The use of swear words by women: a study of single sex and mix sex conversations

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Abstract

This essay discusses women's use of swear words in both single sex constellations and mix sex constellations. Its primary aim is to find out which swear words women use the most. The secondary aim is to see what communicative function they have in the women's usage. As a final point, the tertiary aim is to discover in what gender constellation women swear the most.

In this research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology is used. The quantitative methodology is used to find out which words are the most common, and the qualitative methodology is used to examine which communicative functions they converse, as well as to study how the different gender constellations effect the usage of dirty language.

The analysis of this essay is divided into these three parts - which words, which communicative functions, and the effect of gender constellations - and concludes and confirms previous research in this narrow and rare field of investigation. This paper shows that women swear less than men but more when they are in the company of their own gender. It also displays which words are the most common, both in tables and in discussion. Finally, this essay shows the most common functions of the chosen swear words women use.

Keywords: Swear words, women, gender constellations, motifs, functions, gender, single sex, mix sex, corpus transcripts, American English

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1. Introduction

In society today swear words are used by both men and women. They are prominent features in the vocabulary in context of anger and frustration. However, other areas of emotional states, such as happiness or surprise, can bring about the use of swear words. In addition, swear words can be used for emphasis in any state of mind.

This essay shows how difficult it is to research swear words as they are so dependent on the right socio-physical settings. The results received are to some extent expected, however, it also reveals irregularities and puts a light on problems with using corpus when researching swear words.

This essay adds to the research of swear words and in doing so, it will shed more light on to what extent women use selected swear words, in what situations and constellations, and to what effect. The primary aim of this project is to examine which swear words women use the most. The secondary aim is to see what communicative functions these swear words fill in the data set. For example, for emphasis or just as a discourse particle. The tertiary aim is to define in what gender constellation these swear words are most commonly used by women; in single sex conversations or in mix sex conversations. Both a quantitative and a qualitative method is used throughout the essay.

This essay is starting with a theoretical background and an account of the data and method used. Following are the three major parts, *Research and background information*, *Results*, and *Discussion*. In the first of those sections information is given on what a swear word is, its functions and motifs, and the effects on gender constellations. The second section gives the results and facts from three different research sources. Lastly, the third section discusses and analyses those results and facts.

2. Theoretical background

When it comes to the study of swear words, opinion differs as to whether there is extensive or scarce research made in the past. This concerns both American and British English which are two important varieties of English. Some researchers argue that very little is known about the use of swear words and that few relevant studies have been made. Others maintain that much research has been carried out, although somewhat unsystematically and not primarily based on sociolinguistic variables (McEnery, Xiao 2004, p. 235). This study seeks to fill some of this gap in previous research. In doing so, it contributes to the field of sociolinguistics as well as the

field of pragmatics and the focus is on swear words used by American women in spoken conversations and the gender constellations and contexts in which they are used.

When researching swear words, it is very important to carry out the research in a public setting as the correct physical and social setting is vital for the use of swear words. In a laboratory setting it is difficult to collect data relating to swearing and therefore a laboratory setting does not provide the appropriate necessary circumstances for research on swearing. However, up until the 1980s, most research on word use was conducted in a laboratory setting (Jay 1992, pp. 117-119). A relevant factor is the importance of speaker/listener relationship in the use of swear words. Also important is how relaxed the social setting is and the topic of the conversation. Some previous research has focused on specific situations such as classroom language, or specific ages of language users, such as children. Neither of those parameters are suited for studying swear words as the settings involving children or classroom environments do not promote swearing (Jay 1992, pp. 113-115). Jay mentions research conducted by Thorndike and Lorge in 1944 as an example of research made in the wrong setting. This was a big study of word frequency. However, there were three major problems with it. The data were collected only from written sources from mostly children's literature, or popular adult literature, and the research is totally outdated. Other research, such as that carried out by Black, Stratton, Nichols, and Chavez from 1985, or the research by Cameron in 1969, both mentioned in *Cursing in America,* are of little use when studying the actual frequency of swear words. Although there are swear words included in their research, the studies are conducted in mostly formal settings such as college classrooms, and those are not natural settings for swear words (Jay 1992, pp. 114-115).

