Dictionary of Bad Behavior

New Words for New Lows

# acoustic terrorism

*n*. The disturbance of the peace caused by excessively loud noise.

# Other Forms

acoustic terrorist (n.)

You would think that, in these post-9/11 times, people would be careful where they slapped the “terrorism” label, but that’s not the case when it comes to boom cars. These are cars equipped with extremely powerful stereo systems that are played with the volume and bass levels turned up and the car windows rolled down. They seem to bring out the rage in people, as evidenced by the call to arms in the example citation.

# Example

Our homeland security is violated every time a “boom car” goes by with 150-plus decibels of audio onslaught. You know what that means? Some of our kids are terrorists…Acoustic terrorism merely is a symbol of hypermasculinity and displays sexist behavior with desire for domination. Get smart, lawmakers, give us peace; ban anything over 80 decibels like many cities.

—David Opasik, “Boom-car ‘terrorists’ disturb our local peace,” *The Stuart News/Port St. Lucie News*, May 13, 2002

# See Also

car-panning

# aftercrimes

*n*. A pattern of crimes that occurs in the wake of an initial crime.

# Examples

We have all heard of aftershocks, the tremors that follow a big earthquake, but what about aftercrimes?

—“Quakes and crime,” *The Australian*, October 26, 2010

George Mohler, a mathematician at Santa Clara University, in California, thinks something similar is true of crimes. There is often a pattern of “aftercrimes” in the wake of an initial one. The similarity with earthquakes intrigued him and he wondered if the mathematical formulas that seismologists employ to predict aftershocks were applicable to aftercrimes, too.

—”The aftershocks of crime,” *The Economist*, October 21, 2010

# See Also

iCrime

# ag-gag

*adj*. Relating to laws that criminalize the taking of undercover photos and videos in certain businesses. (*agriculture* + *gag*)

# Other Forms

ag gag

The *ag* part of this term is short for “agriculture,” because these gag (also called *anti-whistleblower*) laws were originally aimed at stopping activists who were using photographs and videos to document animal cruelty on factory farms. Another newly criminalized agricultural activity is *seed piracy*, where a farmer who replants a seed taken from a patented crop.

# Example

Minnesota’s “ag-gag” law — isn’t that a great name? — would seek to punish not only photographers and videographers but those who distribute their work, which means organizations like the Humane Society of the United States and Mercy for Animals, which contracted the videographer for the E6 investigation.

—Mark Bittman, “Who Protects the Animals?,” *Opinionator*, April 26, 2011

# agnotology

*n*. The study of culturally induced ignorance or doubt, particularly the publication of inaccurate or misleading scientific data. (*agnosia (Latin: “ignorance”)* + *-ology*)

# Other Forms

agnotological (adj.)

This term was invented by science historian Robert Proctor and first appeared in his book *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and Don’t Know About Cancer*, which was published by Basic Books in March, 1995.

# Example

Agnotology serves as a counterweight to traditional concerns for epistemology, refocusing questions about “how we know” to include questions about what we do not know, and why not. Ignorance is often not merely the absence of knowledge but an outcome of cultural and political struggle.

—Londa Schiebinger, “Feminist History of Colonial Science,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, January 31, 2004

# See Also

IRB laundering • zombie lie

# algo-sniffing

*pp*. Using securities trading software designed to detect other trading programs.

A high frequency trading (HFT) program is designed to buy and sell securities using a particular algorithm (essentially, the program’s trading strategy), so such a program is often called an *algo*. This high-tech approach is fine, but there are lots of low-tech methods used by unscrupulous sellers. For example, there the *high closing*: artificially boosting a stock price by purchasing quantities of the stock a few minutes before the end of the year or quarter; *paint the tape* means to increase the price of the stock by creating the illusion of a buying frenzy; and the *pump and dump* is an investment scam in which a stockbroker, analyst, or shareholder encourages investors to buy a particular stock in an effort to raise its share price, and then to sell what he owns of the stock at the higher price.

# Example

But there are two rather more predatory strategies. One is called algo-sniffing. Here, a super-fast computer tries to find other computers going about their everyday business of buying or selling shares, and figures out what they’re going to do and when.

