

URBAN DICTIONARY: CROWDSOURCED APPROPRIATION

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Urban Dictionary began as a joke among friends, but it crept into broader culture and became a major propagator of popular language. Urban Dictionary's success and widespread use have many consequences and are illustrative of some of the large problems on the internet today. This paper will discuss the role of Urban Dictionary in the integration and appropriation of words from marginalized dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English (AAVE), into mainstream culture and media. According to Jenna Wortham of *The New York Times*, Urban Dictionary "has become the anthropologist of the internet." It documents cultural occurrences and phenomena through the new terms that circulate online. Many of the terms defined on Urban Dictionary originate from AAVE. In most cases, the way in which these words are defined and treated on the website reflects blatant cultural insensitivity and appropriation. The definitions often portray Black people as being less intelligent and Black culture as unrefined. The first sign that Urban Dictionary is not focused on cultural sensitivity or humility is the use of the word "urban" in its name. The word urban has been commonly misused to describe Black people (Nolan). Black people can be urban, that is, live in cities, but not all urban residents are Black. The term is also frequently used as a synonym for Black music, like hip-hop, even if the music did not originate from an urban area (Nolan). As New York City freelance writer Clio Chang points out, Urban Dictionary serves to disseminate prejudiced views about the Black community, rather than define their language in a productive way (Chang). The many insensitive, racist (showing prejudice or discrimination based on a person's race, specifically towards a minority or marginalized group), sexist (showing prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex, typically towards women), homophobic (showing prejudice or discrimination against gay people), etc. definitions and features on Urban Dictionary shine a light on

and play a role in how we use words of different dialects in mainstream media and culture today.

In this paper, I draw from other research about the effects of Urban Dictionary and find examples on social media and in the press of Urban Dictionary's impact on modern-day language and culture. I also create case studies around select words defined on Urban Dictionary. My research involved looking at the Urban Dictionary website and searching for articles related to the topics of AAVE, appropriation and commodification of Black culture, and Urban Dictionary. Urban Dictionary masks appropriation and exploitation of Black language as sharing and documentation of culture. My analysis is built off of two main scholarly platforms and many articles from popular media. John Damaso and Dr. Colleen Cotter's paper, *UrbanDictionary.Com* is focused on comparing Urban Dictionary to traditional slang dictionaries. Damaso is an English teacher who studied linguistics at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and Cotter a senior lecturer at the School of Languages, Linguistics and Film, also at QMUL. *Emo, Love and God: Making Sense of Urban Dictionary, a Crowd-Sourced Online Dictionary*, by Dr. Dong Nguyen, Dr. Barbara McGillivray, and Dr. Taha Yasseri, three researchers from The Alan Turing Institute in London, UK, discusses the benefits and flaws of crowdsourced projects and how crowdsourcing information effects Urban Dictionary. They also dive into the offensiveness of the content on Urban Dictionary.

The internet has allowed for language, and therefore culture, to evolve at such an incredible pace that by the time the next edition of the Oxford English Dictionary is scheduled to be released, 2037, it will be out of date (Davis). The web addresses this issue by providing opportunities for languages, dialects, and especially slang, to be shared around the world, though standard English dominates cyberspace. Slang is the element of language that differentiates people of different dialect groups (Bucholtz, 282). Slang dictionaries have been in use since the sixteenth century (Peters), because slang words are rarely accepted into traditional dictionaries. In the past, words were not common knowledge until entering the traditional dictionary (Davis). Dr. Samuel Johnson, the author of *Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language* and one of the most well-respected lexicographers in the history of the English language, claimed to steer

clear of defining “low bad words” in his dictionaries (Damaso and Cotter, 22). Dr. Johnson was calling slang lesser in the eighteenth century. The notion that slang is bad is ingrained in the history of the English language. Urban Dictionary shifts the traditional slang dictionary model from one using an editor, to a crowdsourced model (Smith, 45).

