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**SEXUAL PROFANITY AND INTERPERSONAL JUDGEMENT**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**The Department of Sociology**

**by**

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**B.A., Stephen F. Austin State University, 1989**

**M.A., East Carolina University, 1995**

**December 2001**

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## **ABSTRACT**

One of the cultural changes noted in American society in the last fifty years has been a noticeable increase in the public use of sexual profanity, particularly by women. Many commentators attribute this change to the sexual revolution of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, as well as the increasing emancipation of women from traditional gender roles. This dissertation examines the ideological foundations that have shaped both western sexual attitudes and the nature of modern use of sexual profanity, to question whether these changes are indicative of greater gender equity. Using a dramaturgical approach to gender identity, an alternative interpretation is presented that defines these changes as a cultural reaffirmation of the devaluation of women.

The following presentation weaves together the threads of language and gender, the symbolism of sexual language and its relationship to sexual norms, and the relationship of these to our concepts of sexual deviance. The implications of sexual language for gender identity and sexual behavior, and how these have changed together, provide insights on gender relations that challenge existing literature that equates widespread use of profanity by women as an indicator of the change in status of women in our society.

To test the degree to which traditional values regarding sexual language and gender-appropriate behavior still exist in American society, an empirical analysis of undergraduate students' reactions to users of sexual profanity is presented. Written vignettes were used to assess student ratings on items of interpersonal judgement involving measures of perceived sociability, potency, activity, and attractiveness.

involving measures of perceived sociability, potency, activity, and attractiveness.

Manipulations included the presence or absence of sexual profanity, the gender of the actors, and blue collar and white collar workplace settings.

MANOVA results found significant differences in respondents' ratings depending on whether the actor was male or female, and whether the actor swore. There were also significant differences between the ratings provided by male respondents and female respondents. The results indicated not only that sexual profanity is still considered deviant, but that the degree of devaluation attached to swearing differs significantly for men and women. If there is a connection of sexual language with the devaluation of women as argued below, then the conclusions warranted by these results indicate that women's status gains can be considered very uneven at best.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The second half of the twentieth century has seen a dramatic change in norms concerning public use of profanity. Use has increased greatly, particularly by women. Most observers attribute these changes to the purported sexual revolution of the 1960's and 1970's, and the emancipation of women from traditional roles as a result of third wave of feminism.

This line of thought suggests a blurring of traditional gender role behaviors demarcating masculinity and femininity. To a certain extent, this is true. However, research into gender and language, and other aspects of gender indicate that traditional gender norms and expectations continue to underlie many aspects of social interaction. Because gender is a fundamental component of identity and self-presentation, normative changes concerning gender behavior should correspond to actual shifts in gender identity cues. Normative expectations not only shape the individual's self-presentation, conformity to these expectations also affect others' evaluations of the individual.

Following the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language both reflects and shapes culture, gender differences in swearing may be seen as indicative of the way that U. S. society assigns unequal status to males and females. Using symbolic interaction and Goffman's dramaturgical approach to identity and self-presentation, the following study seeks to determine the extent to which traditional gender norms concerning use of profanity still differentially influence individuals' perception of others, despite the much-heralded emancipation seen in recent years.

The theoretical argument presented here is that although there has been a recent relaxation of norms concerning the use of profanity, as marginal deviance such behavior will still (in the eyes of others) reflect negatively on the swearer. In addition, because language norms have traditionally differed for men and women, such negative evaluation will differ to the extent that emancipation from traditional gender role expectations remains incomplete.

In order to understand the underlying norms of language, gender and sexual behavior, several different topics need to be addressed. Therefore, the reader should keep certain limitations in mind. Although the primary sociological spotlight here is on self-presentation and gender identity, the endeavor undertaken necessarily must delve into a disparate variety of topics and disciplines about which volumes have already been (and probably will continue to be) written; including language, history, and religion. Constraints of space and focus prohibit a full development of many of these areas, yet they are of substantial interest to the topic at hand and therefore cannot be ignored.

In addition, empirical evidence from past research is provided wherever possible, but before the 1970's much research (especially concerning use of profanity) has been based on literary, observational, and anecdotal evidence. The validity of generalizing from such evidence may rightly be questioned; however, what is presented generally is representative of "conventional wisdom in the field;" that is, similar conclusions and corroborating observations of a number of researchers. Also, because the primary tool for examining gender differences in the presentation below involves sexual profanity, use of words that are offensive (by definition) to many people is unavoidable.

**The following presentation examines the connection between language and culture, language and gender, the historical development of modern norms of sexual behavior, and the relationship of these norms to current sexual language and gender identity. These topics provide the key for understanding the underlying ideology of our sexual and gender norms, as well as symbolic derogation underlying sexual profanity as an insult. Changes regarding both profanity and concepts of sexual deviance strongly suggest that they are intricately connected. The implications for gender identity and gender appropriate behavior are addressed, and an empirical study is presented to test the differential dramaturgical effect of such profanity by males and females on an audience.**

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Language and Culture**

The idea that the systematic use of symbols through language is a fundamental prerequisite of society was largely introduced to sociology through the teaching and posthumous publication of the work of George H. Mead (1934). Gestures (or “signs”) communicate our intentions by calling out reciprocal behavior in others, and their response informs and calls out our next action. Verbal gestures are “significant symbols,” and language consists of a codified system of signs that represent shared meanings. Language allows individuals to interact, coordinate activities, as well as make reference to the past, future, objects not present, intangible ideas, *etc.* Both verbal and nonverbal gestures allow individuals to anticipate the activities of others, and align their own actions accordingly. In addition, they allow people to act toward themselves as objects, and engage in introspection.

This introspection and objectification allow one to develop a “self” (also see Rosenberg 1979; Herman & Reynolds 1994; Blumer 1969). Through the reactions of other people, we come to know who we are (or at least who we are expected to be). This process was described by Charles H. Cooley (1922) as “the looking-glass self.” We also begin to realize the relationship of other people with respect to us and learn to anticipate their activities relative to our own, adjusting our actions accordingly. Mead referred to this stage of development as the “game stage,” in which we are able to take the role of the other. As one matures and becomes more aware of the surrounding world, and the other actors within it, that person is able to understand the social



relationships between the self and others, and relationships among those others. There is also an awareness that many of those relationships exist apart from any individual incumbent. Once we reach this stage, we may become full social beings.

To extend Mead's use of the game of baseball as an example, no matter who is playing first base, all players and fans have expectations concerning what a first baseman does during the game. The person playing first base in any particular game is expected to understand not only the role of the first baseman, but also the roles of other individuals playing other positions and how they relate to each other. For today's player, the basic rules of baseball governing these relationships have already been established by others long dead. In addition, there are longstanding public sentiments concerning activities by participants. Players are expected to perform to the best of their capabilities. Umpires are expected to adjudicate the game impartially. Fans are expected to watch and cheer, but not interfere with the progress of the game.

It is the same with any social interaction. Anyone born since the dawn of history has, by definition, been born into a preexisting social system and language system. Therefore, the rules of the game have already been established, at least to a certain extent. Although such systems are continually being updated, one does not have to invent new symbols and new meanings for every activity, for that has been done by others long gone (Berger & Luckmann 1966, Hewitt 1988). These meanings include the society's ideas about good and bad, sacred and profane, and how the universe is structured.