Susan E. Hughes carried out a research of the language of lower working-class women. However, with only six participants it must not be considered a major contribution to the research of female use of swear words. In addition, the Hughes' research is focused on British English only (Hughes 1992, pp. 296-301).

Very little research has focused on spoken language, and the relation between gender and swearing has not generally been a focus. Previous research on word frequency has relied on estimates as it is not possible to count all the words that are used in the world. Moreover, in many of these older studies profanity has been removed which gives a false picture of the use of swear words. Even in some research on spoken language, swear words have been omitted. Jay mentions the research by French, Carter, and Koenig from 1930, where recordings of telephone conversations were used for examining word frequency. This research, however, is not useful for examining swear words as all 'dirty' words are omitted (Jay 1992, p. 115).

Even in those studies where foul language has been kept, it is of no use or accuracy in the study of spoken swearing, since it involves written language. Written language is more polished than spoken language and does not include as many swear words as spoken language. When you write, you have time to think and edit your thoughts and polish your language. Conversely, the study "*Fk yea I swear: Cursing and Gender in MySpace*" by Mike Thelwall, is a part of perhaps a new trend in researching swear words. By using social media, where the language can be seen as written spoken language, it is possible to retrieve the scale of research that is necessary, and that has been lacking in previous research (Thelwall 2008, pp. 83-107).

3. Data and Method

The primary aim of this project is to examine which swear words American speaking women use the most. As there are many varieties of English this study chose American English as its delimitation. The data used is analysed in light of previous research in forms of books, papers, and studies and relies extensively on research that was carried out by Timothy Jay (Jay 1992, pp. 120-138). In his research eleven words were listed as the most common swear words used by women: *shit, fuck, hell, asshole, ass, Goddamn, bitch, Jesus, damn, suck,* and *piss*. These words are the basis and the starting point of this essay's continuing research. A quantitative method was used when collecting the words for the study, as they were selected based on their frequency in Jay's study.

To further answer the question of the frequency of the selected swear words and the circumstances of their utilization, this research looks at recorded conversations from both single sex groups and mix sex groups. The recordings are gathered through the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBC). The SBC is a corpus containing 249,000 words recorded all over USA. It focuses mainly on spoken interactions that occur naturally during face-to-face conversations, but also sermons, food-preparation or during card games. The corpus has a variety of gender, ages, ethnicity, occupations and social backgrounds (SBC 2014). These recordings are analysed both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. The quantitative methodology is applied when examining the number of times a certain swear word is used in a conversation, while the qualitative method is applied when examining the context in which the swear word is used and its purpose.

In addition, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), was used in cross referencing the frequencies of the selected swear words. COCA is the largest balanced corpus

of American English including a total of 450 million words, 95.5 million of which constitute spoken language. The corpus includes data from 1990 to 2012 and the spoken section is collected from over 150 unscripted TV and radio shows (Davies 2008-). In this cross reference a quantitative method was used as well.

In research it is important to set limitations and that is true for this study as well. The expression *swear words* has many synonyms. This paper uses the phrase *swear word*. However, other common phrases are *curse words*, *expletives*, *dirty words* or *profanity*. In addition, there are many different forms of *fuck,* such as *fucking* or *fucker,* and in this paper all the different forms are counted under its infinitive form, *fuck.* This is the case with the word *piss* as well where the forms *piss*, *pissed*, and *piss ass* are counted together. Similarly, the words *shit* and *bullshit* are counted together. Another delimitation is the choice not to address euphemisms, but research pure swear words only.

In conclusion, this essay uses a total of 15 words with the highest frequency gathered from research by Timothy Jay:

God	*Shit*	*Fuck*	*Hell*	*Goddamn*
Ass	*Asshole*	*Piss*	*Jesus*	*Idiot*
Bitch	*Jerk*	*Suck*	*Heavens*	*Damn*

In addition, 18 transcripts from SBC are analysed, and these are:

A Tree's Life	*Tell the Jury That*	*Zero Equals Zero*
The Retirement Bit	*A Book About Death*	*Cuz*
Howard's End	*Actual Blacksmithing*	*Lambada*
Conceptual Pesticides	*Appease the Monster*	*Deadly Diseases*
Tastes Very Special	*Guilt*	*Try A Couple Spoonful*
The Classic Hooker	*Just Wanna Hang*	*Raging bureaucracy*

4. Research and background information

In this section, divided into three parts, research results are presented. Chapter 4.1 shows what constitutes a swear word and chapter 4.2 defines what different functions and motifs a swear

word can have. Lastly, chapter 4.3 discusses the impact of gender constellations in female swearing.