This shift leads to a less prescriptive version of defining words (Smith, 45). Historically, dictionary editors had control of the lexicon and lexicography has not been collaborative in the past. The internet allows a new style of crowdsourced dictionaries, inviting anyone to contribute to creating our lexicon. Urban dictionary defines over one million “ephemeral” words, meaning words that are only popular or used for a brief period of time. Urban dictionary is an “emergent genre” of slang dictionary, curated by the public (Damaso and Cotter, 19). Urban Dictionary has proven to be a more useful disseminator of “ephemeral words”, than past slang dictionaries which recounted the origin and history of a word (Peters). Some believe that slang dictionaries are useful tools only when organized and in the context of place and time and Urban Dictionary is too disorganized to serve this purpose (Dalzell). Jonathon Green, the editor of *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*, the largest and most reputable English slang dictionary, argues that it is impossible for Urban Dictionary to replace slang dictionaries as users are adding two thousand new words per day and there is no way that all of these words exist (Davis). Though Urban Dictionary may not be fulfilling the roles of a traditional slang dictionary, it serves other important roles. According to John Damaso and Dr. Colleen Cotter, Urban Dictionary serves to record present-day language and popular meanings of words for posterity (Damaso and Cotter). In addition, Urban Dictionary offers opinions of words along with their meanings (Nguyen et al.). Many of the definitions are tainted by these opinions, which are often filled with disrespect and racism. The subjective nature of the definitions leaves room for disrespect towards marginalized groups due to many of the words on the website originating from AAVE and other marginalized dialects.

The use of AAVE terms and phrases became widespread in the United States largely due to their use in popular African American music movements including hip-hop (Richardson, 7). Hip-hop language (HHL) is recognized as a “genre” of AAVE

(Richardson, 10). Dr. Elaine Richardson, Professor of Literacy Studies, Department of Teaching and Learning at The University of Ohio writes, "...the sounds, visual images, identities, labels, names, etc. associated with Afro American language, discourses, and people are largely a heterogeneous set established historically, institutionally, and economically by those with power to assign meaning, worth, and value" (Richardson, 12). Urban Dictionary gives this power to the anonymous user behind the screen.

Urban Dictionary transfers power over language from dictionary editors to anyone who would like a place in lexicography (Damaso and Cotter). Aaron Peckham created Urban Dictionary in 1999 during his freshman year at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Peckham graduated with master's and bachelor's degrees in computer science (Cal Poly Magazine). He created the site as he was uncomfortable with the idea that "...a printed dictionary, which is updated rarely, tells you what thoughts are O.K. to have, what words are O.K. to say" (Wortham). Peckham noticed how different friends' language practices were depending on where they were from geographically (Davis). Though Urban Dictionary's style is different than that of a traditional dictionary, it is still showing "...what thoughts are O.K. to have [and] what words are O.K. to say." Additionally, the thoughts and words included on the website are offensive in many cases. Nguyen et al. explain that "...the existence of [offensive content] can signal to other users that such content is acceptable" (Nguyen et al., 9). Through housing offensive definitions and comments on the site, Urban Dictionary is showing these users that these offensive comments are okay. The existence of a word on Urban Dictionary denotes it as acceptable for use. In a 2004 interview with *National Public Radio* Aaron Peckham revealed that Urban dictionary was intended to be a "parody of dictionary.com." Urban Dictionary has many similar features to a traditional dictionary, even a paper dictionary, but its immediate and crowdsourced nature completely changes its effect (Damaso and Cotter, 20). Anyone can create an account on the Urban Dictionary website and add any word along with any definition they wish. Users with accounts can also interact with the website by liking and disliking other definitions. By October 2013, 8.4 million users checked the website each month. In 2014, the website had over seven million definitions with two thousand definitions added each day (Wortham). In 2017, Urban Dictionary was the

thirty-first most visited site in the country (Lawson). The derogatory messages contained in definitions on the website are seen by many and they are impossible to contain once spread.

