes from an 1884 monograph from a “well-respected medical researcher and doctor” named J. Leonard Corning, who drew these white supremacist, misogynist, colonialist, and xenophobic conclusions:

“Thus flesh-eating nations have ever been more aggressive than those peoples whose diet is largely or exclusively vegetable. The effeminate rice eaters of India and China have again and again yielded to the superior moral courage of an infinitely smaller number of meat-eating Englishmen . . . But by far the most wonderful instance of the intellectual vigor of flesh eating men is the unbroken triumph of the Anglo-Saxon race. Reared on an island of comparatively slight extent, these carnivorous men have gone forth and extended their empire throughout the world. (Corning 1884, 196–7)”

Over and over again, “science” comes to the rescue of white supremacists, sexists, misogynists, colonialists, and xenophobes, who need to “justify” their oppression, genocide, “delusions of superiority,” etc.

¹² Cough, cough.

¹³ Not unlike *McDonalds* and the countless purveyors of meat-based products for those who need their “meat fix” *fast*.

- The name of the “documentary” is *The Whopper Virgins*, which yet again targets those responding to the “sex/y sells” objectification and trivialisation of all females¹⁴. The title may also imply that any place that has people who have not yet had a “whopper” are “virgins” who can be made “complete” by eating this beef-based hamburger.
- The “experiments” took place in “third-world” countries, including “Transylvania”¹⁵.
- The “experimentees” were ridiculed and trivialised, by having them wear traditional garbs, made to appear childlike and innocent, and even had participants supposedly unable to figure out how to eat the whoppers. The “documentary” made it appear as if they were primitive, and exoticized them as “descendants” from “Dracula.”

Sumpter (2015) investigates how consuming meat helps confirm masculinity and reproduce male hegemony, while meat avoidance evokes femininity. She also looks into how perhaps males who don’t eat meat may defy hegemonic masculinity, but in the end, eating meat is associated with the expected gender behaviours of males. Solanas (1968:17) declared:

“Although he wants to be an individual, the male is scared of anything in himself that is the slightest bit different from other men; it causes him to suspect that he’s not really a ‘Man’.”

And “real men” eat meat. Is there a simpler way to reassert “man’s” superiority over animals?

3.0.1 “Meat man” vs. “soy boy:”

“Real men” are besieged by insecurity and the need to “prove their masculinity” at all times. So much so, that they can not even be seen consuming soy foods (as opposed to meat, milk, and other animal-based products), for fear of being denigrated or othered by homophobic and “effeminate” epithets, such as *bitch*, *pussy*, *sissy*, or for this circumstance: *soy boy*. The “top definition” of *soy boy* on the Urban Dictionary website on 13 February 2021 reads so¹⁶:

“**Soy Boy** - A soft little bitch who can’t handle even the slightest amount of pressure, and will get “triggered” by almost anything. Damn, josh sure is a soy boy¹⁷.”

Adelman (2018) takes a critical look at the myth of *sustainable development* from the perspectives of both “Western” (“developed”) and “third-world” (“underdeveloped”) countries, drawing several conclusions, including:

- Sustainable development is generally considered to be the key to economic growth for all nations, yet is based on the continued exploitation of a planet that has finite resources.
- We insist on viewing sustainability from an anthropocentric perspective, which is based on continuing to take from the environment, and is therefore unrealistic.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, this is probably the largest demographic group targeted by marketers.

¹⁵ Stănescu (2016:93) clarifies: “To state perhaps the obvious, there is no country called ‘Transylvania’; ‘Transylvania’ refers to the center forested region of Romania.”

¹⁶ Permalink taken on 13 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/kWNRR>. To attest to the popularity and “hullabaloo” of *soy boy*, there were over 70 “definitions,” with over 75,000 “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” ratings at the time.

¹⁷ Such a “definition” might reflect “man sized” helpings of fear, hate, homophobia, misogyny, and othering.

- Western nations purportedly incorporate “third-world” nations into their political and economical worlds, but do so with the same colonialist and imperialist inequalities, thus helping to insure that these “third-world” nations will remain “underdeveloped.”
- Free-trade and the continued exploitation of natural resources only serve to further harm those that are already vulnerable, including their ability to keep their culture, as “development” of the “global south” is done from a Eurocentric perspective.
- Laws have been designed from the anthropocentric standpoint, to regard nature as objects of ownership and exploitation, which thus legitimises its continued abuse by humans.
- “To be ecologically sustainable, economic activity cannot replicate the anthropocentric shortcomings of Eurocentric rationality predicated upon dominium over nature; it cannot be an alternative form of development rebadged as sustainable development but an alternative *to* development.” (Adelman, 2018:22)

This all points towards how “third-world” countries have been, and continue to be *othered*, on account of their having had *a more egalitarian relationship with nature*. So, in reality, which countries are truly going backwards?

Let us see how three popular general English dictionaries handle *third world*, and how much of the othering and oppression embodied by this expression is reflected in their article for this lemma, along with suggestions for improvement:

3.1 The *Oxford Living Dictionaries online*, as permalinked from their website on 19 February 2021¹⁸:

“(usually **the Third World**)

“The developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

‘levels of literacy have risen in the Third World’ ”

Additional items in the dictionary article:

The lemma is identified as a noun, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are example sentences.

Brief analysis of *Oxford’s* paraphrase of meaning:

The key to this paraphrase of meaning is the word *developing*, and here is the corresponding sense from *Oxford*:

“Denoting or relating to a poor agricultural country that is seeking to become more advanced economically and socially.

‘the developing world’ ”

This is an extremely Western and Eurocentric paraphrase of meaning. It makes several assumptions, none of which are necessarily true. First, “poor agricultural country” others “agricultural countries” as being “poor,” as if the only wealth is economic and technological.

¹⁸ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/zlUYu>

Then, they imply that they are “backward,” see themselves as backward, and understand that the only way to become “advanced” is through financial wealth and technology. The mention of “socially” implies that such countries have primitive people, and reflects a patriarchal and colonialist bias. Finally, *Oxford* others all continents other than Europe and North America (perhaps leaving out Australia as a continent nation¹⁹, and Antarctica), implying that they (or at least their countries “in general”) are primitive.

Suggested improvements to this article:

Oxford might consider several possibilities. They could include a usage label, such as *Western and Eurocentric*, or *colonialist*, along with *derogatory*. Usage labels can be more specific than *offensive*, *dated*, or *derogatory*. In this case, they could have included one of the stalwarts, *derogatory*, and another which is more precise.

In addition, they could add a *usage note* in which it is mentioned that there are many manifestations of wealth, only one of which is economic. They might also say that countries that are not capitalistic consider the promotion of health, education, safety, and general well being of those living there to not be “just about the money.”

3.2 Longman Dictionary²⁰:

Third World, the

“the poorer countries of the world that are not industrially developed, including most of Africa and parts of Asia and of Central and South America. Some people think this expression is offensive, and the Third World can also be called the South.” → compare **First World.**”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are no example sentences.

Brief analysis of Longman’s paraphrase of meaning:

“Poor” economically does not mean poor morally, socially, or culturally. Denigrating nations that have not embraced capitalism zealously is unjustified. Saying “Some people think this expression is offensive” makes is sound like “these” people are being unreasonable and/or oversensitive, and are therefore othered *for being sympathetic to the needs of other people*. They probably meant the *Global South* when they wrote “Third World can also be called the *South*.” *Global South* is almost as insensitive as *Third World*.