4.1 What constitutes a swear word?

In order to research women´s use of swear words, it has first to be defined what in fact constitutes a swear word. The Oxford Dictionary explains swear words as: *an offensive word, used especially as an expression of anger.* Still, swear words can be used as other types of expressions as well, such as surprise, agreement, contradiction, or joy. It can be read in Merriam-Webster that it is *a profane or obscene oath or word.* This is also true, however, it can be argued what constitutes an obscene word. According to Collins English Dictionary a swear word can be defined as *a socially taboo word or phrase of a profane, obscene or insulting character.* This is a more detailed explanation.

Every culture has their own selection of swear words specific to them, based on what is taboo or sacred in that culture (de Klerk 1992, p. 277). The act of swearing is universal but the cultural influences vary. In swearing there are two things that affect the swearing, the context of the direct communication and the general beliefs of the person in question. Two aspects have to be present for it to be considered a swear word in a culture; inappropriateness and offensiveness. The levels of how inappropriate the word is to the listener and how offended they are to hear it, decides the severity of the swear word. In this equation, aspects like who says it, who hears it, and where it is said, play a big part in the evaluation (Jay 1999, pp. 147-149). In western society the taboos mostly concern religion, sex, bodily functions and unmentionable body parts.

In addition, Lars-Gunnar Andersson and Peter Trudgill further suggest that a swear word is used to express strong emotions and should not be interpreted literally (Andersson, Trudgill 1990, p. 53). In the exclamation "*you piece of shit!*" it is not that the person saying it means that the other person is an actual piece of faeces, but instead that the person is the connotation of *shit*.

Using swear words to some extent is a common thing to different degrees. However, some people do not like it at all. In order to get the same effect that a swear word can get without using actual swear words, people have developed euphemisms. This is basically mispronunciations such as *gosh* instead of *God*, *shoot* instead of *shit*, and *darn* instead of *damn*.

The reasons why people use swear words are both neurological and psychological, but also sociocultural. In the case of the psychological reason, the likelihood of a person using swear words is based on their personality, background, and genetics. The restrictions for using foul language are based on how old the person is, their emotional awareness, how religious they are, their gender, and how impulsive they are. Swear words are used to achieve different outcomes such as expressing anger, provoke or make people laugh, to insult somebody, or to strengthen or exaggerate a statement. The selection of words is based on the semantics it offers in the context it is used. Profanities are used more generally but to be really offensive obscenities are specifically used (Jay 1999, pp. 243-244).

4.2 Functions and motifs of swear words

Swear word can be categorised in a number of ways and according to different variables. One option is to divide swear words into categories based on their motif. One of these classifications is these six large categories; religious, scatological, genital, intercourse, sodomy and mother (Ljung 2006, p. 62). Another classification can be; sex, religion, bodily functions, ethnic groups, food, dirt and death (Andersson, Trudgill 1990, p. 55). Yet another order of grouping can be cursing, profanity, blasphemy, taboo, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, epithets, scatology, insults and slurs (Jay 1992, pp. 1-8). A swear word, or phrase, can belong to more than one group at one and the same time, like *fucking cunt*, which belongs to both the intercourse group and the genital group (Ljung 2006, p. 63). This essay uses all of them as they are principally the same, though they differ some in size.

Swear words are based on a culture´s area of taboos, however, the actions themselves that these words suggest are not totally forbidden. They are, however, controlled and restricted by the rules of that society. The actions of *fuck* and *shit* is not forbidden, but controlled in the manner of when to do it, where to do it, and sometimes the right person to do it with (Andersson, Trudgill 1990, pp. 55-56). The same is true for almost all of the words in the religious group. The word *hell* is not considered a bad word in the phrase, *God doesn´t want anyone spending eternity in hell*, whereas in the exclamation, *Go to hell,* the word is clearly considered a swear word, a blasphemy.