Urban Dictionary prevails in many unexpected environments, including schools, courtrooms, and historically significant events (Smith). The United States Department of Motor Vehicles uses Urban Dictionary to determine if vanity plate requests are appropriate (Davis). The website is surprisingly popular among judges. In 2003, a High Court judge in London used the site to help make decisions in a copyright case between musicians ("Rap Lyrics Confound Judge"). In April 2013, a Wisconsin appeals court used the website to decipher the alias of a convicted robber (Kaufman). Urban Dictionary was in the news when definitions of terms from Justice Brett Kavanaugh's yearbook were circulated (LeMiere). Urban Dictionary's use in official proceedings is interesting, although simultaneously unsettling, due to the website's rampant racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Even though Urban Dictionary is so widespread, the website is rarely censored, as Peckham believes one of the assets of the website is its self-censorship and crowdsourced up or downvoting. He believes that the ability of users to vote on their favorite definitions and respond to other posts is a unique way to capture the popular opinions of our time. Peckham will remove definitions if they are targeted at or reveal the private information of a specific person (Wortham). He claims that "racial and sexual slurs are allowed, racist and sexist entries are not" (Davis). This is not compelling in terms of combating prejudice. There is no clear attempt at censoring when looking at the website. Lack of editing usually makes crowdsourced ventures lower quality (Nguyen et al., 1). Judgments of definitions are subjective as they are based on users' personal opinions (Nguyen et al., 4). Young people are basing their colloquial vocabulary on what they see on the internet (Smith, 45). Many users are young people (Smith, 45) and they are consuming Urban Dictionary as they form their opinions of the world and those around them and learn to communicate their ideas. Offensive content is not only in the form of definitions for offensive words, but also non-offensive words are defined in an offensive manner. Giving Urban Dictionary the benefit of the doubt, there are also some non-offensive definitions for offensive

words (Nguyen et al., 9). Nguyen, McGillivray, and Yasseri also claim that “highly offensive content tends to receive lower scores through the dictionary’s voting system” (Nguyen et al., 1), though this is not evident when looking at many definitions on Urban Dictionary. Along with the lack of editing or censoring, Urban Dictionary has no clear algorithm. From reading through the site it is impossible to decipher how definitions are ranked, as it does not seem to correlate directly with up and downvotes.

Offensive definitions are left as is likely because users are attracted to these outlandish definitions, leading Peckham to make more money. Dr. Sarah T. Roberts, assistant professor of information studies at The University of California, Los Angeles, puts it simply, “I would assume that the site is intended to make money...it’s the profit motive.” Attempting to censor the site now would be incredibly expensive and time-consuming (Chang). Aaron Peckham spins the website as “social good” as he is increasing accessibility to defining words. Simultaneously, he is not transparent about the fiscal value of the website and is making a living off of Urban Dictionary’s racist and sexist content (Chang). His assessment of “social good” is an extreme stretch, and actually the opposite of what Peckham and Urban Dictionary are promoting. The United States has a tradition of commodifying Black culture; from hairstyles, to dance, to language. Urban Dictionary follows this trend by offering mugs, t-shirts, and other paraphernalia printed with words and definitions from the website. Peckham also authored multiple books compiling content from Urban Dictionary. He makes a living off of his earnings from the website and related endeavors.

Peckham himself said, “the real authority on language and the meaning comes from people who speak the language” (Kaufman). So why is he allowing anyone who would like to define AAVE terms the unfettered ability to do so? Damaso and Cotter claim that asking the general population for popular meanings of everyday language “places emphasis on democracy and equal-access to meaning-making rights” (Damaso and Cotter, 20). Damaso and Cotter’s analysis holds true when people use this access virtuously. Unfortunately, this equal access has not been consistently used for good and communities are being marginalized by the definitions included on Urban Dictionary. The choice for editors and contributors to remain anonymous with

screen names creates space for cyberbullying in the form of racism (Damaso and Cotter, 21).

Nguyen, McGillivray, and Yasseri created qualitative measures to compare Urban Dictionary to another popular online crowdsourced dictionary, Wiktionary. A word's "offensiveness score" is based on a three-tier ranking system and random people were asked to rank three definitions for the same word from most to least offensive. All of the responses for each word were aggregated, resulting in an offensiveness score out of three (Nguyen et al.,14). Urban Dictionary's crowdsourced platform can lead to offensive content, which is acknowledged by the paper and its methods, but the results do not show any particular trends in what types of words have offensive definitions. Though some scholars are researching Urban Dictionary, they are ignoring some of its wider implications. A table crafted by Damaso and Cotter pointing to the different linguistic tactics used on Urban Dictionary includes sexist and homophobic definitions, though their paper does not delve into the implications of these definitions (Damaso and Cotter, 23). So far scholars have only scratched the surface. It is imperative that we take responsibility for the algorithms and information on the internet and start learning about how and why they exist, and what we can do to reverse adverse effects.