Suggested improvements to this article:

As mentioned in the Oxford recommendations, they could add an appropriate usage label. They might also include a *usage note* to the effect that not demonstrating obsequious deference to the Western and Eurocentric ideals of material wealth does not make a country inferior, as not so subtly implied by the label “Third World.”

¹⁹ To them, Australia is anyway a part of the “global south.”

²⁰ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/n8X8b>

3.3 *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*²¹:

Third World also **third world**

- “1. The developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
2. During the Cold War, the nations not aligned with the First World or the Second World.”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are no example sentences.

Brief analysis of *American Heritage*’s paraphrase of meaning:

Sense 1: Nothing new.

Sense 2: They make it sound as if *you are with us*, or *you are against us* (“Second World”), otherwise, *you do not even count*.

3.4 Further commentary:

Usage labels can be more specific than *offensive*, *dated*, or *derogatory*. In this case, they could have even included one of the “standard” ones, such as *derogatory*, and/or another which would be more precise, such as *Eurocentric*, *othering*, or *capitalistic*.

It is also worth noting that none of these dictionaries mentioned any form of *othering*. Aside from the expression othering “third-world” countries, there is also the othering when using it to refer to substandard conditions or when something is simply bothering someone in “the *first world*.” For example, “the cable TV has been out for hours now; where do they think we are, in the *third world*?!” Not to mention the daily othering of people *perceived* to be “third world,” as in: “so where do *you* come from?” Or, “*your kind* only make trouble,” etc.

On account of their anthropocentric, capitalist, patriarchal, xenophobic, and exploitative viewpoints, Western and Eurocentric countries would never even consider that these “backward nations” they have so labelled were just fine the way they were, and would be a lot better off if the imperialistic and colonialist countries just let them be. The same goes for the environment and nature in general!

4. Example three – *nigger*:

*Nigger*²² is probably the most hate-laden word in the English language. Currently, happily, white people caught using this word to disparage a Black person or Peoples in general may be held accountable. But, since we are currently mired in a “*political correctness*” fad, this entails being “obligated” to *not* say or do this or that, or to *have to* say or do that or the other in order to “not get in trouble.” Although it is undoubtably good that certain words are verboten, none of this alters any of the deep-rooted intolerance and hate a person may have. Language shapes how people think, behave, see, and experience life, and therefore how they treat each other. Nobody

²¹ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/lIOTh>

²² Since this is a scholarly lexicographical paper, there will be no euphemism for this unspeakable word.

is born knowing what an expression like *nigger* means, nor with a predisposition to use it with such hate and violence. This is learned within a given society and culture.

For example, during 2020, in the USA state of Georgia, a Chief of Police (Brooks) and an officer (Allmond) were engaged in a conversation, during which they were unaware that they were being recorded by a bodycam they had thought was defective. Here are some pertinent snippets²³:

- “If I had to fuck a nigger, I’d rather fuck the mayor [of the city of Atlanta] than Stacey Abrams²⁴,” says the officer wearing the camera, to which the chief responds, “Yessir.”
- “It seems to me like they furnished them a house to live in. They furnished them clothes to put on their back. They furnished them food to put on their table and all they had to do was fucking work. And now we give ‘em all those things and don’t have to fucking work,” Allmond says.
- “They have a good laugh as Brooks reminisces about people in his family lineage who were slave owners, then the chief complains that Black people are no longer made to work for white people like in the good ole days.”
- They also commented on the “virtues of shooting or tasing niggers,” in addition to “liberally using the n-word.”

Since they were convinced that there were no witnesses, they spoke “freely and from the heart,” manifesting quite a bit of fear, hate, vilification, and the continued readiness to exploit and to inflict harm. So, to these white supremacists, those with Black skin are less than human; they are just “niggers.” And when these white supremacists talk about “fucking niggers,” aren’t they also reproducing that narratives of slaveholders reinforcing their colonial power by raping their slaves? Would such a conversation be indicative of any change over the last centuries in the way that white racists see Blacks? Hardly so!

4.0.1 “Nigger” as “other,” long before *othering* was used in the “other” sense:

According to the *Merriam Webster online dictionary*, *other* and *othering* were first utilised in 1985 “to treat or consider (a person or a group of people) as alien to oneself or one's group (as because of different racial, sexual, or cultural characteristics)” sense²⁵. Before then, *niggerization* was used as an early equivalent for *othering*. The *Oxford dictionary of American political slang* (Barrett, 2006) has this for *niggerize*:

“v. to relegate to a position of marginal power or opportunity. -usu. considered offensive. Hence *niggerization*, n.” The earliest cited quote was from 1890.

More recently:

In her introduction to Valerie Solana’s *SCUM Manifesto* (Solanas, 1968), Vivian Gronick has this to say on the fear that men have of women, and how they seek to keep them down:

²³ The full text of the article (Fieldstadt, 2021) can be seen by clicking on this permalink, taken on 1 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/IGxVz>

²⁴ At the time of these utterances, each of these women were well known in Georgia politics, and obviously Black.

²⁵ Permalink taken on 10 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/n8X8b>

“And for *this*, for *this*, women have been subjugated. For this, enormous cruelties have been inflicted, and desires suppressed, and spirits deformed. For this shabby, frightened charade, over half of the human race has been “niggerized”, has been persuaded its capacities are stunted by nature, and its needs qualitatively different from (i.e., inferior to) those of men.”

Considering that *nigger* is probably the most hate-laden word in the English language, let us see how three popular general English dictionaries handle this expression, focusing on how much of the othering, oppression, and violence embodied by this word are reflected in their article for this lemma, plus suggestions for improvement.

4.1 The online version of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, as permalinked from their website on 19 February 2021²⁶:

“1 *offensive; see usage paragraph below* -used as an insulting and contemptuous term for a Black person

2 *offensive; see usage paragraph below* -used as an insulting and contemptuous term for a member of any dark-skinned race (see **race** entry 1 sense 1a)

3 *now often offensive; see usage paragraph below* : a member of a class or group of people who are systematically subjected to discrimination and unfair treatment”

Usage of *Nigger*

“*Nigger* is an infamous word in current English, so much so that when people are called upon to discuss it, they more often than not refer to it euphemistically as “the N-word.” Its offensiveness is not new-dictionaries have been noting it for more than 150 years-but it has grown more pronounced with the passage of time. The word now ranks as almost certainly the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in English, a term expressive of hatred and bigotry. Its self-referential uses by and among Black people are not always intended or taken as offensive (although many object to those uses as well), but its use by a person who is not Black to refer to a Black person can only be regarded as a deliberate expression of contemptuous racism. Its offensiveness has grown to such an extent in recent decades that sense 3 is now rarely used and is itself likely to be found offensive.”

Did the Definition of *nigger* Change?

“There is a widespread belief that the original meaning of *nigger*, as defined in dictionaries, was “an ignorant person,” and a related belief that current dictionary definitions describing its use as a hateful, racist epithet are a recent change. We do not know the source of those beliefs, but they are not accurate. The word was first included in a Merriam-Webster dictionary in 1864, at which time it was defined as a synonym of *Negro*, with a note indicating that it was used “in derision or depreciation.” There has never been a definition like “an ignorant person” for this word in any subsequent

²⁶ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/M4ORS>

dictionary published by this company. Nor do we know of such a definition in any earlier dictionary.”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, there is a usage paragraph, and an additional paragraph on the expression. There are no example sentences.