Besides dividing swear words into categories of motifs they can also be put into different function groups. This is based on the semantics of the swear word. A swear word can be used differently and have different connotations depending on how it is used, in what context it is

used, the recipient of the swear word, the presenter of the swear word, and the tone and volume of their voice. Functions can be categorised depending on whether it is directed to another person or not. When a swear word is used as an expletive or as an auxiliary word, it is not directed towards others, but simply a way to express emotions or to amplify other words, for example *Oh shit!* or *That bloody car!* When used abusively, to offend or as an insult, or humours in a non-derogatory manner, they are directed towards others, for example, *get your ass in gear, you fucking shithole* (Andersson, Trudgill 1990, p. 61). For this essay the function categories defined by Magnus Ljung in *Svordomsboken* (2006, pp. 60-61) are used to analyse the research of this project. He divides swear words into 14 functions:

1. Exclamation: *Shit! Fuck!*
2. Oaths: *By God!*
3. Affirming: *Damn right, you are!*
4. Denial: *The hell I won´t!*
5. Curses: *Damn you!*
6. Unfriendly urging: *Go to hell!*
7. Standing insult: *Your mama!*
8. Abuse: *You piece of shit!*
9. Abusive key word: *He´s a funny bugger.*
10. Disapprobatory term: *It´s a hell of a storm.*
11. Emphasis: *Every bloody time.*
12. Strengthening: *fucking stupid*
13. Enhancement of wh-words: *Who the hell is it? What the fuck do you want?*
14. New words/meanings: *He is fucking with me. Don´t give me any crap!*

4.3 Women and swearing in different gender constellations

According to earlier research more is described about how women ought to be talking than is described how they in reality talk. The perceived notion of how women in general speak, and in this case, swear, is much different from how they actually use swear words. Just what that difference is, and how profound it is, is not agreed on by the scientists.

The public perception is that women swear less than men (Ljung 2006, p. 92). But is that really so? All in all, there are some differences in the frequencies of the swear words used.

Women do not swear as much as men do, not by far, however, they swear more in the company of other women than they do in the company of men. Interestingly, research performed in laboratory settings show signs of the same gender based differences. Women tend to use fewer swear words in the presence of an interviewer of the opposite sex than in front of an interviewer of the same sex (Hughes 1992, p. 294). Timothy Jay confirms Hughes' findings that women, as well as men, are influenced by the gender of the person conducting the research interview. Although the interviewer is not supposed to be a part of the research, the interviewees are consequently affected (Jay 1992, p. 169). In other words, it is more common for women to swear in same sex conversations than in mix sex conversations when it comes to the total frequency of swear words.

Previous research has made it clear that there are no significant dissimilarities in the types of swear words used by men and women. Moreover, research shows that women do not use numerous different swear words but generally just a few number that are used repeatedly with several altered meanings. A large number of other swear words are used at a very low frequency and some of them only once in researched conversations. This is evident in both single sex and same sex constellations. They also tend to use the more offensive words such as *asshole*, *fuck*, and *shit* in a same sex environment (Jay 1992, pp. 139, 157). Some research has also shown that women tend to use "good" religious swear words such as *heavens* and *God* whereas men use the "bad" words such as *damn* and *hell* (Finegan, Rickford 2004, p. 105).

The swearing of females is more likely to occur amongst friends with similar background (Jay 1992, p. 123). Furthermore, women do not swear greatly in public but the more in private settings. However, it should always be remembered that all women are not the same and will thereby not speak the same way. Other factors to consider are age, education and social level. It is no secret that swear words are more common and accepted in the working class and the lower educated people (Ljung 2006, p. 94).

5. Results

This section of the essay is dedicated to presenting the results from Jay's research and the findings from the two corpus. The focus is merely on the facts of the results as the discussion and comparing of the findings is under the proceeding section six. This section five covers which words are the most common in the various sources and the frequency of them. Under subheading 5.1 the research of Timothy Jay is displayed in forms of tables. In subheading 5.2,

the results from the examined transcript from SBC is presented, and lastly, the subheading 5.3 lists the findings from COCA.