In order to understand Urban Dictionary in this context, close reading of the definitions posted is essential. This paper analyzes three words from Zeba Blay's HuffPost article, "12 Words Black People Invented, and White People Killed," bae, fleek, and basic. I create and evaluate case studies around these words. My case studies include background research on the use of these words in Black communities and their appropriation in white communities and the corporate world. I evaluate the Urban Dictionary pages for these words through analysis of the definitions, user interactions, and activity analytic charts. I will examine the initial and most widely accepted definitions, then break down the top three definitions from Urban Dictionary.

Figure 1: Bae

A. Green’s Dictionary of Slang Definition for “Bae:”

bae *n.*

[AAE pron. babe *n.* (3); acronym before anyone else is pop. ety](US)

1. [2010s] the object of one’s affection; popularized by ‘bae caught me slippin’ [i.e. sleeping] meme associated with pictures taken of a sleeping subject and uploaded to social media.
2. [2010s] used adj. to denote someone or something of which one is exceptionally fond.

B. Urban Dictionary Top Definition

TOP DEFINITION

Bae

AAVE (African-American Vernacular English) pronunciation of "babe," used as a term of endearment toward loved ones. "Bae" can be a pronoun or an adjective. The term caught fire to mainstream colloquial Standard American English jargon and, due to unfamiliarity with its origins, developed **multiple definitions**. Trolls and people who dislike its use will often incorrectly **juxtapose** "bae" with Danish "bæ" which means "poop" (often to shut people up). Others will treat it as an acronym such as "before anyone else." The term is frowned upon by many, as it is seen as ghetto and uncouth, although its origins are simply dialectal.

"My husband is bae!"

"Whaddup, Bae?"

"He's my bae; he comes before anyone else!"

"Stop saying 'bae', it means 'poop!'"

by **nomnom99** February 10, 2017

👍 505 👎 118

Get a **Bae** mug for your cat Jerry.

C. Urban Dictionary Definition Two

2

Bæ

Bæ/bæ is a **Danish** word for poop. Also used by people on the internet who think it means baby, **sweetie** etc.

Bæ *I love u so much*

Brian, my bæ

I just made a bæ

#bae #honey #bæ #sex #danish

by **Volvopigen** January 29, 2014

👍 58754 👎 17209

Get a **Bæ** mug for your mother-in-law Zora.

D. Urban Dictionary Definition Three

3

B.A.E.

Best At Everything

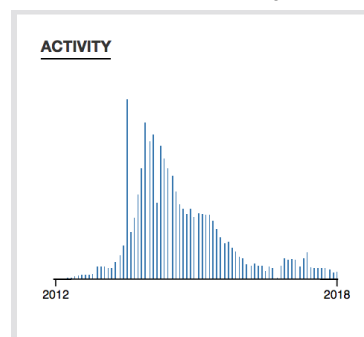
She's **the B.A.E.**

by **bitstripslang** November 18, 2015

👍 1157 👎 327

Get a **B.A.E.** mug for your coworker Bob.

E. Urban Dictionary Search Activity



Bae gained popularity in 2013 and 2014 on Black Twitter and Instagram through hashtag use and Pharrell's 2014 song “Come Get it Bae”, and the “bae caught me slippin” meme (Blay). Shortly after the release of Pharrell's song, Katy Steinmetz of

Time Magazine published an article titled *This is What 'Bae' Means*. The article's goal was to define the word bae. Steinmetz concludes that the term is synonymous with boo or babe and is a term of endearment for a person or thing, often a significant other, but its origin cannot be pinpointed (Steinmetz). Bae is often presented as an acronym for "before anyone else," but this is not the initial definition (Blay). Green's Dictionary of Slang attributes the word to African American English and includes babe and the acronym definition. According to Green's Slang Dictionary, Bae was popularized by the "bae caught me slippin" meme (Fig. 1A). Bae was first searched on Urban Dictionary around November 2012 and was searched most frequently in February 2014 (Fig. 1E). The top definition does refer to bae's roots in AAVE and provides the acronym definition (Fig. 1B). It also explains that bae is the Danish word for feces. The top definition is, surprisingly, respectful and informative. It also explains that "the term is frowned upon by many, as it is seen as ghetto and uncouth, although its origins are simply dialectal." This is very refined as far as Urban Dictionary definitions go. One of the examples is, "Stop saying 'bae,' it means 'poop!'" Other words having alternate definitions in other languages does not stop us from using them. For example, "kiss" means "urine" in Swedish. Despite this Figure 1A is the top definition of the word bae, although it does not have many upvotes, only 505. It also has 118 downvotes, further muddying the ranking system parameters. The second definition refers to the link with Danish and claims that the word is "used by people on the internet who think it means baby, sweetie etc" (Fig. 1C). Using the word "think" in this definition delegitimizes the word bae and Black culture; the author of the definition is invalidating the definition of bae used by AAVE speakers. The second definition has 58,754 likes and 17,209 dislikes. The third definition provides an alternate acronym definition– Best at Everything (Fig. 1D). This definition is not offensive but it is wrong. It has 1,157 upvotes and 327 downvotes.

