

2013

Taboo lexeme conditioning and obscenities in American English

Alexander Werny

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.emich.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Linguistic Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Werny, Alexander, "Taboo lexeme conditioning and obscenities in American English" (2013). *Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*. 453.

<http://commons.emich.edu/theses/453>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact lib-ir@emich.edu.

Running header: TABOO LEXEME CONDITIONING

Taboo Lexeme Conditioning
and Obscenities in American English

By

Alexander Werny

Thesis

Submitted to the English Department
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English Linguistics

Thesis Committee:

T. Daniel Seely, PhD, Co-Chair

Veronica Grondona, PhD, Co-Chair

Joe Bishop, PhD

Ypsilanti, MI

Thank you Daniel, Veronica, and Joe, for your guidance through this process

*Thank you Rev. Dr. Eugene Montague,
for your crucial input and advice.*

Thank you G.C., for sparking my scrutiny of words, and the world.

Abstract

Taboo Lexeme Conditioning refers to the neurological, psychological, and sociological conditioning required during lexical acquisition for a native speaker to treat or experience certain lexemes as highly taboo. Taboo words differentiate both neurologically from non-emotional or non-taboo lexemes, and lexically person to person, in at least 4 ways: 1) they exhibit high activity in the emotional and moral processing structures of the limbic system, and can activate, or be uttered, independently of cortical structures involved in propositional language processing; 2) they generally receive a high amount of negative emotional response during lexical acquisition and subsequent usage, which affects how they are processed and encoded by the brain; 3) they are consistently suppressed through social mores, religious or legal censorship, persecution and/or prosecution; 4) they violate a morality code by means of taboo and describe the most potent taboos of a culture. American English Obscenities meet all of these criterion: 1) they exhibit independent, non-propositional limbic activation, as seen in brain imaging of patients with neurological damage or disorders; 2) they receive highly negative emotional responses from people who find them offensive morally and socially, which influences neurological encoding during lexical acquisition; 3) they have been subjected to censorship by American Church and State, deriving from an English legal system censoring profanities and blasphemies, each consistently influenced by Puritan interests; and 4) they violate linguistic taboos, which evolve from two much older taboos in Judeo-Christianity: taboos against the body and taboos against anti-religious or deity invoking language. The rise of the secular West sapped

religious profanities, blasphemies, and oaths of their emotional power, but taboos of and negative attitudes towards the body remained, and obscenity filled that emotional void left by profanity. Today we are left with a unique class of lexemes in American English that came about only through a very specific progression, and repression, of attitudes towards the body and the power of language.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
The N of NPS.....	3
The P of NPS.....	5
The S of NPS.....	6
Purpose of the Thesis.....	8
Hypotheses.....	9
Background on Obscenities.....	14
Chapter 2: The Limbic System and Neurolinguistics of Swearing.....	18
Chapter 3: Disgust, Emotional Conditioning, and Morality.....	33
Chapter 4: The Sacred, Profane, and Christianity.....	46
Chapter 5: Linguistic Censorship by Church, Crown, and Law.....	64
Part I: England.....	66
Part II: America.....	79
Conclusion.....	95
References.....	108
List of Terms.....	118

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Linguistic Origins of English Obscenities.....	15
2	Earliest Evidence of English Obscenities.....	15

TABOO LEXEME CONDITIONING

Chapter 1: Introduction

Piss, Shit, Fuck, Cunt, Cocksucker, Motherfucker, and Tits. Those are the heavy seven. Those are the ones that'll infect your soul, curve your spine, and keep the country from winning the war. (George Carlin, 1972)

In 1999, Timothy Jay attempted to explain the nature and reasons for taboo language in his book *Why We Curse*, proposing a *Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) Theory* of swearing. Jay offers insight into this linguistic class by examining components of the brain, the limbic system, thought to be involved in taboo utterances; psychological processes such as language acquisition, learning, and emotion; linguistic factors such as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics; and social factors such as taboo, language censorship, religion, law, social status, gender identity, speaker power, humor and word magic. Jay's NPS theory offers a prototype framework for understanding swearing, but it is limited to data available at the time and therefore lacks current data from the fields of neurology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, which would make his theory more comprehensive. While attempting to explain the nature of taboo word acquisition and how certain words achieve taboo status, Jay leaves an incomplete picture of the neurolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic aspects of swear words, missing some key information on how swear words acquire such strong negative emotional connotations. Thanks to over a decade of new research in the areas of neurology and emotion, we now have finer tools to dissect the problem of how swear words become so negatively charged and activate in the limbic system. The purpose here is to form a general theory of *taboo lexeme conditioning* that can apply to the human linguistic ability,

adapting Jay's neurological/psychological/sociological framework in *Why We Curse* (1999) and examining these factors in relation to American English obscenities.

Much of what is known about how the brain processes swearing has been observed in subjects with neurological damage or neuro-degenerative diseases that create an inability to control swearing, or uncontrolled utterances of taboo language. This includes Tourette Syndrome (TS), Aphasia, Huntington's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Epilepsy, Dementia, and Schizophrenia. Uncontrollable swearing is known as *coprolalia*. Jay recognized that coprolalia provides a “nexus for cursing” (1999) that involves specific neurological, sociological, and psychological factors. This includes brain structures that give “normal speakers” the ability to control cursing, the sociological factors that inhibit certain thoughts and words, and the psychological factors that affect each patient differently as to what they find to be the most taboo. As Jay puts it:

Coprolalia in TS is not merely the uttering of dirty words; it is a behavior far more deeply integrated into a speaker's experiences and personality. Coprolalia represents the inability to inhibit oneself from saying a forbidden word. But a word is not forbidden until the child is told that it is. The child learns from his or her parents and from the community at large that some words are too offensive to say in public. (1999, p. 5)

Through coprolalia Jay recognizes that taboo words are the result of enculturation, a combination of psychological and sociological conditioning that gives certain words emotive force or power. This conditioning in turn affects how neurological components activate these

words during linguistic processing and production. The following provides a review of Jay's NPS Theory (1999) and highlights what holes in that theory this thesis will fill.

The N of NPS

In Jay's literature review, he proposes that *propositional language* processes, the ability to produce sentences within a language's correct syntax, operate in the left hemisphere (LH) of the brain. *Non-propositional* and automatic vocalization processes such as emotional vocalizations (crying, laughter, screams), musical abilities, cliches, idioms, and swearing activate in the right hemisphere (RH). An increased use of swearing occurs with damage to the left side of the brain, while propositional language production and processing can be impaired, leaving swearing as one of the only forms of speech that survive. Jay then assumes that non-propositional speech processes lie within the RH. His argument relies on studies suggesting that emotional processing may occur in the RH, stating that damage to the RH results in a decrease of swearing, or no swearing at all. Jay provides only one source for this decrease in/no swearing claim, and he notes that in many of these studies of RH damaged subjects, participants were generally discouraged from swearing at all, unless it was deemed helpful to recovery. Also, Jay's work remains restricted to Western subjects and cites work by Tsunoda (1985) suggesting that Japanese speakers lateralize emotional speech processing in opposite hemispheres from English speakers.

Jay's approach needs revision on two levels. Primarily, a general theory of language acquisition and neurolinguistic function assumes that we are all equipped with the same neurological hardware and linguistic capacity and so must account for all speakers, regardless of language. Secondly, it is hard to make the claim that swearing as a non-

propositional and emotional speech function lateralizes to one side of the brain when subjects in the studies are actively advised not to swear. Support for the RH model of swearing primarily comes from studies of emotional/non-emotional speech and propositional/non-propositional speech, where exterior measurements of brain activity (observing eye movement when processing to prop./non-prop. or emotional/non-emotional phrases) are used to indicate lateralization of speech properties, so we can't see what structures are actually activating in the brain. Without further evidence, we can't assume that language abilities lateralize the same in every human, but, there are brain structures that do consistently activate during a taboo utterance.

Jay recognizes the role of the *Limbic System*, the subcortical or “lower” brain that controls the processing and production of emotions, as being integral to filling the gap between psychology and language acquisition. He acknowledges the role of the amygdala and the basal ganglia in controlling emotional reactions, stating that damage to the amygdala can both increase or eliminate emotional outbursts, and that both structures are involved in the coprolalic outbursts of TS. The basal ganglia is recognized as the controller of action and moral inhibition, so damage to this area can result not only in involuntary taboo speech acts but other motor tics as well. What Jay lacks is the present-day research of brain imaging technology (fMRI, PET, CT scans) that shows us exactly what structures are involved in a swearing event and lexical acquisition in both neurologically healthy and dysfunctional subjects. Jay's recognition that the limbic system is integral to swearing is an important admission, but the RH model of swearing falters, relying on exterior observations of actions and speech associated with certain types of language. Jay's theory also finds complications

in Tsunoda's study of Japanese speakers, who may lateralize emotional speech processing more dominantly in the opposite brain hemispheres to that of English speakers (1985). The neurological aspect of the theory needs to be updated with evidence from current brain imaging studies that show us what structures are activating consistently before any conclusions are made as to where swear words activate in the brain. This knowledge will open doors to understanding the role of emotion in lexical acquisition and how the brain processes this input differently than non-emotionally charged words.

The P of NPS

Timothy Jay has done a great deal of research into the psychological effects and functions of swearing, sampling variables such as age, gender, religiosity, in group behavior, usage rates, identity, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Jay, 1981; 2005; 2009a; 2009b). He states that during the language acquisition process, children learn the emotional qualities of swearing through classical conditioning, while they learn how they are used (syntax, semantics) through operant conditioning. How and why we curse becomes very much a function of our personality and our environment. Children acquire swear words as early as one year, and in the same way as they acquire other lexemes. However, he proposes that, unlike other lexemes, swear words are acquired with the added psychological factors of religiosity and sexual anxiety.

This part of the theory, while pertaining to the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of language acquisition and swearing, does not fully explain how swearing itself becomes so emotionally charged. In his neurological chapter, he outlines the correlation between the use of swearing and the emotional state of anger. In his sociological chapter, he

puts a focus on scatology and the language of disgust, mainly finding that words used to describe body parts and body fluids are generally offensive, and are described with the language of disgust (filthy, dirty, nasty, foul, unseemly, rude, bad). He cites research by Paul Rozin detailing a survival form of disgust, which motivates us to avoid contaminated things in order to avoid death, as a contributor to the emotional conditioning of swear words.

Again, this model sets up a good framework, but it has gaps in showing what the effect of emotional conditioning during lexical acquisition is, which is one of the main factors in emotionally charging swear words. In 1999, little was available to Timothy Jay in terms of emotional research, much less how emotions affect us during language acquisition, but it is an important part of the linguistic puzzle. We are emotional beings, and much of how a statement is interpreted depends on the emotional tone, the prosody, in the context of that statement. It is therefore important, *especially* in terms of swear words, to acknowledge the role of emotion in language acquisition. This part of our lexicon adds a specific emotional quality to an utterance, usually not attainable by other single lexemes. Taboo words are the product of strong negative emotional responses to certain subjects and actions prohibited by a morality structure, taboos. And so it follows that in order to talk about swear words, one must have an understanding of emotion and emotional conditioning, and how that factors in to the language acquisition phase of our youth, when we are most susceptible to cultural conditioning and the formation of cognitive processes.

The S of NPS

In the last section of his book, Jay (1999) reviews some of the sociological factors and sociolinguistic attributes that surround swear words, and how they affect their usage. For

instance, the interpretation of swear words as good or bad is dependent on the context and by the emotional tone of an utterance (angry/happy: “Fuck You!” / “Fuck Yeah!”). How powerful or convincing a speaker is perceived to be can be affected by their use of swear words: for example, swearing during an altercation may increase the perception of your threatening disposition. A factor related to speaker power is one's social identity (gender, race, social class, occupation, age). How and why we swear, or how our swearing is accepted by society, can depend on our social identity and how powerful we are perceived to be. In each of these identity areas we find that there are some common and unique slang terms, whether used to show in-group status, increase emotional effect, conceal (euphemize) meaning, or denote a social class association. We obviously see swearing as a function of humor as well, how we relate to the group, adding a certain emotional quality to our discourse, breaking taboos or challenging the status quo in terms of social acceptability.

Jay devotes a little space to outlining the censorship of swear words, mostly 20th century occurrences like fines in the entertainment business for uttering obscenities, making obscene gestures, or otherwise offensive remarks. He notes the plight of musical artists forced to put warning stickers on their products for obscene or offensive lyrics, products which some stores refuse to carry. He manages a brief section on the legal restrictions of swearing and how that structure relates to the former religious censorship that took place before the secularization of the West. Generally, his overview touches only on America from the 1900s onward.

His theory, therefore, is historically incomplete. America has a long history of both swearing and censorship, chronicled by the likes of Geoffrey Hughes (1991; 2006), Tony

McEnry (2006), and John Zelezny (2001, 2011). Before the 1960s cultural revolution, there was a great deal of private and governmental censorship of printed works, films, plays, television, and radio, generally influenced by Puritan and overall Christian interests. The advent of many new communications technologies that do not rely on the public radio waves, and which are not under regulatory control of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), led to a relaxation in censoring practices, as riskier material was allowed to be aired. Still, censorship of swearing and obscene language has been the norm for most of U.S. history. They are only one of a few forms of legally censored language in this country along with fighting words, slander, and libel. A general negative attitude towards swearing and the legal framework that censors certain forms of swearing derive mainly from one religious group who had political influence in both America and England, the Puritans. The framework for censorship was transported from England during American colonization, so we must understand the religious, political, and legal frameworks from which our obscenity laws descend.

Purpose of the Thesis

The focus of this thesis will be to apply a revised version of Jay's NPS Theory (1999) to a certain lexical class in American English, obscenities, and three of these specifically. Of the seven cited at the top of the introduction, the focus will be put on *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt*. A majority of Americans sampled classified these as the most offensive words in the English lexicon (Jay, 1999). These three words also have been chosen because they are taboo lexemes that represent highly restricted themes throughout Christian history: the body, sex, and defecation. American English obscenities ultimately derive their emotional power from

violating a Christian morality structure, transported to America by Puritan colonization. The taboo status of a word says a lot about the taboos of a culture, and to understand how those words become taboo one must look at the history surrounding them and their censorship. Understanding the plight of these three words, how they become emotionally charged, and how they are processed in the brain, will reveal by what mechanisms words become taboo and derive their emotional force. What is obscene or considered a taboo word will differ between cultures, speakers, and time. By examining American English obscenities through neurology, psychology, sociology, and the linguistic aspects of each field, we can develop a framework that may be applied to native speakers of other languages and their linguistic capacities. People swear by that which is potent to them, what is taboo in their culture (Hughes, 1991; Jay, 1999), and so both the semantic content and the phonological strings differ between languages and cultures. However, the processes for language acquisition and emotional conditioning are relatively stable. Approaching obscenities in American English with a revised version of NPS Theory (Jay, 1999) will illuminate these processes and make clear what factors led to their current unique lexical status.

Hypotheses

A revised NPS Theory (Jay, 1999) will provide a comprehensive explanation of the factors responsible for making *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* the most offensive and unique words in American English (Jay, 1999) and provide a general theory for *Taboo Lexeme Conditioning*. The intention is for it to be cross-linguistically functional in explaining how certain words become taboo in a culture. To do this, we must have an understanding of the following:

1. The function of limbic structures associated with taboo utterances
2. Emotional research into different forms of disgust that inform morality systems
3. The sacred, the profane, and, for obscenities, specific Judeo-Christian verses that create negative attitudes towards the body, sex, defecation, and swearing
4. The laws that censor swearing and obscenities throughout English history.

This thesis takes the skeleton of Jay's NPS theory and gives it “muscle” and “flesh,” through updated neurological research, emotional conditioning research, a Judeo-Christian literature review, and a comprehensive review of legal and linguistic censorship in English. What follows will demonstrate the integral factors at work that make *fuck*, *shit*, and *cunt* so taboo and so unique to American English.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of limbic system function. The central point of this thesis is concerned with emotional conditioning and its psycholinguistic effects during lexical acquisition, a crucial part of forming taboos on words. While addressing some of the general mental and physical processes the limbic system is responsible for, there will be a main focus on the amygdala, the basal ganglia, and the hippocampus. These three structures are active in controlling emotion production/processing, semantic processing, memory, action/moral inhibition, and swearing. It has been shown through fMRI, PET, CT, and SCR scans that the amygdala, basal ganglia, and hippocampus consistently activate during a swearing event, deep in the limbic system (Jan and Janschewitz, 2007; Paulmann, Pell, and Kotz, 2009; Houeto, Karachi, Mallet, Yelnik, Mesnage, Welter, Navarro, Pelisollo, Damier, Pidoux, Dormont, Cornu, and Agid, 2005; Joseph, 2000; Pavlenko, 2008; Landis, 2006; Van Lancker and Cummings, 1999; Sidtis and Postman, 2006; Dong, 2010; Morris, 1993;

Panksepp, 2008; Jay, 2008; Stephens et al., 2009; Pinker, 2007; Jay, 1999). The amygdala, among other things, is responsible for the production and control of emotions, emotional memory, and emotional vocalizations (swearing, laughing, crying, singing, yelps). The hippocampus is involved in long term and short term memory and learning, and the basal ganglia is involved in semantic prosody/processing and action/moral inhibition. Those afflicted with TS generally have damage to their basal ganglia, which helps to explain the motor tics associated with the disease, and the vocal tics like coprolalia (Van Lancker and Cummings, 1999; Jay, 1999).

Hypothesis 1 states that during language acquisition, obscenities are initially stored in the lexicon through the short term/long term memory function of the hippocampus. Only after repeated negative emotional feedback do we learn that obscenities are taboo, via the semantic processing of the basal ganglia, and the emotional memory function of the amygdala (Jay, 1999, 2008; Jay and Janschewitz, 2007; Pinker, 2007; Joseph, 2000; Moore, 1976). This is apparent from the utterance of swear words by children, who pick up the phonology and syntax, and maybe even some of the semantics, but fail to realize their taboo status in society. It is only after a period of socialization that they learn when, where, and how to use these words. It is integral to recognize the early stages of obscenity acquisition as emotionless, which implicates the hippocampal memory system. It is after these words receive negative emotional charging that they become stored or activated by emotional memory, per the amygdala, hence that structure's consistent activation during a obscenity utterance. From there it is up to the basal ganglia to either inhibit its utterance or give it

semantic (emotional) prosody. This neurolinguistic processing is the first factor in making obscenities unique in contrast non-taboo and propositional language.

Chapter 3 will give an extensive overview on the emotion of disgust. There are three forms, all directly impacting the emotional conditioning of obscenities: *Core (pathogen or contaminant) Disgust*, *Animal Disgust*, and *Moral Disgust* (Rozin et al., 1999; Rozin et al., 2000; Oaten et al., 2009; Horberg et al., 2009; Danovitch and Bloom, 2009; Jones and Fitness, 2008; Tybur et al., 2009; Haidt et al., 1993; Olatunji et al., 2008). Core disgust is the base, survival form of disgust that acts as a death or disease avoidance mechanism, and can be experienced through taste, smell, sound, sight, and touch. Animal disgust is a socialized form created to separate us from the animal world and animal form, whether through an anxiety over our mortal animal bodies or to elevate our status in the natural world. Moral disgust, also a socialized form, informs our morality systems, and taboos, and emotionally conditions us to feel disgust when taboos are broken. *Hypothesis 2 states that all three forms of disgust are responsible for the emotional charging of obscenities: Core disgust in the case of bodily fluids (shit), Animal disgust in the case of the body and animal drives (fuck, shit, cunt), and Moral disgust by breaking the taboo of swearing (an effect of Judeo-Christian religion and Puritan fanaticism to abolish swearing).* This emotional conditioning acts as another factor to make obscenities unique, in that they receive a disproportionate amount of negative conditioning as opposed to other words.

Chapter 4 focuses on specific verses from the Old and New Testament which create negative emotional conditioning towards the body, its drives, and its fluids. This includes the act of circumcision as a covenant with God, menstrual taboos, rape, masturbation, nakedness

as a cause for shame, and eating feces as a punishment. It will explain the idea of sacred and profane space, dividing the world into good and bad, showing how this idea and the three forms of disgust inform the morality system of Christianity. *Hypothesis 3 states that obscenities in American English partly owe their taboo status to attitudes in Christianity that designate the body as a profane space and a cause for disgust, which adds a negative emotional charge to this form of bodily slang.* To understand the moral framework of the Puritans and the linguistic censorship frameworks they promoted, one must understand the source of their attitudes towards swearing and the body. The religious factor plays an important role in making obscenities unique; taboo words about the body cannot become charged without the subject of the body becoming charged first.

Chapter 5 will be an extensive review of linguistic censorship from Medieval England through the modern day American states. Studies by Geoffrey Hughes (1991; 2006), John Zelezny (2001; 2011), and Tony McEnry (2006) will outline a chronology of laws and fines enacted to censor and deter blasphemies, profanities, and obscenities. The Puritans were heavily involved in designing legislation aimed at censoring the stage and print, creating fines for public swearing, actively seeking prosecutions, and creating charity schools and political movements that enforce their ideology towards swear censorship. Their legal framework for blasphemy and profanity censorship was transported to America with colonization and provided the recent framework for modern obscenity law, as modes of swearing became more secular along with the culture. *Hypothesis 4 states that legislation aimed at censoring swear words in the media and fines for public utterance further emotionally condition obscenities to taboo status, and reinforce that emotional charge*

through moral disgust. This censorship is the last factor in making obscenities unique, as they fall into a small category of words that are actively censored and stigmatized.