5.1 Previous research from Timothy Jay

In order to find out which swear words women are more prone to use, previous research was consulted. According to a field study conducted by Timothy Jay, twelve college students recorded occurrences of swear words and then noted them on a field card together with the number of persons present, their age and gender. Noted was also the location where the swear word was uttered and in what manner and to what intent. The findings of that study resulted in these eleven most common swear words in different gender constellations (Jay 1992, pp. 120-124).

Table 1. Frequency of swear words by women in the primary data from Timothy Jay's research

Shit	159	23 %		*Total No of utterances: 2171*
Fuck	136	20 %		*Male: 1482 (68%)*
Hell	53	7,7 %		*Female: 689 (32%)*
Asshole	52	7,5 %		
Ass	50	7,3 %		
Goddamn	45	6,5 %		
Bitch	43	6,2 %		
Jesus	36	5,2 %		
Damn	26	3,8 %		
Suck	13	1,9 %		
Piss	6	0,9 %		

Table 2. Results from Table 1 divided by gender constellations

Same sex constellation (485 utterances)			Mix sex constellation (204 utterances)		
Fuck	112	23 %	Shit	48	24 %
Shit	111	22 %	Fuck	24	12 %

Asshole	38	7,8 %		Ass	18	8,9 %
Hell	36	7,4 %		Hell	17	8,3 %
Goddamn	35	7,2 %		Bitch	16	7,8 %
Ass	32	6,6 %		Asshole	14	6,9 %
Bitch	27	5,6 %		Jesus	11	5,4 %
Jesus	25	5,1 %		Goddamn	10	4,9 %
Damn	16	3,3 %		Damn	10	4,9 %
Suck	13	2,7 %		Piss	6	2,9 %

The results from Table 1 show that women use swear words to a much lesser extent than men, only 32% of the swear words were used by women while 68% of them were uttered by men. Similarly, the frequency of swear word utterances made by women in a mix sex constellation are far less than if the constellation involves women only. The percentages being 70% in a same sex environment to 30% in a mix sex environment.

The research made by Timothy Jay shows, in Table 2, that there is not much difference in the choice of words between single sex and mix sex constellations. The top three words in either sex constellation in Table 2 belong to the group of obscenities, under categories of sex, bodily functions/body parts. Those three words constitute 53% of the amount of swear words in the same sex constellation, and 44% of the total word count in the mix sex constellation.

5.2 Examined transcripts from the Santa Barbara Corpus

For this paper, the Santa Barbara Corpus is chosen as a source of research. From this corpus a total of 18 different transcripts of conversations are chosen to be studied. Nine of them are same sex spoken interactions and the other nine are mix sex spoken interactions. Delimitations in this choice is face-to-face conversations in an informal setting between friends or family members. These delimitations are chosen because of the higher chance of occurrence of swear words in this type of setting. An exception is one recording that takes place in a formal setting between strangers. All swear words detected in the transcripts were noted, however, only the ten most occurring swear words are recorded here.

Table 3. Frequency of the ten most reoccurring swear words by women in the SBC data transcripts.

God	40	35 %	*Total No of utterances: 114*
Shit	33	29 %	
Fuck	10	9 %	
Bitch	8	7 %	
Hell	6	5 %	
Piss	5	4,4 %	
Jerk	4	3,5 %	
Idiot	4	3,5 %	
Heavens	3	2,6 %	
Asshole	1	0,9 %	

Table 3 shows that the two top words, *God* and *shit*, stands for 64 % of the total amount of swear words in the selection. They are quite similar in size but they derive from two different categories, religious and body functions. When this data is divided into sex constellations, it looks like this:

Table 4. Results from Table 3 divided into gender constellations.

Same sex constellation (63 utterances)			Mix sex constellation (51 utterances)		
God	20	32 %	God	20	39 %
Shit	15	24 %	Shit	18	35 %
Bitch	6	9,6 %	Fuck	7	13,7 %
Hell	4	6,4 %	Bitch	2	3,9 %
Idiot	4	6,4 %	Hell	2	3,9 %
Piss	4	6,4 %	Piss	1	1,9 %
Jerk	3	4.8 %	Jerk	1	1,9 %
Fuck	3	4,8 %	Idiot	0	0 %
Heavens	3	4,8 %	Heavens	0	0 %
Asshole	1	1,6 %	Asshole	0	0 %

Table 4 shows that, regardless of gender constellation, there is no change in the two most frequent words, *God* and *shit*. In addition, the word *fuck* is still in third place in the mix sex constellation, whereas in an all-female environment, the word *bitch* takes that place. Moreover, in the same sex constellation, *fuck* only comes in eighth place.