Durkheim (Catlin 1950) used the terms "collective sentiments" and "moral consciousness" to describe these prescriptive ideals that society's members share. Two

anthropological linguists are credited with the hypothesis that language systems influence the cultural ideology of a society by reflecting, directing and constraining how individuals perceive reality. Edward Sapir (Mandelbaum 1949) and Benjamin Whorf (Carroll 1956) studied pre-European and modern Native American language systems and noted that the languages were structured in such a way as to facilitate thought and speech around the world view of the society, which made it correspondingly more difficult (or in some cases impossible) to speak or think of the world in ways foreign to that world view. Although their careers overlapped Mead and postdated Durkheim, they apparently came to similar conclusions independently. Discussing language as the connection of ideas, Whorf wrote: “The very existence of such a common stock of conceptions . . . does not yet seem to be greatly appreciated; yet to me it seems to be a necessary concomitant of the communicability of ideas by language . . . (p.36).” and: “So, in further definition of this concept of connection, it may be said that connections must be intelligible without reference to individual experiences and must be immediate in their relationship (p.37).”

According to Sapir and Whorf, any ideas incongruent with the world view of a society must be reformulated or discarded. The language system not only determines what questions can be asked, but also circumscribes the range of possible answers. Gregersen (1979) takes issue with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, providing anthropological and linguistic evidence that cultural change does not necessarily entail language change. He concludes that language may reflect culture, but does not determine it. Gumperz & Levinson (1996) provide an overview of the controversies concerning the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Sapir and Whorf have met with wide

acceptance, however, and their ideas are prominent in feminist discussion of language and gender, to be discussed below.

### **Language and Gender**

The modern (or “third wave”) feminist movement began in the late 1960's and early 1970's, an era of social unrest and questioning of longstanding social relations. Feminist activists and writers then and since have drawn attention to the many ways in which women were subordinated and oppressed in a male-dominated society. A complete review of major theorists and trends is beyond the scope of this paper; readers may find valuable overviews and critiques of the language and gender debate in Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley (1983), Henley & Kramarae (1991), Crawford (1995), and S. Mills (1995). The origin of gender and language research and current controversies are summarized below.

In 1975, Robin Lakoff published *Language and Women's Place*, in which she hypothesized that certain characteristics of the English language, and the ways in which women use it, both reflect and reinforce their subordinate status in society. While growing up, girls are taught to be supportive, polite, and nonaggressive. Their behavior is controlled more strictly than boys, and they are scolded for “talking rough.” Women therefore learn different conversational styles that place them at a disadvantage with men. Segregation of children's play groups by sex facilitates separate conversational and interactional styles. Aspects of women's speech include politeness, tag questions, deference to male speakers, indirect requests, trivial terminology (*i.e.*, a richer vocabulary for areas considered the woman's domain- sewing, fabrics, colors, *etc.*), milder expletives, greater intonation, and exaggerated expressiveness. She also noted

the male form of pronouns and other inclusive words, such as “mankind,” to denote not only the male but also the neutral.

Lakoff’s book generated an avalanche of both support and criticism, as well as a plethora of empirical studies trying to determine if such differences in speech styles actually existed. Major criticisms include her reliance on intuition and self-interpretation rather than hard data, her assumption of female deficit and male norm, and for ignoring structural issues of male power and dominance. Academia was not the only place where Lakoff had an impact. There was a tremendous increase in self-help books and training programs in the late 1970’s, teaching women to act and speak more assertively. Unfortunately, women who took such training usually found that using the assertive speech strategies they were taught resulted in negative evaluation by others, as well as more aggressive responses (Tannen 1994; Crawford 1995). Later linguistic work lent some support for the idea that male and female speech styles differ, and individuals who use gender-inappropriate styles are characterized negatively (*e.g.*, Kemper 1984; Rasmussen & Moely 1986). The latter researchers found that nonconforming speakers of both genders were more likely to be characterized as homosexual, and nonconforming females were seen as “uppity.”

Work in Lakoff’s theoretical vein has been labeled female deficit theory. Other similar paradigms have been largely subsumed under general categories of psychological deficit theories (women’s conversational styles end up making them as passive as they sound) or human capital theories, and two cultures theories (boys and girls are socialized differently, and this inevitably results in different speech styles).

Bem (1993: 143-151) has described this process as “The making of a gendered native.” A large portion of this research has focused on miscommunication in cross-gender interaction ( S. Mills 1955).

Tannen (1990, 1994), a sociolinguist and understudy of Lakoff, created another controversy by pointing out that conversational styles are more dependent on geography, ethnicity, and individual traits than on gender. She notes conflicting results of empirical studies attempting to discover gender differences in speech traits, and suggests that counting is not the way to understand language. No speech act can be understood except in context (*cf.* Morris 1955; Goffman 1974; Postman 1977; Jay 1992; Hughes 1991), and the same conversational strategy can be used to different ends. Tannen (1994) found regional and ethnic differences in conversational styles that lead to misinterpretation, so not all miscommunication should be attributed to gender differences. Nor can such miscommunication be taken as evidence of power differentials or malignant intent on the part of a speaker. She also considers the relationship between power and hierarchy. Contrary to folk wisdom, power necessarily implies a relationship, therefore more intimacy. Equality implies no connection, and therefore distance. Like Goffman (1963b, 1976), she notes that a relationship entails rights and obligations, and deference can be used to invoke the obligations of the other party. (Goffman, however, points out the individual may give up a great deal of freedom to access those obligations).

Female deficit theories have been harshly criticized (*e.g.*, Crawford 1995; Henley & Kramarae 1991; S. Mills 1955) as blaming the victim, using the male standard as the norm, and reverting to biological essentialism, in which women are

considered physically, emotionally, and psychologically inferior to men by virtue of their genetic makeup and reproductive capabilities. Variations of this line of thought have informed Western ideology since the writings of Plato and Aristotle (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994, Bullough & Bullough 1977). Two cultures theories are castigated for blaming no one, therefore ignoring the problem. Criticisms also include a failure to recognize the importance of social power, and how power is embodied in a male-dominated social structure. In addition, women are not a homogeneous group. Social position, age, and ethnicity all affect one's power or lack thereof.

If an ideology of male dominance and female inferiority is embedded in the social structure of society and language is a fundamental component of social existence, then one would expect language, particularly sexual language, to reflect that ideology. Introducing a book on sexual narrative, Roof (1996:xvi) writes: "Its myriad loci suggest that narrative both operates like ideology and is shaped by ideology." In order to understand the ideology underlying verbal sexual expression, an examination of the symbolic nature of sexual profanity and the development of western attitudes toward sexual behavior may be informative.

### **Sexual Profanity as Metaphor**

Profanity is the debasement of something that should be sacred. This may include religious objects and concepts, kinship relations, or any other topic or activity that is taboo in public. In terms of language, profane words are those that refer to sacred or taboo subjects without the using the expected degree of reverence. The word used may often be slang, rather than the official or clinical terminology. If the referent is religious, we call it blasphemy. When such words are used to describe bodily parts or

processes, they may be described as obscenities, “dirty” words, or four-letter words (a description that is sometimes correct, sometimes not). Sagarin (1962:48) states that the concept of words being dirty arises when “. . . there is an aura of privacy, guilt, and shame surrounding the processes and the products thereof.” This includes sexual activity, bodily fluids, and parts associated with excretion.