The information in these four chapters should make it clear in the conclusion by what processes obscenities, and taboo words in other languages, become emotionally charged. This thesis serves to explain the nature of taboo utterances as part of the human condition, how they are emotionally conditioned during the language acquisition process, and what sociological and sociolinguistic factors reinforce their taboo status. It is the combination of limbic function, disgust conditioning, supernatural belief, and morality that makes obscenities unique in their own right, language that embodies an emotional message in full, unattained by other lexemes.

Background on Obscenities

Fuck, shit, and cunt have been in the English language in one form or another for many hundreds of years, with cognate forms in other Germanic languages that existed at the same time or prior to those earliest written records. There is some speculation on the possibility that early roots of *cunt* and *shit* date as far back as Latin and Proto-Indo-European respectively. Taboo words historically are avoided in print, but the fact that we do have material evidence of these obscenities' existence suggests that they were not as taboo then as they are now. They have been censored from English dictionaries through various periods (Hughes 1991) and even now, at this time, the spell check of this word processor (NeoOffice) does not recognize the word *cunt*, perhaps a tribute to its taboo status. Hughes, in his books *Swearing: A Social History of Foul Language, Oaths and Profanity in English* (1991) and

An Encyclopedia of Swearing (2006), provides some tables denoting the earliest written recordings of these words in English, shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2:

Anglo-Saxon	Norman-French	Unknown
shit	piss	cunt (ca. 1203)
turd	cock	fuck (ca. 1503)
arse		bum (ca. 1387)
fart		twat (ca.? 1660)
	crap (ca. 1780?)	

Figure 1. Linguistic Origins of English Obscenities
(Adapted from Hughes, 2006, p. 10)

Word	Date
piss	c. 1290
shit	c. 1000
fart	c. 1250
fuck	c. 1503
cunt	c. 1203
turd	c. 1000
arse	c. 1000
cock	c. 1400
tarse	c. 1000
weapon	c. 1000
limb	c. 1000
yard	c. 1397
tail	c. 1362
tool	c. 1552
prick	c. 1592
penis	c. 1676

Figure 2. Earliest Evidence of English Obscenities
(Adapted from Hughes, 1991, p. 25)

As we can see, these words surface in writing during the Medieval period in England. How long these words have actually been in the language is unknown, as there is no written evidence before these dates. Hughes offers some suggestions on the etymologies of these words, though they all prove inconclusive:

Cunt is recorded in ME (1200) and although there are many ancient cognate Germanic forms, such as Old Norse 'kunta', Old Frisian, MLG, M. Dutch 'kunte', the

word is not found at all in old English.....scholars are divided about the likely but problematic link with Latin '*cunnus*', possibly related to '*cuneus*', 'a wedge', which has supplied the Romance relatives '*con*' (French and Middle French), '*conno*' (Italian) and so on. (1991, p. 27)

A similar etymological conundrum concerns the relations between fuck (recorded only from Early Modern English) and its continental semantics partners, French '*foutre*' and German '*ficken*' 'to strike'.....The curious forms 'windfucker' (for windhover) and Scots 'fucksail' (for foresail) suggest yet another potential root in Old Norse '*fukja*', 'to drive', in this case 'to be driven by the wind'. (1991, p. 27)

Middle Dutch '*fokken*', 'to thrust, copulate with', Norwegian dialect form '*fukka*', 'to copulate', Swedish '*focka*', 'to strike, push, copulate'. (2006, p. 188)

Harper (2010) provides us with possible etymologies of our 3 obscenities as well:

Shit- O.E. *scitan*, from P.Gmc. **skit-*, from PIE **skheid-* 'split, divide, separate'.

Fuck -probably is from a general North Sea Germanic word; cf. M.Du. *fokken*, Ger. *ficken* 'fuck,' earlier 'make quick movements to and fro, flick,' still earlier 'itch, scratch;' the vulgar sense attested from 16c. This would parallel in sense the usual M.E. slang term for 'have sexual intercourse,' swive, from O.E. *swifan* 'to move lightly over, sweep.'

Cunt- M.E. *Cunte* 'female genitalia,' akin to O.N. *kunta*, from P.Gmc. **kuntōn*, of uncertain origin. Some suggest a link with L. *cuneus* 'wedge,' others to PIE base **geu-* 'hollow place,' still others to PIE **gwen-*, root of queen and Gk. *Gyne* 'woman.' The form is similar to L. *cunnus* 'female pudenda' (also, vulgarly, 'a woman'), which is

likewise of disputed origin, perhaps lit. 'gash, slit,' from PIE**sker-* 'to cut,' or lit.

'sheath,'"from PIE **kut-no-*, from base *(*s*)*keu-* 'to conceal, hide.'

Though the precise etymologies of these words are uncertain, they were probably in the Germanic lexicon long before they were in print. Some sources offer later dates for the surfacing of these words than Hughes or Harper, such as Jonathon Green in *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang, Vol. II* (1995), placing *shit* and *cunt* at the 15th and 17th centuries respectively. However, we find *cunt* placed on a sign as part of a street name in Oxford around 1230 C.E., *Gropecuntlane* (Hughes, 1991), or as part of a few people's proper names:

Gunoka Cuntles (1219), Bele Wydecunthe (1328), and even men's names such as Godwin Clawecuncte (1219), John Fillecunt (1216), and Robert Clevecunt (1302). (Hughes, 2006, p. 110)

Shit too is found in a London street name, *Shitteborwelane*, from 1272 (Hughes, 1991). The public display of these words suggests that they didn't carry the emotional weight or taboo status that they do today, so it suffices to say that it was only through certain psychological or social influences that these words gained the negative charge associated with them in the present day English lexicon. So what exactly happened in English culture to push these words into extreme taboo status?

Chapter 2: The Limbic System and the Neurolinguistics of Swearing

Obscenities activate differently from other words in the brain of American English speakers. They activate in structures removed from areas where propositional language processes occur and, instead, where emotional and non-propositional language processes are controlled. Though obscenities can be used propositionally, they activate in these emotional control centers independently, instead working in tandem with structures controlling propositional language production and comprehension. An example of propositional swearing would be someone swearing as part of a building a sentence: “That guy's got a shit-eating grin.” Non-propositional swearing is familiar in the form of the expletive, yelling “fuck!” after you smash your finger in the car door. This non-propositional outburst carries an emotional message, namely your emotional state while experiencing pain. This type of outburst is useful to others around you to understand your emotional state or the possibility of danger or injury.

Propositional language processes are recognized to activate in the cortical (surface) structures of the Left Hemisphere (LH; Jay, 1999; Van Lancker et al., 1999; Landis, 2006; Nishitani, Schurmann, Amunts, and Hari, 2004; Jay and Janschewitz, 2007), Propositional language production is associated with Broca's area, while propositional language processing is associated with Wernicke's area. Propositional swearing requires interaction with these areas (Jay, 1999). Aphasiacs with damage to the LH are still able to make emotional vocalizations (swearing, laughing, crying, singing), and yet may not be able to understand or produce propositional speech. It is damage to this hemisphere that has helped scientists to understand where propositional language processing occurs in the brain. Until recently,

however, the involuntary taboo utterances people made after damage to the LH was sustained received little attention, not being considered “real” language. Rather, they were regarded simply as outbursts, like crying or laughing, not denoting any intelligent capacity, simply primal emotional sounds. These involuntary utterances are known as *Coprolalia*, from Greek *kopros* “dung” and *lalia* “talk, prattle, a speaking” (Harper, 2001). This symptom arises in a number of neurological diseases and afflictions such as Tourette's Syndrome (TS), Aphasia resulting from lesions or damage to the LH, lesions on or damage to the basal ganglia, epilepsy, Parkinson's and Huntington's Disease, as well as Alzheimer's, schizophrenia and dementia (Freeman, Zinner, Muller-Vahl, Fast, Burd, Kano, Rothenberger, Roessner, Kerbeshian, and Stern, 2009; Brown and Kushner, 2001; Jay and Janschewitz, 2007; Paulmann et al., 2009; Houeto et al., 2005; Jay, 1999; Jay, 2005; Landis, 2006; Van Lancker et al., 1999; Morris, 1993; Pinker, 2007; Sidtis et al., 2006; Nishitani et al., 2004). Studies have compared neurological imaging (fMRI, PET, CT) of patients affected by coprolalia and healthy neurological subjects during swear word production and memory recall tasks, finding the neurological hardware used during a swear utterance is the same (Pavlenko, 2008; Dewaele, 2004; Dong, 2010; Ferre, Pilar, Garcia, Teofilo, Fraga, Isabel, Sanchez-Casa, Rosa, Margarita, Melor, 2010; Kensinger et al., 2003; Panksepp, 2008; Jay, 2008; Stephens et al., 2009; Jay and Janschewitz, 2007; Jay, 1999). We have in recent years gained a better understanding of how the limbic system works and where swearing occurs or activates in the brain, consistent throughout different linguistic cultures (Jay, 1999; Jay, 2005). Three structures in particular must be discussed for one to comprehend how these words/morphemes are activated in the limbic system:

1. the *amygdala*- implicated in control over emotions and drives, emotional memory, autonomic nervous system response, emotional learning, and vocalizations
2. the *hippocampus*- involved in long/short term memory and learning
3. the *basal ganglia*- involved in (emotional) prosody production/processing and action/moral inhibition.

These limbic structures are intimately connected to each other and show activation during a swearing event for different reasons, but before explaining their functions and relation to taboo utterances, a quick review of the limbic system and what it is responsible for is in order.

The limbic system controls all aspects of emotion and motivational functioning, what scientists refer to as the 4 F's: feeding, fighting, fleeing, and [reproduction] (Joseph, 2000; Moore, 1976).

...the limbic system comprises parts of the old and new cerebral cortex, as well as parts of the basal ganglia, thalamus, midbrain, reticular formation, autonomic nervous system.....the limbic system ties together or integrates the newest cortical or cognitive centers of the brain with the older sensori-motor systems and the primitive visceral and reticular structures of the nervous system...several of the major structures which comprise man's limbic system evolved from the rhinencephalic cortex or the small brain of lower vertebrates. (Moore, 1976, p. 229)

Moore provides a good mnemonic for the functions of the limbic system, which is to "M-O-V-E," or drive us to survive as an individual and species:

M = Memory

O = Olfaction “smell”

V = Visceral or autonomic nervous system function

E = Emotional components of behavior

(adapted from Moore, 1976, p. 231)

The environment affects our limbic system, which in turn affects how we behave, how we form memories, and how we respond emotionally to events. This system enables us genetically to seek pleasure and avoid harm, both of which are motivations that are reinforced as we grow (Moore, 1976). This will have large implications concerning emotional conditioning and will be discussed in Chapter 2, where the role of disgust in building morality frameworks play a part in the emotional charging of obscenities.

Operating at the control booth of the limbic system is a small, almond-shaped structure called the *amygdala*. Here, emotional and motivational events are processed (Joseph, 2000; Hamann, 2001). Even human infants' ability to produce and process emotional expression are controlled by the amygdala and other subcortical structures (Jay, 1999). Functions of the amygdala also include emotional processing and expression, controlling social-emotional behavior, recognizing faces and voices, emotional memory, and receiving sensory information from our eyes, ears, and sense of touch (Joseph, 2000).

The amygdala can produce emotional vocalizations and activates during the processing/production of emotional speech such as obscenities, laughter, crying, shrieks, and phrases stored as chunks such as cliches and idioms (Joseph, 2000; Panksepp, 2008). It is activated both during production and processing of swear words (Joseph, 2000; Pinker, 2007;

Jay, 2008; Jay and Janschewitz, 2007; Morris, 1993; Jay, 1999). Swearing is likely to be produced when the amygdala becomes aroused by certain environmental factors we perceive or by other neural electrical stimulation, if the right neurological conditions exist (Jay, 1999). This is confirmed not only by brain imaging technology but also by possible visible physiological reactions such as blushing or sweating, signs that the amygdala is activated, that emotional centers are being activated (Pinker, 2007; Landis, 2006). A study by Landis (2006) focuses on emotional word stimuli and emotional reactions to arousing and non-arousing words, finding that, in particular, the left amygdala becomes activated when processing swear words. A similar study by Pavlenko (2008) found that among bilinguals, taboo words activate the amygdala, as opposed to emotion-neutral words in English or their native language. Monolingual speakers registered higher amygdala activation than their bilingual counterparts when confronted with taboo words, confirmed physiologically by registering a higher SCR (Skin Conductance Response), another way of measuring autonomic nervous responses controlled by the amygdala. Harris, Gleason, and Aycicegi (2006) reached similar results, stating that when two languages are learned in childhood, swear and taboo words elicit similar physiological reactions for both languages. Dewaele (2004) also finds that in bilingual speakers, swear words in the speaker's native language elicited a greater emotional response than in an L2 learned later in life. This is not surprising when one considers the affectivity of emotional memory pertaining to taboo words in the language learned earlier in life, when emotional conditioning is more effective in shaping lifelong attitudes. This research shows that at least in one's native language, swear words are more potent. As we've seen, potent words like swear words produce or are produced by

amygdalar activation. This research into bilingual neurological function will be of some consequence in the later discussion of swearing, the basal ganglia and its action/moral inhibitory function in a brain damaged multilingual speaker. It speaks to the emotional connectivity of a speaker to a primary language, absent learning two languages at once during the beginning stages of lexical acquisition. Emotional responses to taboo words are higher in primary languages, which suggest that emotion plays a greater role in the acquisition of a primary language as opposed to another language learned later in life. Taboo words in a primary language will register higher emotional response because of the language's deep integration within the culture and its taboos. Taboo words learned in another language of another culture won't register the same emotional response if the speaker is not as emotionally connected to that secondary culture and its linguistic taboos.

Timothy Jay (2008) investigates the recall rate of taboo words versus non-taboo words, finding that there are separate neural pathways in the processing of arousing taboo words and non-arousing, or emotion-neutral, words. Taboo or emotionally arousing words were found to be activated along the amygdalar-hippocampal pathway, whereas non-arousing/non-taboo words rely on controlled processing along the hippocampal-prefrontal pathway. This is especially pertinent when considering the role of the amygdala in emotional control, vocalization, and emotional memory. Negative non-arousing words rely on other cognitive process of the pre-frontal cortex--for example, elaboration--to enhance memories of those words and ideas surrounding them (Jay, 2008). Amygdalar-hippocampal pathway activation is confirmed in another study by Jay and Janschewitz (2007). Taboo/arousing words were found to require very little of the mental attention available that one can devote

to memory enhancement and encoding, while non-arousing words required conscious attention to achieve this enhancement. The dual-route model for taboo/emotional word processing further finds support in memory experiments run by Kensinger et al. (2003), which found that subjects scored higher recall rates on negative emotion words (swear words) than on neutral emotional words. The study indicates that individuals remember emotional words with more detail than they remember neutral words. Emotions modulate the different mental processes that perform recollection and memory encoding (Kensinger et al., 2003). The brain responds differently depending on the emotional content of a word when it is processed. Because obscenities carry such a large emotional charge, these words seem to be affective on the amygdala's emotional memory capacity. The fact that these words activate a separate neural pathway from non-emotional words provides further evidence of their linguistic exclusivity; they are not processed the same way as the rest of the non-emotional language we use.

One of the modes of swearing most people are familiar with is the expletive, usually described as a sharp vocal outburst, and not generally given much semantic value. The introduction noted that expletives are a non-propositional form of language. They fully encode an emotional state into their utterance (Jay, 1999). When we yell “fuck” or “shit” when we are in pain, or when a brain damaged patient with symptoms of coprolalia uncontrollably utters swear words repetitiously, these are non-propositional forms. In the case of neurologically healthy individuals, these emotional outbursts have long been analogized to serve a certain purpose of letting off steam (Patrick, 1901), perhaps as an attempt to avoid physical outbursts. New evidence suggests that they do in fact serve a

purpose along those lines. Dong (2010) and Stephens et al. (2009) find that emotions can have an effect on the way we experience pain and can be explained by the close knit circuitry of structures that regulate pain and structures that regulate emotions, such as the hypothalamus and the amygdala (shown to activate when one swears). In Stephens et al. (2009), subjects who submerged their hands in icy cold water could withstand the pain up to 40 seconds longer if they swore, as opposed to those who did not. Swearing had a pain-lesening (hypoalgesic) effect. This was attributed to fear, pain activating the fight or flight systems. Amygdalar activation during fear causes the activation of pain inhibitory systems, to which the amygdala is connected.

A route following from the amygdala and hypothalamus to the mid brain is known as the Rage Circuit. This part of the brain houses an instinctive reflex seen in animals that have been injured or confined:

....erupting in a furious struggle to startle, injure, and escape from a predator, often accompanied by a blood curdling yowl..... the surge of an impulse for defensive violence may also remove the safety catches on aggressive acts ordinarily held in place by the basal ganglia, since discretion is not the better part of valor during what could be the last five seconds of your life. In humans, these inhibited responses may include the uttering of taboo words. Perhaps the combination of a firing up of negative concepts and words, a release of inhibition on antisocial acts, and the urge to make a sudden sharp noise culminates in an obscenity rather than the traditional mammalian shriek... (Pinker, 2007, p. 365)

It is these engrained functions of the amygdala contributing to fear and aggressive behavior that create swearing and other emotional outbursts (Panksepp, 2008). Activation of the amygdala within this rage circuit further suggests a link with swearing and emotional processing. When we yell obscenities while experiencing pain or in moments of high emotional excitement, as when we're in danger, this type of swearing is activated in structures separate from those involved in propositional language processing and production. They serve another purpose, denoting an emotional state, and alone encode that information into the phonemic and prosodic string. The amygdala has also been shown to activate in response to sexually and socio-morally disgusting stimuli (Borg, Lieberman, and Kiehl, 2008). The amygdaloid response to sexual and moral disgust will be important to the discussion of how obscenities become conditioned neurologically through emotional reinforcement in Chapter 3. In all types of emotional production and processing, including swearing, the amygdala is consistently active. With obscenities activating the same structure involved in emotional outbursts such as yelps, shrieks, laughter, or crying, it suggests that somehow the influence of emotions and emotional conditioning charge certain words to such a high degree that they actually integrate our linguistic capacity with the neural substrates responsible for emotional control and vocalization.

The *hippocampus* has already been implicated in limbic activation during swearing events via the amgdalar-hippocampal pathway (and rage circuit; Jay, 2008; Jay and Janshewitz, 2007; Pinker, 2007). The hippocampus is considered the structure integral to learning and memory encoding. Joseph (2000) provides a good summary of hippocampal function. While the amygdala is responsible for emotional memory, the hippocampus is

associated with storing verbal, visual, spatial, and contextual details in memory, important to the production and recollection of verbal or emotional images. Activity in the neo-cortex can stimulate the hippocampus through a neural interface, which can provide stimulation directly to limbic structures such as the amygdala (Joseph, 2000).

Damage to this structure can result in a disruption of memory encoding. If damaged on one side, individuals will be unable to form new memories temporarily. If both sides of this structure are damaged, short term and long term memory both are lost; the individual will not regain the ability to learn anything new (Moore, 1976). Animals with a damaged or destroyed hippocampus will show uninhibited behavioral responses and shifts in attention (Joseph, 2000). When the hippocampus is damaged in humans, however, though short and long term memory are lost, emotional memory remains, such as swearing, crying, laughing, and defensive behaviors, which may become more pronounced (Moore, 1976). Since the amygdala is responsible for emotional memory and remains untouched, these emotional vocalizations, including obscenities, are still able to occur. This suggests that the hippocampus is involved with the early stages of lexical acquisition, initially storing the chunks of sound before they are emotionally conditioned by the culture. It is only after that emotional conditioning that words such as obscenities take on an emotional charge and activate in, or become activated by, the amygdala.

Our final focus is the *basal ganglia*. The basal ganglia is a structure that is attached or grows out from the amygdala (Joseph, 2000). Much of what we know about the function of the basal ganglia comes from research with patients who have received damage to the LH or the basal ganglia itself. The basal ganglia has been found to be responsible for our

emotional prosody in speech, and in emotion and emotional speech processing (Paulmann et al., 2009; Van Lancker et al., 1999; Pinker, 2007; Huoeto et al., 2005; Gallese, Keysers, and Rizzolatti, 2004; Speedie, Wertmen, Ta'ir, and Heilman, 2003). It has also been identified as the gatekeeper for action and moral inhibition control (Van Lancker et al., 1999; Pinker, 2007; Gallese et al., 2004; Jay, 1999). This is pertinent to coprolalia, the inability to control swearing: failure to control speech as an action and failure to inhibit a verbal taboo, taboos which derive from a morality system. It is this structure, and specifically when it malfunctions, that is associated with the motor control problems of Tourette's Syndrome (Jay, 2005; Jay, 1999; Van Lancker et al., 1999). When the basal ganglia becomes dysfunctional, it produces abnormalities in limbic system function and the processing/production of emotional activities (Van Lancker et al., 1999). One of the roles of the basal ganglia is to designate certain thoughts and desires as unthinkable, taboo, in order to keep them in check, and is implicated in the role of initiating epithets (swearing/expletives/obscenities; Pinker, 2007).

