

Don't Think She's a Thot

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My savvy generation has heartily embraced the astute remarks of a young gentleman by the name of Keith Cozart. You may know him better as Chief Keef, the second-string American rapper who just “hate bein’ sober” and is often busy “smoking trees.” In 2012, in the shadows of Yeezy and Drake, Chief rapped, “show no love for a thot.” Thot. In 2014, The Game released “T.H.O.T.” Soon after came J. Cole with “Thotty” and Tyga with “Thots.” The term moved right on into social media when headlines earlier this year blared that “Chris Brown”—notorious for violence against women—“calls Karrueche Tran a Thot.” From Cozart’s Glory Boyz Entertainment recording studio all the way to the Menlo School quad in upright Atherton, “thot” was blaring.

So now you’re wondering, what does “thot” actually mean? No, it isn’t texting lingo for “thought.” It is, though, spread by the same set who use ttyl for “talk to you later” and brb for “be right back.” Urban Dictionary, virtually the *Bible* amongst teenagers, defines “thot” as “a hoe.” More specifically, “thot” is an acronym for “that hoe over there.” The term applies almost solely to young women, has a pejorative connotation—an understatement—and is widespread in high schools. Who uses the term? Teenage boys and young men.

Wondering why this word caught on? Like some of the most popular expressions to grow out of rap music, it’s catchy and insulting. Somehow the same word that manages to degrade women sounds downright innocent popping out of your mouth. Give it some thought: how could a word be harmful if it rhymes with a concept as cutesy as tot? Not only does it roll off the tongue more easily than “turnt” or “twerk,” but also, music couldn’t be better suited to get a word stuck in your head. Think about it: a teen may love the latest John Green novel, but no one lounges on the quad singing the first line of *The Fault in Our Stars*. The

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music world is genius in its promotion of innovative language, coming up with terms like “doe,” “trap,” or “donk” that the masses can’t wait to utilize. And of course, logically, anything that Chris Brown says is very cool. Chief Keef took the thot and ran with it, titling this year’s album “Thot Breaker.” There’s nothing like a term that’s both derogatory and saucy to kill two birds with one stone.

Killing might be too dramatic. And we aren’t talking about birds, per se, unless, perhaps, you’re British. Language is powerful in every country and at every stage of life, but it is supremely important for American teens who are developing their voices and senses of self. The magic of these ever-evolving terms is that adults don’t understand them. As soon as your parents are saying “bounce” or “bae,” you know it’s time to move on. And move on, teens do. The vocabulary of your average 16-year-old can heighten insecurity, ruin friendships, and even obliterate someone’s reputation. Everyone in high school knows, of course, that reputation is everything. The person hurling the “stone” at the “birds” gains a false sense of power over an unknowing victim. Something more along the lines of killing chicks.

Essentially, “thot” refers to females who are thought to be sexually promiscuous. The term is not some revolutionary concept but simply the newest label of an age-old prejudice. Slut. Skank. Slag. Trollop. Tramp. Tart. Hussy. Harlot. Hoebag. Whore. Each one a synonym of “thot.” More shocking than the number of denigrating terms is the fact that no single word exists to positively describe a sexually empowered woman. Even “promiscuous,” the most seemingly respectful word, has a harsh connotation. Our culture has managed to develop a term for a provocatively dressed child, “prostitutot,” yet there is no word to describe a sexually liberated female.

While few think it’s a good idea for a high school girl to have many sexual partners, the fact is that teenage girls are sexually curious and do experiment with sexuality. “Thot” most often comes out of male mouths, exposing the harsh outlook on a female’s carnal behavior, while males are rarely criticized. At some level, this double standard is justified as women can become pregnant and are more susceptible

to STTs. But really, are those insecure teenage boys in the hallway declaring that girl a “thot” because they are genuinely concerned about her health and wellbeing? That is, indeed, not the case. A teenage girl, under the microscope of scrutinizing males and brutal, biased, social expectations, just cannot seem to win. She engages in the exact same sexual activity as a guy and she is immediately labeled a “slut” or a “thot,” while that boy’s reputation may very well remain pristine or even gain stature. Meanwhile, she isn’t sexually adventurous and she is written off as a “prude,” a word with underlying judgement almost equivalent to that of “thot.” In our society, it’s nearly impossible for a sexually active female to be perceived as “classy,” yet a “classy” teenager is exactly whom we respect. Could any girl really balance on that fine line between “thot” and not?

In the same society, the most “promiscuous” of males might be referred to as a “player,” “stud,” “baller,” or “big man on campus.” A male’s sexual feats garner respect in our society. Giving a girl a glaring hickey or hooking-up with two strangers in one night or establishing a new “friend-with-benefits” are the accomplishments of a “studly” teenage boy. How exactly is a girl supposed to be classy with a hickey on her neck too pronounced to conceal with makeup or to hide under a collared shirt or to cover in a veil of hair? Terms such as “playa” are really just playful, maybe even endearing. If the dude is the player, then what exactly is the “game” and how on earth does the girl fit in?

The monster has evolved since Chief Keef spat such fire. The meaning of “thot” goes beyond female sexuality to now encompass appearance based observations. To a “baller,” a so-called “thot” could be a complete stranger, a girl whose sexual behavior he knows nothing about. The label is frequently just an observation about the way a girl dresses: too much cleavage, too short skirt, tank top way too tight. The same society dishing offensive labels is the society that pressures females to dress in a certain way to begin with. The hopeful girl is convinced by the media and by peer pressure that the only way the dreamy guy in her biology class will notice her is if she shows some extra skin. What a “thot,” right?

And just think: THOT. It doesn't make any grammatical sense. "Hey bruh, look at that major 'That-Hoe-Over-There' by the water fountain." The acronym implies a disgusting dynamic that goes beyond its negative meaning, given that the term is most often thrown around casually between two males. These two are discussing, *gossiping* about, a certain female subject they deem slutty. By definition, the first word in the acronym, "that," implies that the girl is separate from the boys who are objectifying her with their long-distance, physical observations. That girl "over there" also implies that the men are conversing about her from far away and that only the men have voices, while the woman is silenced by distance. You might think that men with so much to say would be big thinkers, but ironically, the boys going around with this superficial, non-grammatical "THOT" don't seem to be thinking at all.

"Thot" is most damaging when the males in question are referring to a young teenager, who is at her most vulnerable while trying to gain a sense of herself in her peer group. In high school years that are already characterized by nervous awkwardness, all a girl needs is to be labeled as a "thot." These days, it's not uncommon for the word to appear in middle schools. In April, swoon-worthy Cody Simpson, who is worshipped by preteens, released "Thotful" with the suggestive line, "She'll be anything to anyone." Hopefully the seventh-grader being called a thot doesn't understand the implications, but every insightful twelve-year-old knows that a flirtatious girl runs the risk of being called "easy." In these defining years, language has the power to develop the self-esteem of a girl who is "clever," "fun," or "super smart." For the girl labeled "thot," that view of self could negatively affect her for years to come.

Clearly, I've thought a lot about this. Like the homosexual community with "queer" or the way that "bitch" has become a term of endearment when used with other women, part of me wishes that women could turn "thot" into an empowering sentiment. Ideally, the language would evolve, but before that, the perception of women needs to change. We need to begin with an acknowledgment that women are sexually interested and that their experimentation shouldn't be that different from men's. We are, though, a long way from that. In the meantime, I do know one thing. I will think and never say thot.