According to Hughes (1991), swearing in ancient and early medieval times largely consisted of “swearing by,” or “swearing to.” The swearer would invoke a deity or sacred object to bring good fortune or power to oneself, bad fortune to an enemy (cursing), or to bring the wrath of the heavens if the swearer did not honor his word. Hughes also notes the common idea of word-charms among primitive and early medieval people. This involved the belief that certain words or signs (runes) as objects had certain supernatural powers to bring great good or evil to individuals who did not properly insulate themselves from such power. Similar beliefs concerning the power of the spoken word underlie the religious use of invocations or *manthras* (Sanskrit *mantra*) (Boyce 1992). Words have the power to do things, and inspired thoughts put into appropriate words by persons connected to the sacred are extremely efficacious.

By the late medieval period, the most common form of cursing was “swearing at.” The objective now was to insult another person. This could be done seriously or in jest. In Scotland in the 1500's, the art of swearing was highly prized by male gentry who tried to outdo each other in such insulting invective, a tradition known as “flyting.” This was a literary version of the modern day practice of “sounding” among African-American males.

This type of swearing as an insult involves the use of metaphor. Goffman (1963a:5) notes that “We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning. We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one . . .” This implies that the meaning of symbols can occur at different levels. The denotative meaning refers to the object for which it is a literal symbol. Connotative meaning refers to the affective response that the word arouses in the hearer (Osgoode 1962; Jay 1977, 1992; Hughes 1991). Morris (1955) describes four different modes of use for signs. Designators are informative, appraisors are evaluative, prescriptors are incitive, and formators are systematic (“and,” “or,” “either”). It would seem that metaphor transforms a word from the first category to the second and third.

Morris also describes fictive discourse, which is concerned with an imagined rather than actual universe. The primary purpose of fictive discourse is evaluation rather than information. He states: “The telling of the tale is to be approved and the events narrated are to be found significant; if neither result is attained, the work has failed its purpose (p.129).” In discussing metaphor as a special type of fictive discourse, he uses the following example:

“Since an automobile is not literally a beetle, to call it a beetle forces the interpreter to attend with special care to the automobile in order to determine in what sense the automobile is like (and unlike) a beetle (p.137).”

Two basic elements of metaphor are presented here. First, metaphor is a labeling process. Second, any metaphor is untrue if taken literally. Therefore it is fictive discourse. Left unsaid is that the interpreter is expected to determine, within the context of the interaction, what valuation should be inferred. One might consider a



male lover confiding to his girlfriend; “You are my morning sun.” An observer may take note of several characteristics of the sun, not all of which a woman would take as a compliment. It is extremely large, is noted for violent storms on its surface, gives off harmful ultraviolet radiation, and is hiding on the other side of the world every night. Yet it brightens everyone’s day, gives us warmth, and life as we know it would be impossible without it. As an interpreter (especially interpreter *qua* interactant), we must quickly surmise the valuation extended by the metaphor. Contextual clues and cultural knowledge inform us, as the author of the metaphor probably will not be expected to explain it all to us. If a full explanation is required, why use a metaphor? As noted above, the speaker probably hasn’t fully dissected the terminology either, but the connotative evaluation that is imputed to the target should be apparent.

A basic ingredient for understanding social interaction, therefore, is to understand the level at which it is taking place. Goffman (1974), using Bateson’s concept of *frame*, describes how an ordinary strip of activity can be transformed into a quite different activity, and the importance of knowing what interactional frame is being presented is vital in informing the audience reaction. Goffman uses theatrical examples to demonstrate. One is expected to react quite differently to a person being murdered than to a dramatization of a person being murdered. Reading a script of a stage play in which someone is murdered calls forth a different response than either of the first two possibilities. One cannot readily describe the first possibility as reality and the others as not real, because a stage play may not enact a real murder, but it is a real stage play, and elicits a real reaction from the audience.

One may also observe a similar transformation among children (and sometimes adults) at play, when what seems to be a real fight degenerates into mock fighting; or when children's play at fighting becomes real fighting as one interactant takes offense at the actions of another. Such activities are common among young males (*cf.* G. Fine 1987; Goodwin 1990; Tannen 1994). The process of transformation of an activity from one frame to another is known as *keying*. Keying can be multiple. In Goffman's dramaturgical example above, the stage play is a keying of the normal activity, the script is a keying of a keying. Barnes (1994) describes how, in cultures where fictive discourse is a common mode of activity (such as practical joking or the telling of "tall tales"), actors must provide explicit cues when an activity is not keyed, so they will be taken seriously. Goffman (1974) used the term "brackets" to describe these cues. Normally one can gather such cues from observing the interaction. I observed an example of an inappropriate response recently (1998) following a coed softball game, because someone failed to understand that an activity was keyed:

After a controversial play on the field during the game, a loud verbal confrontation occurred between a female player from each team, which threatened to become a physical fight. Order was soon restored, and after the game the players retreated to a nearby tavern for refreshments. After the parties to the original dispute left, two other female players began joking about the incident. In a caricature of the original interactants, they undertook an exaggerated reenactment of the confrontation. This was taken by an inebriated male patron to be a real fight, causing him to loudly insist that the players be ejected from the bar. The person tending bar, aware of the true frame of interaction, instead threatened to toss the drunken male.

Understanding that metaphor is a keying, and that "swearing at" is metaphor, is important in understanding use of and reaction to profanity. The use of obscene words to insult another is not a literal description of physical conditions, but rather an imputation of derogatory qualities based on a comparison with bodily parts, processes,

or fluids. Thus we use slang terminology not only to refer to taboo objects and activities, but also to indicate hostility or opposition to people (or their actions) whom we find objectionable (Sagarin 1962). The obscene label comes to mean “a worthless or thoughtless person (Hughes 1991; Jay 1992).” This seems to particularly be the case for sexual profanity, defined here as slang terminology referring to sexual acts or genitalia.

There is always the danger that a word may become so far removed from its original meaning that it loses its force through overuse, a process Hughes (1991) termed *verbicide*. The word will then disappear from common vernacular. One should make note of the two criteria for verbicide: That it loses its denotative meaning, and that it loses its connotative meaning. The British slang term *bloody* may be a good current candidate. Hughes notes that it originally probably had a religious reference, but that reference is now obscure. It was also considered by many the most offensive word in England, at least through 1960, but now has lost much of its force. The term never raised any eyebrows in the U. S., being taken as simply a quaint British slang term. The possibility of verbicide for popular sexual slang may be raised, but I will argue that this is not the case for the terms discussed below.

Swearing in its broadest definition can include almost any insulting term or phrase in the language under consideration, depending on the definition of the researcher. Hughes' (1991) review of Middle English, and Modern English literature provides a vast array of insults, some quite current. Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon largely consisted of “swearing by” and “swearing to,” with insults referring to cowardice or failure to keep one’s word. Because this study is concerned with sexual attitudes and gender relations, the focus will be on sexual profanity. The shift from religious to sexual profanity, and from “swearing by” to “swearing at,” occurred within the same

historic period. There was a gradual change from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a dramatic tilt from World War I on.