Brief analysis of Merriam-Webster’s paraphrase of meaning and usage notes:

This is an outstanding article. All three senses are accurate, and in order to help ensure that users are aware of the usage notes, they have the text “*see usage paragraph below*” in italics even *before* the paraphrases of meaning. It is worth noting that as useful as *usage notes* can be, many (if not most) users do not read them, especially if they use a dictionary as a quick reference to consult and get back to whatever they were doing.

Therefore, in many or most cases, unless a user “reads all the way through,” further insight into the offensive/derogatory/vulgar/etc. character of the lemma would not be known. With an expression like *nigger*, nothing should be left to chance, something *Merriam-Webster* reflected. Their insight into how offensive and inflammatory this word is even included a well-informed comment on “reclamation.” Just because an expression is “reclaimed,” does not mean that every member of the group or community embraces it. In addition, they owned up sincerely (as opposed to the usual “social apology,” if that much) to an instance when they did not regard Black people with the respect and regard they should have. In all, *Merriam-Webster* has provided a bias-free, inclusive, and egalitarian treatment for this expression, and users reading the full article would be that much more likely to express themselves in a bias-free, inclusive, and egalitarian manner.

Suggested improvements to this article:

None.

4.2 Oxford Living Dictionaries online²⁷:

offensive

“A contemptuous term for a black or dark-skinned person.”

Usage

“The word *nigger* has been used as a strongly negative term of contempt for a black person since at least the 18th century. Today it remains one of the most racially offensive words in the language. Also referred to as ‘the n-word,’ *nigger* is sometimes used by black people in reference to other black people in a neutral manner (in somewhat the same way that **queer** has been adopted by some gay and lesbian people as a term of self-reference, acceptable only when used by those within the community)”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, there is a usage note (quoted above), and there no are example sentences.

²⁷ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/Zb2qQ>

Brief analysis of *Oxford's* label, paraphrase of meaning, and usage note:

The word is labelled as *offensive*, and the paraphrase of meaning is accurate enough, but as a whole it is kind of sanitised. An expression such as *nigger* would be better labelled as *racist*, or perhaps *extremely racist and contemptuous*. To *Oxford's* credit, the word *contemptuous* is in the paraphrase of meaning. The *usage note*, as noted, may or may not be read, and for this expression it would be worth mentioning its presence in the paraphrase of meaning. However, since the paraphrase of meaning does not give any insight into the racism, fear, and hate incorporated into this expression, the usage note should have taken care of that task.

The usage note starts off well; the first two sentences being helpful. “*Also referred to as the ‘n-word,’*” however, ought to be explained. For example, “*this word is so laden with hate, that it is commonly euphemised as “the n-word.”*” Their “did you know” type section is rather shoddy. Between Black people who use this word it can indeed be neutral, but is more often positive, as in addressing an esteemed person, or at least one with whom there is a certain solidarity. Their tying *queer* in with *nigger* makes some sense, as in oppressed groups trying to reclaim expressions, but is anyway incorrect, as the expression *queer* is now used in many settings outside of “the community,” such as in *queer studies*.

Suggested improvement to this article:

To provide a hyperlink to the *Merriam-Webster* article for *nigger*.

4.3 *The American Heritage Dictionary*²⁸:

Offensive Slang

“1. a. Used as a disparaging term for a black person: “You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a nigger” (James Baldwin).

b. Used as a disparaging term for a member of any dark-skinned people.

2. Used as a disparaging term for a member of any socially, economically, or politically deprived group of people.”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, no usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there no are example sentences.

Brief analysis of the label and paraphrase of meaning:

Nigger is too significant an expression to get such short treatment. A *usage note* would be recommended, as this is a word that will highly likely have a user try to gain more insight. “Used as a disparaging term for a black person” is too little. “*The most disparaging term*” might be better, or perhaps something along the lines of “*contemptuously disparaging*.” They label the expression as “*offensive slang*.” It certainly is *offensive*, but is probably not *slang*. The word has been around too long, and the hateful and racist connotations have been there for centuries. On the plus side, the excellent quote was fitting.

Suggested improvements to this article:

To provide a hyperlink to the *Merriam-Webster* article for *nigger*.

²⁸ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/vUdH8>

4.4 Further commentary:

Merriam-Webster did what a quality dictionary should do, and they did it superbly. Their treatment of this expression showed the kind of respect that all people deserve. In addition to reflecting a deep understanding of this word within the linguistic, cultural, and social contexts, they also recognised the responsibility that dictionaries have to their users and society.

In the face of a normally racist, sexist, capitalistic, patriarchal, and colonialist culture, society, and language, the bias-free, inclusive, and egalitarian treatment *Merriam-Webster* provided for this expression is radical.

5. Example four – *Bitch*:

There are expectations, and therefore demands, based on assigned gender roles, and the following two excerpts illustrate some of the consequences for “disobedience” (and even for “obedience.”)

In *The bitch manifesto* (Freeman, 2000:227) Jo Freeman states:

“A true Bitch is self-determined, but the term "bitch" is usually applied with less discrimination. It is a popular derogation to put down uppity women that was created by man and adopted by women. Like the term "nigger," "bitch" serves the social function of isolating and discrediting a class of people who do not conform to the socially accepted patterns of behavior.”

In *The bitch manifesto* (Freeman, 2000:228) Jo Freeman further states:

“For this resistance they were roundly condemned. They were put down, snubbed, sneered at, talked about, laughed at and ostracized. Our society made women into slaves and then condemned them for acting like slaves. It was all done very subtly. Few people were so direct as to say that they did not like Bitches because they did not play the sex role game.”

In a patriarchal society, many males think they can do whatever they want to females, decide for them, and so on. When males perpetrate violence against females, the physical violence is usually accompanied by verbal violence, and words such as *bitch*, *whore*, and *cunt* are a mainstay.

According to Joseph (2016):

- Gender-based street harassment, including catcalls, “invitations,” obscene gestures, following, assaults, groping, and masturbation, is probably the most common form of quotidian harassment.
- Street harassment is an everyday component within a constellation of verbal and/or physical acts of terrorism targeting females, whose ability to simply be “outside” is threatened.
- Males “bond” through this harassment, as it often is perpetrated by groups of men.

- Men of any age, socioeconomic status, etc., may perpetrate verbal and/or physical acts of street harassment.
- It is a form of gender policing, sociocultural control, reinforcement of male dominance, and a part of “keeping women in their subordinated place.”

Violence and othering slurs are an infamous duo, and regardless of how much progress is supposedly made, or how certain issues are made more visible, all it takes is a flash to harshly be reminded of how things truly are.

Case in point, in 2020, a female student at the University of Strasbourg was attacked by three males, near the city centre during daylight hours²⁹. The victim had this to say:

“One of the three men said to me: ‘Look at that whore in a skirt’. I allowed myself to answer back, saying: ‘Sorry!’ Then they said to me: ‘Shut up, bitch and lower your eyes.’ Two caught hold of me, each taking one of my arms, and the third punched me in the face. And after that, they ran away.”

She also stated that there were around 15 witnesses who were present before, during, and after the attack, and that none of them did anything.