—Tim Harford, “High-frequency trading and the $440m mistake,” *BBC News Magazine*, August 10, 2012

# alief

*n*. A feeling or attitude that occurs automatically or habitually and conflicts with one’s explicit beliefs. (*a* + *belief*)

A related idea is *disconfirmation bias*, the tendency to actively refute or discount evidence that challenges a belief. Something that runs counter to an alief could trigger an *amygdala hijack*, an immediate, overwhelming, and usually inappropriate emotional response to a perceived threat or emergency.

# Example

Aliefs motivate us to take or withhold action. You might enjoy sweets, but would you eat a chocolate bar shaped like feces? Dr. Rozin and his colleagues showed that college students would not, though they knew it would not harm them. Our conscious beliefs tell us to shape up, use our wits and act rationally. But our subconscious aliefs set off deeply ingrained reactions that protect us from disease. The alief often wins.

—C. Nathan DeWall, “Magic May Lurk Inside Us All,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 2014

# See Also

end of history illusion • miswanting

# allergy bullying

*n*. Intimidating a person, particularly a schoolmate, by threatening exposure to a food that the person is allergic to.

If the person doing the allergy bullying is female, she’s sometimes known as an *alpha girl* (although this term can also refer to the dominant member in a group of girls).

# Example

With rising numbers of children suffering allergies, support group Anaphylaxis Australia Inc is concerned bullies are homing in on students’ disorders in a new form of harassment. ...

South Australian Primary Principals Association president Glyn O’Brien said every school had a policy on anaphylaxis. She said any cases of allergy bullying would be ‘‘regrettable’’, but believed it was rare in primary schools.

—Elissa Doherty, “Support group tells of parent fears,” *Sunday Mail*, April 8, 2007

# See Also

bully offer • bullycide

# almost alcoholic

*n*. A person who exhibits some of the symptoms or behaviors associated with alcoholism, but who is not a full-blown alcoholic.

# Other Forms

almost-alcoholic (adj.)

The almost alcoholic oftenindulges in the practice of *pre-gaming*: bingeing on alcohol at home before going out for the evening, particularly to a place where alcohol is expensive or not available. Depending on their level of consumption, the almost alcoholic might also contribute to secondhand drinking (a play on *secondhand smoking*) that refers to a negative effect that a drinker has on a non-drinker.

# Example

The almost alcoholic zone is actually quite large. The people who occupy it are not alcoholics. Rather, they are men and women whose drinking habits range from barely qualifying as almost alcoholics to those whose drinking borders on abuse.

—Joseph Nowinski, “Are You Almost Alcoholic? Taking a New Look at an Old Problem,” *The Atlantic*, April 2, 2012

# See Also

drunkorexia

# apostrofly

*n*. An errant or misplaced apostrophe, particularly one that seems to have been added randomly to the text. (*apostrophe* + *fly*)

Perhaps the most common type of apostrofly is the *greengrocers’ apostrophe*, an apostrophe erroneously inserted before the final “s” in the plural form of a word (“Onion’s on Sale!). Unable to stomach these public gaffes, some people resort to *guerrilla proofreading*: marking up a public sign to correct or point out a grammatical error or typo. Not to be confused with *drive-by editing*, which refers to ruining part or all of a story by quickly editing it without checking facts or consulting with the writer or another editor.

# Example

Guerrilla proofreading does seem to be a popular hobby for some people. They can get quite agitated about apostroflies, invisible hyphens, and other such entities.

—Stan Carey, “Grammar to go,” *Sentence First*, March 26, 2010

# Apple picking

*pp*. Snatching a person’s iPhone, iPad, or iPod.

Apple device users are, ahem, ripe for the picking because they wear *mug me earphones*: the distinctive white cord and earbuds associated with Apple’s iPhone, its iPod digital music player, and even its iPad tablet. That cord is why some folks refer to iPhone/iPad/iPod users as a whole as the *white-cord subculture*.