Among modern terms of sexual profanity in the English language, none is more prominent than what shall be termed “the F-word.” Sagarin (1962) describes this popular slang term for coital intercourse, *f\*\*k*, as the king of four-letter words. It seems to be the most popular swear word among males in the United States, and among females in same-sex conversation (M. Fine & Johnson 1984, Jay 1992). The former authors list it second to *shit* among females in mixed settings. Jay rated it fifth among female children less than twelve years old in mixed settings, but first among young adult females. Cameron (1969) lists it first among males, but replaced by *shit* among females overall.

The word was first recorded in 1592 as denoting intercourse (Hughes 1991). The roots are debated, as it seems to have no connection to the Middle English coital term *swive*, a slang term only used in its literal sense. The similarity to the French *foutre* and to the Germanic *ficken* (to strike) has been noted, but no links can be established. The Old Norse *fujka* (to drive) is also suggested. Sagarin (1962) notes similar metaphors in euphemisms for the F-word, particularly *screw*, which he describes as implying penetration and passive resistance. Gregersen (1977) and Hughes (1991) surmise that the original imperative insult implied demoniality, as in “[may the devil] f\*\*k you.”

The F-word apparently also was largely restricted to its literal meaning until the 1890's. Since that time, it has been used in many different expressions as an expletive, a directive, an adjective (the most common according to Jay (1992)), a sandwich word, or

a noun with or without the suffix *-er*, usually in a derogatory fashion. It is grammatically unique not only in some of its uses, but also in ways that it cannot be used. Considering that intercourse is generally pleasurable, one can only wonder why it cannot be made negative (unf\*\*k you!), as that should be the correct form of insult (Sagarin 1962; Hughes 1991; attributed to Albert Ellis). The implications of this asymmetry should become more apparent below.

The proliferation of metaphoric (nonliteral) use of profane terms suggests the possibility of verbicide, noted previously. The criteria were that the word has become removed from its original meaning, and that overuse has lessened the connotative impact to the point of no longer being offensive. However, many of the common terms of sexual profanity, including the F-word, still hold their literal meaning as a sexual referent. They also retain their force as offensive insults in hostile interaction (Jay 1977, 1980, 1992; Hughes 1991; M. Fine & Johnson 1984, DeKlerk 1991; Selnow 1985; Kocoglu 1996).

Sexual profanity remains a controversial issue despite increased public use. A student at the University of Arizona filed a legal suit over sexual language and topics in a course on women in literature (College Press Exchange 1999). In May of 2000, the Texas Rangers baseball team had a locker room controversy concerning explicit lyrics in music being played on a boom box (Delaney & Busby 2000). Recently a Michigan man was fined and ordered to perform community service for swearing in front of another man's family ( New York Times 2000). *Sixty Minutes* commentator Andy Rooney (2001) has publicly objected to the gratuitous use of profanity in recent films.

Certainly one can readily observe that some individuals do not object to profanity, nor is it always used in a confrontational manner. One may cite the use of certain sexually profane words as casual terms of endearment among male friends. However, this only demonstrates a keying of a keying; that is, an insulting sexual metaphor being used in jest. In addition, these terms remain taboo under many circumstances, although both formal and informal sanctions vary by time, place, and type of interaction. It is therefore apparent that society attaches different degrees of deviance to swearing depending on the interactional situation.

### **The Social Construction of Deviance**

As previously noted, any member of an existing society is born into a system of rules governing interaction. These rules govern both language and other behavior. However, over time these rules are adjusted due to role innovation, technological changes, new dangers, or environmental changes (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Rosenberg, Stebbins & Turowitz 1982; Hewitt 1988). What may be acceptable in one society may be considered deviant in another, or may have been deviant in the same society in a previous century.

Durkheim (Catlin 1950) has noted that societies define certain behaviors as deviant in order to prescribe the boundaries of acceptable behavior. If deviance did not exist, we would invent it. His famous example of a cloister of saints, in which acts considered trivial by lay people would become magnified as great offenses within the cloister, demonstrates both the variability and the inevitability of deviance. Erickson (1966) portrayed a real-life example among colonial Puritans, as their ideological stance and definitions of deviance shifted in response to successive immigrations of religious sects from other colonies. Howard Becker (1963) portrayed the construction of

deviance at the micro level among drug users, jazz musicians, and other special populations. He noted the role of societal labeling in determining whom and what is considered deviant. Richardson (1975) describes how the definition of deviance can change in modern religious groups. In some respect, we can all be considered deviant, depending on whose definitions are used. Thus Naples (1996) found virtually all residents of a small Iowa city to be considered (or consider themselves) deviant, because no one subgroup could be defined as the standard. Of course, defining what is deviant necessarily entails defining what is “normal.”

Societies often create elaborate ideologies in justification of their sentiments concerning what is considered good or bad (Wuthnow 1987). Our modern ideas concerning appropriate gender behavior, sexual behavior, and sexual language are the extension, and in some cases the inversion of ideologies dating back into early antiquity. They include both religious and secular contributions from diverse sources. In order to understand these ideologies and their implications for gender relations, an overview of the development of sexual norms in western society is presented below.

### **The Development of Western Attitudes toward Sex and Gender Roles**

The longstanding view of women as inferior to men physically, emotionally, and psychologically was noted above. One may discern a cult of masculinity extending from pre-Christian to modern times, with both religious and secular roots. The ancient Greeks celebrated men as the ultimate standard of human development, and women as weak and irrational. The Greek myth of Pandora and the Hebrew creation story of Eve both reinforced this definition (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994; Bullough & Bullough 1977). The association of reason, order, light, and good with the masculine; and irrationality,

disorder, darkness and evil with the feminine were common in a number of Mesopotamian religions (Zaehner 1955).

To understand the influence of ancient thought in shaping our modern attitudes toward sexual deviance, profanity, and gender relations, one must look at several developments. In pre-Christian Rome, there were definite norms concerning appropriate sexual behavior for free males (Veyne 1985; King 1994). These norms revolved around three polar opposites: Free love vs. exclusive marriage (not necessarily indissoluble), sexual activity vs. sexual passivity, and freedom vs. slavery. For a man, sex was all right with one's wife, mistress, or slave of either sex. Both Greek and Roman libertines celebrated sex with either men, women, or both. To be active was to be male regardless of the sex of the partner, but it was a dishonor to be used for someone else's sexual pleasure. It was common for males to insult other males by implying sexual passivity, or to threaten to rape one's male enemies. It was also considered appropriate for a cuckolded husband to anally rape the trespassing male (Williams 1999). On the other hand, there were definite restrictions on choice of sexual partners. Veyne notes (1985:29): "The important thing was to respect married women, virgins, and youths of free birth." Adultery and aggressive homosexuality were nominally illicit, but largely overlooked. However, oral-genital contact was considered the most debasing of all behavior, regardless of gender. By modern western standards, these norms seem libertarian. However, the Romans considered them to be conservative compared to Greek standards.

Greek dualistic thought concerning the metaphysical nature of mankind presented a different approach to sexual activity, but one which would later merge with



the secular norms just noted to form modern beliefs concerning sexual deviance and proper gender behavior as well as the asceticism for which early Christianity was noted. There were a number of important sources that influenced Greek philosophy in this regard. Two of the most important were the cult of Orpheus and Zoroastrianism. Because the Orphic cult was closer to a domestic and direct influence, it lends itself to a more concise discussion and therefore shall be considered here first. This should not be taken as an ordering of importance.