5.3 COCA

The Corpus of Contemporary American English contains approximately 95.5 million spoken words and serves in this essay as a tertiary source. The words listed from Jay's research together with the words listed from the SBC transcripts are cross checked against COCA to see how, and if, they match.

Table 5. Number of tokens of the selected words in COCA

God	19108	62 %	*Total number of utterances: 30 648*
Hell	4570	15 %	
Jesus	3299	11 %	
Damn	1208	4 %	
Ass	515	1,7 %	
Idiot	465	1,5 %	
Bitch	402	1,3 %	
Jerk	355	1,2 %	
Suck	330	1,1 %	
Heavens	234	0,8 %	
Shit	58	0,2 %	
Piss	50	0,2 %	
Goddamn	43	0,1 %	
Fuck	6	0,02 %	
Asshole	5	0,02 %	

In Table 5 the four most common swear words belong to the group of religion, under categories blasphemy and cursing. The total of 90% of the fifteen selected words belongs to the top three words, *God*, *hell*, and *Jesus*.

6. Discussion

For the discussion part of this essay, the selection of the most common swear words in Timothy Jay´s study and the transcripts from SBC, are chosen to be looked at. A total of 15 words.

God	*Shit*	*Fuck*	*Hell*	*Goddamn*
Ass	*Asshole*	*Piss*	*Jesus*	*Idiot*
Bitch	*Jerk*	*Suck*	*Heavens*	*Damn*

The discussion is divided into three parts each with a different aspect to cover. In chapter 6.1 a comparison of the most common swear words in the different sources is made. The following chapter, chapter 6.2, deals with the variations of motifs and communicative functions of the selected words. The third chapter, chapter 6.3, looks at the two gender constellations and their impact on the use of swear words.

6.1 Most common swear words used by women

When looking at the three sources of research it is clear that one source stands out from the other two, and that is COCA. The reason for this inconsistency in comparison to the other research is clear. COCA collect almost all of its spoken material from TV- and radio-shows. In these settings the recorded people are fully aware that other people, strangers of all ages, and social levels, are listening, and they are therefore polishing the language, avoiding the most offensive words, such as *fuck*, *shit* or *asshole*. As mentioned earlier, the usage of swear word is highly sensitive to the right mood, setting, and company. In COCA, *God*, *hell*, and *Jesus* get 90 % of the tokens, and the more offensive words such as *fuck*, *asshole*, *piss*, *shit*, and *goddamn* are in the absolute bottom. Interesting to see though is that *ass* is at fifth place. One reason for that can be that when used in the motif as a body part, *I fell on my ass,* it is not considered as offensive as if used as an abuse, *you ass!,* or, *you asshole!*

The word in the high end in both of the other sources is the word *shit*. It comes in first place in the research of Timothy Jay with 23%, and in second place in SBC with 29%. This shows that the word *shit* is an easy word to use in most situations where swear words are used. It is also a versatile word that can transform into both a noun, an adjective, and an adverb.

The other high end words in those two sources are *God* with 35 % of the total in SBC, and *fuck* which received 20% of the total utterances in the research from Jay. Interestingly, the two researches do not match each other in any way when comparing those two words directly. The high percentage that *God* received in SBC only got 6,5% in Jay's research. Similarly, the high percentage of the word fuck in Jay's research only got 9% in SBC. One theory to consider in this scenario is the limited size of the SBC research compared to the extensive research from Jay.

What is common in all three research sources is the tendency to use mostly two different words in swearing regardless of which words they are. In COCA, the top two words stand for 77% of the total. In SBC, 64% is given to the two most commonly used words. Finally, Jay's research show that 43% is dedicated to the top two swear words.

6.2 Most common functions and motifs

The main motifs in all of the three researches revolve around religion and bodily functions/parts with the words s*hit, fuck, hell,* and *God* clearly in the lead. The exception being in COCA where there were mainly religious motifs, however, this is, which has been discussed earlier, because of the somewhat biased sources of the corpus when it comes to swearing.