# Example

Nabbing electronic devices isn’t new. But lately it is growing “exponentially” according to a 2011 report from the New York Police Department. The lucrative secondhand market for today’s niftiest handsets has produced an explosion in “Apple picking” by thieves. A used iPad or iPhone can fetch more than $400.

—Rolfe Winkler, “Fighting the iCrime Wave,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2012

# See Also

iCrime

# appraisal mill

*n*. An unscrupulous company that provides misleading or erroneous appraisals, particularly for real estate.

A similarly miscreant enterprise is the *mortgage mill*, which is a company that automatically approves mortgages, particularly to unqualified buyers. Both the appraisal mill and the mortgage mill (as well as the *foreclosure mill* that appears later in the book) are examples of companies that employ *robo-signers*: people who sign legal documents without reading them or understanding their contents.

# Example

And as it turns out, there are plenty of legitimate concerns about the new reforms, including the establishment of Appraisal Management Companies — unregulated third-party appraisal mills.

—Joe Weisenthal, “Wait, Maybe The Realtors Aren’t Wrong This Time,” *The Business Insider*, June 25, 2009

# See Also

foreclosure mill • homedebtor • ninja loan

# argumentum ad tl;dr

*n*. The fallacy of supporting a proposition by inundating one’s opponents with specious arguments that are too numerous and too lengthy to read, much less refute point-by-point. (*argumentum ad* [Latin: “argument to”]+ *tl;dr* [“too long; didn’t read”])

The verbal equivalent of argumentum ad tl;dr is a debating technique called the Gish Gallop, named after the creationist Duane Gish, who was famous for overwhelming debate opponents with a torrent of arguments too numerous to refute. Oh, and the tl;dr part? That’s shorthand for “too long; didn’t read,” which online folks have been using to summarily dismiss each others’ arguments and posts since at least 2003.

# Example

The author of the article wrote a long anti-feminist screed including link after link after link to other anti-feminist, argumentum ad tl;dr screeds, cited studies in which the researchers’ conclusions were either taken out of context, ignored completely, or just made up out of whole cloth.

—Cerridwen, “I read a particularly heinous example of ‘Argumentum ad tl;dr’ article a few weeks ago,” *Democratic Underground*, February 2, 2014

# attention theft

*n*. The intrusion on a person’s attention by unwanted and unauthorized text, sounds, or images.

Alas, it’s no longer enough to rely on nature or social ties to get our attention. Now as we move through our environments we must deal with *engineered distraction*, stimuli designed so that we can’t help but notice them. But when the distraction engineers build attention-grabbing interfaces, and when those interfaces are the only way to interact with a resource and so are a kind of coercive connectivity, then we’re dealing with nothing less than attention theft.

# Example

You can alter your habits. Much more is now known about the importance of adaptive learning. The more that those habits involve fascination with some aspects of the world instead of entertainment by tuning out, the less empty overconsumption or casual attention theft you may suffer. Sensibilities to surroundings don’t involve just roses, but also rooms, streets, and neighborhoods.

—Malcolm McCullough, “On attention to surroundings,” *Interactions*, December 15, 2012

# See Also

FOMO

# auto-eating

*pp*. Eating without thinking or without being hungry. (*automatic* + *eating*)

A variation on auto-eating is *passive overeating*: eating whatever is put in front of you, even to the point of discomfort. Many auto-eaters dine *al desko* — that is, at their desk — a meal that could be a *deskfast*. Such meals tend to feature *one-handed food*, which refers to food that is small enough to hold in one hand and is not messy to eat so that it can be consumed while working. Careful, though, or you might end up with a *qwerty tummy*: a stomach illness caused by typing on a germ-ridden keyboard infested with *keyboard plaque* (the dirt, dust, and other grime that accumulates on computer keyboards).

# Example

I love it with a thick spaghetti (Barilla makes a good one), which mellows the heat in the sauce ever so slightly, but doesn’t tame it so much that you go into auto-eating mode — you know, the kind of eating you do without thinking because the food you’re chowing on is so bland, so meek, your taste buds become indifferent to what’s passing over them.

—Andrea Clurfeld, “Pasta sauce, red vino take heat in stride,” *Asbury Park Press*, January 24, 2001

# See Also

food baby