Originating in Thrace approximately 800 B.C., the cult of Orpheus gradually spread throughout Greece and later through Rome and Sicily, declining with the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity (Swain 1916; Macchiore 1930; Bullough & Bullough 1977). It was based in part on the legend of Dionysus, son of Zeus, who was killed and eaten by the Vulcans. For this act of cannibalism, Zeus destroyed the Vulcans and created man from their ashes. The human body was therefore made of profane material governed by evil passions, but contained a divine soul within. In order to obtain spiritual salvation, one must escape domination of the flesh through ecstasy, spirituality, self-knowledge, and asceticism. One thereby would become “twice-born” as Dionysus was.<sup>1</sup> This concept became a fundamental premise of several schools of Greek philosophy, particularly the Stoics, Cynics, Pythagoreans, and some Neo-Platonists. They believed that indulgence in physical pleasures drained energy that should be used for intellectual and spiritual pursuits. For Greek Stoics and Neo-Platonists, this meant freedom from excess. Some Stoics believed that only procreative sex within the bonds of marriage was acceptable. No pleasure should be involved, because that would indicate being overcome by bodily passions. Others eschewed all sex. Cynics made an extreme point of abstaining from all material things,

often dressing in rags. The asceticism of the Cynics was often far more notable than their philosophical contributions, however.

The influence of Zoroastrianism on western thought was more indirect and complicated, but perhaps more pervasive. Any Greek philosopher or other highly educated individual in the eastern Mediterranean area would be well aware of Zoroaster as an ancient sage. His teachings formed the basis of the oppositional dualism that underpin the cosmology and eschatology of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam today, and were no less influential in other religions that gained widespread popularity in early Christian times.

Zoroastrianism developed from the ancient religion of early Iranians, dating back to at least the third millennium B.C., and possibly to the fourth or fifth (Boyce 1975, 1982, 1992; Boyce & Grenet 1991; Smith 1982; Tiele 1912)<sup>2</sup>. Zoroaster was an Iranian magus who reformed their religion. He conceived the cosmos as the opposition of light and darkness, good and evil. Creation of the world and mankind was a purposeful act by the supreme god Ahura Mazda to aid in the battle against evil. Eternal salvation awaited those who served the forces of good, and damnation those who served evil.

Like most reformers, Zoroaster met considerable resistance and hostility in his homeland, and was forced to flee southward. However, by this time the original Iranian religion had already spread into areas now known as Afghanistan and eastern Iran, so his teachings were grafted onto a compatible preexisting ideology. The new religion gradually gained converts and spread westward. By the time of the Achaemenian line of Persian great kings in the sixth century B.C. it had become widespread. It is debatable as to which of the Achaemenids were strictly Zoroastrian, although sarcophagal

inscriptions indicate that Darius the Great was very devout. These kings tended to be tolerant of other religions, a practice that with few exceptions extended through later Arsacid (126 B.C. -227 A.D.) and Sassanian (227- 651 A.D.) dynasties<sup>3</sup>. This toleration was essential public policy in maintaining the loyalty of diverse people in a far-flung empire. Zoroastrianism certainly held a favorable position to other religions within the Persian empire through the Sassanian dynasty, under which the Mazdean Church was established as a state religion. The demise of the Sassanians and the decline of Zoroastrianism as a major world religion came at the hands of Muslim invaders in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.

The influence of Zoroastrianism on western thought is tied to the vagaries of ancient Middle Eastern politics and history. Prominent developments include the Assyrian conquest and dispersion of Israel, the Babylonian exile, the rise of the Persian Empire, and the spread of Hellenistic culture following Alexander the Great, who defeated Persia in 331 B. C. Many Jews remained in both Babylon and Egypt, playing an important role in the social and political life of these regions for more than a millennium. This was an important factor in later religious developments that still impact us today. From this time on, the Middle East was now exceptionally syncretic with respect to both culture and religion. This was particularly true for Babylon as the gateway between the Mediterranean and the Orient, and Palestine as the land route to Egypt. The tendency for Hebrews (and others) to mix religious practices of surrounding people with their own is cited as a common problem throughout the Old Testament, as well as in the centuries after Jesus (Tiele 1912; Neusner 1986; Black & Green 1992).

Alexander's empire quickly fell apart after his death, resulting in numerous local conflicts in the power vacuum that ensued. The two stable forces that emerged, the Seleucids (311-142 B.C.) in what was once the old Assyrian/ Babylonian kingdom and the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt eventually called on the new military power in Rome to help end the conflicts. Roman troops entered the Middle East in 190 B.C., conquering Palestine in 63 B.C.

It was this eclectic cultural milieu that gave rise to new religions, including Christianity and Gnosticism. Although the exact origins of Gnosticism are difficult to pinpoint, it is now believed that this religious movement developed from a Hellenistic Jewish wisdom tradition (exemplified by Philo of Alexandria) and disillusionment with messianic Judaism (Swain 1916; Groninger 1967; Pearson 1990; Rudolf 1983; McDonald 1988; Pelikan 1970). Gnostics combined a radical version of Iranian oppositional dualism (*i.e.*, good/light vs. evil/darkness) with Greek philosophy and a reinterpretation of the Hebrew creation story. The Jewish creator god was an evil lesser divinity similar to Plato's Demiurge, who with the help of other lesser divinities (note the plural in Genesis 1:26, RSV "Let us make man . . .") created the physical form of man.<sup>4</sup> Life was then breathed into man through the power of a higher divinity. The divine inner spirit of man was thus trapped in an evil material body (in an evil material universe), and sought to escape by overcoming the bonds of material existence through mortification of the flesh and gaining true knowledge of the self and the cosmos.

Some Gnostic sects were libertine, claiming that the power of the flesh could only be overcome by experiencing all worldly indulgences in this life. Others were

extremely ascetic, renouncing all worldly pleasures, including sex. The more ascetic groups may have been the most successful in attracting followers (Bullough & Bullough 1977).

Gnosticism was probably doomed to fail as a major religion due to its highly individualistic nature and the conflicting teachings of its different groups. They never developed any stable bureaucratic organization or settled on an “orthodox” creed. They disagreed not only over asceticism and libertarianism, but also over the nature and purpose of Jesus. Many Gnostics considered themselves Christian, and were influential in several early churches. St. Paul spent a considerable amount of time and energy fighting the Gnostic “heresy,” but was undoubtably influenced by their asceticism. Although their conflicting doctrines left them easy targets for what was to become orthodox Christianity<sup>5</sup>, Gnostic asceticism made its way into Christianity through not only Paul, but also early church leaders such as Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Tertullian, who believed that one could not be Christian and have sex (Bullough & Bullough 1977; McDonald 1988). Tertullian, a former Stoic, is credited with formulating the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin (Pelikan 1970). He later left the Catholic Church to join the Montanists, a highly ascetic Christian group with strong Gnostic tendencies.<sup>6</sup> An earlier influential Christian leader, Origen, had himself castrated to avoid sexual temptation (McDonald 1988).