Damage to this area can impair a subject from discerning emotion prosodically and semantically. A study by Paulmann et al. (2009) found that lesions on the left basal ganglia made it impossible for patients to discern the prosody and semantics of fear and disgust in emotional vocalizations, but not happiness or anger. This applies to patients afflicted with both Parkinson's and Huntington's disease, as well as other neuro-degenerative diseases that affect the basal ganglia.

This weakens the argument that previously reported emotional deficits in neuro-degenerative disorders may result from cortical dysfunction and strengthens the

hypothesis that the basal ganglia are indeed involved in emotional speech processing.

(Paulmann et al., 2009, p. 164)

Both the amygdala and the basal ganglia have been implicated in processing the emotion of disgust as evidenced by Gallese et al. (2004); Paradiso, Robinson, Andreasen, Downhill, Davidson, Kirchner, Watkins, Ponto, and Hichwa (1997), and by Borg et al. (2008), where subjects showed high activations of both these structures when processing statements concerning incest. If someone with basal ganglia impairment can neither discern disgust as a listener nor control vocal emotional outbursts which have been conditioned, then there is some support for the claim that the basal ganglia are an integral part in the swearing experience.

The symptom of coprolalia, involuntary taboo vocal outbursts, has gained more recognition in both science and media in the last decade. Van Lancker et al. (1999) hypothesize that coprolalia is a limbic vocal tic whose *“unique content is informed by the social and emotional communicative purposes of limbic vocalizations”* (p. 98). They concluded that this symptom was due, at least in part, to a dysfunction of the basal ganglia. As they put it:

...Voluntary normal cursing and cursing in aphasia may share the anatomy and physiology of coprolalia. Normal, aphasic and coprolalic cursing have in common the expression of certain identical linguistic productions, as well as the unitary, noncompositional structure of the stimulus. Persons suffering from aphasia, in whom left hemispheric areas mediating propositional speech are dysfunctional, may have access to structures mediating limbic vocalization, modulated by basal ganglia

structures and facilitated by right hemisphere cortical structures. Normal cursing typically occurs in periods of anger, frustration, and other intense emotional situations where limbic system structures are activated and limbic vocalizations may be facilitated. In many normal and aphasic individuals, cursing also occurs frequently as habituated verbal productions. The over learned and emotive vocal-motor ‘gestures’ of cursing are hyperactivated in GTS and remain residually available in the aphasic speaker. (Van Lancker et al., 1999, pp. 98-99)

One interesting case of swearing impairment comes as an example from Speedie et al. (1993), where a multi-lingual 75-year-old man sustained a right basal ganglia lesion. Among other non-propositional language types, his ability to swear had been impaired. Certain types of automatic speech did manage to persevere, in the form of greetings (perhaps as a result of repetition over time) and idioms (which may indicate that they are stored in the lexicon as full chunks of phonological, syntactic, and semantic information, in the way obscenities seem to be). The subject, who was also a speaker of French and Hebrew, lacked any impairment to the production and processing of speech in those languages. This led to the hypothesis that the function of non-propositional speech production, but not processing, may reside in the right basal ganglia (Speedie et al., 1993). This is a case worth noting, especially the language of the hypothesis. The word *production* is not clarified as to whether the actual vocalization occurs with the activation of the basal ganglia, but it may be implied that ability to vocalize swearing is lost, not the activation of swearing in the amygdala, as automatic speech is still understood.

So, when a word goes through a process of taboo lexeme conditioning, how does the brain process and store the information about that word differently from the emotionally-

neutral lexical entities we use day to day? Taken all together, early in the lexical acquisition process, after exposure to the phonetic structure and rules of swear words and obscenities, these words enter the lexicon as emotionally neutral via the hippocampus. It is only after the emotional conditioning of these words, reinforced by cultural norms and expectations, that they are labeled or encoded as taboo, in part by the prosodic (emotionally semantic) processing function of the basal ganglia. This emotional charging then causes them to be stored or activated within the amygdala along with other types of emotional and non-propositional vocalizations. It is this emotional conditioning to taboo status that then activates the basal ganglia to either inhibit these vocalizations or give them prosodic elements, via the basal ganglia's control of action/moral inhibition and semantic prosody.

This research combined marks a starting point on the map of how language is processed neurologically. It is the bypass of brain structures involved in propositional speech, the ability for LH impaired subjects to still be able to produce and understand swearing and non-propositional utterances, that makes these taboo words unique. Because propositional linguistic production/processing may differentiate culturally between the two hemispheres (Tsunoda, 1985), it is more sound to look at the amygdala, hippocampus, and basal ganglia as the neurological source for obscenity utterances. Though our understanding of how the lexicon is stored in the brain remains incomplete, research into taboo word activation illuminates some of those processes by which the language is stored and activated. This has implications for trying to model the mental lexicon and how its storage is affected by other neural processes. It is clear that obscenities go through a very different neural experience than non-arousing words and that neural processing is part of what makes these

words unique. In the next chapter, we will see how the biological and social functions of disgust charge these words, through a process of creating a sense of morality, right and wrong, good and bad. Because obscenities are such emotional words, it stands to reason that to understand their status one must understand how emotions themselves play into taboo creation and emotional conditioning during lexical acquisition.

Chapter 3: Disgust, Emotional Conditioning, and Morality

The determinant of obscenity lies not in words or things, but in the attitudes that people have towards these words and things. To hazard a definition, we may say that obscenity is any reference to the bodily functions that gives to anyone a certain emotional reaction, that of a 'fearful thrill' in seeing, doing, or speaking the forbidden. Thus it is the existence of a ban or taboo that creates the obscenity where none existed before....the response is an emotional one, altogether out of proportion to the simple semantic content of the word. (Read, 1934, p. 264)

Chapter 2 shows us how the limbic system is involved in emotions, memory, swearing, and how all three are intertwined. *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* rely on a heavy amount of negative emotional conditioning to wield the power that they do. Much of our emotional conditioning depends on what we designate as “good” and “bad.” It is important to understand what emotions inform those kinds of judgments, and how both fit into the bigger picture of lexical acquisition and taboo lexeme conditioning. Primarily, obscenities violate some kind of moral code. Word magic, assigning power to words, plays a role in this moral violation. The commandment against taking God's name in vain illustrates this and will be utilized later on. Words used to threaten (or invoke metaphysically) negative power or circumstance through a deity is considered a sin. Morality is a simplification of the world into good and bad, usually by instituting what is sacred and profane within the culture (Eliade, 1957). It is the profane that concerns us here when considering obscenities, and so we'll look at the emotion that helps create the profane and morality.

Obscenities are part of a relatively small percentage of words in the English lexicon designated “bad,” but how are these judgments made? Nothing is inherently good or bad, and what is good to one person can inevitably be bad to another. Take pork, for example: some people eat it without worry; for others, to eat it is a sin. The answer lies in the emotion of disgust. When we think of the words we use to describe obscenities or taboo language, the ones that come to mind are bad, obscene, profane, indecent, vulgar, dirty, filthy, nasty, potty-mouthed, and so on. The very language we use to describe obscenities and swear words at large stems from the language of disgust. Disgust then becomes important to our discussion. As we will see, it is the primary emotion integral to building morality systems. Morality, the sacred, and the profane (discussed in Chapter 4) act symbiotically in helping us determine what we *feel* is good and bad. Obscenities derive their power through disgust and its influence on morality.

Disgust is one of seven universal emotions, along with joy, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, and contempt (Ekman and Friesen, 1971; Ekman, 2003; Rozin et al., 2000). These seven basic emotions have been documented across many cultures and ethnicities, even in the most remote areas with no previous contact with Western civilization, and so no opportunity to study Western expressions of emotion. There is also no significant difference between pre-literate and literate, nor least or completely Westernized cultures (Ekman and Friesen, 1971). These are the emotions we are born with. The work of Paul Ekman in phenomena called *micro-expressions* and *macro-expressions* has led to the discovery that all human beings are capable of experiencing these universal emotions and has updated Darwin's *Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* showing the connection between humans and

animals in the seven universals. Macro-expressions are the faces we make when we experience emotion. These are definite and observable muscle movements in the face that designate what emotion we are feeling at that point in time. Micro-expressions come about when we try to hide the emotions we are really feeling, as part of deception. Only a few of the muscles of a certain emotion may give away the internal state of the subject (Ekman, 2003). It is observing these expressions across various cultures, near and remote, that has shown this common link in human experience. A majority percentage in both of two different cultures will ascribe the same emotion to the same expression, in spite of any translation problems (p. 13). All humans experience these emotions, and have particular facial muscle movements to denote them (Ekman, 2003; Ekman and Friesen, 1971; Stevenson, Atkins, and Kingston, 2010; Oaten et al., 2009). Each basic emotion then becomes culturally conditioned, so the accepted mode of expressions may vary (though micro-expressions will give them away; Ekman, 2003; Rozin et al., 2000; Haidt et al., 1993). No matter how we learn to express these emotions, we all have the capability of experiencing them. We are, then, all biologically the same in the capability to produce basic emotions, because we all possess the same neurological hardware. For taboo lexeme conditioning to be supported, it requires evidence such as this to enable different languages and cultures to produce taboo words, as it relies on the processing and production of emotional content.

Like other basic emotions, we are socialized to experience disgust towards things or events through a number of other mediums, such as emotional prosody, word choice (Lee and Narayanan, 2005), body language, and sometimes through abuse. Disgust, like all emotions, exists with some survival value (its biological function) and its culturally conditioned states.

In the literature this survival form is termed *Core*, *Pathogen*, or *Contaminant* disgust, here we will use the label *Core*. The culturally conditioned states of disgust are *Animal* (sometimes referred to as *Sexual*) disgust and *Moral* disgust (Rozin et al., 1999; Rozin et al., 2000; Oaten et al., 2009; Ekman, 2003; Horberg et al., 2009; Danovitch and Bloom, 2009; Jones and Fitness, 2008; Rozin et al., 1986; Tybur et al., 2009; Haidt et al., 1993; Goldenberg et al., 2000; Olatunji et al., 2008). A great deal of work has been done on this emotion by Paul Rozin, testing a variety of stimuli that evoke one of these three states.

Core disgust serves a biological purpose to prevent us (ideally) from eating or exposing ourselves to something that's contaminated or deadly. Core disgust revolves mostly around ingestion and intruding on the personal space, in order to protect the body. It can be experienced by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; even thinking about something that is or can be perceived to be contaminated. Think about when you are near someone who vomits. If you see, hear, or smell that experience, chances are you feel disgusted. You may feel like you will vomit yourself, you may even taste it in the back of your throat, which only compounds the feeling. This is a biological reaction meant to keep you alive. It becomes a matter of threat assessment: "If someone near me is throwing up, they may have eaten or come in contact with something contaminated; if they came in contact with it, I may have too." It is an automatic emotional reaction; the body enacts its self-cleansing process.

Many disease-related disgust elicitors are universal. Because this type of disgust operates at a survival level, it suggests that disgust has a crucial function in protecting us against death (Oaten et al., 2009). The odor of decay, the odor of death, is recognized as the most basic odor of disgust (Rozin et al., 2000). Disgust at a young age mirrors distaste, a

rejection of things that taste bad, but doesn't appear fully in socialized forms until between ages the of 4 and 8 years (Ekman, 2003). Stevenson et al. (2010) report that children first show significant emotional elements of core disgust towards stimuli at 2 and a half years. Oaten et al. (2009) report that neonates have an innate response to bitter and sour tastes or irritants but show little emotional response to other stimuli that evoke this emotion in adults. New rejection based on disgust is learned by children observing the disgust reaction of adults to certain stimuli and appears between 2-12 years of age.

...although 3 year olds typically reject feces as food, it is not clear that this rejection has contaminating or offensive features, and it may be no different than a distaste, or a distaste combined with danger. So far as we know, there is no sense of offensiveness or rejection outside of the sensory realm in either infants or nonhumans, and hence no gape elicitors other than certain negative tastes. Disgust seems to require enculturation....(Rozin et al., 2000, pp. 645-656)

Rozin et al. (1986) ran an experiment where subjects were first given a cubed piece of high-quality chocolate fudge alone on a paper plate, then asked to rate their desire to eat another piece. They were then given two more pieces, both on paper plates, one which looked like a disc, another which looked realistically like dog feces. They rated which one they preferred, and then were asked to take a bite of the piece which they had indicated. Not surprisingly, most people didn't rate the piece shaped like feces very high, simply based on its visual representation. That is how powerful the emotion of disgust and the drive to avoid disease and death is within ourselves. Even when we can use logic to deduce that there is nothing wrong with the fudge, outside of its coincidental appearance to something that could

be contaminated or lethal, disgust is powerful enough to make us not take the chance. Here we can certainly understand then why *Shit* took on such a negative charge. The odor of decay in feces, representing the odor of death, creates an emotional response of disgust. *Shit* in part relies on this form of disgust to gain a negative emotional charge.

Where things get tricky, and where they become more pertinent to a main point of taboo lexeme conditioning, is when *Core* disgust becomes socialized into *Animal* and *Moral* disgust.

Disgust involves a conservative output system with a flexible and expanding input/evaluative (elicitor/meaning) system; the principle cultural differences in disgust have to do with the input/evaluative system. (Rozin et al., 2000, p. 647).

It is these forms of disgust that bear the most weight on how obscenities become emotionally charged, because it is these forms that profane our bodies, our natural state, and provide us a framework for morality. *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* rate as the most taboo lexemes in American English (Jay, 1999), and they represent a bodily function, a bodily fluid, and a body part. *Animal* disgust is termed so because things and events that remind us that we are animals are regulated or condemned, usually resulting in the regulation of the body, including sexual practices, diet regulation, defecation, what clothes you can wear, and cleanliness practices. These are often incorporated into the moral codes of cultures and religions (Rozin et al., 1999).

Many animal taboos involve disgust. Some animals are disgusting because they bear some resemblance to body products such as mucus (e.g. slugs), or because they are commonly in contact with rotting flesh, feces, or other human waste (e.g. flies,

cockroaches, rats, vultures, and other scavengers). Carnivorous land animals eat raw, often decaying animal flesh, and produce putrid feces. They are therefore disgusting at both ends. (Rozin et al., 2000, p. 640)

If Core disgust guards the body, Animal disgust guards the psyche, driven by the fear of our animal mortality (Rozin et al., 2000), “*Disgust serves to 'humanize' our animal bodies. Humans must eat, excrete and have sex, just like animals...*” (p. 642). Although they are socialized disorders, people with bulimia and anorexia nervosa frequently feel disgust towards their own body parts, sexuality, and certain foods (Ekman, 2003). A disgust based on the animal form and mortality may not be apparent to a young child, but children often show disgust to physically disgusting acts (defecating, throwing up), more so than to non-sexual “immoral” acts (stealing, lying). They become aware that their bodies, as are others', are cause for disgust (Danovitch and Bloom, 2009; Stevenson et al., 2010). The body, its fluids, products, and decomposition become a core focus of regulation (Kolnai, 1998; Holden, 2000). One way children may learn disgust towards their bodies is during the potty training phase (Stevenson et al., 2010), as parents might make faces of disgust during the clean-up period.

We as a species have focused the emotion of disgust from the outside in. As Haidt et al. astutely state:

Humans cannot escape the evidence of their animal nature. In every society people must eat, excrete, and have sex. They bleed when cut, and ultimately they die and decompose. We propose that most cultures have found ways to 'humanize' these activities, through rituals, customs, and taboos that serve to differentiate humans from

animals. People who violate their local food and sex taboos risk being shunned and reviled by their peers, and in many cultures they are labelled as 'animals.'

(Haidt et al., 1993, p. 712)

This focus of disgust inward creates a mental separation and anxiety over our mortal form, adding a negative emotional charge towards the perception of the body and animal acts. Obscenities are imbued with this charge. All three focused on here require the body to be designated as “bad” in some way, and Animal disgust provides us with that negative charging towards the body. Why we as humans seem to think we might be outside the reach of natural law, or should be, is an interesting philosophical point, and its implications here have been the focus of a philosophy from the psychoanalytic realm called *Terror Management Theory* (TMT) (Goldenberg et al., 2000; Solomon, Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, McCorry, and Greenberg, 1999). TMT states that people form death-denying cultural belief systems to manage the terror they feel about their animal and mortal forms. People's concern with death then affects their behaviors in relation to the afterlife, preservation of the self, their faith, and worldview (Goldenberg et al., 2000). The idea is that the body is a problem for humans because it reminds us of our similarity to other animals, and hence our vulnerability to death. In humans, disgust can be expressing one's rejection of, or superiority to, things like food, the body, philosophies and actions (Goldenberg et al., 2000). Sex provides a huge problem in the world of terror management. It is an animal act, involves contact with bodily fluids, it represents half of the life cycle (birth and death), there is a large amount of blood and an excruciating amount of pain at birth for the mother, a chance of the mother or baby dying, a chance for infection. To separate sex from the animal form, certain

restrictions are placed on the act to make it an acceptable human experience:

Cultures elevate human sexuality from a simple animal activity to a uniquely human expression of abstract meaning in many ways. The multitude of restrictions on who can do what with whom, where, and when, which vary widely from culture to culture, are all ways in which cultural norms are used to give sex its uniquely human meaning. Regulations can range from abstinence for some members, to confinement of sex to marriage or for procreation, to restrictions on sexual position, appropriate sex partners, and pleasure derived from the sexual act. Indeed, most religions condemn the pleasure 'of the flesh' in favor of spiritual pursuits.

(Goldenberg et al., 2000, p. 206)

One way we see sex being elevated to a distinctly human quality is through romantic love and marriage, and many cultures symbolize this humanity by placing certain restrictions on the act of love making, as noted in the quotation above. Its giving meaning or value to the act (Solomon et al., 1999). This type of sublimation serves to reject our animal being, our mortal form, and relieve some of this terror that plagues our psyches. This may seem far fetched to some, but research has shown that when being confronted with thoughts of one's mortality, subjects who were not mentally well prepared over death related concerns, and those who were psychologically classified as neurotic, both showed a decrease in the appeal of sex related acts, feelings of guilt, disgust, or general anxiety around these matters (Solomon et al., 1999). If the physical acts of sex bring to mind one's creatureliness in these individuals, then it may come as no surprise such feelings will arise.

Some cultures with nature or land-based spirituality, such as those found in Africa, Australia, or the Americas, view animals as unique individuals deserving of respect in their own right. They and the rest of nature tend to be regarded to have supernatural powers. Although there may be some distinction in these close to nature attitudes with that of Westernized or industrialized nations, it is thought within the TMT philosophy that the abstract power of nature that is embraced, rather than nature itself within those cultural world views (Goldenberg et al., 2000). There are still some restrictions on how the body is used, or how bodily acts should be performed. It is from here that animal nature or sexual disgust feeds directly into the third category of disgust: Moral. This is the final tier of disgust from which obscenities derive their power. Animal disgust puts a negative emotional charge on subjects surrounding the body; Moral disgust makes the body and Animal disgust a moral issue. Obscenities rely on moral disgust to further emotionally charge the body by creating a system of good and bad.

If Animal disgust is meant to give us some separation from the rest of the animal kingdom, then *Moral* disgust is our connection to the spiritual or metaphysical world. It defines our taboos, imposes restrictions on the way we live, and dictates how we treat ourselves and each other. Many of our taboos involve sex and sexuality, which can only be born out of a disgust with those acts. Sex is often referred to as “dirty,” metaphorically unclean, something that goes against morality (Cahill, 2005). Moral Disgust, then, guards the soul. At this level, disgust acts as a moral emotion and a form of negative emotional conditioning (Rozin et al., 1999). We see this in arguments about gay marriage, where homosexuality is being targeted because some people find it overly disgusting, morally

wrong. This is also prevalent with the subject of incest, where familial relations are a heinous crime against family (Cahill, 2005). The variation in cues that elicit moral disgust is especially interesting. Even though cues that elicit moral disgust may vary, this form still appears to exist across different cultures. Violation of encultured norms, especially regarding sex, the body, protecting children, food sources, and territory, can produce disgust (Oaten et al., 2009).