This incident consisted of a brutal physical attack, a vituperative verbal assault, and there were multiple males who took it upon themselves to police what the victim wore, said, and did. Such occurrences are so commonplace, that no one around her did anything, or were afraid of the consequences if they did. Perhaps to them, “boys will be boys,” and it is best to let the “boys” have their “harmless fun.” When will it be safe for females to do something as simple as walk along a street? In the centre of “a large cosmopolitan city” (called by some “the capital of Europe³⁰”, no less!)? During daytime hours? The answer is: not before, during, nor for the foreseeable future after 2020.

Just like the Georgia cops in the *nigger* example, the perpetrators perpetrate with impunity against oppressed groups. When is enough truly enough?

Bitch is probably the most often utilised slur to address and/or refer to a female. Let us see how three popular general English dictionaries handle this expression, and how much of the othering, oppression, and violence embodied by this word is reflected in their article for this lemma.

5.1 The *Oxford Living Dictionaries online*, as permalinked from their website on 19 February 2021³¹:

Noun:

“1 A female dog, wolf, fox, or otter.

²⁹ Permalink: <https://archive.vn/eD1gj>

³⁰ “Thanks to its location at the heart of Europe and its historical ties to two countries and two cultures, Strasbourg has naturally become the Capital of Europe and boasts some twenty European institutions.” Permalink taken on 11 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/iRzJV>

³¹ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/4VvdJ>

‘A female puppy or bitch reaches sexual maturity at roughly the same age as a male; however, there are variations among breeds and individuals.’

2 *derogatory* A spiteful, unpleasant, or disliked woman.

2.1 *offensive* A woman.

2.2 *informal* A person who is completely subservient to another.

2.3 *US informal* Used as a form of address.

3 (a *bitch*) *informal* A difficult or unpleasant situation or thing.

4 *informal* A complaint.

Verb:

1 *informal* Make spitefully critical comments.

1.1 Express displeasure; grumble.”

Additional items in the dictionary article: No usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are example sentences.

Brief analysis of the labels and paraphrases of meaning:

Noun, *sense 1*: Making no mention of this being a contemptible expression to address and/or refer to females makes it sound like this sense occurs in a vacuum, and tacitly legitimises its use (if only, ahem, to refer to a female dog, wolf, fox, or otter...)

Noun, *sense 2* and *2.1*:

This expression is more than *derogatory*. It is *sexist*, and its use promotes the perpetuation of male hegemony.

Noun, *sense 2.2*:

Its use may be *informal*, but it certainly is very offensive, and even more so to males.

Noun, *sense 2.3*:

“*US informal* Used as a form of address” makes it sound harmless. Using this as a form of address in any context other than among people who have previously made clear that it is acceptable, would be egregiously inconsiderate, sexist, and contemptuous.

Noun, *sense 3*:

The paraphrase of meaning is correct, but again, words do not exist in a vacuum; certainly not one like this.

Noun, *sense 4*:

Same comment as for *sense 3*.

Verb, *sense 1*:

To use this word in this context reflects tremendous insensitivity. It belittles all females, not just from the sexist perspective, but also from the “whatever females have to say has no merit” one as well.

Verb, *sense 1.1*:

For this sense they did not even bother with *informal* or *derogatory* labels.

Analysis of the labels and paraphrases of meaning, plus suggestions for improvement:

As a whole, *Oxford* provides a sanitised treatment of the expression. They covered nine senses, and only one had *derogatory* as a label. No expression “exists in a vacuum;” most certainly not one like this. Considering that perhaps only *cunt*³² is a more sexist, derogatory, and contemptible manner to address and/or refer to a female, *Oxford* could have done a much better job labelling its usage. Examples would include: *extremely denigrating*, *exceedingly sexist*, and *very offensive*. In addition, a *usage note* touching upon the sexism, misogyny, othering, and violence would have been beneficial. Finally, the article does not reflect any sensitivity, at all, in relation to the victims of this slur.

5.2 Random House Unabridged Dictionary³³:

noun

“1 a female dog: *The bitch won first place in the sporting dogs category.*

2 a female of canines generally.

3 *Slang.*

a malicious, unpleasant, selfish person, especially a woman.

a lewd woman.

Disparaging and Offensive. any woman.

4 *Slang.*

a a complaint. See also **bitch session**.

b anything difficult or unpleasant: *That test was a real bitch.*

c anything memorable, especially something exceptionally good: *You threw one bitch of a party last night.*

5 *Slang.*

a person who is submissive or subservient to someone, usually in a humiliating way: *Tom is so her bitch -he never questions what she decides.*

6 *Slang.*

a a man who willingly or unwillingly submits to the will and control of a dominant partner in a sexual relationship, especially with another man, as in *prison bitch*: *Watch out, or your cellmate will make you his prison bitch.*

b a gay man who assumes the passive or female role in a sexual relationship.

verb (used without object)

1 *Slang.* to complain; gripe: *They bitched about the service, then about the bill.*

verb (used with object)

³² *Squaw* is perhaps even worse, but is not nearly as widely utilised as *bitch* or *cunt*.

³³ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/KvtRQ>

8 *Slang*. to spoil; bungle (sometimes followed by up): *He bitched the job completely. You really bitched up this math problem.*”

Additional items in the dictionary article: No usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are no example sentences other than those included with the paraphrases of meaning.

Analysis of the labels and paraphrases of meaning, plus suggestions for improvement:

There is no shortage of senses in the *Random House* article, but, like the *Oxford* one, users get a sanitised treatment of this expression. Thus, the comments on the insensitivity on the part of the lexicographers, usage labelling, and its “use in a vacuum” apply as well. All senses are very *disparaging and offensive*, yet only one was labelled so. In all, *Random House* covered many senses, but essentially ignored the fear, hate, misogyny, sexism, and outright contempt associated with this expression, which could have also been explored in a *usage note*.

5.3 Collins English Dictionary³⁴:

noun

“1. a female dog or other female canine animal, such as a wolf

2. *derogatory, slang*

a malicious, spiteful, or coarse woman

3. *offensive, slang*

a woman

4. *slang*

a complaint

5. *slang*

a difficult situation or problem

6. *slang*

a person who acts as a subordinate or slave to another person

verb *informal*

7. (*intransitive*)

to complain; grumble

8. to behave (towards) in a spiteful or malicious manner

9. (*transitive; often foll by up*)

to botch; bungle”

Additional items in the dictionary article: No usage notes nor other such indications are given, and there are no example sentences.

³⁴ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/o2Nvg>

Analysis of the paraphrases of meaning:

The treatment *Collins* gives to this expression is very similar to that of *Oxford* and *Random House*, so there is not much to add, other than that they at least labelled a “malicious, spiteful, or coarse woman” as derogatory.

Further commentary:

As a whole, based on the usage labels, these lexicons give the impression that only under very specific circumstances can *bitch* be offensive, yet, perhaps only *cunt* is a more sexist, derogatory, and contemptible manner to address and/or refer to a female. None of the lexicons mentioned the fear, hate, misogyny, sexism, and othering associated with this expression. Nowhere in the articles is there any sensitivity in relation to the victims of this slur. An appropriate *usage note* would help users to better understand the othering, and the role *bitch* plays in oppressing females. So equipped, users might reduce, or perhaps eliminate their use of this loathsome expression. If desired, an additional usage note could also have explored the use of *bitch* as an empowering and solidarising expression among certain females.