In considering the influence of these religions on modern sexual thought, it should be noted at this point that Zoroastrianism *as a religion* was neither ascetic or chauvinistic. Man and nature were good creations, and the just had the right to enjoy the good things in life. Fasting and other ascetic practices were sinful because they

weakened the body. Zoroaster insisted that salvation was as important for women as for men, and magi were expected to be married. The wives of these priests performed important religious functions. Women also played a very prominent role in the Orphic cult and many Gnostic sects as well as some heterodox Christian groups (*e. g.*, the Montanists) despite their asceticism. This was one reason these groups were opposed by many pagan Greeks, Hebrews and orthodox Christians (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Ehrman 1993; Macchioro 1930). The combination of a radical form of Iranian dualism with Hellenistic philosophy produced the extreme asceticism that still affects our sexual mores today, but the patriarchy cannot be attributed to the same religious developments.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this section, it is the asceticism that is the matter of primary concern.

As Gnosticism declined, a new religion known as Manichaeism developed in Babylon. Its founder, Mani (216-274 A.D.) was given the task of creating the world's greatest religion by Sassanian Emperor Shapur I (Liue 1992; Neusner 1986; Parrinder 1971; Wimbush 1990). Mani did so by combining what he saw as the best elements of each of the major religions of the Middle East into one new belief system.<sup>8</sup> Containing elements familiar to Zoroastrians, Gnostics and Christians, it could be marketed to any group simply by emphasizing the similarities and ignoring the differences. The most prominent features of this new religion were Iranian dualism, and Gnostic ideas of evil matter and salvation through self-knowledge and asceticism. The two primordial elements were light and darkness. Man was created by the rulers of darkness, but contained a spark of light within. Mani was heavily influenced by the asceticism of Paul and also Marcion, who led a Christian sect that shared the Gnostic rejection of the

Old Testament. For Mani, unregulated sex was considered a wedge of darkness in the kingdom of light. Sins of the flesh included not only the act, but also the impulse (Bullough & Bullough 1977). Manichaeism spread from Europe to China, and was a major target of Christian inquisitions in medieval times. When Augustine converted from Manichaeism to Christianity, he revived the ascetic tendencies of his new religion (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Pelikan 1970).

It was also during the centuries just before and after Jesus that a sexual reinterpretation of the Biblical account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah occurred (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Aries & Bejin 1985). According to noncanonical texts, the original sins of these cities were pride, haughtiness, failure to aid the needy, and unspecified “abominations.” These original “acts against nature” were described by Paul and Augustine as sexual deviations, which could be any nonprocreative sex, including between married couples. These Christian leaders permitted marriage for those who could not remain celibate, but the latter was definitely preferred. Paul’s list of sins against the flesh particularly singled out those who prostituted themselves and unspecified *mollities*. This latter term could be loosely defined as “pleasures,” but also came to mean effeminacy (Aries 1985). Because homosexuality was by definition nonprocreative, it was now included as an act against nature. Paul only mentions men with men, not women with women. Aries suggests that the fault includes both pleasure-seeking and passivity on the part of males. However, it was not any specific sexual act that was sinful, but the power of the flesh over the individual. Therefore, it encompassed all sexual activity outside of marriage, and sexual pleasure within marriage.

Anal intercourse and other sexual deviancy have at this point been transformed from a philosophical concept and a violation of social status to a sin. The sin was that of lust, lumped together with fornication and adultery. The concept of sexual deviancy (anything other than procreative sex within the bounds of marriage) was greatly expanded throughout the medieval period, although ecclesiastic authorities rarely noted what specific acts were prohibited (Bailey 1962; Bullough and Bullough 1977; Foucault 1985; Pelikan 1970). Discussion usually involved the phrase “acts against nature.” Their reluctance to use specific terminology allowed the development of vague edicts that could be interpreted in a variety of ways. In later medieval times, Church doctrine became more specific, defining the degree of seriousness of various offenses and the penance required for each. As these ideas were expanded, the only sexual activity endorsed by some ecclesiastic authorities was married couples face-to-face, with the woman on her back (Bullough & Bullough 1977).

The incorporation of these concepts into secular law began in the 1500's, partly in response to the spread of syphilis throughout Europe, and partly by secular rulers attempting to wrest power from the Church (Bullough & Bullough 1977). Ambiguity remained, as “crimes against nature,” “sodomy,” and “buggery” tended to be used interchangeably because legal as well as religious theorists were loath to mention specific acts. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, both moral and legal authorities had begun to separate homosexuals (a term coined in 1869) as a distinct class of deviants based on pathology rather than sexual license. Aries (1985:65) notes:



**“The Church was prepared to recognize the physical anomaly which made the homosexual a man-woman, an abnormal and always effeminate man; for we must not forget that this first stage toward the creation of an autonomous condition of homosexuality was under the label of effeminacy.”**

**With the medicalization of homosexuality in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, hostile attitudes and segregation from the rest of society increased. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, rapid urbanization and commercialization of society in western Europe and the United States was accompanied by the development of a male homosexual urban subculture (D’Emilio & Freedman 1988). Undoubtedly there was a strong connection between this development and the backlash from a white heterosexual male-dominated society, although it would be difficult to establish the causal order.**

**The medical and psychiatric communities were prominent players in that backlash. Because such sexual deviancy was thought to expend energy in nonproductive ways, it was theorized that homosexuality would lead to physical, mental, and emotional problems (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Nungesser 1983; Aries 1985; Pollack 1985). Homosexuality was also thought to spread rapidly from person to person, and to lead to other crimes. With the increasing prestige of medical science behind them, many researchers claimed a biological origin. Homosexuality (like masturbation and other sexual deviance) was caused by some physical or mental defect, rather than resulting in such deficiencies. These theories were overwhelmingly unsympathetic, although a few prominent researchers like Ulrich and Freud argued against pathologizing sexual deviance. However, the American Psychiatric Association only removed homosexuality from the category of mental illness in 1974. On the other hand, as technology improved, early sexual researchers discovered the actual physiological processes involved in reproduction and copulation, which would eventually demonstrate the error of many myths about women.**

Another trend in sexual attitudes arose from the steady growth of the middle class in post-medieval times (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Aries & Bejin 1985). A trend toward repression had begun in England in the early 1600's, particularly under Cromwell's rule. This gave way to a licentious reaction in speech, drama, and behavior under the Restoration. From the mid 1700's until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, there was a steady increase in legal and religious restrictions on both extramarital sexual activity and sexual themes in print. The impetus for this trend largely came from middle class moral entrepreneurs. The notion of two categories of women, one to be respected and the other to be exploited, has been mentioned above. Historically, this dichotomy was linked to the tradition of the bride's family paying a dowry. The size of the dowry was contingent in part on the virtue of the bride, and partly on the social connections that the marriage would establish. Therefore, it was important for families to both approve of the marriage and control the behavior of daughters, lest the latter lose their marital value (*i.e.*, become damaged goods). Prostitution was tolerated and even sanctioned by authorities to provide a safe outlet for males to engage in premarital sex. In both Pre-Christian Rome and the Carolingian era, marriage could easily be dissolved. The Catholic Church struggled to control the behavior of not only monks, but also priests and laity in early medieval times (Bullough & Brundage 1982; Huizinga 1996; Johanssen & Percy 1996). As the Church gradually gained control over most aspects of medieval life, it increasingly strove for the permanence of marriage, backed by Biblical sanctions for indissolubility and the subjugation of the woman to her husband.