It is possible that some of these moral violations arose in recognition that certain things prevent early death. This includes hygiene, child rearing, sexual, and food related practices. Disgust is used as a moralization tactic at the level of society, and a socialization tactic at the level of the individual (Oaten et al., 2009). Though this emotion may have arisen out of a biological defense, a disease-avoidance mechanism, it has been formed into the main infrastructure of our moral codes, such that, “that which disgusts me is bad.” It is a product of cultural evolution, rather than genetic evolution, which serves to remove us from what we find objectionable, such as child pornography or obscenity (Ekman, 2003). This form of disgust has to do with the domain of purity: disgust is associated with impurity or “badness,” with purity being the inevitable representation of “goodness.” Disgust towards purity violations elicits harsher moral judgments by observers when violations occur than those less concerned with maintaining a pure being or society (Horberg et al., 2009). Concerns of purity and contamination of the physical and spiritual form are greatly influenced by what we are told is disgusting, what to avoid, and thus create a system of “morality” to enforce “purity.” In this sense Moral disgust mirrors Core disgust, protecting us against contamination or impurity. Children must learn to feel this form of disgust, and learn to

accept the morality of their given culture. They aren't pre-disposed to show disgust towards moral violations, and are more likely to show it towards physically disgusting acts (Danovitch and Bloom, 2009). It may be instilling a sense of evil, as done through religious and legal systems, with perceptions of evil stemming from a sense of repulsion and contamination, and may be “*no coincidence that we call liars and cheats 'slime' and those with exacting moral standards 'puritans'*” (Jones and Fitness, 2008, p. 625). Thus, children must learn through moral disgust that certain words are bad, and that saying them is bad. This is in part how obscenities are formed, as part of a morality structure based on instituted disgust towards the human body, a subject dealt with in Chapter 4, and towards the use of forbidden words, discussed in Chapter 5. Taboo Lexeme Conditioning as a general principle would require at least the participation of Core and Moral disgust in forming feelings of contamination or moral impurity towards certain words, as it is not clear that body related slang is the norm of highly taboo lexemes in other languages.

Disgust is the primary emotional reaction to taboo violations. Anger is also prevalent, however, it is more frequent in moral conservatives who are more concerned with maintaining personal and spiritual purity (Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla, 2007). The correlation between disgust and morality, purity and impurity, can inform and be informed by a culture's understanding of the sacred and the profane (Eliade, 1957). It's the sectioning off of space in the known Universe, into physical and metaphysical, animal and spiritual. Moral disgust is taught to preserve the sacred and spiritual parts of our being. Violations of this space, profaning it, lead to all manner of negative ramifications, from simple social stigmatization to war and genocide. Chapter 4 will be a demonstration of how Judeo-

Christian religion interprets these ideas of the sacred and profane, how it utilizes the three forms of disgust in creating language, body and sexual taboos. Disgust is an integral part of our emotional conditioning as children, it shapes much of the way we see and react to the world (Locher, 1996). Constant negative emotional reinforcement towards the body, its products, and sexual acts creates a mental separation from our animal selves, in order to preserve some feeling of superiority, of uniqueness in the world. The moral form of disgust is driven home into our minds long before we can rationalize our feelings towards certain subjects, forever leaving its imprint upon our emotional experiences. When we talk of passing on our morals through the generations, what we are really talking about is passing along our disgust sensitivity. Obscenities are a verbal taboo violation describing taboo bodily content, the result of a morality system, built on the foundations of disgust. Chapter 4 will illuminate the source of that morality system, Judeo-Christian religion, and how it uses these forms of disgust in placing taboos upon the body, bodily acts and fluids. Chapter 5 will explain why obscenities, and not their less potent euphemisms (intercourse, poop, lady parts) are conditioned to that level of emotional power through the religious and legal censorship of swearing by Puritan influence.

Chapter 4: The Sacred, Profane, and Christianity

When we look more directly at the social world itself, it becomes apparent that the general distinguishing mark of human sexuality, as of all social reality, is the unique role played in its construction by language, consciousness, symbolism, and labour, which, taken together – as they must be – are praxis, the production and reproduction of material life. (Padgug, 1999, p. 20).

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 show how obscenities are unique through their neurological and psychological conditioning. It is the primary reaction of disgust towards the body's animal form and obscenities as a moral violation that creates this emotional charge. Disgust helps build our ideas of morality, but what enforces that morality? Humans have long felt the need to fill the gap of explaining their existence. Atheism has not been the most popular idea amongst most civilizations, and until recently the numbers of unbelievers has been stagnant or underground. Most cultures throughout history as well as today believe that there is something otherworldly to our existence, something sacred, spiritual, and pure. Entire religions and civilizations are built around this idea. Each culture, to one degree or another, has some concept of the sacred and profane.

Obscenities fall into the spectrum of the profane, as a result of word magic. Profane words in a Christian context represent language that disrespects or disregards God's word and the Church. Obscenities, as we will see, derive from the moral framework that makes language such as swearing a profane act, and the body a profane space. They evolved from the taboo of uttering or thinking such forbidden words, and represent the decline of Church power, bringing in a more secular age, a redefining of the sacred and taboo.

Mircea Eliade writes in the book *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957), that “*the history of religions- from the most primitive to the most highly developed- is constituted by a great number of....manifestations of sacred realities.....the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects, that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world.*” (p. 11). Religious structures (temples), artifacts (crosses), and sites (graves) are all examples of this idea, where something from the concrete “profane” world is given a metaphysical “sacred” existence or meaning. We find this feeling directed towards sports stadiums, government buildings, and our homes, in the sense that we form restrictions on our behavior so as not to profane the space. The same idea is behind not letting the American flag touch the ground, and burning it if it does, so as not to profane a “sacred” object. As Eliade goes on to say:

The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible in the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for primitives as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality.....The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between real and unreal or pseudoreal.....Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power. (Eliade, 1957, pp. 12-13).

...the irruption of the sacred does not only project a fixed point into the formless fluidity of profane space, a center into chaos; it also effects a break in plane, that is, it opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and make possible an ontological passage from one mode of being to another. (p. 63)

When we talk of moral disgust representing the impurity or profanity in the world, then the rejection of that impurity allows us to live in, or closer to, the sacred. It is the sacred that establishes order, it fixes limits, creating that center amidst the chaos. People accept a morality and live by it in hopes of being re-established with the sacred, the holy, the ultimate reality, or to minimize the profanity within their reality. A break from morality puts in jeopardy the ability to re-establish that connection. So it is a powerful motivation to maintain a certain framework, especially when there is a threat of existential retribution. In the words of Eliade, humans *cosmicize* themselves. Life tends to exist on two planes, the human existence, and a metaphysical plane, that of the gods or cosmos (Eliade, 1957). It is the idea that everything exists with some significance. With the discovery of agriculture, the world was brought more closely together in a sacred space: sexuality, fertility, woman and earth mythology, all gain a concreteness in religious experience, more intimately connected to life.

All of human existence is given a dual role, one profane and one sacred. This dichotomy can live within one object. The human body has been a victim of this dual role. It is a profane cell within which lies trapped a sacred spirit, an essence of the divine. Each culture somehow incorporates this idea, whether as being a vessel for a deity's work on earth or through sexual communion to connect with the cosmos, and each places its restrictions on the body in order to avoid contact with as much profane space as possible.

On the one hand, human embodiment and sexuality are considered good; but they are good because God said so (Gen. 1:31) and because they are products of God's creative activity. Yet at the same time they are the very symbols of human difference from God. (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1991, p. 15).

Judeo-Christian religion offers its own version of this duality, and its own version of restrictions. It should be prefaced that there are inherent philosophical contradictions within the Biblical texts concerning sex and the profanity of the act, so religious understanding of these ideas are based on a few factors: the religious texts themselves, what sections certain groups choose to acknowledge or not, and the interpretation of texts that they choose to focus on when building morality systems. It should also be noted that this section does not serve any purpose for religion-bashing. It's only aim is to bring to light how certain understandings of Biblical texts influence the system of morality and what one finds disgusting in present day America, so as to show what artifacts of the Puritan morality system survived through the secularization of the Western world, and give obscenities their emotional power.

Fuck, Shit, and Cunt derive their power in part from bodily taboos. They would not exist if there was not an engrained feeling of negativity towards our animal form, and so it becomes crucial for these lexemes to be emotionally conditioned that the body be designated as a profane space. Much of what is said about the body, bodily fluids or processes, sexual practices, the restriction of the body comes from the Old Testament, though some can be found in the New Testament as well. To understand the Christian Faith, we must understand aspects of the Jewish faith which preceded it. An important part of the Jewish faith is the idea of circumcision. Genesis talks about circumcision, removing the foreskin from the penis, as a symbol of the covenant between God, Abraham, and the proliferation of Abraham's line, the Jewish people (Genesis (Gen.)17: 10-14) (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1991). Those who are uncircumcised are cut off from God and God's people. In Gen. 34: 15-24, Hamor and his son agree to marry into Jacob's family only if all the males in the city agree to

be circumcised, and be of one people. Circumcision was so important that God commanded Joshua to perform a second circumcision on the people of Israel who had come out of Egypt, and an initial one for those born in the wilderness on the way (Josh. 5: 2-5). We find similar proclamations of this holy covenant, being one with God's people, the doom of those who do not partake in the practice, and metaphor of circumcising the foreskin of the heart to be in open commune with God in Genesis (Gen.), Exodus (Exod.), Leviticus (Lev.), Deuteronomy (Deu.), Joshua (Josh.), Jeremiah (Jer.), Luke (Luke), John (John), Acts (Acts), Romans (Rom.), Galatians (Gal.), and Colossians (Col.). The symbolism of cutting off a piece of the body so intimately connected to one of the strongest human/animal drives, and consequently, one subject to many taboos, says a lot about the rejection of the animal body in service to a higher power. This sacred communion through the flesh-piece of desire strengthens that separation of the body and spirit. Circumcision is not a strictly Jewish custom. They most likely gained this practice when under the rule of the Egyptians, who committed circumcision because it was considered to be more healthy and pleasuring during intercourse (Waszak, 1978). After leaving Egypt, the practice was co-opted and given its own significance under Jewish culture. This helps establish a main point in charging obscenities, designating the body as a profane space. Cut off part of the profane space, representing profane actions and desires, in hopes of a sacred existence. Symbolically cutting off or severing man's desire to *fuck*. This in fact may be the most powerful of all representations profaning the body throughout the Biblical texts, and consequently most important in lending power to the ideas that help charge obscenities.

Even with this covenant of the flesh with God, the Jewish attitude towards sex differed greatly from the Christians. Sex, procreation, was not only encouraged, it was considered a commandment, "...Be fruitful and multiply..." (Gen. 1:28). One who bore children was considered more holy, more of God's people, than who remained chaste (Anderson, 1992). If one reads the Songs of Solomon they will be exposed to a number of verses that many Christians have found, at the very least, indecent. Verses like Solomon (Sol.) 7: 7-8: "*This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples*"; or Sol. 8: 10: "*I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour*". Over time, a Christian's life of chastity and abstinence, sacrificing human drives to honor the sacredness of God, became more holy than procreating, and by-proxy, profaning the body. St. Augustine had a large influence in this mode of thought (Cahall, 2004). Although this division in the understanding over sex exists, there are still many restrictions around when and how people are allowed to procreate. A man is not allowed to approach a woman while she is menstruating, "You shall not approach a woman in her time of unclean separation, to uncover her nakedness" (Lev. 18: 19). Menstrual blood is, not surprisingly, considered unclean. Disgust and physical danger were used as incentives to keep Jews observing the "Laws of Family Purity." As Guterman, Mehta, and Gibbs (2008) write:

When a woman was menstruating, she was seen as a physical and spiritual danger to all men. Nahmanides states that her breath is harmful, and her gaze is detrimental. A woman was instructed not to walk between two men, because, if she did so at the end

of her period, she would cause strife between them, and if she passed between them at the beginning of her period, she would cause one of them to die. This shows that the 'danger' of the menstrual woman is not simply the blood, but even the atmosphere around her. (Guterman et al., 2008)

This idea of physical and spiritual danger followed into the Middle Ages (Guterman et al., 2008; Steinberg, 1997; Hunt and Jung, 2009). In Biblical Jewish belief, men and women are not allowed to touch each other until the end of menstruation (Niddah period), after a ritual bath. Ignorance pertaining to how the process of menstruation works has manifested itself in cultural restrictions. Cultures all over the world have founded restrictions based on a woman's menstrual cycle. In many cultures menstrual huts were created to separate the women from the rest of the tribe to maintain the purity of men or the village, and this practice still exists in some tribal communities today, such as the Huaulu of Indonesia, the Dogon of Mali, and until recently the Hagen, Duna, and Pangia areas in Papua New Guinea (Guterman et al., 2008). Customs in the areas of Asia and the Middle East owe much of what is believed about menstruation to the Aryans:

As the etymology of "mother," "daughter," and some other basic English vocabulary indicates, our culture is indebted to the Aryans who sired both Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. Ancient Hindu law required that a 'menstruant' be isolated to prevent contamination to others. She could not bathe or enter a temple. It was believed that the wisdom and energy of a husband would vanish if he had intercourse with his wife during menstruation. If a menstruant touched an Aryan she was to be beaten. The Zoroastrian scriptures pertaining to the menstruant were even more severe. 'When she

touches the bedding and garments of anyone,' so one text states, 'it is to be washed with bull's urine and water.' She was confined to a special house, and it was a capital offense for anyone to have sexual relations with her. Influenced by the prominent Zoroastrian emphasis on ceremonial cleanliness during their exile in Babylonia, the Jewish priests established laws pertaining to menstruation similar to those that were common in Mesopotamia. Accordingly, the Torah declares a woman to be ritually unclean during her period and for a week afterward. (Phipps, 1980, p. 299)

Menstruation is not only a cause for keeping the purity of men intact, but to exclude women from religious practice, such as being banned from the temples in Jerusalem during this reproductive period (Phipps, 1980). We find that “...*physical danger, disgust, and concomitant fear are the principal markers of Jewish thought surrounding menstruation in all epochs except our own.*” (Steinberg, 1997, p. 11). Instead of menstrual blood and blood of birth symbolizing procreative capacities, they are associated with death (Eilberg-Shwartz, 1991). In Christian Eastern Orthodoxy, menstruation is a major reason for disallowing women to keep positions of authority in the Church, and some denominations disallow women from receiving communion or performing alter services during this period (Phipps, 1980). Dyonisius, a bishop from Alexandria in the 3rd century, was the first leader in Christianity to publicly voice support for restrictions against women menstruating, proclaiming his distaste for their coming to receive communion (p. 300). Outside of creating a multitude of gender disparities in society, this sanctioning of women during menstruation serves as a mechanism for profanation of the body, its natural processes and natural fluids. This general disgust towards bodily fluids, and an essential part of being a woman, serves to

profane female anatomy, in part from which *Cunt* derives its power. It's a combination of Core, Animal, and Moral disgust that targets the female biological form, supplemented by the designation of the body, and perhaps females at large, as a profane space, which *Cunt* ultimately relies on.

Part of this profanation of the female body comes with the age of patriarchal societies and the fall of the mother-goddess:

...celebrations of sexual union existed in the religions of ancient Crete, ancient Egypt, and the Indus Valley, as well as, in fact, in most parts of the ancient world. The goddess being impregnated and giving birth to new life was a logical and almost inevitable early metaphor for hunter gatherers and especially for agriculturalists, who depended on the fertility of earth for survival. And it is in this context that the depositing of the male seed in the womb or any plant seed in the ground would have been expressed metaphorically by way of such mythical figures as the god who pours out his life giving fluid and the dying and buried or "planted" god who returns in the spring. (Leeming, 2003, p. 104)

This can be likened to Pandora of Greek mythology, whose name means "gift giver" and was possibly an agriculture deity, as well as an example of a female-based fall from grace. The Biblical stories of Adam and Eve, as well as Samson and Delilah, represent two stories out of many where dominant males are seduced, and where the "femme fatale" has replaced the goddess of fertility (Leeming, 2003).

It was only the development of priestly law and early rabbinical condemnation of Canaanite religious practices that led to the repression of the popular worship among

the Hebrews of the goddess Asherah ("God's wife"), for example, in her many, often erotic, aspects. (p. 106)

The plight of women and sexuality has been a long struggle, and much of their troubles are owed to the cultural restrictions placed upon them by the rules of patriarchal religious dogma (Hunt and Jung, 2009). If not for the teaching that their bodies were impure and that they could, through natural processes, be a detriment to those around them, much of the inequality we witness through history may have been avoided. But religion offers restrictions by which they are to maintain the purity of their community and themselves.

The male body is not without its prohibitions either. Though it is not nearly subject to the restriction of the female body, there are some rules a man must follow, like not entering the temple if he has been wounded in the "stones" (Lev. 21: 20, Deu. 23: 1-2). Apart from not being able to enter the temple if your testicles hurt, a man must not spill his "seed" outside of a woman or interrupt coitus (Gen. 38: 7-10), or God will slay him. Lev. 15: 16-19 details cleansing restrictions for men and women who come in contact with "seed" which has been "spilled." Restricting what a man may do with his ejaculate restricts masturbation and bodily pleasure, things which distract from saving your body for God and the sacred afterlife. It also is symbolic of how Animal disgust of bodily fluids transforms into moral disgust with social conditioning. Outside of these passages, there is relatively little to do with male genitalia restriction as that seen in female menstrual sanctions. This patriarchal system utilized its power to diminish the role of women and enforce a multitude of sexual restrictions on their lives, while leaving the field relatively open to male domination. Women and female sexuality only serve as temptations to distract from full religious commitment.

However, despite all of the sexual restrictions on women, we find that men are allowed to keep many wives, as well as concubines. David had many concubines (Samuel (Sam.) 5: 13, 20: 3), Saul possessed one (II Sam. 3: 7), Rehoboam had 18 wives and 60 concubines, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (Kings (Kin.) 11: 3). It's amazing Solomon could find the energy to do anything else with such a harem. This point is made only to illustrate the imbalance in sexual restrictions, and how animal disgust of the body towards women creates cultural practices unfavorable to them, a skewed continuum of sexual infractions based on gender. Though men have created moral frameworks that lean in their favor, disgust towards the body still permeates through the basic moral teachings. Even with all of those concubines, sexual practices would have to be honored to maintain purity of the body and soul.

The naked body is also a symbol of profanity. The naked body is a cause for shame and humiliation, as seen in passages like II Sam. 6: 20:

Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself.

We also see this in Isaiah (Isa.) 20: 2-4:

At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon

Ethiopia; So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

Similar passages are found in Gen. 9: 22, Exod. 20: 26, I Sam. 19: 24, Ezekiel (Eze.) 16: 7, 36-39, Eze. 23: 10, 29, Hosea (Hos.) 2: 3, Habakkuk (Hab.) 2: 15, Revelations (Rev.) 16: 15 and Rev. 17: 16 . The body has become a cause for shame, something to be hidden to maintain respect. This serves as a separation from the animal kingdom, clothing is one of the things that distinguish us from other life forms. The fact that clothing might be a necessity for our species for survival in the elements with our ill adapted hides doesn't factor into their reasoning. Instilling that our bodies are cause for shame creates a motivation to maintain whatever possible purity through our actions to please the creator deity. Obscenities rely on this kind of emotional conditioning, the body must be cause for great negativity. Without the body having that charge, obscenities would not be obscenities, they would as emotionally impotent as saying "bicycle".

Even with all of these restrictions, sex leads a dual life outside of procreation. It is also used as a weapon. The Old Testament is awash in stories of rape. In Gen. 19: 4-8, Lot offers his daughters to the men of Sodom to "do ye to them as is good in your eyes." They originally wanted his two male visitors, angels. Here it is better to let this horrible attack happen to his own blood than to God's angels, which should conceivably be more powerful than his two young daughters. In Deu. 21: 10-14 the Israelites, with God's permission, are allowed to take beautiful women to make them their wives. They are given a month to mourn, at which time if they don't please their captors, they can simply be let go, not to be

sold because they've already been “humbled”. Judges (Jud.) 19: 22-29 tells of the sons of Belial, who rape and abuse a man's concubine for an entire night in substitution of his male house guest. When she returns in the morning, the man cut her up into 12 pieces and sent them to “all the coasts of Israel.” God even punishes David by raising up “*evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun*” (II Sam 12: 11-12). We find other passages involving rape in Numbers (Num.) 31: 17-18, Jud. 21: 14-23, Sam. 13: 1-14, Isa. 13: 15, and Eze. 23: 17. The context of rape in these passages is not the focus, it is the fact that a simple act used for procreation, a profaned act in the eyes of the pure, is used to profane and humiliate the bodies of others. Examples of sexual animal aggressiveness create a correlation between animal behavior and animal “acts” (aggressiveness and sex). Given what we know of animal disgust, and how that influences moral disgust, these passages serve as reinforcement to the idea that sex and the body are rich with impurity, and need regulations to preserve what sanctity they may still possess.*

Cartlidge (1975) credits 1 Corinthians 7 of the New Testament as the underlying premise for the Christian sex ethic. Paul ultimately prefers celibacy, however, he concedes that sex in marriage should be something that is expected (7: 2-5). He prefers that people be unmarried, but he does not call for people to divorce, rather, he suggests to remain as they are

*Of all the sexual references listed, two themes we will not be dealing with are incest and homosexuality (Lull 2007; Berliner 1987). Though there are many passages that involve incest (Gen. 4: 1-2, 17, Gen. 19: 30-38, Gen. 20: 12, Gen. 38: 16), one of notoriety being Cain and his “wife” (there was only Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel) bearing Enoch. Incest falls into dangerously taboo ground for many, however, as we see, both in the Bible and historically in European royalty, it's something that is given a little more leeway. For some this is an act high on the moral disgust scale, and given what we know about incest-related birth defects or complications, it is easy to see how today incest would be considered immoral, especially when concerning the health of the child. Homosexuality, though it almost occurs in passages mentioned above (Gen. 19: 4-8, Jud. 19: 22-29 for example), attitudes towards sexuality are based more on the prescription of sexual relations between men and women for the purpose of procreation (Gen. 19, Jud. 19, Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9, 1 TM 1:10, Gen. 1-2 and Mark 10:7-8) (Lull 2007). They are, however, of little use to the discussion of how animal and moral disgust in the Bible lend emotional charge when culturally conditioning attitudes towards obscenities.

at the time of his message. Sex within marriage is not a sin (7: 25-28a), but, “the body is not for fornication but for the Lord” (6: 13), and so the body must remain unsullied for the resurrection. This view is in part because Paul believed the Second Coming was imminent, and so he essentially sought to increase the chance for a sacred existence for Christ's return.