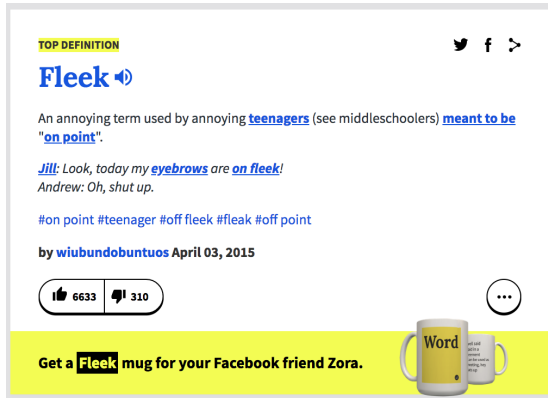
Figure 2: Fleek

A. Green’s Dictionary of Slang Definition for “Fleek:”

fleek *adj.* [2000s+] (US) smooth, admirable, thus *adj. fleeky.*

In phrases : on fleek (*adj.*) [2010s] (US campus) fashionable, top quality, thus *v. fleek on, to be superlative.*

B. Urban Dictionary Top Definition



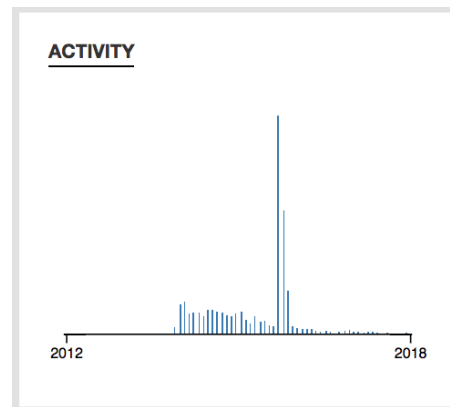
C. Urban Dictionary Definition Two



D. Urban Dictionary Definition Three



E. Urban Dictionary Search Activity



Fleek is widely misused and there is confusion about the original definition even in Black communities (Blay). “On fleek” appears in lyrics from many rappers including Cardi B, Nicki Minaj, 21 Savage, and Offset (“What does “On Fleek” mean?”). Constance Grady, a staff writer for Vox, attributes the word to Kayla Lewis who used the word in her 2014 Vine video where she said, “eyebrows on fleek.” As the word became more widespread its origin was forgotten. In 2017 Lewis started a

campaign to trademark the phrase and receive credit for her creation, sparked by the range of companies profiting off of her new definition of the word. IHOP, Denny's, Domino's Pizza, Sour Patch Kids, and other brands used the word on their Twitter accounts (Grady). This is a common phenomenon as evidenced by the existence of @BrandsSayingBae, a Twitter account solely dedicated to compiling instances where brands appropriate Black language practices (@BrandsSayingBae). According to Green's Dictionary of Slang, fleek originated in the United States and more specifically on United States campuses (Fig. 2A). Fleek was first searched on Urban Dictionary in August 2014 and was searched most frequently in June 2016 (Fig. 2E). The top definition calls the word "annoying" and attributes it to teenagers. This makes the definition both ageist (showing prejudice or discrimination based on a person's age) and racist (Fig. 2B). The word is defined as what is "meant to be." This takes away legitimacy as the author of the definition could say "it is" or "it means." The example dialogue is also sexist, as it includes a woman using the term "on fleek" and a man responding, "Oh, shut up." This definition has 6,633 likes and 310 dislikes. The second definition is "A shitty word made by shitty people with no fucking lives" (Fig. 2C). The dialogue for this definition includes a person named "Dumbass" using the term. The second definition has 3,783 upvotes and 239 downvotes. The third definition is "Dumbest word to ever surface used by stupid dumb fucks!" (Fig. 2D). The dialogue includes a person named "Stupid Bitch" using the term with a response from "Smart Person." This definition also includes the hashtags, "#fuck#this#word#to#hell!" This definition has 7,444 likes and 537 dislikes. The second and third definitions are extremely disrespectful, calling people who use the words "shitty" and "stupid dumb fucks". This is rude to anyone who uses the word fleek but especially disrespectful and racist towards the members of the Black community who created and use the word.