6. Example five – *squaw*:

In an article analysing the expression *squaw*, Merskin (2010:345) posits: “What’s in a name? Plenty when it comes to the ability of words to establish identity.” “Two primary representations are revealed in the discourse defining *squaw*: as sexual punching bag and as drudge.” She also mentions that this expression refers to the vagina or female genitalia in the Algonquin and Mohawk languages.

She goes on to state:

“The psychological impact of this racial and sexual slur has a significant negative impact on quality of life, perceptions, and opportunities for Native American women (ethnostress) due to the consistent use and reification of the *squaw* stereotype through more than 400 years of U.S. history.” (Merskin, 2010:345). Furthermore, “To many Native people, renaming [of locations] is not just a matter of politeness, it is an effort to reclaim indigenous identity and decolonize the landscape.” (Merskin, 2010:346)

Squaw also went on to be associated with *prostitute*, on account of the popular notion that “Indian women” were promiscuous (Bacigal, 2017.) As with *bitch* and *cunt* (among others), expressions that denigrate females may also be utilised to offend males. “Effeminate men, homosexuals, cowards, men willing to marry women outside of their race, and non-Native men who married Indian women were all referred to as ‘squaws’” (Bacigal, 2017:3.) As Mihesuah (2003:102) notes, “the ‘squaw’ is the dirty, subservient, and abused tribal female who is also haggard, violent, and eager to torture tribal captives.”

As per Parezo and Jones (2009):

“ ‘Squaw’ referred to women who looked old, stoop-shouldered, downtrodden, and exhausted from long hours of toil-images that had earlier been affixed to the word “witch” but for different reasons. Indian squaws were beasts of burden, unquestionably obeying ‘braves’ who beat them for any insubordination.”

Returning to the landscapes, locations with this name serve as daily reminders as to how colonialist, sexist, and racist white people see these women. Although there have been many efforts to remove the word *squaw* from location names, a search for “*squaw*” using the Geographic Names Information System (a service of the U.S. Geological Survey³⁵) on 15 February 2021 provided 1,178 locations with the word *squaw* in it. These include: *Big Squaw Valley, Little Squaw Creek, Old Squaw Lake, Squaw Beach, Squaw Butte, Squaw Canyon, and White Squaw Mission.*

As ridiculous as it may seem to ask, how might white women feel about names like *Box Bay, Cunt Creek, Muff Mountain, Pussy Park, Snatch Stream, or Twat Trail*? Sounds ludicrous, right? And yet, these would “only” be sexist names. Location names like *Big Squaw Valley, Little Squaw Creek, Squaw Butte, and Squaw Canyon*, are also repulsively racist and colonialist. Then there might also be *Bitch Beach, Bitch Bay, Bitch Bridge, Wench Way, Shrew Stream, Vixen Valley, Henpecker Harbor, Fishwife Forest, Dragon Dam, She-Devil Swamp, Gorgon Gulch, Hag Haven, Beldam Bend, Trot Trail, Witch Way*, and on and on. Why must it only be the victims and egalitarians who are forced to understand? Dorrel (2018:267) summarizes some of the othering and oppression white supremacists inflict:

“Since the arrival of European colonizers in the 15th century, Native American people have been slaughtered, relocated, discriminated against, stigmatized and stereotyped. The oppressive, domineering power of White society created and promulgated negative, unauthentic, stereotypical representations of Native Americans to further marginalize them.”

Anderson (2004:229) shares her insight into how such negative constructions of Native womanhood came to be, including:

“The dirty, easy squaw was invented long before poverty, abuse, and oppression beset our peoples. She was invented and then reinforced because she proved useful to the colonizer. The ‘uncivilized’ squaw justified taking over Indian land. She eased the conscience of those who wished to sexually abuse without consequence. She was handy to greedy consumers. Dirty and lazy, she excused those who removed her children and paved the way for assimilation into mainstream culture. She allowed for the righteous position of those who participated in the eradication of Native culture, language, and tradition.”

Anderson (2004) explains in detail how this “degraded and disposable” Native female figure came about. Here is a brief summary:

When the Europeans first arrived, Native womanhood represented the beauty of the “discovered” land. This was the *Indian Queen*, as powerful as she was beautiful, but this power made her a threat. She inspired awe and fear. Once the invaders decided to claim the land as their own, the archetypal Native woman was demoted to an *Indian Princess*. This exotic and sexy princess was, like the land, just waiting to be “explored” by white men. She was “virgin,” like the land, and to also be exploited and consumed. When the Native inhabitants started to resist being conquered, controlled, exploited, and murdered, the “*squaw drudge*” came to be. So, the Native

³⁵ <https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:1:::::>

woman went from reverence to refuse, to fit the colonisers' needs, including "justifications" for their actions.

Next, let us see how three popular general English dictionaries handle the expression *squaw*, and how much of the othering, oppression, and violence embodied by this word is reflected in their article for this lemma, along with suggestions for improvement.

6.1 The *Oxford Living Dictionaries online*, as permalinked from their website on 18 February 2021³⁶:

"1 *offensive* A North American Indian woman or wife.

1.1 *North American* A woman or wife."

Usage

"Until relatively recently, the word *squaw* was used neutrally in anthropological and other contexts to mean a North American Indian woman or wife. With changes in the political climate in the second half of the 20th century, however, the derogatory attitudes of the past towards North American Indian women mean that the word cannot now be used in any sense without being regarded as offensive"

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, there is a usage note, and there are no example sentences.

Analysis of the labels, paraphrases of meaning, and usage note, plus suggestions for improvement:

As evidenced earlier in this example, the expression *squaw* is not just offensive. It is disgustingly racist, repugnantly sexist, obscenely colonialist, and appallingly misogynist. It is not enough to just use the generic label *offensive*. Many, perhaps even most people looking up this word have little idea of what it truly embodies. The countless victims of the way of thinking and acting that would motivate a person to use this word, however, do not have to look it up. They live it, they are othered by it, they are oppressed by it, they live the incorporated violence, and even know that they may be murdered by it. Suggestions include labels that include all of the following together: "*racist, sexist, colonialist, misogynist.*"

Regarding the *usage note*: The first sentence barely qualifies as a "my bad" type of "apology." The anthropologists (?) and others who used this expression "neutrally" were furthering the racism, sexism, colonialism, and misogyny associated with it, whether they knew it or not. The second sentence makes it seem like some white people thought better of this usage, and appears to be included as barely more than an afterthought. The usage note makes no mention of the othering, the fostering of continued vilification and oppression, nor provides any insight into why it is offensive. In this manner, they are serving the perpetrators, while keeping the victims silenced. The usage note is barely more than a "politically correct" suggestion to not use the word, in order to not get in trouble. The quip on "*the derogatory attitudes of the past towards North American Indian women*" kind of makes it seem that any harm has already taken place,

³⁶ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/LfpOb>

and that now everything is just fine. Except that it isn't so for the victims, and has not been so at any moment during the past centuries since the European invaders arrived.

6.2 **Merriam-Webster**³⁷:

- “1 *now usually offensive* : an American Indian woman
- 2 *dated, usually disparaging* : woman, wife”

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, there is no usage note, and there are no example sentences.