We need not psychologize unpsychological texts to see that, in this context of assumptions about the linkage of sexuality to a fallen creation and to male superiority, the only way that women and men could be 'liberated' was that they should become asexual...This, for Paul, is a liberation which must wait the eschaton. He does insist that, even in our sexuality, male dominance is not productive (1 Cor. 7:2). Paul's urging that sexual relations are expected in marriage is not a grudging admission; it is a reminder of the reality of the Corinthians' position, that is, 'not yet.' Paul still believes, however, that real liberation means asexuality. (p. 232)

Paul gives us a double edged sword. It may be that sex within marriage is not considered a sin, but if liberation of the soul means asexuality, then how do people reconcile their own mortality and afterlife if they are married, and have children? It would seem by this logic that even though one is not sinning when committing sexual acts, the fact that they committed the acts at all still counts against them in the afterlife. It creates a moral dilemma, and in the end it is hard to say where sex in this context lies among the sin continuum. If true salvation lies in celibacy, then it only adds a certain profanity to the act of sex, as it detracts from the sacredness of the body and soul.

Although the Bible generally advocates sex within marriage, whether sexual behavior can be raised to a spiritual level is open to interpretation and individual moral

structures. It is presumed that many Christians must either consciously or unconsciously ask themselves whether the body is inherently corrupt or can be regarded as a vehicle for spiritual experience within specific parameters, such as marriage. (Ullery, 2004, p. 79)

There was a sexual reinterpretation of passages concerning sex (such as the tales of Sodom and Gomorrah) due much in part to Saints Paul and Augustine, such that all sex for pleasure was considered profane (O'Neil, 1989). It was not any specific sex act that was profane per se, but the power of the flesh over an individual. Again we see more ways the body and its drives receive negative emotional conditioning, specifically integral to the taboo conditioning of *Fuck* and *Cunt*. It is engrained cultural attitudes exemplified by these passages that set the stage for obscenities to take over for religious forms of swearing, after the secularization of the West.

One last point to be addressed is how defecation is treated in the Old Testament. God, among other things, seems to like to make people eat feces out of vengeance. Malachi (Mal.) 2: 2-3 describes God's wrath of smearing dung on the faces of priests and in their food (feasts) if they do not give the proper glory to his name. A jealous God throwing a shit-fit, literally. We also find rules for fecal disposal, "*And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee: For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee*" (Deu. 23: 13-14). Feces would detract from the holiness, the sacredness, of the camp, and profane

the area where God would be walking. In Eze. 4: 12-13, God tells the Israelites they will eat dung in barley cakes, and that they shall eat it among the gentiles. Verses like these help to reinforce the idea that things which come out of the body carry the same profane qualities as the source they emerge from. As we've seen, Core and Animal disgust can be attributed to the negative charging towards feces. The use of feces in this way further lends negative emotional conditioning towards the body and its products, and here, specifically, to the charging of *Shit*.

In the King James Version of the Bible, from which much of these verses have been cited, there is an interesting term used for males. We find it in, among other verses, I Kin. 16: 11, "*And it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, that he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one that 'pisseth against a wall', neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends.*" This term, "pisseth against a wall", is not reoccurring through various translations of the Bible, but it does lend some negativity to the act of urination. Of all the ways to refer to males, it is strange that this one made the final cut. But with the previous references to how bodily fluids and defecation are viewed within the Bible, one might assume that this represents another stab at the animal qualities of the body. Given the negative context of the verse, it seems unlikely that this was humorous word play. More likely, although this is speculation, the wording serves as a reminder of animal profanity, to further degrade the residents in the house of Baasha. In other contexts it still serves as a degrading term, in that the reference is frequently ridding a certain target of offspring or any that pisseth against walls (Sam. 25: 22, 34, I Kin. 14: 10, 21: 22, II Kin. 9: 8). Though "piss" is not on our list of 3 words of which this thesis is focused on, it certainly made it onto

George Carlin's and TV censor's blacklists, which is indicative of the difference between prevailing attitudes towards the word when the King James Bible was written and modern society.

It is not simply the texts themselves that create taboos and the severity of taboos, but the culture that focuses on and enforces them. Especially in the context of swearing and obscenities, taboo words tend to go through peaks and trenches in terms of social acceptability. Disgust and religious dogma are only two factors that allow for the negative charge on obscenities (Beck, 2009); social reinforcement becomes the prevailing factor in sustaining taboos, and creating negative emotional charge around taboo words. Chapter 5 will demonstrate how these attitudes towards the body came to the forefront in influencing what words became obscenities by looking at how the Christian institution of the verbal taboo was enforced and changed with religious political influence. The focus will mainly be on the Puritanical interpretations of body and swearing taboos, and their influence on shaping legal frameworks of linguistic censorship. The laws against blasphemy and profanity instituted by the Puritans and other religious figures were upheld by the legal system in England, and that system found itself transported to America as the continent became colonized. Through this history it will become evident how the framework of moral disgust, rising from Christianity, still effects the American legal system today when concerning obscenity laws. We will see how disgust becomes the primary factor, whether core, animal, or moral, in deciding what acts and words are acceptable to spiritual sacredness and public good. Where obscenities are concerned, it is their degree of offensiveness in society that taboos them so, as for one to be offended essentially means that they are disgusted, on either

a sexual or moral level. One must consider *offense* as a principle when reviewing the nature of these words in the last 800 years. It is artifacts of the religious institution of avoiding verbal offense that makes the act of swearing taboo, while its attitudes towards the body provide the lexical content that help to fill the linguistic place-holder for taboo language in American English as obscenities.

Chapter 5: Linguistic Censorship by Church, Crown, and Law

Chapter 4 shows how religion provides both a symbolic and social structure for individuals to live by. As we've seen, morality is an attempt to minimize our exposure to disgust, whether it be towards our animal/mortal bodies or towards acts that are socially taboo. Religion and law were, and are, closely tied social structures that more or less dictate certain modes of behavior (Wallace, 1966). The last chapter outlined how disgust of the body translated into the body existing as a profane space. Restrictions on sexual and bodily function serve a purpose of negative emotional conditioning towards the body, creating taboos on bodily acts. For obscenities, there is one more integral biblical verse, the creation of the verbal taboo in Judeo-Christian religion:

Thou shall not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. (Exod. 20: 7)

The third commandment (in the King James Bible) serves as a pretense for the creation of swearing taboos in the Judeo-Christian context. *“Punishments are extremely severe in the Hebrew Bible, even including stoning, but the offense is more leniently viewed, as are all human failings, in the New Testament.”* (Hughes, 1991, p. 164). Swearing is a general term used in the literature to cover a multitude of socially negative utterances. Falling under that term are the genres of blasphemy, profanity, cursing, malediction, oaths, epithets, expletives, scatology, cussing, vulgarity, etc. Swearing represents a verbal commitment of taboo, and taboo has been around as long as the concept of the sacred and profane. One type of swearing, or oath can be found in the asseveration, declaring something by a binding oath. We find this in *By Zeus!* or *Pro Jupiter!* in ancient Greek and Latin writings (Echols, 1951). We hear this kind of oath with “so help you god” when we swear to

tell the truth in court. It's the invocation of a higher power to lend credence to our words: word magic. The reason for a commandment against swearing is a belief that words hold power, in these contexts, a metaphysical power (Jay, 2005). This is not entirely a thought born of the supernatural. Words can be “powerful” and move us in ways other forms of communication or experiences can't. We connect to and empathize with certain phrases, whether it is in the semantics or the prosody of a statement. This power is realized in taking a god's name in vain. If words hold special power over ourselves and the environment, then invoking a supernatural being through word only increases that power. The third commandment is telling the people to not invoke that power, and certainly to not involve God, in any negative or false statements, in order to preserve the sacredness of that being. We of course see this word-power invocation in the context of cursing as well (Jay, 1999). The Greeks and Romans were known to write curses down on tablets and bury them, or more commonly, throw them into water. In ancient Rome there were restrictions on where and when you could curse codified into Roman law (Wajnryb, 2005). The premise of cursing was based on faith, in the power of the gods to follow through on your curse, and it was seen as a weapon which was expected to have results in the concrete world. It is this same word magic that is involved in giving obscenities negative emotional power.

To understand where we are in the United States when it comes towards our attitudes towards swearing and obscenities, we have to look at how the cultural attitudes and laws towards blasphemies and profanities were shaped in Germanic culture, and eventually the British Empire. Because the cultures of England and America are so closely intertwined, our taboos are directly affected by the marriage of the church and the legal system during the

British Empire. Obscenities as we know them today are a relatively recent phenomena in terms of classification. *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* have seen a roller-coaster type acceptability in social circles, often leading a dual life between the higher and lower registers in English society (Hughes, 1991; Hughes, 2006). It can be seen as a duality of high and low, the sacred and profane: invoking a deity to threaten with a curse and below the belt body parts/functions to compound the insult (Hughes, 2006).

Part I: England

Swearing in English has seen a number of restrictions throughout its history, but it has also found circumstances in which to flourish. We find evidence that obscenities did not always carry the emotional weight that they do today in certain street names of England in the 13th century:

...the enticing (or monitory) appellation *Gropecuntlane*, dated 1230. Such public evidence, alongside the ubiquitous *Pissing Alley* and *Shitteborwelane*, a London street name of 1272, suggests that cunt must have been a publicly acceptable term.
(Hughes, 1991; 2006)

As mentioned in the introduction, *Cunt* could be found in the recorded names of certain individuals in the 13th and 14th centuries: “*Gunoka Cuntles (1219)*, *Bele Wydecunthe (1328)*, and even men's names such as *Godwin Clawecunte (1219)*, *John Fillecunt (1216)*, and *Robert Clevecunt (1302)*” (Hughes, 2006). Geoffrey Hughes (*Swearing*, and *An Encyclopedia of Swearing in English*) and Tony McEnry (*Swearing in English*) provide extensive accounts of swearing, swearing culture and swearing censorship throughout English history. Religious swearing was the focus of the day: curses, oaths, invocations.

What we've come to know as obscenities didn't even register on the radar, they were printed in public space.

When it comes to linguistic censorship through law, we must consider both the religious and political contexts of the time. It's easy to look back and try to apply current attitudes towards swearing and censorship, but it lacks an understanding of the motivations for certain legal restrictions. Not all linguistic sanctions are religiously based; some are constructed to institute religious and political repression, especially in the age of print and the English stage. As we look back through the history of swearing, we find that censorship is instituted with a number of motivations.

During the Old English period (500-1000 CE), laws indicate that swearing certainly seemed to be a problem, and fines were instituted to curb the behavior:

'If anyone in another's house calls a man a perjurer, or shamefully accosts him with insulting words, he is to pay a shilling to him who owns the house, and six shillings to him to whom he spoke that word, and to pay twelve shillings to the king.' (Law of Hlothhere and Eadric, kings of Kent [673-685?], no. 11).

(as cited by Hughes 1991, p. 43)

Northern England and Scotland provided stiffer penalties than in the south, which indicates that swearing was either more wide-spread or attitudes in the south were less conservative. In ancient Germanic society, virtue and reticence were much prized attributes, which swearing would ascertain neither. There was, however, a ritual form of taboo word play known as *Flyting* (Hughes, 1991; 2006; Wajnryb, 2005). *Flyting* was a provocative form of word play used in the royal courts, using harsh and scatological language (Hughes

1991). Flytings are considered especially surprising to appear in the Scottish courts, whose culture was strongly against profanity (Hughes, 2006). This word for ritual insults finds meaning in Old English as “to contend” or “strive” (Wajnryb, 2005). It finds its root in Old Norse *flyta*, reportedly restricted to heroic ambience, in this sense of provoking or enticing an opponent (Hughes, 1991). During this form of verbal sparring, such participants could include prominent philosophers, writers, actors of the day, as well as the King himself. Flyting survived in Scotland and Northern England into the Middle Ages, even as it had died out in the southern parts of the country. This is presumably because of the Norse influence in those northern areas (Hughes, 1991; 2006; Wajnryb, 2005). Even as swearing was sanctioned in the speech of the common people, the courts enjoyed rounds of swearing matches to prove intellectual and verbal flexibility. The use of scatological and sexual references were not only provocative, but they also resonate with the sexual and moral disgust provided in the Christian moral framework. Though swearing is preserved as an integral part of flyting competitions, it is still projected as something to avoid among the common people, thereby enforcing negative emotional conditioning towards sex and the body, and the act of swearing itself.

Henry I (1068- 1135) instituted a hierarchical scale of fines for swearing in the precincts of the royal residence: “*a duke, 40 shillings; a lord, 20 shillings; a squire, 10 shillings; a yeoman, 3s. 4d.; a page, a whipping*” (Hughes, 1991; 2006). Monetary compensation for swearing infractions is arguably a positive step up from stoning. It is also still during a period where *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* remain outside the group of words actually considered swearing. We see this in the works we draw from Chaucer. He is probably best

known for his work *The Canterbury Tales*, and in that work, uncensored, we find fart, shit, queynte (alt. spelling of cunt), and swive (equivalent of fuck; Hughes, 1991). If swearing or bodily slang were to be prohibited by law, then the use of these words indicates they, at that time, did not have the same emotional force that they do today. Hughes goes on to say:

As reformist impulses grew, the monolithic structure and the vocabulary of the Mother Church disintegrated. Consequently.....As the period developed, a major shift occurred in the form of an increased incidence of personalized 'swearing at', as against the more impersonal mode of 'swearing by'. This change brings into play a whole variety of new personal referents in swearing, which are entirely secular and which we now take for granted, such as age, stupidity, low status, meanness and uncleanness, conveyed in new emotive uses of words like old, fool, churl and lousy. (Hughes, 1991, p. 56)

This secularization is one of two waves in history that changes the swearing dynamic. We will see with the ebb and flow of religiosity and influence of the Church on the Crown, swearing too sees its practices and forms change with the times. This is where religious swearing starts its fall on the path to bodily or sexual swearing. The Protestant Reformation represents the loss of faith in the Catholic Church, and the division in the protestant branches spawned in later years. Throughout the 1500s, the split faiths were fond of calling each other *whores*, and “*from this seminal metaphor grew the legion of vitriolic terms denouncing spiritual perversion through words with strong sexual overtones, such as fornication, harlotry, sodomy, and carnality, as well as polymorphously perverse religious practices mutually denounced by rival sects as profanations, enormities, and abominations*” (Hughes,

1991, p. 96). This demonization of rival sects through sexual imagery only served to reinforce the emotional power of sexual terminology or slang, where as religious swearing decreased.

With the printing press, mass communication became possible in a way not previously achieved. In England, the Stationer's Company effectively ran a monopoly on the printing world, instituting its own brand of censorship, under the reign of Elizabeth I. Her framework would set the tone throughout her reign and the English Civil War. Her brand of censorship was aimed at suppressing publications against Elizabethan religious settlements (McEnry, 2006). The Stationers Company was joined by the Church Court of High Commission to enforce this censorship, which was logical for the time, as the church itself was a center for mass communication. Specific language was not the focus of censorship, only control of ideas that might be damaging to the Crown and Anglican Church. This system was imperfect however. The monarch was the final authority on censorship, but only 44% of printed works were officially authorized in the 1590s (McEnry, 2006). Whatever censorship of "bad" language that occurred, there has been no conclusive proof that the Crown was concerned with such matters, focusing more on Puritan dissemination of propaganda against the Crown and the recently established Church of England. In fact, the prominent agitators looking to censor bad language at the time of Elizabeth were the Puritans:

They found swearing, blasphemy and oaths offensive and sought promote legislation to enforce linguistic censorship; in an anonymous Puritan speech prepared for the 1584 session of Parliament, there was an unsuccessful call for the control of 'Idell

pamphletts & dire leud & wanton discourse of love of all languages leud'.

(McEnry, 2006, p. 56)

The Puritan movement gained no ground on this subject however, as they were effectively censored by the Crown. This may be in part to the fact that Elizabeth was known to utter oath's herself (Hughes, 1991). She instituted a Master of Revels in 1574 to pre-censor stage plays, however, there is no evidence that she sought to censor profane language, since she liked to partake. There was a bill introduced in 1601 to prohibit common swearing, but it failed on the floor, and only later in 1606 after the reign of Elizabeth was there any sanction against profanity, called the 'Act to Restraine Abuses of Players', where it was 10 pounds per offense for utterances against God or religious figures (Hughes, 1991; Mencken, 1944). The reign of Elizabeth is important to see the political and legal aspirations of the Puritans, though they and their linguistic censoring agendas were both repressed. Elizabeth, keen on swearing herself, would not have felt a lot of incentive to limit that type of speech, nor was she interested in the Puritan political agenda.

It is the reign of James I that we see a change in the political landscape, primarily from closer ties between the Crown and the Puritans (McEnry, 2006). One of James' first acts as King was to institute a mode of censorship through publishing companies against matters which cause much offense. It is this legislation and the act against the Abuses of Players which constituted the first recognizable sanctions against bad or offensive language. James' dealings with the Puritans was a political ploy to harness the support of their moderates, while not fully embracing some of their radical ideals. The Master of Revels along with the Church Court of High Commission proceeded to censor blasphemous

language from stage plays and print, sometimes overruling what the other would have allowed, and the government would frequently abuse this power to suppress publications on political, not moral, ground (McEnry, 2006). The censorship of offensive and blasphemous terms only serves to reinforce negative emotional conditioning towards tabooed subjects. Moral disgust becomes compounded when there are extra measures put forth to taboo them.

The Puritan Revolution represents an enormous multiplication of taboos; it is replete with negative attitudes; and it enlarges to infinite proportions the range of the concept of vulgarity.... The growth of taboos brought with it a vast flood of euphemisms.

Everyone is familiar with the breast of chicken sandwich which became a chest of chicken sandwich. While the word *pissoir* is boldly spelled out in Flanders, it becomes *W.C.* (a foreign language term) in France, or simply *Water* (pronounced 'vatair'); while in England it is very frequently a convenience. In this country it is a toilet, a lounge, a rest room, a comfort station. (Schnurer, 1941, p. 505).

This type of dysphemismal language represents culturally enforced censorship resulting from the Puritan efforts against swearing, attempts to avoid thoughts about the body and its functions. Those who refused to pay the fines for swearing, blasphemy or profanity would be sent to the stocks as punishment, if age 12 or younger a whipping sufficed (Hughes, 1991). A punishment on the books for uttering blasphemies was burning at the stake up until 1677, though the last recorded instance of that punishment being carried out was in 1612 (Hughes, 1991). The Puritans had been trying to wage a war against profane vocabulary since the 1560's, and after the death of Elizabeth, gained ground in this fight with James I (Mencken, 1944). Their fight would continue through the reign of James I to the

colonization of America. Censorship of “offensive” language was still interpreted rather broadly to include political commentary against the Crown or Crown allegiances, as well as political commentary via sexual allegory (McEnry, 2006). A more general prohibition on swearing came in 1623, resulting from Puritan pressures:

For as much as all profane Swearing and Cursing is forbidden by the Word of GOD, be it therefore enacted, by the Authority of the then Parliament, that no Person or Persons should from thenceforth profanely Swear or Curse, upon penalty of forfeiture one shilling to the use of the Poor for every Oath or Curse.

(as cited by Hughes, 1991, p. 105)

It may be from the Middle English period that we get the idea of the swear box, paying for our sin of swearing, passing on that tender to those who need it. It is this attitude towards swearing, this legal enforcement of a Biblical commandment against swearing, that further taboos the act, and sets the tone for linguistic censorship through Victorian England and America. As a result, minced oaths became common on the stage, toeing the line, mocking the law (Hughes, 1991). As we will see, this attitude towards swearing birthed a plethora of euphemistic language, going to certain extremes to avoid any kind of sexual imagery in public.

