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The many meanings of pimp

Kevin Baker, Financial Post

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Librarians in Racine, Wis., had to answer complaints about a youth-outreach event they named Pimp My Cart. "Language changes over time," said one. "I don't think you should use an old dictionary to try to defend a modern meaning of a word." In this case, an old dictionary may have aided the defence. The Oxford English Dictionary says the origin of pimp is unknown. It may be related to the 16th-century French verb pimper, which means allure or seduce with appearance or dress; the adjectival form pimpant is in current use and means smartly attired. At Pimp My Cart, kids decorated book carts with such things as old car and motorcycle parts, making the books in the carts enticing to reluctant readers.

Racine's librarians were inspired by MTV's car-makeover show, Pimp My Ride. There, pimping means treating something as a pimp would treat his trade-stock: beautifying it to attract prospective customers. And it means making something fit for a pimp: outfitting it with luxe furnishings to create the expensive allure of a Hugh Hefner or a Nelly, the rapper who even had a 2003 single Pimp Juice ("Now your pimp juice is anything that would attract the opposite sex / It could be money, fame, or straight intellect").

In April, Oakville, Ont.-based heavy equipment dealer Masterlift launched a marketing campaign called Pimp My Lift. "It's not enough any more to be the best forklift on the market," president Gary Wilson explained. "You've also got to be the best-looking forklift on the market." Unlike Racine's librarians, Masterlift wants to reach an audience that knows pimp means more than decorate. The forklift pictured at PimpMyLift.ca, painted red with white flames, looks like the juice-pumping teenage son of a garden tractor and a Smart Car. When it's not hard at work lifting and carrying, it's covered in a bevy of luscious admirers.

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have a kid now; that doesn't make them grown-ups."

"Anyone care to pimp their shorts?" asks a member of Backpacking Light magazine's online community. He is a hiker wanting to know the best kind of new shorts to buy. Pimp means recommend. Several online retailers of clothing for babies and children advertise onesies and T-shirts bearing the title Playground Pimp. Here the word says, "Yeah, my mommy and daddy

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