Brief analysis of the labels and paraphrases of meaning, along with suggestions for improvement:

Sense 1: “*now usually offensive*: an American Indian woman.” In reality, it has been extremely offensive to Native American women (and to informed non-sexist and non-racist people) for centuries, since it also refers to a female's genitalia, and to women considered to be “disposable.”

Sense 2: *Maybe dated, always disparaging.*

Suggestions: usage labels which accurately describe the racism, sexism, colonialism, and misogyny incorporated into this expression, along with a usage note that says it like it is.

6.3 **American Heritage**³⁸:

- “ 1. *Offensive* A Native American woman, especially a wife.
- 2. *Offensive Slang* A woman or wife. “

Additional items in the dictionary article: The lemma is identified as a noun, there is no usage note, and there are no example sentences.

Brief analysis of the labels and paraphrases of meaning, along with suggestions for improvement:

Similar to the *Merriam-Webster* treatment, but with a couple of significant improvements: the *offensive* label appears for both senses, and *Native American* is currently the ethnonym by choice of and for these Peoples. Since *squaw* is also in prevalent use in Canada, also including *First Nations* would have been even better. An illustrative *usage note* would have also been welcome.

Further commentary:

The usage *labelling* in all lexicons was insufficient, the *paraphrases of meaning* did not convey any of the racism, sexism, colonialism, and misogyny incorporated into this expression, and *usage notes* could have been utilised to provide a realistic picture of what the expression *squaw* truly embodies.

³⁷ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/5Fq94>

³⁸ Permalink taken on 19 February 2021: <https://archive.vn/wip/kgHjM>

7. Further discussion and conclusions, along with additional consideration of relevant metalexicographical aspects:

7.1 Five Examples:

7.1.1 *anthropocentrism*:

As a whole, from the bias-free and egalitarian viewpoints, the lexicons would better serve their users by suggesting contrasting *anthropocentrism* with *ecocentrism* and/or *biocentrism*. In addition, a *usage note* that mentions that the self-proclamation of being the “most important entity in the universe” reflects a considerable amount of bias, egocentrism, insecurity, and an almost infantile bravado. Since this also represents the ultimate in self-aggrandisement, perhaps *anthropocentrism* is the original source of all *othering*. White supremacists who fear and hate any people who are not also white are obviously self-aggrandising racists. Males who fear and hate females are clearly self-aggrandising sexists and misogynists, and so on.

7.1.2 *third world*:

Only one of the dictionaries went so far as to say, “Some people think this expression is offensive.” It is offensive, degrading, and othering, and reflects an extremely Western, Eurocentric, patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalistic bias. The paraphrases of meaning imply that these countries are “backward” and “inferior,” that they see themselves as backward and inferior, and understand that the only way to become “advanced” as a nation, socially, and culturally, is through financial wealth and technology. None of these articles considered the possibility that countries that are not obsequiously embracing capitalism might consider the promotion of health, education, safety, and general well being of their residents to not be “just about the money.” A usage note would have been helpful to clarify or explain any of this.

7.1.3 *nigger*:

Merriam-Webster had a bias-free, inclusive, and egalitarian article for the expression *nigger*. There was no othering, the lemma was properly labelled, and they understood that the usage notes for this expression were so important, that they had wording alerting to them even *before* the paraphrases of meaning. Lexicographers should understand their role in a society that is dependent on reliable information. Wiegand (1997) stresses the responsibility that dictionaries have to users, society, and to a dictionary culture. Paraphrases of meaning that are accurate and free of bias are socially responsible, provide users trustworthy information, and promote a dictionary culture by addressing the unfulfilled needs of several target user groups, which encourages their consultation on a regular basis. This is something *Merriam-Webster* reflected in this article. As mentioned, the other dictionaries would have served their users best by simply hyperlinking to the *Merriam-Webster* article.

7.1.4 *bitch*:

Each of the lexicons, based on the usage labels, gave the impression that only under very specific circumstances can *bitch* be offensive, despite it perhaps being “only second” to *cunt* as the most sexist, derogatory, and contemptible manner to address and/or refer to a female. None of the lexicons mentioned the fear, hate, misogyny, sexism, and othering associated with this expression. Nowhere in the articles is there any sensitivity in relation to the victims of this slur. An appropriate *usage note* would help users to better understand the othering, and the role *bitch* plays in oppressing all females.

7.1.5 *squaw*:

The usage labelling in all lexicons was insufficient, as the expression *squaw* is not just offensive. It is disgustingly racist, repugnantly sexist, obscenely colonialist, and appallingly misogynist. The paraphrases of meaning did not convey any of the racism, sexism, colonialism, and misogyny incorporated into this expression. The countless victims of the way of thinking and acting that would motivate a person to use this word, however, do not have to look it up. They live it, they are othered by it, they are oppressed by it, they live the incorporated violence, and even know that they may be murdered by it. Usage notes could have been utilised to provide a realistic picture of what the expression *squaw* truly embodies: as far as white racists, sexists and colonialists are concerned, “Indian” women are to be abused, sexually exploited, and thrown away when done.

7.2 Usage labelling:

As seen in these example expressions, there are mainly two problems with *usage labelling*. The first is that lexicons tend to have only a limited set of “universal” labels for hateful expression. These include *offensive*, *disparaging*, and *derogatory*. Why not expand the palette, to also include more specific identifiers? These would include, depending on the expression, words such as *racist*, *sexist*, *misogynist*, *patriarchal*, *xenophobic*, *colonialist*, *speciesist*, *ethnocentric*, *Eurocentric*, *heterosexist*, *othering*, and so on. There could also be combinations of these labels as well. For *squaw*, for instance: *racist*, *sexist*, *colonialist*, *misogynist*. These could also be combined with intensifiers, as in: *extremely denigrating*, or *exceedingly sexist*.

7.3 Paraphrases of meaning:

The *paraphrases of meaning* should be bias-free and inclusive. In the *squaw* example, for instance, there were no senses for female genitalia, nor for females considered to be “disposable.” Nonetheless, these meanings have been in use for centuries, and such senses should be included in the paraphrase of meaning. Leaving them out also sanitises the two included senses and silences the victims.

Since most people trust what dictionaries have to say, lexicographers who understand their role in a society that is dependent on reliable information have an enormous responsibility to their users. Many words and phrases have bias and exclusion incorporated into them, yet regular general dictionaries are not doing an adequate job of alerting users to this usage. These lexicons are generally ignoring or mischaracterising such usage, which essentially legitimises biased expression. Consequently, regular dictionaries do not give their users insight into how inequality, othering, and victimisation work through language.

7.4 Usage notes:

As useful as *usage notes* can be, many (if not most) users do not read them, especially if they use a dictionary as a quick reference to consult and get back to whatever they were doing. Therefore, in many (or perhaps most) cases, unless a user “reads all the way through,” further insight into the offensive/derogatory/vulgar/etc. character of the lemma would not be known. This would be especially applicable when extra scrolling would be necessary to even see any usage note. This can be remedied in mainly two ways: the first is what *Merriam-Webster* did in their article for *nigger*, which was to have a text alerting to the usage notes in italics even *before*

the paraphrase of meaning for each sense. Another is to notify, before the defined senses, that there is a usage note. For instance, right after the part of speech.