With increased industrialization, and urbanization, middle class women were incrementally excluded from the workplace. "Respectable" women were now expected

to be completely disengaged from useful activity, indicating that their husbands or families were well enough off that they did not have to work (Goffman 1959; Trudgill 1976; Aries & Bejin 1985). In the Augustan and Victorian eras, an ideal of feminine modesty and delicacy developed, as well as reinforcement of the notion that women must live for men. Of course, since ancient Greece and Rome, the idea that women only existed for male pleasure was a given. There was no consideration of a woman's interests or feelings, an attitude that has held sway throughout western history. Simon & Gagnon (1986:107) write: "Indeed, the very idea of female interest in or commitment to sexual pleasure was, and possibly still is, threatening to many men and women." A certain degree of license had always existed for the wealthy, and lower classes were morally suspect (Hughes 1991; Losecke & Fawcett 1995). This new middle class standard required that women and children be protected from any hint of immorality. Because any cross-gender interaction could possibly become a sexual encounter, rules of etiquette strictly defined proper behavior (Goffman 1967). Virginity was mandatory for single women, and any deviation from socially acceptable behavior could be taken as evidence of promiscuity. This concept has been described as the Madonna (or angel) / whore dichotomy. Accordingly female delinquents are punished more harshly for status offenses (Chesney-Lind 1973; Rosenberg, Stebbins & Turowitz 1982; Williamson & van Schie 1989). Well into the 1960's, female delinquents had to submit to a pelvic exam on arrest regardless of offense, with the justification of controlling venereal disease (Chesney-Lind 1973; Cernkovich & Giordano 1979). There was no such requirement for males.

Trudgill (1976) also describes a cult of masculinity evolving from the time of the French Revolution, although it would be difficult to classify previous norms in other terms. It seems likely that further gender polarization at the feminine end of a continuum would be accompanied by polarization at the masculine end, however. Colonialism and expansion of the American frontier may have strengthened male stereotypes as rugged and self-reliant.

The rise of the middle class was accompanied by an increase in literacy throughout the populations of Europe and America. This led to a change in the thrust of censorship. Before the 1700's, censors were mostly concerned with political and religious content (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Hughes 1991). As a greater number of people were able to read, moral entrepreneurs sought to protect women and children from sexual content in print and drama, and later in other media. Social changes in the twentieth century have resulted in a continual redefinition of acceptable behavior in both the public and private realm.

### **Twentieth Century Change in Public Profanity and Sexual Attitudes**

Social observers have noted many changes in modern western norms, particularly those involving sexual behavior and sexual dialogue. The Vietnam War, civil unrest in the 1960's and 1970's, and the third wave of feminism are generally considered to be the primary agents for change (*cf.* Hughes 1991; Bem 1993; Lorber 1994; Crawford 1995). Changes are generally attributed to the "emancipation" of women from traditional roles and restrictive behavioral norms. Reflecting the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, DeKlerk (1991:158) writes: "If expletive usage is indeed a correlate

of social power, then one would expect that as the social role of women in western society changes, patterns of expletive usage will change accordingly.”

Others decry a “desexualization” of American life due to the evils of modernity and loss of traditional moral values (Klapp 1969; Winick 1995, Schmidt 1995). According to those who advance this theoretical position, increased industrialization, urbanization and mobility have weakened the “moral conscience” of modern societies. This is the process that results in the dominance of “impulsive” personalities, for whom the pursuit of selfish interests results in narcissism as institutional controls fail to provide meaningful guidance for individuals’ lives (Turner 1976). Part of this weakening of traditional controls involves the blurring of traditional gender roles. The widespread use of sexuality in mass marketing has destroyed the special character of the sex act. As sex has become profane, language has changed accordingly. The following section will examine purported changes in public use of sexual profanity, corresponding changes in sexual activity and sexual attitudes, and some of the important factors that have influenced those changes. This will establish a foundation for discussion of self-presentational implications of gender identity and gender roles.

Hughes reports a radical shift in swearing in the U. S. from 1950 on, with the largest increase in the late 1960's. Sagarin (1962) speaks of a “modern explosion” even earlier, however. Many researchers have noted that swearing has traditionally been seen as a male domain, reflecting strength, aggressiveness and greater social power (Miller 1962; Lakoff 1975; Jay 1977, 1980, 1992; Gregerson 1979; Haas 1979; G. Fine 1981, 1987; Kocoglu 1996). Jay’s empirical research in the 1980's recorded male incidence of swearing to be almost twice that of females for sexual profanity even in same-sex

settings (also see M. Fine & Johnson 1984; DeKlerk 1991; Kocoglu 1996), but some other recent studies have found no gender differences (Cameron 1969; Wells 1989). Rieber, Wiedemain & D'Amato (1979) found that feminist females were more likely to use sexual profanity than males or nonfeminist females.

Wells (1989) reported a greater preference for the F-word in reference to coital sex by lesbian females and heterosexual males in same-sex settings (M=71.4% first choice; F=57.9%), but in mixed settings males preferred euphemisms such as *screw* or *make love* (M=65.3%; F=41.6%) while the F-word was still heterosexual females' highest preference (M=25.4%; F=48.5%). Of course, "preference" may or may not reflect actual use. There is also no differentiation between literal use and metaphor, but these data certainly raises questions concerning gender differences in offendedness [how offended the research subject is, as opposed to how "offensive" the subject thinks the word is to others (Jay 1992); few researchers make this important distinction].

Jay (1992) recorded significant reductions in incidence of sexual profanity by both males and females in cross-gender interaction. Overall swearing was cut in half for both genders, and use of the F-word as an expletive or insult was only one-third as often as in same-sex conversation. Overall, males swore twice as often as females, and used a much larger profane vocabulary. He also reported that the target of the insult was overwhelmingly male for both coital and homosexual labels (*e.g., faggot, queer, etc.*) regardless of whether the swearer was male or female. *Bitch* was the most common derogatory term for females. Findings that females generally start swearing at later ages, and report being more offended by sexual profanity, seem to be uncontested. Females are also less inclined to look favorably on sexual humor (Love & Deckers 1989).

Comparing empirical findings is difficult, however. Different word sets are used, some items of which are gender-specific. For example, in a gender comparison of “fighting words,” Heasley, Babbitt, & Burbach (1995) only include one sexual term, *motherf\*\*\*\*r*, which is rarely applied to females. Some researchers use self-reports, and others use field recording of incidence. There is no differentiation in field research between high frequency of swearing by a few individuals or more moderate usage by many different individuals. Operationalization of cross-gender conversation can also differ, depending on whether the researcher is concerned with “target,” “listener,” or simply whomever may be in audible range. Additionally, self-reporting of past behavior can be notoriously inaccurate, even when discrepancies are unintentional (see Short & Nye 1962). “Preferences” also may not accurately reflect usage. Using audio recording equipment can bias results toward conversationalists with the loudest voices, however (Jay 1992; Tannen 1994). Because they tend to be spoken more emphatically, audio recording tends to pick up expletive remarks more clearly than adjectival or other labeling terms. This bias could be significant, considering that Jay recorded adjectival use of the F-word as comprising over half of all usage for both genders. If the research cited above that women use milder swear words is correct, audio recording could result in significant undercounting of female swearing.