The rise of Puritan power in England found fuel for the fire in the First English Civil War. As the Puritans took up arms with Oliver Cromwell in 1642, they declared their enemies to be, along with the King, “*popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, and profaneness*” (Hughes, 1991; 2006; McEnry, 2006). There were harsh punishments for swearing, as documented by the treatment of a quartermaster named Boutholmey, who had

his tongue bore out with a red hot iron, his sword broken over his head, and was dismissed from the service (Hughes, 1991). The war against profanity was conducted on all fronts, as shipmates on Cromwell's *Ironsides* payed 12 pence for swearing (Hughes, 2006). In this time too, stage plays were banned from 1642 to 1660, as the stage “*offered alluringly decadent fare in the form of risque sexual intrigue, outrageous compromising situations, adultery, fashionable swearing, knowing innuendo, outright ribaldry, and seductive actresses*” (Hughes, 2006, p. 393). But the civil war created a breakdown in the censorship system, and many unlicensed works, some of which should have been censored for political reasons, made it through, especially in the case of the press (McEnry, 2006). Many presses were sought out and destroyed, and the Licensing Act of 1649 was created to help keep the rest of the presses in line, and in government interest. A year later, The Blasphemy Act of 1650 displays the Puritan moral influence and control on English culture. This act was created to re-instate some of the censorship infrastructure lost during the war, and while on its face it seems meant to suppress the sin of swearing and cursing (Hughes, 1991), it was also created to silence and censor non-government opinion and radical Protestant groups, such as the Ranters, who embraced swearing and free love, scandalizing the Cromwellian government and provoking the Blasphemy Act of 1650 (McEnry, 2006). The Ranters believed that the pure soul could not be tainted by impure actions, and so showed their purity through sex and swearing. The provisions of the Act made it illegal to:

1. Advocate drunkenness, adultery or swearing;
2. Claim that heaven, hell, salvation and damnation were one and the same;
3. Declare oneself to be God;

4. Declare that there was no difference between moral and immoral behaviour;
5. Deny the existence of God;
6. Deny the existence of heaven, hell, salvation and damnation.

(McEnry, 2006, p. 65)

These provisions were more politically motivated, and in the context of the time can be seen to target the Ranters' ideologies and behavior. However the first provision targets swearing, and certain sexual behavior directly. Again, this targeting serves to empower the taboo status of both sex and swearing in its attempt to institute Puritan morality, who viewed swearing and sex as “evil” or “foul” (Hughes, 2006). Again we see the language of disgust. This Act only prohibited swearing or the denial of god's existence in public. Presumably one could swear and say there is no god in the privacy of their own home, and there is no evidence that there were ever any such witch hunts into the private sphere. The Act was focused on suppressing radical non-governmental entities, with the Ranters specifically in mind. Linguistic censorship of bad or offensive language was most heavily pushed by the Puritans from the period of Elizabeth to Cromwell. The government, however, seldom censored the press and plays with bad language in mind. Censorship still was primarily a means of suppressing radical or anti-governmental groups and ideas. This meant that while certain threats to the government were not linguistic entities, they could be suppressed by claiming they used offensive language; persecution for using bad language was the exception instead of the norm, peer pressure being the main force in dealing with wrong doings day-to-day (McEnry, 2006).

After the Restoration, the stage was reopened by Charles II, and with it came much of the language “of the street”, subjects and language that were sure to offend the more conservative members of society. A response grew to this in the form of religious societies, whose focus was to do away with swearing and “irreligiousness,” which included a number of other vices such as pride, envy, prostitution, and drunkenness (McEnry, 2006). Religious practice or adherence seemed to be on the decline, and these groups, with the support of the church, actively sought out sin and punishment. One such group, the Society for the Reformation of Manners (SRM), formed around 1691, specifically hunted down those breaking morality laws and encouraged law enforcement to apply the law or punishments (McEnry, 2006). Part of why this enforcement became so militant was the view of the SRM that God and the Devil were forever locked in combat, to aid God was to commit good deeds on Earth, and to use bad language, among other activities, was to aid the Devil. The SRM was aware of the laws they could utilize in these prosecutions, and used the legal system to carry them out, approximately 101,683 prosecutions by 1738 (McEnry, 2006).

Around the same time the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) formed, aiming to wrestle with the same issues of the SRM, but using a different approach of trying to work at the root, rather than the manifestation of vice, through education (McEnry, 2006). Though their tactics differed, these two organizations worked very closely together, sharing both information and members. In the 1720s, the SPCK developed charity schools aimed at teaching and establishing a social hierarchy: poor children were taught dutiful humiliation and obedience to superiors, middle class children were taught their moral superiority and imposing their middle class moral agenda on the children of the poor.

Children were taught to recite, by heart, relevant sections of Acts of Parliament relating to acts such as blasphemy (McEnry, 2006). These schools provided a framework that impacted British classroom education even to this day, and presumably, classroom education in early America. It's possible that a societal change in attitudes towards swearing may have arisen from the formation and education of the charity schools run by religious societies. While the SPCK has survived, the SRM began to fade out through the 1730s. The SPCK has survived to this day, along with its intent on moral reform.

With the coming of the Victorian Age came the moral framework from the religious societies; negative attitudes towards bad language that have been taught for into the 21st Century (McEnry, 2006). These attitudes led to one of the greatest eras of euphemisms, as words that could be considered offensive or denoted offensive traits were avoided, spawning something so comical as *inexpressibles for trousers* (Hughes, 1991). As in the past, swearing in this age lived a sort of dual life. It was flourishing outside of public earshot. It is also in this time period that we find *obscene* and *obscenity* being used to refer to things that are “lewd,” “disgusting,” “filthy,” and “indecent,” as the pope could refer to private parts as “obscene parts” around 1725 (Hughes, 1991). The nature of swearing had been changing over the past few centuries, as Hughes puts it:

Swearing in religious terms increased from medieval to Victorian times in direct proportion to the decline of the Church as a major force in Western society, while the corresponding increase in the currency of sexual swearing seems to reflect the liberation from inhibitions traditionally suppressing the sexual drive and direct reference to it....people swear by what is most potent to them. Hence, the decline in

religious swearing in Protestant societies reflects the decline of the influence of the Church. (Hughes 1991, p. 249)

Gradually, *Fuck* was replacing *Damn* in usage, and *Piss* had taken on a much higher taboo status than it previously enjoyed, boosting it to the level of obscenity some recognize it at today (McEnry, 2006). *Fuck* was used much more prevalently without the severe connotations we understand it to have at present. Victorians were aware there were two worlds of swearing: between the rich and poor, between the impoverished and the wealthy (Hughes, 2006). And yet there was a great amount of energy put into promoting a public face of decency, the euphemistic terminology continued to expand to avoid the use of any word that might create sexual thoughts or lust. The term chicken breast took on the new label “white meat,” and the public standards of decency went so far as to have piano “legs” covered (Solomon et al., 1999). Similar requirements went for tables, in an attempt to prevent one from associating those legs with a pair of human legs and what falls in between. Human legs were to be referred to as “crossers” (Hughes, 1991). One does have to wonder whether trying to cover piano and table legs does in fact reduce the number of associations with human legs.

But more to the point, this excessive repression of swearing and sexuality, with its vast spawning of euphemisms, also lent greater negative charge to obscenities, in the way we know them today. There was a colorful variety of slang that accumulated during this time, some of which are just fun to say. *Piss-burned* for *discolored*, *fartleberries* for *excrement that hangs around the anus*, *shitting-through-the-teeth* for *vomiting*, *beard splitter* for *a man much given to wenching*, *duck-fucker* for *a man in the care of the poultry on a ship of war* (as

cited by Hughes, 1991). Whatever linguistic morality was being preached by certain sects of society, there are slang usages and euphemisms that, given the right context, could be far more offensive than *Fuck*, *Shit*, or *Cunt* alone. Some of them are far more complex in the concepts they tie together, and as such could carry more weight emotionally, especially if a word like *Fuck* didn't carry the emotional weight that it does today. The expansion of swearing occurred later in the Victorian period, but like so much of 'underground' society, decorum suppressed, at least in some public sense, these modes of behavior.

Part II: America

The British, as an extension of their Germanic roots, were well known for their swearing habits, and that tradition travelled with them to the Western Hemisphere. Over time, Americans carried on with tradition, and soon became well known for their swear-peppered speech as well. The Puritans that colonized the Eastern seaboard brought with them their 'plain speech' and their morals which demanded linguistic restraint, to avoid swearing, blasphemies, and profanations.

In America, the sparse 'plain speech' of the Puritans, and even the more attenuated speech style of the Quakers of Pennsylvania with their insistence on truth and sincerity, can be seen as a reaction against Restoration dandyism, foppishness and decadence.....The model of 'plain speech' also retains, curiously, the sober dignity and reticence so admired as an ideal in Anglo-Saxon times. Particularly is the Quaker emphasis on Christ's words in Matthew v. 34, 'Do not swear at all' and their consequent refusal to utter or take any oath, even those required by legal procedure. (Hughes, 1991, pp. 164-165)

With the decline of the power of the Church with the Reformation, religious swearing lost its edge, and through the Victorian period, the sexual swearing that replaced it too began to, at least in some form, meet censorship or repression. A decay in the legal concepts of blasphemy made little resistance to profanities, and so American swearing was primarily based around obscenities (Hughes, 1991; 2006). America, being under Crown rule, was subject to Crown law, and even with some of their local laws, was still functioning culturally similar to their Motherland counterparts. It is through our separation from England and transition to the Modern Era, our progressive secularization and the resistance to it, that we see modern concepts of obscenity and swearing acceptability take shape.

There has always been a resistance to swearing, even some of our founding fathers went to certain lengths to stigmatize those who did. In 1775, John Adams was assigned to draw up rules and regulations for the Navy by the Continental Congress, which authorized commanders to punish '*profane and blasphemous*' sailors by making them wear a wooden collar or '*some kind of shameful badge*'; George Washington issued an order that deplored '*the wicked practise of profane swearing and cursing*' (as cited by Mencken, 1944, p. 245). Mencken also chronicles one of the religious societies which formed in England and transported itself to America, the Holy Name Society, whose main focus was the fight against blasphemy, though they later increased their focus on the devotional aspects of religion. The frameworks for today's obscenity laws were transported with the blasphemy laws of England, but only in the 20th century did obscenities acquire an identity separate from politics and violent behavior (Gordon, 2000).

Religion and the American legal system, though in theory are supposed to remain separate entities, drew much from each other in the early years of the American legal system. With the Christian tradition, the power of the word factored heavily into their interpretation of Blasphemy laws and protection of the right to free speech and free religion. As Gordon puts it:

Failure to punish blasphemy would compromise the integrity of the sworn oaths of legal witnesses, which were required by statute to be based on 'laying the hand on and kissing the gospels.' Vilification of the gospels was in this sense an attack on the moral foundation of law. (Gordon, 2000, p. 686)

She goes on to say that by the 1830s, “*American blasphemy law validated the theory that the liberty created by words of power could flourish only if shielded by law from corrosive licentiousness.*” (Gordon, 2000, p. 693). Though prosecutions may have been uncommon, they became arguments for morality and moral use of speech freedoms. This argument comes deeply seeded in the belief of the power of the word, word magic, and the Christian morals that influenced the development of the country. It follows that, as some argue today, the curbing of offensive or inciting speech preserves the integrity of social and governmental processes, thus ensuring the liberties promised by the constitution, or “god-given” rights.

...good government enacted the will of God, coloring those who resisted reformation with the distinctive tint of anti-Christianity. The protection of the Word against vulgar and obscene words was also a means of hoisting the law out unfeeling technicality and desiccated formalism. (Gordon, 2000, p. 702).

In 1821, Vermont passed this country's first statute prohibiting the publication or distribution of obscene materials, and by the mid 1800s, the American legal system had moved towards declaring sexually explicit materials illegal (Zelezny, 2011). In 1873, a law was passed that changed the nature of the focus on legal sanctions against swearing, more in line with what we are familiar with today. The Comstock Act appointed postmasters to seize and inspect mail that they deemed to be obscene or indecent (McGarry, 2000; Hughes, 2006). This was the first instances of governmental censorship on a large scale, and the definition of obscenity was expanded to include printed material, and criminalized the circulation or advertising of information concerning contraception and abortion (McGarry, 2000). As McGarry puts it:

Comstockery was structured by the fear of (and fascination with) sexualized information and images traveling out of cities, spreading into hinterlands and across state lines, and bringing a contaminated public culture into the sanctity of the private sphere. Moral reformers, like Comstock, waged war to keep the vices of the streets removed from 'proper' homes, at a historical moment when such homes supposedly needed protection and buttressing...by 1885, 24 states had 'little Comstock laws' on the federal statute. (McGarry, 2000, p. 18)

This generated fear created additional negative emotional conditioning towards swearing, sex, and the body. From McGarry's statement we can see the language of disgust and supernatural belief permeate through the central theme: "*bringing a contaminated public culture into the sanctity of the private sphere.*" The Comstock Act can be seen as a response to an increase in swearing after the Civil War, when swearing practices came home with the

soldiers after the war. Attitudes of the day can be seen illustrated in the writings of Edwin Whipple (1885). Whipple describes profanity as an infectious disease, "*It spreads like the measles, the scarlet fever, and diphtheria; and ten miles of space cannot preserve his own little innocents from the contagion*" (p. 538). He views swearing and profanity as a means of uneducated men with limited vocabularies to express themselves, a problem of the lower class, which saps the innocence or sanctity of the children who are brought up in the household speaking it, "*who are educating themselves in that self culture which may eventually which may eventually lead them to the penitentiary or the gallows...*" (p. 537). He goes on to say:

It does not require any deep sense of religion in the man that threads his way through a group of these infantile tramps, these childish ruffians, spawned on the sidewalk before their wretched habitations, to feel a thrill of horror, as he hears the oaths that spontaneously leap forth in their little shrill voices. Well, they have been born and brought up in households in which the 'wet damnation' of bad whiskey in the stomach has found its appropriate expression in the hot damnation of execrations rushing to the lips. (Whipple, 1885, p. 537)

Whipple's statements represent an attitude passed down by the Puritan forefathers. Swearing as an evil entity, corrupting the moral health of any individual who partakes, or is in earshot (Feinberg, 1983). The language of disgust labels the children who swear as degenerates, whose speech can strike fear into any passerby. These attitudes remained relatively stable until after the First World War. We can see this incremental change in acceptance in *The Comfort of Cussing* by E. Maclean Johnson. Johnson makes a distinction

between those who swear to vent emotion as opposed to a more profane type of speaker who peppers their speech with swear words, making them “chiefly responsible for the stigma of reproach that attaches to the practice.” He even goes on to criticize the Puritanical attitude towards swearing by attacking it at its source:

The passions of those who will not swear sour within them and poison the very springs of their nature. The diabolical disposition of our Puritan forefathers is directly ascribable to the fact that they dammed the natural channels of their feelings. Instead of getting rid of their cussedness, they kept it stored up within themselves. Hence their gloomy faces, their crabbed outlook upon life, their kill-joy practices. The stocks, the ducking stool, the whipping post? These were the devious ways through which their thwarted emotions sought expression. (Johnson, 1928, p. 187)

Johnson expresses the effectiveness, and necessity of swearing, and its role in humanity, even calling it “the nearest approach we have to a universal language.” Effectively, the universal language of emotion. And in Johnson's view, this emotion needs an outlet, a sincere one. He acknowledges that some try to euphemize or substitute swear words with more harmless invectives, “Bats and Black Beetles!” or “Cats and Kingfishers!”, but these show “...a lamentable lack of acquaintance with the art of swearing and its underlying psychology...” (p. 188). Long before we had the technology to see that swearing is activated in the emotional centers of the brain, it was recognized that swearing provided some emotional relief, that it served a purpose. It is during this time that we see the definition of obscenity become rather broad, where works that held educational merit, or works that were previously uncensored, came under attack. In 1927, further sale of the previously printed

books *Elmer Gantry* by Sinclair Lewis and *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Deiser would be deemed grounds for obscenity charges (Zelezny, 2011). We also find linguistic restrictions with the advent of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Legislation from 1927 states “Whoever utters any obscene, indecent, or profane language by means of radio communication shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years, or both (18 U.S.C. 1464). The FCC was specifically empowered to prosecute under this statute in the 1934 Communications Act (Zelezny, 2011). Since this time the public airwaves have been subject to linguistic sanctioning of what would be considered offensive language.

The aforementioned attitude held by Johnson did not sit well with Christian Conservatives. In 1930, Will Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA) found himself pressured by the Catholic Church to censor “immoral” films that were destroying the moral fiber of America (Black, 1989; Jay, 1999). Hays set up the Production Code Administration (PCA), whose code was written by a Catholic priest, to create a form of self-censorship within the industry. Scripts had to be approved by the PCA, and production could not start without a seal of approval by that entity. The MPPDA (which later became the Motion Picture Association of America) could level a \$25,000 fine against violators of the production code. The church pressured the MPPDA, to which they obliged, to remove from circulation any film the church deemed to be “immoral,” and to empower local theater owners to cancel any showing of those films (Black, 1989). Heading the PCA was a staunch Catholic named Joseph I. Breen. The Church had effectively helped to create an industrial form of self-censorship, where the monopolized industry conformed to the Churches ideas of morality, and could legally enforce those violations of the code through

hefty fines. This administration would hold censoring powers over a majority of the films made in the United States from 1930-1968. Because the country was in a state of civil unrest during the 1930s, it is apparent that the industry sought to control the messages and concepts being relayed through this new form of entertainment, and accounts, for lack of a better phrase, the linguistic sterility we find in films from the 1930s to the late 1950's. Themes that weren't to be touched were revenge in modern times, illegal drug traffic, sex perversion, excessive and lustful kissing, embracing and suggestive postures, pointed profanity (God, hell, Jesus Christ, damn, S.O.B.), or other profane and vulgar expressions (Hughes, 1991). We do find a breach in the code in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), with Rhett Butler's line "Frankly, dear, I don't give a damn," but Breen was otherwise known to follow a strict adherence to the Production Code. As we have seen over the years, whatever ethics and morals were trying to be instilled with the Production Code, censorship has fallen by the wayside, to the point of almost unrestricted language usage in the movies. This shift in practices largely has to do with the advent of broadcast television in 1939, whose own prohibitive codes were more strict than that of the film industry against nudity, profanity, and immorality (Hughes, 1991). As audience numbers began to fall in the cinema, the movie code became looser and looser to compete with the national television audience. Television was tailored to the family audience, and subject to censoring demands of their advertisers, and so the film industry saw an opportunity to make adult oriented films. This is why television still has an in-house department called "Standards and Practices" to censor their material so as not to lose funding from advertisers, whereas the film industry isn't subject to the same kinds of funding restrictions.

It is the 1940s and after that we see another surge of swearing in American culture. Accounts of the time period indicate that the rate of swearing was on the rise, or at least seemed more commonly public. In Schnurer's essay *On Vulgarity* (1941), he comments that in the events of “*the world wars and the collapse of lassaiz faire.....even the sternest of moralists will tolerate expressions and gestures which would have seemed utterly distasteful twenty years ago,*” (p. 506), but that the middle class still finds swearing and vulgarity repulsive, a sign of weak morals or lower class status. Again this suggests that there was a relative surge in swearing in a tumultuous era affected by wars and depression, and that there was even becoming a certain desensitization of the people to the practice, or at least being more passive to swearing in public than society would have been at an earlier time. As with the Civil War, the World Wars, in their aftermath, saw huge swaths of soldiers returning with a vocabulary that would make those in Whipple's time feel a “thrill of horror”. It is then that we find a derivative of one of the words on our list poking its head into mainstream American vocabularies, *mother fucker*. With the desegregation of the army, aspects of black vocabulary found its way into that of their white counterparts, and *mother fucker* made a lasting impression in a time where obscenity was back on the rise after a long period of puritanical restraint (Hughes, 2006). As noted in Hughes (1991), the second World War played a role in the acceptability of slang and swearing, following the historic ebb and flow of swearing acceptability and linguistic repression in periods of war and times of peace.

The 1950s mark the early formation of American Obscenity Laws as we know them today. The case of *Roth v. United States* (1957) denotes the point where the courts began to get involved in defining obscenity (Zelezny, 2011). Though prosecutions for obscenity were

uncommon, the right of the courts to prosecute it had been remained unquestioned via Title 18 Section 1461, making it illegal to distribute obscene matter through the mail and *Alberts v California*, a state prosecution against selling obscene publications (Friedman, 1983).

Samuel Roth had been convicted in 1955 in California for distributing obscene publications such as *Photo and Body*, *Good Times*, and *American Aphrodite Number Thirteen*, among others, which was upheld by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals (Friedman, 1983). The Supreme Court was faced with the question of whether or not the Federal Government had the right to suppress obscenity, or could otherwise allow the most obscene material imaginable. The defense attorney argued that as it were, obscenity statutes in California regarded any book that could arouse sexual thoughts was to be considered bad or obscene, and that classifying something as obscene should be more narrowly focused to publications that promoted a certain sexual conduct in the populace (Friedman, 1983). The court decided that obscenity was indeed unprotected by the 1st amendment, and went on to create the first constitutionally born definition of obscenity, narrowly defined as hard-core sexual material utterly without redeeming social value (Zelezny, 2011). This was in stark contrast to the broader definition used by the states that incorporated any material considered sexual or creating sexual thoughts. This definition however, could be extended to distribution of sexually explicit materials to willing adult audiences. Though this case did not deal with spoken obscenity specifically, it helped institute the framework by which obscenities would be classified.