When it comes to the number of utterances, women tend to use these four swear words with two similar main functions, which are as expletives with the meaning of an exclamation, such as *Shit! Fuck!* or as oaths as with *Oh, God!* Important to mention is that in the case of O*h God!* the expression is rarely used in anger or as seriously as the exclamations *Shit!* and *Fuck!* On the contrary, it is more commonly used as an expression of surprise or as an interjection. The word *hell,* however, is most often not used as an expletive but as an urging, *go to hell,* or as an enhancement of wh-words, as in, *who the hell is it?* The context in this usage is more of a hostile expression. These findings of the most common functions and motifs does not include COCA which demands a much more extensive research to find the functions of the swear words than is manageable in the size of this essay.

When women use swear words in another functions than as expletives or oaths, they tend to select between a varieties of words. The most common function of swearing, when considering the sheer number of diverse words, is abuse, for example name calling, where a total of eleven different words were chosen. Although there were only small differences between them, the three words *bitch*, *jerk*, and *idiot* were the most used words as an abusive name calling attribute.

The second largest function group, when counting the number of diverse words, is the new words or meaning category. Example of this is being: *using her language and shit, pisses me off, fucking it up, sort of fucks up the animals, I probably look like total hell, the audacity to bitch about it.*

6.3 The effects of different gender constellations

It has been stated in earlier research that women swear less in mix sex constellations, and this essay can only concur to those findings. In Jay's research the difference was substantial with 70% of the swear words used in same sex constellation, while only 30 % in mix sex constellations. This is the case in the SBC research as well. Here though with not that clear of a difference. The women used 55% of the swear words in same sex constellations and 45 % of them in mix sex constellations. The choice of which swear words women use does not differ that much depending on the gender constellation.

In regards to COCA it must be presumed that the recordings are all in mix gender constellations since, although the speakers might be of the same sex, TV and radio are listen to by both gender. There is therefore no comparison with COCA in this section.

In the research made by Jay, the same two words are at the top, regardless of gender constellation, and those are the words *shit* and *fuck*. However, they switch places of first and second depending on constellation. *Fuck* is the most common in same sex constellations with 23 %, while it only comes in second place with 12 % in mix sex constellations. This shows that *fuck* has a higher level of inappropriateness and offensiveness in women which is why they use the word more scarcely among males. In the same sense, *shit* is not considered as inappropriate and offensive as it is used in approximately the same extent regardless of constellation. In mix sex constellations it reaches first place with 24 % and comes in second place with 22 % in the same sex constellation. In comparison, these findings are evident in the transcripts from SBC as well, with the difference that *shit* is in second place in both categories. However, not nearly

at the same percentage, 24 % in the same sex constellation and 35 % in the mix sex constellation.

In SBC, the word *God* is in first place, with a clear margin, in both gender constellations. This is very interesting when compared to the research from Jay, where *God* does not even make the top ten. This essay cannot claim to know the answer to why this is, and leaves it to be answered by future research.

7. Conclusion

This essay aimed at finding out more about women and swearing. In particular which swear words women use, to what communicative function and in what gender constellations. Three major sources was consulted, SBC, COCA, and a previous research performed by Timothy Jay.

Other previous research has shown that women do not swear as much as men and this essay found that to be right. In addition, women tend to use more swear words in the presence of their own gender. The words they use are mostly from the motifs of religion and bodily functions and body parts, for example *shit*, *fuck*, *God*, and *hell*.

The main function of women's swearing is to communicate an expression of anger, surprise, or as an interjection. This is done through expletives or oaths such as *Oh God! Shit!* and *Fuck!* Another way to look at it is not by the number of utterances, but the number of different words used. According to that approach, the main functions are abuse or new forms of words.

Much more research is needed in the future to understand not only women's use of swear words but the general use as well. Not only is the present research limited, it is highly dependent on defined context. Although this essay found out which words that are the most common, it does not actually say that much. A word can have numerous diverse connotations. Why do we choose a specific word in one specific situation? How do we learn where a swear word is appropriate to use? We are not taught the semantics, pragmatics, or grammar of swearing, so how can we know? These are exciting questions that hopefully future research can answer.

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