Usage notes should address the needs of the victims by being written from a bias-free and egalitarian perspective, and *not* to serve as a “social apology” or as a “justification” for maltreatment. For instance, in the *Oxford* article for *squaw*, the usage note also served for several othering purposes:

- To provide a “my bad” type of “apology.”
- To protect the perpetrators, while keeping the victims silenced.
- To issue a “politically correct” suggestion to not use the word.
- To make it seem that any harm has already taken place, and that now everything is just fine.

Beyond this, usage notes can serve to illustrate why a given expression harms others. After a bias-free and inclusive paraphrase of meaning, further information on how an expression is biased and/or exclusive can be given in a usage note. Why not liberate “usage notes” from confining labels? *Usage*, *usage note*, and *usage paragraph* are so generic, that they already announce that they may not contain much insight where othering and oppression are concerned.

For expressions that other and oppress, here are some ideas, which can be tailored to specific expressions and how they other and oppress: *insight into the othering*, *why this word is so racist*, *perceiving the xenophobia*, *focusing on the sexism*, *conquering colonialism*, or *highlighting the heteronormativity*, to name a few. Finally, instead of just having sample sentences, there could also be curated quotes that are timely, relevant, and highly readable.

7.5 Putting it all together:

Here is a bias-free and inclusive article for the expression *squaw*, with all the trimmings, but without information overload:

squaw *n* *extremely offensive, racist, sexist, colonialist, misogynist, denigrating, objectifying.* (Please see further commentary after the definition.)

1. A Native American or First Nations woman regarded as slovenly, despicable, exploitable, and ultimately disposable
2. The genitalia of a female, especially that of a Native American or First Nations woman
3. A woman, especially if Native American or First Nations
4. A wife, especially if Native American or First Nations

Insight into the racism, sexism, colonialism, misogyny, denigration, and objectification:

When the Europeans first arrived, Native womanhood represented the beauty of the “discovered” land. This was the *Indian Queen*, as powerful as she was beautiful, but this power made her a threat. She inspired awe and fear. Once the invaders decided to claim

the land as their own, the archetypal Native woman was demoted to an *Indian Princess*. This exotic and sexy princess was, like the land, just waiting to be “explored” by white men. She was “virgin,” like the land, and to also be exploited and consumed. When the Native inhabitants started to resist being conquered, controlled, exploited, and murdered, the “*squaw drudge*” came to be. So, the Native woman went from reverence to refuse, to fit the colonisers’ needs, including “justifications” for their actions. **Additional notes:** *Native American* is a better choice when referring to *Indian Peoples* in the USA, as would be *First Nations* in Canada. Needless to say, the landmass currently known as “North America” already existed before the European invaders arrived, therefore it was not “discovered.”

Illustrative quote, from Kim Anderson*:

“The dirty, easy squaw was invented long before poverty, abuse, and oppression beset our peoples. She was invented and then reinforced because she proved useful to the colonizer. The ‘uncivilized’ squaw justified taking over Indian land. She eased the conscience of those who wished to sexually abuse without consequence. She was handy to greedy consumers. Dirty and lazy, she excused those who removed her children and paved the way for assimilation into mainstream culture. She allowed for the righteous position of those who participated in the eradication of Native culture, language, and tradition.”

* Anderson, Kim, 2004. The Construction of Negative Identity, in Prince, A., Silva-Wayne, S. and Vernon, C. eds., 2004. *Feminisms and womanisms: A Women's Studies reader*. Canadian Scholars’ Press.

Such an article fosters a better understanding of the othering and oppression this expression embodies, and perhaps even some empathy. This might lead, for instance, to a person deciding against a “Pocahottie³⁹” getup for themselves or a cared for person on a “costume-wearing occasion,” such as “Halloween.” Getting unbiased labels and paraphrases of meaning, along with readable additional information, also promotes a *dictionary culture*. However they may be called, usage notes in dictionaries should address the needs of the victims by being written from a bias-free and egalitarian perspective, and *not* to serve as a “social apology.”

Please note: *if you are not a lexicographer, you may consider skipping ahead to the **Final thoughts** section, starting on page 31, since the following is not terribly relevant otherwise.*

Users can read as much or as little as they want. They know that there is more information after the definition, if desired. The most important information is conveyed in a few lines, without information overload. The advertising accompanying most online lexicons is regrettably another matter. Gouws and Tarp (2017:402-403) encapsulate this *information overload* from the marketing perspective so:

“On the one hand, the users get free and easy access to a large number of dictionaries of different types, but on the other hand, these dictionaries are increasingly stuffed with a lot of irrelevant and disturbing material.”

³⁹ From **Pocahontas** and **hottie**. Permalink of a relevant article titled “*I’m An Indigenous Woman, & This Is What I Think Of Your “PocaHottie” Costume*”, by Jordan Marie Daniel: <https://archive.vn/wip/JtKVh>

7.6 Additional metalexical considerations:

7.6.1 The responsibility lexicographers have:

Lexicographers should understand their role in a society that is dependent on reliable and bias-free information. As per Kaplan (2020:208):

“Despite there being widespread biased and exclusive expression in the English language, general dictionaries do not do an adequate job of alerting users to this usage. Quite the contrary. Anyone accessing these dictionaries is usually only getting a part of the full picture, information that ignores these aspects, or even definitions (or a lack thereof) which promote further biased and exclusive usage.”

Wiegand (1997) goes into detail on the responsibility that dictionaries have to users, society, and a *dictionary culture*. Paraphrases of meaning that are accurate and free of bias are socially responsible, provide users trustworthy information, and promote a dictionary culture by addressing the unfulfilled needs of several target user groups, thereby encouraging their consultation on a regular basis.

7.6.2 Dictionaries as “infallible:”

Lew and De Schryver (2014:341) have this to say on the veneration dictionaries have enjoyed:

“For many centuries, dictionaries were viewed with authority, often admired and revered with awe, and the status of ‘the dictionary’ in some countries could be likened to that of the lay Bible. The high level of respect was no doubt due, at least in part, to the ties of lexicography with scholarship and education. Dictionaries were widely perceived as providing ‘received’ knowledge, and their authority was rarely questioned. This relationship was one which, apparently, both lexicographers and dictionary users seemed quite happy with.”

They note that this unchallenged status is changing, as seen, in part by users seeking to access lexicographical information through general search engines. Nevertheless, users should still be able to count on the authoritative nature of the information that dictionaries offer.

7.6.3 Extra-lexicographical scenarios that might lead to the use of a dictionary:

There are mainly two extra-lexicographical scenarios that might lead to the use of a dictionary: cognitive and communicative situations. As per Bergenholtz and Bothma (2011), *cognitive situations* are those where users wish to acquire knowledge. An example would be looking up a specific biased word or expression in order to obtain a paraphrase of meaning. *Communicative situations* arise when a user needs assistance with oral or written expression, as per Bergenholtz and Bothma (2011). For instance, a journalistic text is to be prepared, and a trusty research companion whose focus is inclusion is needed.

7.6.4 Dictionaries, other lexicographical works, corpora, the internet, and a *dictionary culture*:

Dictionary and corpus data can naturally be a great combination, especially when seeking further insight into, and examples of, othering and exclusion. Heid, Prinsloo and Bothma (2012) highlight the utility of electronic dictionaries incorporating or linking to corpus data from other sources in various ways, including links to full-text documents and information portals, but

should do so judiciously, for the benefit of their users. This may involve explanations to users, should be easy to navigate, and have an emphasis of quality over quantity.