As the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War were underway, obscenities were thrown into the forefront of the public consciousness by early anti-war and anti-

authoritarian rhetoric. Movements like the Hippies and Flower Children openly disagreed with and violated the traditional family values and middle class decency propagated throughout early American society. This included open sexuality, taking drugs, and freedom from “bourgeois” restraint (Hughes, 1991). We can see this in anti-establishment slogans like “Fuck the Pigs!” or “Fuck the Draft!”, a common rant in altercations between the liberal movements and the upholders of the status quo. In *Cohen v. California* (1971), a man was convicted for wearing a jacket that said “Fuck the Draft” in court, only to have his conviction later overturned 5-4 in an appellate court (Hughes, 1991). Even though the phrase may have been considered unseemly by many at the time, it surely did not constitute a purely hard core sexual references. Obscenity as a political force was a tactic used by radical students at Berkley, so called the Filthy Speech Movement, successor of the Free Speech Movement (Hughes, 1991). This was a time where public and legal attitudes towards obscenities and swearing were beginning to lax.

There were two Presidential Commissions of note formed to determine whether or not obscenity had harmful effects on society and whether it warranted restriction. Zelezny (2011) outlines these commissions: The first was called the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography published in 1970, which spent \$2 million on research, and concluded that there was no evidence that exposure to sexually explicit materials was a cause of delinquent or criminal behavior, recommending a repeal on the legislation that banned the sale and distribution of sexual materials to consenting adults, which was never followed. It did agree with the prohibitions on public display and unsolicited mail, however. The second would come in 1985 under Reagan, called the Attorney General's Commission on

Pornography, which found the almost exact opposite of the first commission, that sexually explicit materials (that are violent) lead to more aggressive attitudes towards women and *probably* lead to higher incidences of sexual violence. It is charged by critics, however, that the head of this commission, General Edwin Meese, had sought to determine pornography harmful from the beginning. He had a quarter of the money available to the first commission, and used criticized methods like holding public hearings, examining explicit films and magazines, and visiting adult bookstores, not studying their effects. Its recommendation, however, was to actively seek prosecutions for violators of obscenity and distribution laws (Zelezny, 2011).

During the 1970s swearing and obscenities seemed to be at an all time high, and in the following next few years two more major court cases would help make a final determination by legal tests that would determine if speech would be considered obscene or not. The first is *Miller v. California*, where Miller was convicted of distributing obscene advertisements, primarily consisting of pictures and drawings of men and women engaging in sexual activities. However, the tests derived from this hearing set the bar for spoken obscenity as well as imagery. The courts were aware of the dangers of banning any mode of expression and its 1st Amendment consequences, and so they defined a set of tests that narrowly scoped obscenity to a set of guidelines that must be satisfied:

- (a) Whether “the average person, applying contemporary community standards” would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest.
- (b) Whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law.

(c) Whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

To break down some of the language, prurient interest describes material that only was intended to create lewd, or otherwise “unwholesome” thoughts about sex, healthy sexual desire does not fall in this category (Zelezny, 2011). Contemporary community standards was included in the language because the court acknowledged that “*to require a State to structure obscenity proceedings around evidence of a national community standard would be an exercise in futility*” (as cited by Zelezny, 2001, p. 215). Patently offensive material is defined by the courts as “*representations or depictions of ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated, masturbation, excretory functions, and lewd exhibition of genitals*” (Zelezny, 2011, p. 455). This is where we come to define *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* as obscenities, but of course, only in their literal translations. Figurative speech doesn't fall into this category. Phrases like “Fuck you!” are still banned under legal sanctioning of “Fighting Words,” but the label of obscenity, as we might understand it today, arises from the defining tests cultivated in *Miller v California*.

The last defining case in Obscenity law which made a mark on the legal system comes as a result of a George Carlin piece played over the airwaves, which analyzed in a semi-linguistic way obscene, indecent, and vulgar expressions in English. The piece was called “Seven Words You Can't Say on Television” on his 1972 album *Class Clown*, in which Carlin examines language which definitely couldn't be used on broadcast TV. His list includes “Piss, Shit, Fuck, Cunt, Cocksucker, Motherfucker, and Tits,” and can still be found on the broadcasting blacklist today. This monologue was played at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday by

radio station WBAI in New York (Hughes, 1991), on a program examining current societal linguistic attitudes. A warning about strong language was broadcast at the beginning of the program before it commenced, but a man with his son listened to the broadcast while driving in the car, and proceeded to listen to the entire monologue as it examined the usage of these words and the silliness of societal attitudes towards these sound strings. The man complained to the FCC, and the owner of the station, Pacifica Foundation, was brought to court. The outcome of the case was defining a new subsection of restricted language, *indecenty*, based on a nuisance rationale- a time/place/manner restriction- in which context was the defining characteristic in designating language as indecent or obscene (Zelezny, 2011; 2001). *FCC v Pacifica Foundation* (1978) set in stone the narrow definition originally developed by the Miller case. Obscenities were only obscenities within a literal context. The usages Carlin adhered to were considered indecent because they didn't quite fit all of the requirements in defining obscenities: they didn't, as a whole, appeal to prurient interest, they didn't describe sexual conduct in a patently offensive way, and the work did hold some artistic, political, and perhaps linguistically scientific value, in terms of semantic analysis. These words that may have otherwise been considered obscenities quickly became downgraded to simple indecencies, based on the context of their utterances. While the recording was considered suitable as a private indulgence for consenting adults, its airing on the publicly owned radio waves made it a problem, as impressionable children could be in the listening audience. Today, for one to play this kind of material, it must be from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., when children are likely not to be listening (Zelezny, 2011). Indeed, indecenty has perhaps become a more problematic issue in linguistic sanctioning, where people like

Howard Stern or Bill Maher have lost their jobs for “indecent” comments on the air, or the Parental Advisory stickers now required on albums with profane or sexual language thanks to the efforts of the Parents Music Resource Center, founded in 1985, who wanted more parental control over access of children to music parents might find obscene or indecent.

All of the legislation aimed at censoring obscenities has evolved and descended from a religious framework of verbal taboo restriction. Such legislation innately upholds and reinforces religious ideals of morality and word magic, of sacred and profane space, of disgust towards the body and moral impurity. Their censorship, making them forbidden, lend them more power than can be attributed to their utterance and repetition. As the course of history has shown, prohibition seldom gets rid of the problem. We saw this in the 1920s with alcohol, we see this today with the war on drugs, and it has been painfully obvious that despite all of the attempts of the religious culture from Medieval England to present day America, that swearing is an engrained part of society, indeed, part of humanity. Its ebb and flow through peace and war, its marked increase in usage in post-war society, and its recent flourishing within the telecommunication age makes it clear that these forms of emotional expression have deep roots. Swearing has taken many forms, as evidenced by the legislation created to curb it, and though our frameworks for swearing have moved from a profane and blasphemous focus in England to a focus on obscenities in America, the frameworks to sanction them have in large part remain un-evolved. Their main focus is moral integrity, preserving sacred space, and assume that there can be none where taboo words are present; maintaining the sanctity of the soul and the family or communal space by outlawing taboo emotional utterances, profane by their very nature. At their base, they embody the idea that it

is their right or God's will that they not be offended or disgusted. This is the substantive argument against obscenities, indecencies, vulgarities, profanities, blasphemies, oaths, swearing, cursing, cussing, etc. People feel they have a right not to be exposed to things that offend them, to be morally disgusted, in the public space. The history of linguistic censorship through Anglo-American existence, and indeed any culture that prohibits certain utterances, is based primarily on a need to maintain a feeling of sanctity, to cleanse the profane space of things that are bad or offensive, and as we've seen, the language of disgust is primarily associated with the sexually and morally offensive aspects of our society. Obscenities could have never risen to the top of the taboo word tower had there been no legal and religious enforcement of censorship against modes of swearing. Our laws and religions have, in effect, profiteered by creating the obscenities they seek to repress.

Conclusion

At present, obscenities, along with being the most unique words, may be the most complex words in the American English Lexicon. They have required an extensive history of emotional conditioning, supernatural belief, and linguistic censorship to be able to achieve the taboo status they currently hold. We are hard pressed to find other words in our language that stir such emotion and controversy in our society, that so unambiguously relay emotional content and meaning, and that can be used so fluidly through the syntax and semantics. American respondents rate *fuck*, *shit*, and *cunt* as the most offensive words in American English (Jay, 1999), but in today's time it may be more appropriate simply to rate them as the most emotionally evoking. Each of these words can be used in both spheres of ultimate positivity and ultimate negativity. We can use them to distance ourselves from others or make each other feel closer. As well as being the most complex in their social evolution of taboo conditioning, at least one of these words may be the most versatile. *Fuck* can be derived as a noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, interjection, expletive, intensifier, infix, and conjunction. Its emotional force may have only been rivaled historically in the British English emotional cognate *bloody*, which garnered the same reactions as *fuck* does today (Hughes, 1991). It is interesting that our linguistic capacity allows for this fluidity with these emotional lexemes, and it seems that it is only these words, on which so much emotional conditioning has been focused, that are capable of such feats (though some euphamisms mimic this versatility: 'freaking,' 'flipping,').

Taboo Lexeme Conditioning explores the general factors at work which allow for this emotional conditioning during lexical acquisition by utilizing Timothy Jay's framework set

forth in the Neuro-Psycho-Social theory of Swearing (1999). *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* were chosen to example the processes necessary for taboo lexeme conditioning, but also to show how those words fill a space for emotional vocalizations in the emotional brain. Taboo words, first and foremost, rely on supernatural belief to wield their power, faith in the power of words, word magic. The idea of taboo does not exist without a prior infrastructure of the sacred and profane established, for without the profane there can be no taboos. Our taboos are defined most essentially by what disgusts us, either through disgust of our own bodies, or moral disgust at taboo violations. Superstitious institutions are what help define and socially reinforce those taboos, which both reinforce disgust towards the body and taboo violation. In the case of American Obscenities, this required both the social and legal adoption of Christian values that enforce a framework of linguistic censorship towards swearing, and that designate the body as a profane space. This combination of censorship based on word magic and body profanation eventually lead to the emotional charging of these sexual bodily terms, power-swapping with religious swearing terms as the influence of the Church decreased in English/American society. Of course, it has to be said that none of these words would be able to exist as they do without our brains coming pre-wired to process and produce emotions. Our limbic systems give us the ability to create emotional vocalizations, and somehow it has become entangled with our linguistic capacity. This has allowed for our most emotional (and offensive) words to be vocalized when our brains may be otherwise unable to process or produce any other intelligible language. It should follow, then, that other humans speaking other native languages, with the right circumstances of supernatural belief, emotional conditioning, and social reinforcement, will also have words that are highly

taboo to their culture in their lexicon. And indeed, this is what was found in the research regarding bilingual speakers, “swear” words in their native language activated the amygdala, and were considered more emotional, than words in a second language (Dewaele, 2004; Harris et al., 2006; Pavlenko, 2008). Some languages may in fact not have “swear words” in a strict sense, but they almost certainly have words that are considered highly taboo. Each culture defines sacred and profane space in their own way, and the morality structure set up around those spaces should be indicated in taboo words.

Chapter 2 set out to identify what brain structures were responsible for the processing and production of obscenities during lexical acquisition and taboo utterances. Its main point was to differentiate how swear words are processed in contrast to language used in propositional processes. Jay's NPS theory identifies the amygdala, basal ganglia, and Right Hemisphere as activating during a swearing event. A review of linguistic processing and limbic function was provided to expand on the neurological part of the theory and provide support for *Hypothesis 1*:

During lexical acquisition, obscenities are initially stored in the lexicon through the short term/long term memory function of the hippocampus; only after repeated negative emotional feedback do we learn that obscenities are taboo, via the semantic processing of the basal ganglia, and the emotional memory function of the amygdala.

Support was provided for this claim on a number of counts. Jay (1999) finds that children as early as one year are able to produce swear words, but when they acquire them, they don't assign the emotional value to them that adults understand them to have. Only through a process of emotional conditioning do these words eventually gain their negative

charge. This is supported by the dual-route model of word processing, where swear words are processed along the amygdalar-hippocampal pathway and non-emotional words are processed via the hippocampal-prefrontal pathway (Jay, 2008; Jay and Janschewitz, 2007; Kensinger et al., 2003). The hippocampus would have to treat these words as normal phonological strings upon an individual's introduction to them. Only through repeated emotional feedback can a child learn that these words are considered bad. Emotional and prosodic processing are a property of the basal ganglia, which has a direct connection to the amygdala. This emotional conditioning may register with the amygdala, assign emotional content to the phonological string, and store that lexical chunk into emotional memory. The emotional memory and vocalization properties of the amygdala are what are activated during the utterance of these taboo lexemes. Because Jay finds contradictory research in the linguistic brain function lateralization of Japanese speakers in Tsunoda (1985), it's hard to push for a theory that definitively implicates the RH in taboo word processing and production. The case of the multilingual man who could not swear in English after right basal ganglia damage, but was unaffected in processing and producing French and Hebrew also has some implications on how this type of language is stored in the brain (Speedie et al., 2003). What seems certain is that, in all humans, the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the basal ganglia are integral to the acquisition, processing, and production of taboo words, in this case obscenities, in one's native language. This is an essential point in providing a general framework for taboo lexeme conditioning: that we are all equipped with the same neurological hardware to acquire and produce taboo utterances in the same way, and that those words register neurologically in that same unique way.

Chapter 3 provided for a major theme for the extent of this theory, emotional conditioning. Jay really deals very little with the emotional conditioning aspect of swearing, which as we've seen, constitutes a large percentage of why obscenities are considered so offensive. So emotional conditioning seems to be required as an integral part to any theory of swearing. The review of disgust provides the framework to discuss how this emotion plays a large role in the way societies are structured, helping to define its taboos, and provide negative emotional reinforcement towards our bodies and breaking taboos, both of which obscenities rely on to derive their power. *Hypothesis 2* states:

All three forms of disgust are responsible for the emotional charging of obscenities: Core disgust in the case of bodily fluids (shit), Animal disgust in the case of the body and animal drives (fuck, shit, cunt), and Moral disgust by breaking the taboo of swearing (an affect of Judeo-Christian religion and Puritan fanaticism to abolish swearing).

It was established that disgust is one of seven universal emotions that are experienced by all neurologically healthy humans (Ekman and Friesen, 1971; Ekman, 2003; Rozin et al., 2000). The three forms of disgust, *Core*, *Animal*, and *Moral*, were shown to have large effect on how we feel about ourselves, others, and how society should operate. Core disgust was shown to be innate and an integral emotion to our survival. The avoidance of poisonous, contaminated, or deadly things is intrinsic to our nature (Oaten et al., 2009; Rozin et al., 2000; Ekman, 2003; Stevenson et al., 2010; Rozin et al., 1986). This may have implications on the emotional charging of *Shit*, because of its odor and decaying nature. Core disgust may

to have emotional implications on *Fuck* and *Cunt*, because of the fluids associated with the act, and with the body part.

Animal disgust was shown to create a mental separation of our minds and our mortal beings, to elevate humanity above the rest of the animal kingdom, essentially turning the survival form of disgust inward, and resulting in the many bodily regulations we recognize throughout history and societies (Rozin et al., 1999; Rozin et al., 2000; Ekman, 2003; Danovitch and Bloom, 2009; Stevenson et al., 2010; Kolnai, 1998; Holden, 2000; Haidt et al., 1993). This was further supported by evidence from *Terror Management Theory* (Solomon et al., 1999; Goldenberg et al., 2000), where individuals primed with thoughts of death responded to sexual stimuli with disgust. This disgust, at least in part, stems from discomfort with the body and its mortal weakness. Animal disgust is a theme in much of Chapter 4, where we find a multitude of religious rules regulating the body and its fluids, from menstruation and circumcision, to where you can defecate, to how your testicles have to be functioning if (and when) you enter the temple, to whether or not you should have sex. These many regulations of the body suggest that our mortal forms and their earthly needs required a limiting of the effect our bodies had on the world and others. As discussed in Chapter 4, this required a concept of sacred and profane space. The body, through Animal disgust, was designated profane, and as such regulated to limit the amount of profanity able to affect space made sacred. This regulation would create negative emotional conditioning towards the body, which *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* rely on.

Moral disgust was shown to be integral to developing a morality system. It informs our sense of good and bad, and generally establishes within a society what is considered

taboo (Oaten et al., 2009; Cahill, 2005; Ekman, 2003; Rozin et al., 1999; Horberg et al., 2009; Danovitch and Bloom, 2009; Jones and Fitness, 2008; Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla, 2007). By utilizing Animal disgust in tandem with the ideas of the sacred and profane, Moral disgust helps create taboos towards the body and social reinforcement of those taboos by teaching people that the body is not only a cause for shame, but it is immoral to treat it without the prescribed societal regulations. A combination of Moral disgust, the sacred/profane dichotomy, and religious regulations against swearing create a sense of word magic around obscenities, making their utterance verbal taboos. Through this morality system based on disgust and supernatural belief, obscenities eventually found themselves replacing the profanities and blasphemies of old, receiving the negative emotional conditioning reserved towards religious swearing. These three forms of disgust are at the root of why obscenities are considered so offensive today, by creating negative attitudes towards the body and swearing, and influencing our decisions about what is considered good and bad, what is taboo.

Chapter 4 exposes the reasons why bodily slang such as obscenities are able to take on such a negative emotional charge. Jay's theory fails to mention why certain negative attitudes towards the body exist, and how our obscenities are affected by these attitudes. So many of the language censorship laws were pursued by the Puritans and other Christian sects, and the entanglement of the Church and the law set up a legal framework that reinforced Christian philosophy. It is therefore important to understand the root of their ideologies towards the body and swearing. *Hypothesis 3* states:

Obscenities in American English partly owe their taboo status to attitudes in Christianity that designate the body as a profane space and a cause for disgust, which adds a negative emotional charge to this form of bodily slang.

Mircea Eliade (1957) gives us an understanding of where the roots of power lie in Christianity, with the sacred and profane. Chapter 4 provides numerous quotes and references to ways in which the body was considered a profane space, and the regulations placed upon it to maintain a sense of purity. Circumcision cuts off a piece of the body most associated with animal drives, a symbolic gesture of cutting off a profane space to obtain a sacred connection with God. We find that the many taboos and restrictions placed on menstruating women show that the body was considered unclean, and in need of rituals to maintain some form of the sacred. Regulation of defecation space belies the Core, Animal, and subsequently Moral disgust involved in tabooing the body and the waste that comes out of it. The use of feces as a punishment by God also reinforces negative emotional conditioning towards the body and its products. Rape in the bible symbolizes a profane (animal) act used by profane people and subsequently profaning the one who is raped (or, at least in one case, they were “humbled”). This literature review represents the Animal and Moral disgust necessary to imbue obscenities with the emotional force they hold. They require the attitude or belief that the body is a profane space, a cause for disgust. The commandment against swearing reviewed in Chapter 5, enforced by Moral disgust at breaking such a commandment, works in tandem with these bodily attitudes to give obscenities their taboo status and emotional charge.

Chapter 5 gives a comprehensive history of linguistic censorship law from Medieval England to modern day America. Timothy Jay provided a short review of linguistic censorship only dating back to America in the 1900s, and leaves a large part of the social factors that have affected swearing over the past several centuries unmentioned. Here the aim was to expose the framework from which our American Obscenity laws evolved.

Hypothesis 4 states:

Legislation aimed at censoring swear words in the media and fines for public utterance further emotionally condition obscenities to taboo status, and reinforce that emotional charge through moral disgust.

Reviews by Hughes (1991; 2006), McEnry (2006) and Zelezny (2001; 2011) show the progression of swearing censorship from its roots in prohibitions against religious swearing in England to sexual swearing in America. Political activism by the Puritan sect essentially served to institute a religious framework that tabooed the act of swearing in the British Empire, reinforcing their brand of morality and Moral disgust. In this time the modes of swearing changed from swearing *by* to swearing *at*, and from religious swearing to sexual swearing. As this framework was transported to America through colonization, and as society became more secularized, religious swearing decreased in taboo status, giving way to the sexual swearing we now know as obscenities. Our laws against obscenities are based on this legal framework of profanity/blasphemy censorship, and utilize the same moral code instituted by the Christians that colonized this continent. This means that they operate with the same philosophy of moral disgust towards swearing. Today we talk about obscenities in terms of offensiveness, and as we've seen the term *offensive* falls under the language of

disgust. In this case then we must talk about obscenities being *morally offensive*, which in essence means they are morally disgusting. Our legal framework set up to regulate or prohibit offensive language then derives from Christian sensibilities of moral disgust, morality, and a sense of what is sacred and profane. Essentially, American obscenity laws reinforce an already millennia old Christian framework of emotional conditioning against swearing and the body, by upholding linguistic restrictions born out of supernatural belief, word magic, and moral disgust. As a result, this censorship leads to further emotionally charging obscenities through social and legal reinforcement.

We can learn a great deal from American Obscenities about how we acquire language, how our environment affects the language that we use, and the way we use it. What is obscene today has not always been, nor should it always be. History has shown that what is most offensively or negatively potent doesn't remain constant, and so our taboo words will most likely reflect what is potent at that period in time. This general theory of *Taboo Lexeme Conditioning* points out 4 factors integral in the creation of taboo words: neurological hardware, emotional conditioning, supernatural belief, and social reinforcement. If these factors remain constant throughout the human species, then it should be easy to identify how and why certain words in a language develop a high taboo status.