Figure 3: Basic

A. Green’s Dictionary of Slang Definition for “Basic:”

basic *adj.*

1. [1970s+] unexciting, unexceptional, uneventful.
2. [2010s] (US) immature, unsophisticated.

B. Urban Dictionary Top Definition

TOP DEFINITION

Basic

only [interested](#) in things [mainstream](#), popular, and [trending](#)

Omg BAE is [so basic](#), all she wants to do is drink [pumpkin spice](#) lattes and play [candy crush](#).

#lame #boring #basic white girl #basic bitch #not cool

by [itsmeeeeeyo](#) January 03, 2015

👍 566 👎 104

Get a **Basic** mug for your brother-in-law Bob.

C. Urban Dictionary Definition Two

Basic

1. Used to describe someone [devoid](#) of defining characteristics that might make a person interesting, extraordinary, or just simply worth devoting time or attention to.
2. Lacking intelligence and unable to [socialize](#) on even an [elementary](#) level.
3. Annoyingly frustrating because of the above

Oh her? [Don't even worry](#) about her, girl. She's so basic.

I tried to get to know him, but after I spent 10 minutes with him, I realized he was too basic for me to waste time on.

Is there anything unique or special about her? I have a feeling she's [pretty basic](#)..

He's probably the dumbest person on earth. Too basic to even carry on a semi-intelligent conversation.

I cannot deal with basic people. I get so frustrated by their [basicness!](#)

#generic #uninteresting #boring #stupid #annoying

by [wowlancer](#) April 03, 2013

👍 1380 👎 329

Get a **Basic** mug for your papa Abdul.

D. Urban Dictionary Definition Three

Basic

It [fucking means](#) it has a [pH](#) above 7.

John: "Look at that sodium hydroxide [eat away at](#) that aluminum. What a strong basic and [caustic](#) compound."

Ashley: "Oh my god. That totally reminds me of Jessica. She's [so basic](#), the other day she was wearing yoga pants and wearing ugg's and drinking a starbucks and talking on her iphone and..."

John: "Shut up bitch, and learn proper English."

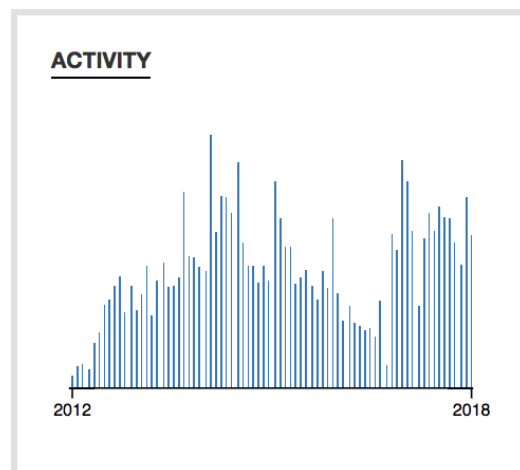
#basic #bitch #yoga pants #uggs #iphone #apple #starbuck #pumpkin spice #

by [rogertthewhale](#) October 25, 2014

👍 1644 👎 448

Get a **Basic** mug for your cat Larisa.

