

# Dictionary.com chooses 'complicit' as its word of the year

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This undated screen shot provided by Dictionary.com shows the word "complicit," on the Dictionary.com website. Russian election influence, the ever-widening sexual harassment scandal, mass shootings and the opioid epidemic helped elevate the word "complicit" as Dictionary.com's word of the year. One of the site's lexicographers, Jane Solomon, said ahead of Monday's announcement that lookups of the word increased nearly 300 percent over last year. She said "complicit" hit just about every hot button of the year, from politics to natural disasters. (Dictionary.com via AP)

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"complicit" as Dictionary.com's word of the year for 2017.

Look-ups of the word increased nearly 300 percent over last year as "complicit" hit just about every hot button from politics to natural disasters, lexicographer Jane Solomon told The Associated Press ahead of Monday's formal announcement of the site's pick.

"This year a conversation that keeps on surfacing is what exactly it means to be complicit," she said. "Complicit has sprung up in conversations about those who speak out against powerful figures in institutions, and those who stay silent."

The first of three major spikes for the word struck March 12. That was the day after "Saturday Night Live" aired a sketch starring Scarlett Johansson as Ivanka Trump in a glittery gold dress peddling a fragrance called "Complicit" because: "She's beautiful, she's powerful, she's complicit."

The bump was followed by another April 5, also related to Ivanka, Solomon said. It was the day after she appeared on "CBS This Morning" and told Gayle King, among other things: "I don't know what it means to be complicit."

It was unclear at the time whether Ivanka was deflecting or whether the summa cum laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business—with a degree in economics—didn't really know.

Another major spike occurred Oct. 24, the day Arizona Republican Jeff Flake announced from the Senate floor that he would not seek re-election, harshly criticizing President Donald Trump and urging other members of the party not to stand silently with the president.

"I have children and grandchildren to answer to, and so, Mr. President, I

will not be complicit," Flake said.

Solomon noted that neither she nor Dictionary.com can know what sends people to dictionaries or dictionary sites to look up "complicit" or any other word. She and other lexicographers who study look-up behavior believe it's likely a combination of people who may not know a definition, are digging deeper or are seeking inspiration or emotional reinforcement of some sort.

As for "complicit," she said several other major events contributed to interest in the word. They include the rise of the [opioid epidemic](#) and how it came to pass, along with the spread of sexual harassment and assault allegations against an ever-growing list of powerful men, including film mogul Harvey Weinstein.

The scandal that started in Hollywood and quickly spread across industries has led to a mountain of questions over who knew what, who might have contributed and what it means to stay silent.

While Solomon shared percentage increases for "complicit," the company would not disclose the number of look-ups, calling that data proprietary.

The site chooses its word of the year by heading straight for data first, scouring look-ups by day, month and year to date and how they correspond to noteworthy events, Solomon said. This year, a lot of high-volume trends unsurprisingly corresponded to politics. But the site also looks at lower-volume trends to see what other words resonated. Among them:

— INTERSEX: It trended on Dictionary.com in January thanks to model Hanne Gaby Odiele speaking up about being intersex to break taboos. As a noun it means "an individual having reproductive organs or external

sexual characteristics of both male and female." Dictionary.com traces its origins back to 1915, as the back formation of "intersexual."

— SHRINKAGE: While the word has been around since 1790, a specific definition tied to a famous 1994 episode of "Seinfeld" led to a word look-up revival in February. That's when a house in The Hamptons where the episode was filmed went on the market. For the record: The Jason Alexander character George Costanza emerges with "shrinkage" from a pool and said "shrinkage" is noted by Jerry's girlfriend.

— TARNATION: It had a good ride on Dictionary.com in the first few months of the year due to a round of social media fun with the "What in tarnation" meme that had animals and various objects wearing cowboy hats.

— HOROLOGIST: As in master clockmaker, like the one featured in the podcast "S-Town," the highly anticipated "This American Life" follow-up to the popular "Serial" podcast. All seven episodes of murder intrigue were released at once in March. Horologist, used in the radio story, trended around that time.

— TOTALITY: There were look-up spikes in August. Thank you, solar eclipse and your narrow band of totality, meaning the strip of land where the sun was completely obscured by the moon.

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