Indeed, we find that other cultures in the world have their own linguistic taboos. The Akan of Ghana call these *abususem*, or “woeful things or expressions” (Agyekum, 2004). These are divided into smaller groups. One kind, *ntam* or “reminiscent oaths,” invoke memories of terrible past experiences that the community has experienced. Another kind, oaths or curses that invoke gods or spirits against another, are called *duabɔ* (Agyekum, 2004,

p. 318). Tassie (1961) shows how Canadian French exhibits a similar taboo pattern as English, having emotional potency in both religious and obscene language. The European Christian experience had similar influence on different language cultures. Religious linguistic taboos such as *Sacré Dieu*, “sacred God”, still have potency (p. 35). *Maudit*, “damn”, is the most used between both French- and English-Canadian speaking cultures (p. 40). *Baptême de constipé*, literally translated as “baptism of constipation” illustrates a mixing of religious and obscene language (p. 37). Tassie notes that religious swearing is more common to French-Canadian speakers than obscenities, and this alludes to the strong influence of the Christian church on the culture of those who settled in Canada.

The Gurindji, a tribe in Australia, find the worst thing you can say to a man translates as “you stinking prick” (Gregersen, 1979). Though he does not provide direct translations, Gregersen (1979) lists a number of phrases from markedly different languages that all employ some sense of motherly abuse: “*you are your mother's cunt*” (Malagasay), “*your mother fucks dogs*” (Lao), “*you come from the devil's cunt-hole*” (Guarani), “*you eat your mother's menstrual blood*” (Enga), and so on with similar phrases from Armenian, Turkish, Spanish, Cantonese, Rumanian, Hungarian and Mali (pp. 6-7). Some liberties may have been taken in translating American obscenities in essence of their taboo cognate, but we can see employing a sexual and derogatory sense about ones mother is a taboo carried across many cultural lines. Published scientific works concerning specific taboo phrases in other languages seem to be small in number, but an internet search will endow the seeker with a plethora of taboo terms from any number of languages. Many of these linguistic taboos resemble our own. Some employ the sacred and profane, some employ the body, others

attack social status, ethnicity, and race. Taboo terms differentiate between speakers, the culture they are raised in, and their sensitivity to different issues, but all are meant to create or denote some kind of emotional shock factor, and are at some level violating a system of morality that instituted such phrases and language as taboo. Emotional language of this type should then activate neurologically similar to English obscenities.

Obscenities may provide further research of interest in identifying how the languages of bi- or multi-linguals are stored in the brain, how the linguistic capacity processes between different languages in one head. Since taboo words of different languages do not seem to be stored or activated in limbic structures as do those of the native language, it raises many questions of how the brain stores and processes language(s) as a whole. Further research into the role of emotional conditioning during lexical acquisition would prove useful in understanding how language is processed and produced. At least in the case of obscenities, it seems that this emotional conditioning is integral to how the brain processes these words. What other effects might emotional conditioning have on our capacity to store and use language? Obscenities and “bad” language have been largely ignored in the scientific community, perhaps an artifact, or living artifact, of the moral disgust passed down through the generations. The general attitude of avoiding anything offensive has limited our scope of understanding the human experience. In all of the English language, never has so much history, sociology and psychology affected such a small set of lexemes. In fact, its astonishing how many things needed to happen before *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* were considered as offensive as they are today. In time new words may replace *Fuck*, *Shit*, and *Cunt* as our “go-to” for highly emotional expressions. Our biological and neurological capacity for

emotion has evolved to integrate our linguistic capacity; these words serve a range of purposes. Censorship of these words begs the question, is it right to outlaw a basic biological and neurological function? They're censored in the name of morality, but is it moral to outlaw emotions and verbal emotional content? Emotions primarily serve a purpose to keep us alive, we take on socialized forms to survive in society. Emotional language serves a vital function in social interaction, and not always to serve some detrimental purpose. In a secular age for the West, is it any longer moral to outlaw emotional utterances based on supernatural belief, word magic, and something in this case so essentially trivial as offense? Taboo Lexeme Conditioning will find life as long as there is still supernatural belief to feed it.

References

- Agyekum, K. (2004). *'Ntam Reminiscential Oath' Taboo in Akan*. *Language in Society*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 317-342.
- Beck, R. (2009). *Profanity: The Gnostic Affront of the Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television*. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 294-303.
- Black, G. (1989). *Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940*. *Film History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 167-189.
- Borg, J.; Lieberman, D.; Kiehl, K. (2008). *Infection, Incest, and Iniquity: Investigating the Neural Correlates of Disgust and Morality*. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, Vol. 20, No. 9, 1529-1546.
- Brown, K.; Kushner, H. (2001). *Eruptive Voices: Coprolalia, Malediction, and the Poetics of Cursing*. *New Literary History*, 32, 537-562.
- Cahall, P. (2004). *St. Augustine of Conjugal Love and Divine Love*. *The Thomist*, Vol. 68, 343-373.
- Cahill, C. (2005). *Same-sex Marriage, Slippery Slope Rhetoric, and the Politics of Disgust: A Critical Perspective on Contemporary Family Discourse and the Incest Taboo*. *Northwestern University Law Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4, 1543-1612.
- Carlin, G. (1972). *Seven Words You Can Never Say On Television*. On *Class Clown* [CD]. Santa Monica, California: Little David/Atlantic.
- Cartlidge, D. (1975). *1 Corinthians 7 as a Foundation for a Christian Sex Ethic*. *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 220-234.

- Danovitch, J.; Bloom, P. (2009). *Children's Extension of Disgust to Physical and Moral Events*. *Emotion*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 107-112.
- Dewaele, J. (2004). *The Emotional Force of Swearwords and Taboo Words in the Speech of Multilinguals*. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 204-222.
- Dong, N.(2010). *Mechanism of Swearing as a Response to Pain*. *Journal of Undergraduate Life Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 4.
- Echols, E. (1951). *The Art of Classical Swearing*. *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 6, 291-298.
- Eilberg-Schwartz, H. (1991). *The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book*. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1-24.
- Ekman, P. (2003). *Emotions Revealed*. New York: Holt Paperbacks
- Ekman, P.; Friesen, W. (1971). *Constants Across Culture in the Face and Emotion*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 124-129.
- Eliade, M. (1957). *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harper and Roe.
- Feinberg, J. (1983). *Obscene Words and the Law*. *Law and Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 139-161.
- Ferre, P.; Garcia, T.; Fraga, I.; Sanchez-Casa, R.; Margarita, M. (2010). *Memory for Emotional Words in Bilinguals: Do Words have the same Emotional Intensity in the First and the Second Language*. *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 760-785.

Freeman, R.; Zinner, S.; Muller-Vahl, K.; Fast, D.; Burd, L.; Kano, Y.; Rothenberger, A.;

Roessner, V.; Kerbeshian, J.; Stern, J. (2009). *Coprophomina in Tourette's*

Syndrome. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 218-227.

Friedman, L. (Ed.) (1983). *Obscenity: Oral Arguments before the Supreme Court*,

Volume 2. New York: Chelsea House.

Gallese, V.; Keysers, C.; Rizzolatti, G. (2004). *A Unifying View of the Basis of Social*

Cognition. *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 9, 396-403.

Goldenberg, J.; Pyszczynski, T.; Greenberg, J.; Solomon, S. (2000). *Fleeing the Body: A*

Terror Management Perspective on the Problem of Human Corporeality.

Personality and Social Psychology Review, Vol.4, No. 3, 200-218.

Gordon, S. (2000). *Blasphemy and the Law of Religious Liberty in Nineteenth-Century*

America. *American Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 682-719.

Green, J. (1995). *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*, 2nd ed. London: Weidenfeld and

Nicolson.

Gregersen, E. (1979). *Sexual Linguistics*. New York: Annals New York Academy of

Sciences.

Guterman, M.A.; Mehta, P.; Gibbs, M.S. (2008) *Menstrual Taboos Among Major*

Religions. *The Internet Journal of World Health and Societal Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2

Gutierrez, R.; Giner-Sorolla, R.(2007). *Anger, Disgust, and Presumption of Harm as*

Reactions to Taboo-breaking Behavior. *Emotion*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 853-868.

Haidt, J.; McCauley, C.; Rozin, P. (1993). *Individual Differences in Sensitivity to*

Disgust: A Scale Sampling Seven Domains of Disgust Elicitors. *Personality and*

Individual Differences, Vol. 16, 701-713.

- Hamann, S. (2001). *Cognitive and Neural Mechanisms of Emotional Memory*. *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 9, 394-400.
- Harper, D. (2010). Online Etymology Dictionary. <http://www.etymonline.com/>
- Harris, C.L.; Gleason, J.B.; Aycicegi, A. (2006). *When is a first language more emotional? Psychophysiological evidence from bilingual speakers*. In A. Pavlenko (Ed.), *Bilingual minds: Emotional experience, expression, and representation*. Clevedon, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters. 257-283.
- Henkin, L. (1963). *Morals and the Constitution: The Sin of Obscenity*. *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 391-414.
- Holden, L. (2000). *Encyclopedia of Taboos*. Oxford: ABC-CLIO.
- Horberg, E.J.; Keltner, D.; Oveis, C.; Cohen, A. (2009). *Disgust and the Moralization of Purity*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 97, No. 6, 963-976.
- Houeto, J. L.; Karachi, C.; Mallet, L.; Yelnik, J.; Mesnage, V.; Welter, M.L.; Navarro, S.; Pelisollo, A.; Damier, P.; Pidoux, B.; Dormont, D.; Cornu, P.; Agid, Y. (2005). *Tourette's Syndrome and Deep Brain Stimulation*. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry*, Vol. 76, 992-995.
- Hughes, G. (1991). *Swearing: A Social History of Foul Language, Oaths, and Profanity in English*. London: Penguin Books.
- Hughes, G. (2006). *An Encyclopedia of Swearing: The Social History of Oaths, Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English Speaking World*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

- Hunt, M.; Jung, P. (2009). "*Good Sex*" and Religion: A Feminist Overview. *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 156-167.
- Jay, T. (1981). *Comprehending Dirty-Word Descriptions*. *Language and Speech*, Vol. 24, No.1, 29-38.
- Jay, T. (1992). *Cursing in America*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Jay, T. (1999). *Why We Curse*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins
- Jay, T. (2005). *American Women: Their Cursing Habits and Religiosity*. *Gender, Language Patterns and Religious Thoughts*, 63-84.
- Jay, T. (2008). *Recalling Taboo and Non-taboo Words*. *American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 121, No. 1, 83-103.
- Jay, T. (2009). *Do Offensive Words Harm People?* *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 81-101.
- Jay, T. (2009). *The Utility and Ubiquity of Taboo Words*. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 153-161.
- Jay, T.; Janschewitz, K. (2007). *Filling the Emotion Gap in Linguistic Theory: Commentary on Pott's Expressive Dimension*. *Theoretical Linguistics*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 215-221.
- Johnson, E. (1928). *On the Comfort of Cussing*. *North American Review*, Vol. 225, No. 840, 183-189.
- Jones, A.; Fitness, J. (2008). *Moral Hypervigilance: The Influence of Disgust Sensitivity in the Moral Domain*. *Emotion*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 613-627.
- Joseph, R. (2000). *Neuropsychiatry, Neuropsychology, Clinical Neuroscience*. New York: Academic Press.

- Kensinger, E.; Corkin, S. (2003). *Memory Enhancement for Emotional Words: Are Emotional Words more Vividly Remembered than Neutral Words?* *Memory and Cognition*, Vol. 31, No. 8, 1169-1180.
- Kolnai, A. (1998). *The Standards Modes of Aversion: Fear, Disgust and Hatred*. *Mind*, Vol. 107, No. 427, 581-596.
- Landis, T. (2006). *Emotional Words: What's so different from Just Words?* *Cortex*, Vol. 42, 823-830.
- Lee, C.; Narayanan, S. (2005). *Toward Detecting Emotions in Spoken Dialogue*. *IEEE Transactions on Speech and Audio Processing*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 293-303.
- Leeming, D. (2003). *Religion and Sexuality: The Perversion of a Natural Marriage*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 101-109.
- Locher, D. (1996). *Beyond Smut: The Interpretation of Sexual Images as Mediated by Beliefs about the Self and Society*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Kent State University, Ohio. UMI: 9701035.
- Lull, D. (2007). *Jesus, Paul, and Homosexuals*. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 199-207.
- McGarry, M. (2000). *Spectral Sexualities: Nineteenth Century Spiritualism, Moral Panics, and the Making of U.S. Obscenity Law*. *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 8-29.
- Mencken, H.L. (1944). *American Profanity*. *American Speech*: Vol. 19, No. 4, 241-249.
- Moore, J. (1976). *Behavior, Bias, and the Limbic System*. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 30, 226-239.
- Morris, D. (1993). *The Neurobiology of the Obscene: Henry Miller and Tourette Syndrome*. *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 194-214.

- Nishitani, N.; Schurmann, M.; Amunts, K.; Hari, R. (2004). *Broca's Region: From Action to Language*. *Physiology* 20, 60-69.
- Oaten, M.; Stevenson, R.; Case, T. (2009). *Disgust as a Disease-Avoidance Mechanism*. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 135, No. 2, 303-321.
- Olatunji, B.; Haidt, J.; McKay, D.; David, B.(2008). *Core, animal reminder, and contamination disgust: Three kinds of disgust with distinct personality, behavioral, physiological, and clinical correlates*. *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 42, 1243-1259.
- O'Neil, R. (1989). *Sexual Profanity and Interpersonal Judgment*. (Doctoral Dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest Information and Learning, UMI Number: 3042643.
- Padgug, R. (1999). *Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History*. In Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, 10-28. London: UCL Press.
- Patrick, G.T.W. (1901). *The Psychology of Profanity*. *The Psychological Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 113-127.
- Paulmann, S.; Pell, M.; Kotz, S. (2009). *Comparative Processing of Emotional Prosody and Semantics following Basal Ganglia Infarcts: ERP Evidence of Selective Impairment for Disgust and Fear*. *Brain Research*, 1295, 159-169.
- Panksepp, J. (2008). *The Power of the Word may reside in the Power of Affect*. *Integrated Psychological Behavior*, Vol. 42, 47-55.
- Paradiso, S.; Robinson, R.; Andreasen, N.; Downhill, J.; Davidson, R.; Kirchner, P.; Watkins, G.; Ponto, L.; Hichwa, R. (1997). *Emotional Activation of Limbic Circuitry in Elderly Normal Subjects in a PET Study*. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 154, No. 3, 384-389.
- Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Emotion and Emotion-laden words in the Bilingual Lexicon*. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, Vol. 11, No.2, 147-164.

- Phipps, W. (1980). *The Menstrual Taboo in Judeo-Christian Religion*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 298-303.
- Pinker, S. (2007). *The Stuff of Thought*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Read, A. (1934). *An Obscenity Symbol*. *American Speech*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 264-278.
- Rozin, P.; Millman, L.; Nemeroff, C. (1986). *Operation of the Laws of Sympathetic Magic in Disgust and Other Domains*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 703-712.
- Rozin, P.; Lowry, L.; Haidt, J.; Imada, S. (1999). *The CAD Triad Hypothesis: A Mapping Between Three Moral Emotions (Contempt, Anger, Disgust) and Three Moral Codes (Community, Autonomy, Divinity)*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 76, No. 4, 574-586.
- Rozin, P.; Haidt, J.; McCauley, C. (2000). *Disgust*, In M. Lewis and J.M. Haviland-Jones (Ed.) *Handbook of Emotions, 2nd Edition*, pp. 637-653. New York: Guilford Press.
- Schnurer, H. (1941). *On Vulgarities*. *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 499-510.
- Shoemaker, D. (2000). *"Dirty Words" and the Offense Principle*. *Law and Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 5, 545-584.
- Sidtis, D.; Postman, W. (2006). *Formulaic Expressions in Spontaneous Speech of Left- and Right- Hemisphere-Damaged Subjects*. *Aphasiology*, Vol. 20, No. 5, 411-426.
- Solomon, S.; Goldenberg, J.; Pyszczynski, T.; McCory, S.; Greenberg, J. (1999). *Death, Sex, Love, and Neuroticism: Why is Sex such a Problem?* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 77, No. 6, 1173-1187.
- Speedie, L.J.; Wertmen, E.; Ta'ir, J.; Heilman, K.M. (1993). *Disruption of automatic speech following a right basal ganglia lesion*. *Neurology*, Vol. 43, No. 9, 1768-1774.
- Steinberg, J. (1997). *From a "Pot of Filth" to a "Bed of Roses" (and back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism*. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 5-26.

- Stephens, R.; Atkins, J.; Kingston, A. (2009). *Swearing as a Response to Pain*. NeuroReport, 1-5.
- Stevenson, R.; Oaten, M.; Case, T.; Repacholi, B.; Wagland, P. (2010). *Children's Response to Adult Disgust Elicitors: Development and Acquisition*. Developmental Psychology, Vol. 46, No. 1, 165-177.
- Tassie, J.S. (1961). *The Use of Sacrilege in the Speech of French Canada*. American Speech, Vol. 36, No. 1, 34-40.
- Tsunoda, T. (1985). *The Japanese brain: Uniqueness and Universality*. Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing Co.
- Tybur, J.; Lieberman, D.; Griskevicius, V. (2009). *Microbes, Mating and Morality: Individual Differences in Three Functional Domains of Disgust*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 97, No. 1, 103-122.
- Ullery, E. (2004). *Consideration of a Spiritual Role of Sex in Sex Therapy*. The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families. Vol. 12, No. 1, 78-81.
- Van Lancker, D. and Cummings, J.L. (1999). *Expletives: Neurolinguistic and Neurobehavioral Perspectives on Swearing*. Brain Research Reviews, 31, 83-104.
- Wajnryb, R. (2005). *Expletive Deleted: a Good Look at Bad Language*. New York: Free Press.
- Wallace, J. (1966). *Relationships Between Law and Religion in American Society*. Review of Religious Research, Vol. 7, No. 2, 63-70.
- Waszak, S. (1978). *The Historical Significance of Circumcision*. Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vol. 51, No. 4, 499-501.
- Whipple, E. (1885). *The Swearing Habit*. The North American Review, Vol. 140, No. 343, 536-550.

Zelezny, J. (2001). *Cases in Communications Law*. Belmont: Wadsworth.

Zelezny, J. (2011). *Communications Law*. Boston: Wadsworth.

List of Terms

Amygdala- a brain structure in the limbic system responsible for emotional and motivational processing, emotional and non-propositional vocalizations, and emotional memory.

Animal Disgust- a socialized form of disgust which attaches negative emotional attitudes towards the body or mortal, animal-like features such as reproductive organs and sex or bodily fluids and discharge.

Basal Ganglia- a brain structure in the limbic system with control over action and moral inhibition, and emotional or semantic prosody production and processing of vocalizations.

Coprolalia- a symptom of neurological damage or neuro-degenerative diseases that damage the *basal ganglia*, producing a vocal tic in the form of taboo language.

Core Disgust- a survival form of the emotion disgust, meant to protect against death and disease, gives us visceral reactions to seemingly or truly contaminated objects.

Hippocampus- a brain structure in the limbic system responsible for learning and short/long term memory formation.

Limbic System- the network of brain structures responsible for memory, olfaction, visceral responses, and emotional processing (Moore 1976), generally described as controlling the 4 F's: Feeding, Fighting, Fleeing, and [Reproduction] (Joseph 2000). Sometimes referred to as the lower brain.

Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) Theory- a theory of cursing “that integrates three broad aspects of human behavior: neurological control, psychological restraints, and socio-cultural restrictions.” (Jay 1999, p. 19)

Moral Disgust- a socialized form of disgust which tends to define morality and taboos in a culture, usually influencing and influenced by doctrines of faith and legal systems, and helping to define culture interpretations of the sacred and profane.

Non-propositional language- language that is psychologically “automatic, reflexive, and uncreative” (Jay 1999, p. 33), such as swearing, idioms, greetings, or cliches.

Obscene- material that is of an explicit sexual nature or interest, such as pornography, informed by animal and moral disgust.

Obscene Words- a class of body and sexual slang words in American English emotionally charged by animal and moral disgust, and are legally censored, including fuck, shit, cunt, piss, tits, and derivatives thereof.

Profane- space and time sectioned off in the universe by a superstitious world view designated as impure, tainted, or otherwise in contrast to the sacred and spiritual or moral “goodness”.

Propositional language- language that constitutes correct and meaningful syntax, defined in Jay (1999) as “the ability to construct syntactically correct sentences” (p. 33).

Sacred- space and time sectioned off in the universe by a superstitious worldview as pure, good, or otherwise untainted by spiritual or moral “badness”.

Taboo lexeme conditioning – the process by which a word becomes negatively charged to taboo status in a culture, requiring such factors as social and legal censorship, supernatural belief and word magic, morality and moral disgust.

Word Magic- the psychological imbuing of words with metaphysical power, perceived as able to affect individuals and the environment, a superstitious belief in the power of words.

TABOO LEXEME CONDITIONING