E. Urban Dictionary Search Activity



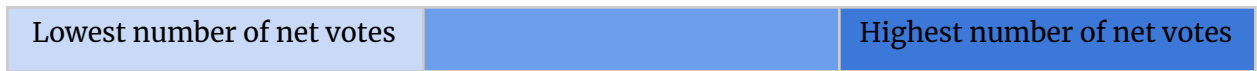
Most people are unaware of the original meaning of the word basic (Blay). The word basic is now often used to describe cultural phenomena in predominantly white communities. Green's Dictionary of Slang defines basic as "immature" or "unsophisticated" and attributes the word to the United States (Fig. 3A). Basic was first searched on Urban Dictionary in July 2012 and was most frequently searched in September 2014 (Fig. 3E). The top definition includes the word "BAE" and "#basicwhitegirl." It also includes the hashtags, "#lame" and "#not cool" (Fig. 3B). It is sexist with the inclusion of "#basic white girl," "#basic biatch, and "All *she* wants to do..." which associate negativity with the example sentence's gendering of the term. This definition has 566 upvotes and 104 downvotes. The second definition is extremely disrespectful and describes "basic" people as those unworthy of attention (Fig. 3C). One who is basic is "devoid of defining characteristics that might make a person interesting, extraordinary, or just simply worth devoting time or attention to" and "lack[s] intelligence." The example conversation uses other elements of Black language. The definition racializes the term then calls people who use it unintelligent and unworthy. This is extremely racist. The second definition has 1,380 likes and 329 dislikes. The third definition is the scientific definition of the word, "has a pH above 7" (Fig. 3D). The example conversation is a woman using the term "incorrectly" and a man telling her, "Shut up bitch, and learn proper English." (Fig. 3D). This definition has 1,644 upvotes and 448 downvotes.

The definitions exhibit a wide range of issues. Out of the nine analyzed, I would consider seven offensive. This is not a huge sample size and my view is subjective, but the mere existence of offensive definitions is an issue. The arbitrary number of upvotes reinforces that Urban Dictionary has no clear algorithm. The lack of censorship and consideration for other people is unacceptable. Some will argue that these definitions are simply jokes, but whether users are serious or not the posts on Urban Dictionary are unacceptable. Urban Dictionary's environment legitimizes racism. Appropriation of Black language began as early as the slavery era. African slaves combined their native language structures with English to create some of the vocabulary that standard English speakers know and love today. The end of slavery did not mean the end of appropriation by any stretch. America is a place that prides itself

on cultural blending, but the use of Black language often supersedes this blending and lands in the realm of appropriation as white Americans not only use this language for financial gain but also to belittle those who speak in AAVE (Grady). Urban Dictionary promotes the continuation of this appropriation. Legitimate sharing of culture is appropriate and productive, but exploitation of other cultures is never okay.

Figure 4: Evaluating Urban Dictionary’s Algorithm

	Bae			Fleek			Basic		
	Up	Down	Net Votes	Up	Down	Net Votes	Up	Down	Net Votes
Definition 1	505	118	387	6633	310	6323	566	104	462
Definition 2	58754	17209	41545	3783	239	3544	1380	329	1051
Definition 3	1157	327	830	7444	537	6907	1644	448	1196



To calculate the net votes for each definition I subtracted the number of downvotes for the definition from the number of upvotes for the definitions. For both fleek and basic the third definition has the most votes. For bae and basic the top definition has the lowest number of votes. There is no clear pattern to the ranking of the definitions. For bae, the second definition has the most votes and is also the most offensive and for basic the top definition was the least offensive, but had the least votes, challenging Nguyen et al.’s claim that more offensive words receive fewer votes. Dr. Safiya Umoja Noble, author of *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* and Associate Professor in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles tweets, “Let’s not forget that Urban Dictionary was founded by someone not Black, attempting to “decipher” AAVE. The whole project is a mess, conceptually, contextually, and as stands as some kind of imagined proxy for Black culture” (@safiyanoble). Noble has conducted many studies of biases on the internet. Google search results are based on what will be profitable for

the company, and unfortunately, some of these top results end up being offensive and discriminatory (Noble).

It is a public good to create a space for people to define and create words that may be specific to their culture or region, but uninhibited access without shared values for respect leads to more harm than good. Urban Dictionary is no longer in the spirit of sharing and learning as initially intended. Language is a fundamental part of every culture and making fun of or taking advantage of a term is an attack on the culture that it is born from. Racist definitions on Urban Dictionary are just a small sliver of the many problems throughout cyberspace. Racial biases are coded into our technologies and algorithms (Noble). It may take a lot of reflection, time, and effort, but it is imperative that we work to make the internet a more inclusive space. Urban Dictionary masks appropriation and exploitation of Black language as sharing and documentation of culture.

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