Fuertes-Olivera and Tarp (2020) emphasise that in the past, a *dictionary culture* required user reference skills to compensate for the complex macro and microstructures the lexicons had. They assert that:

“Lexicographers engaged in the production of digital information tools should therefore stop talking about reference skills and blaming their users for bad usage. Instead, they should take more responsibility for the design of their products and promote a culture of intuitive usage.” (Fuertes-Olivera and Tarp, 2020, pp.282-283)

Their approach certainly fosters a *dictionary culture* based on satisfied users.

Bothma and Gouws (2020) elaborate on the role e-lexicography plays in an online environment that has essentially unlimited information sources, most of which are uncurated. As a part of this “universe” of information, lexicons can be a starting, intermediate, and/or final stop for users with a given knowledge objective. Dictionaries should play their part by not only providing trustworthy information, but by also connecting seamlessly with the other relevant data sources.

Bothma and Tarp (2012:89) state:

“In this respect, dictionaries and other lexicographical works are par excellence *consultation tools*, i.e. artifacts designed to be consulted in order to meet punctual information needs in contrast to global information needs which may be satisfied by other types of artifacts or texts produced with a view to being read and studied from one end to another.”

7.6.5 Usage labels:

Beyer (2011:419) stated:

“Generally, a lexicographical label can be described as a meta-entry in a dictionary article which indicates to the dictionary user that the entry it is addressed to represents an element of some form of marked language usage, for example informal language, jargon, geographical variation and temporal variation. Lexicographical labels contextualise their addresses in terms of actual language usage and therefore provide important pragmatic guidance to the dictionary user, thereby promoting communicative success. They have a long history and have not only become a lexicographical tradition, but also an indispensable instrument of description for the lexicographer.”

This is true, and the matter of the subjectivity in usage labelling in English lexicography is also worth keeping in mind. As a result of the inconsistencies in labelling, users can not be certain of their reliability as guides on contextual usage (Sakwa, 2011.) This uncertainty applies to both native and non-native speakers of the language (Sakwa, 2011.) In this paper, for instance, we saw how *squaw* had three articles from three dictionaries, and each handled the usage labels differently.

7.6.6 Dictionary reviews:

Nielsen (2017) explores many of the aspects of what constitutes a good dictionary review, including critically evaluating the intended functions of the dictionary, how well these functions are supported, and how well the lexicon meets the needs of its intended users. He also mentions that good reviews are beneficial to theoretical and practical lexicography.

If a dictionary is implicitly trusted to provide bias-free and inclusive information, perhaps this too should be a function of a dictionary? If so, wouldn't a good dictionary review also evaluate how a dictionary performs from this standpoint?

7.7 Final thoughts:

All manifestations of othering and oppression are interrelated. An instance where all five example expressions are hammered together is seen in the article “*Pornography Is What the End of the World Looks Like*⁴⁰,” by Hedges (2015.) Here are a couple “less disgusting” excerpts:

- “Porn seeks to eroticize this sadism. In porn women are paid to repeat the mantra ‘I am a cunt. I am a bitch. I am a whore. I am a slut. Fuck me hard with your big cock.’ They plead to be physically abused. Porn caters to degrading racist stereotypes. Black men are sexually potent beasts stalking white women. Black women have a raw, primitive lust. Latin women are sultry and hotblooded. Asian women are meek, sexually submissive geishas.”
- “Women in porn are packaged commodities. They are pleasure dolls and sexual puppets. They are stripped of true emotions. Porn is not about sex, if one defines sex as a mutual act between two partners, but about masturbation, a solitary auto-arousal devoid of intimacy and love. The cult of the self — that is the essence of porn — lies at the core of corporate culture. Porn, like global capitalism, is where human beings are sent to die.”

In *anthropocentrism*, “men” are the “masters of the universe,” which of course includes all females. In porn, females are dehumanised and brutally abused, as a part of the “cult of the self.” As seen, “*third-world*” countries are supposed to be “primitive and inferior,” and their women are “exotic” and stereotyped sexually. “*Niggers*,” in the case of males, are on the prowl to rape white women, while the females are primeval sluts. The females in porn are portrayed as masochists who want to be called *bitch*, *cunt*, and *whore*. In porn, any female who is not white is “exoticised,” and he mentioned “hotblooded” Latinas and docile Asians, and could very well have mentioned *squaws* as a part of this group. Putting it all together, “Porn, like global capitalism, is where human beings are sent to die.”

Dworkin (1997) referred to the denigration, abuse, torture, and humiliation of human females as having their ultimate expression through rape, prostitution, and pornography. She refers to these three pillars as “*the true trinity of woman-hating*” (Dworkin (1997:76.)

There is so much insensitivity, brutality, othering, and wilful ignorance in our society, culture, and language. Lexicographers can play a meaningful role in vanquishing them, by properly labelling lemmas, providing bias-free and inclusive paraphrases of meaning, and by

⁴⁰ Permalink taken from an article appearing on truthdig.com on 16 February 2015: <https://archive.vn/Ind6w>

incorporating usage notes that describe othering and oppression for what they truly are. In doing so, awareness of the needs of others will increase, since lexicons would not be defending the established order.

Working towards a more egalitarian society requires a multifaceted approach, including lexicographical endeavours. The regular general English dictionaries by and large continue to promote and defend traditions and beliefs which encourage and uphold sexism, racism, xenophobia, heterosexism, colonialism, and speciesism, among other forms of oppression and othering. In their indispensable and highly influential work, the lexicographers preparing these dictionaries are making a lot of decisions for all of us, but not taking into account the needs of many of us. They should consider refocusing their lens a bit, in order to bring the needs of those who are othered and oppressed much more to the forefront.

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8.1 Permalinks:

anthropocentrism:

Merriam-Webster: <https://archive.vn/wip/FPjHI>

Macmillan: <https://archive.vn/wip/xJWzR>

Random House: <https://archive.vn/wip/VmTPg>

third world:

Oxford: <https://archive.vn/wip/zIUYu>

Longman's: <https://archive.vn/wip/n8X8b>

American Heritage: <https://archive.vn/wip/lIOTh>

nigger:

Merriam Webster, "nigger as other": <https://archive.vn/wip/n8X8b>

Merriam-Webster: <https://archive.vn/wip/M4ORS>

Oxford: <https://archive.vn/wip/Zb2qQ>

American Heritage: <https://archive.vn/wip/vUdH8>

bitch:

Oxford: <https://archive.vn/wip/4VvdJ>

Random House: <https://archive.vn/wip/KvtRQ>

Collins English Dictionary: <https://archive.vn/wip/o2Nvg>

squaw:

Oxford: <https://archive.vn/wip/LfpOb>

Merriam-Webster: <https://archive.vn/wip/5Fq94>

American Heritage: <https://archive.vn/wip/kgHjM>

8.1.1 Other permalinks:

“soy boy”, from the Urban Dictionary: <https://archive.vn/kWNRR>

“Georgia cops”: <https://archive.vn/IGxVz>

“Attacked female student at the University of Strasbourg”: <https://archive.vn/eD1gj>

“Strasbourg as ‘capital of Europe’”: <https://archive.vn/wip/iRzJV>

U.S. Geological Survey: [https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:1:::;](https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:1:::)

“Pocahottie”: <https://archive.vn/wip/JtKVh>

“Pornography Is What the End of the World Looks Like”: <https://archive.vn/Ind6w>