The general consensus, however, is that swearing has increased in the second half of the twentieth century, and that women are swearing in public to a much greater extent than previously. In separate conversations in the early 1990's, two bar owners stated to me that they no longer criticized male customers for using sexual profanity when women were present. One explained that, after warning a pair of male patrons

about their language when a group of women entered, he overheard the women using sexual profanity more freely than the males had. If the taboo on sexual language in mixed company is to protect female sensibilities, it would be hypocritical to reproach women for using obscenities in the presence of men. Of course, perceptions of such interaction may be biased because of the violation of traditional gender roles. Tannen (1994) notes that females are thought to be dominating conversation even when their actual participation is only slightly more than one third of the total.

Only literary and anecdotal evidence exists for swearing patterns before the 1960's. Hughes (1991) notes that there have always been signal swearers among women, but they were only that (if female swearing was widespread, such terminology would not make sense). Because most concrete historical evidence is literary, and women were largely excluded from this realm, only those women who aggressively violated gender norms would publish under a feminine name. Ecclesiastic and legal censorship have also encumbered historical research into swearing by either sex.

Censorship and other legal restrictions on use of taboo words can be more readily documented than informal speech styles. Historical patterns and an overview of modern court cases below are primarily taken from Hughes (1991) and Jay (1992), except as noted. Text and analysis of U. S. Supreme Court opinions and dissents are provided in Ducat & Chase (1988) and Epstein (1995). Case law is often concerned with more issues than just "dirty words," as obscenity can refer to nudity, graphic visual or verbal depiction of sexual themes, or disorderly conduct induced by aggressive verbal behavior. In the U.S., the Bill of Rights requires that privacy and free speech must be



balanced against the general welfare of the community. Both legal definitions and public standards concerning obscene speech have also changed over time.

Middle English literature seemed to freely use sexual language. The first official secular attempts at censorship in England began around 1600, as a backlash against excesses on Elizabethan Stage. However, the Queen was quite fond of swearing, so no legislation could be enacted during her reign. In 1606, a Master of Revels was appointed under the Lord Chamberlain with prior censorship authority over plays, but the concern of the Crown at this time was preventing blasphemy and politically subversive topics. Through the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the power of this office was expanded. The Licensing Act of 1737 gave the Lord Chamberlain's office broad censorship powers over all media, which was not rescinded until 1968. By this time, sexual language was also under attack.

The role of middle class moral entrepreneurs has been previously mentioned. In Britain, Dr. Thomas Bowdler (1754-1825) and his family were the most prominent. He fought against any sexually suggestive wording in drama or print, and rewrote several Shakespearean works, deleting all objectionable language. His motive was to protect his wife and daughters (as well as other women and children) from such vile language. This sentiment would be echoed in later court rulings on both sides of the Atlantic. In the U. S., Anthony Comstock successfully pushed for 19<sup>th</sup> century legislation against mailing "obscene" materials, which is still in effect. In the mid twentieth century, Mary Whitehouse lobbied against sexual content on British television and cinema, resulting in the formation of the Mogg Commission. This corresponded to the Meese Commission on pornography in the U. S. Although their findings indicated no link between

pornography and sex crimes, the political pressures fueling their existence led to rating systems for movies and television shows. Hollywood had prescribed voluntary standards under the 1934 code of ethics, known as the “production code.” This code prohibited a wide variety of behavioral and speech acts, including many considered quite mild today. The code was constantly being challenged as filmmakers tried to outdo each other stretching the limits. For example, the use of *damn* in the closing speech of *Gone with the Wind* in 1936 was eventually allowed, but only after a fine was paid. American television was not only regulated by the Federal Communication Commission, writers and producers often engaged in their own prior censorship (Lewis 1972). Under political pressure, the recording industry introduced a rating system for lyrics in 1990.

Legal standards for judging obscene printed material were set forth in English common law through *Regina v. Hicklen*, 1868. The court held that material could be judged obscene if it had a tendency to corrupt the minds of those who might get their hands on it (taken to mean the most vulnerable; *i.e.*, women and children). American courts followed this precedent until 1957. In *Roth v. United States*, the Supreme Court dictated a three-part test for obscenity (see Appendix A for Supreme Court docket numbers). The majority opinion stated that the work under scrutiny could be deemed obscene if the dominant theme indicated a prurient interest in sex, if it was patently offensive by contemporary standards, and if it was utterly without redeeming social value. A 1964 case, *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, refined the test by making it explicit that a national standard for offensiveness was to be used. In *Memoirs v. Massachusetts*, the Supreme Court stated that “a modicum of social value” was sufficient for the work to be

legal. In 1973, a more conservative Berger Court began to restrict the *Roth* test in *Miller v. California*. Now a work could be judged by prevailing *community* standards, and was required to show *serious* artistic, literary, political, or scientific value.

Most of these cases involved publication or dissemination of visual representations of sexual themes. Throughout the twentieth century, novelists have pushed for more freedom to describe sexual interaction or use swear words in order to depict real life, especially descriptions of war. Novels considered notable for expanding allowable terminology include *Ulysses* (1922), *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (1928), *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf* (1966).

The modern precedent for judging the obscenity of spoken words extends from *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*, 1942. Chaplinsky was proselytizing on a street corner, and drew a hostile crowd. Police ordered him to cease and one called him a “damned bastard.” Chaplinsky then directed a string of (nonsexual) swear words at the officer. He was arrested under a law prohibiting public use of any offensive or derogatory word to any other person. The court convicted him, noting that the words were not delivered “with a disarming smile.” (There was no keying cue). The Supreme Court upheld his conviction, finding that the offensive utterance was an extremely provocative personal utterance which would have a direct tendency to provoke the average person to violent response; that is, “fighting words.” The Court stated that such words must be uttered face-to-face, and be directed at an individual, not a group in order to be exempt from First Amendment protection.

In *Cohen v. California*, 1971, the defendant was arrested for wearing a jacket into a courthouse with the words “F\*\*k the draft” (spelled out completely) written on it.

Applying the *Chaplinsky* precedent, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction, because the words were not a personal insult directed at an individual. They were only written words, and involved no activity on the part of the defendant.

In a more recent state case, *Buffkins v. City of Omaha* 1989, a Black woman was taken into custody at an airport and interrogated for an hour. Police had acted on an anonymous drug tip, and “Black person” was the only description provided. Upon being released, Buffkin muttered “asshole!” and was arrested for disorderly conduct. Nebraska courts acquitted her, using *Chaplinsky* and several state cases as precedents. Buffkin’s lawyers maintained that the slur was aimed at the system, it did not constitute fighting words because it was only mildly offensive, and police were expected to hear much profanity.

However, the right to restrict the use of offensive words on radio was upheld in *FCC v. Pacifica*, 1978. A New York City radio station had been reprimanded by the Federal Communications Commission after broadcasting a routine by comedian George Carlin ridiculing the television and radio ban on certain “dirty words.” Because broadcasts entered private homes and automobiles, and could be readily heard by children, the Supreme Court ruled that the FCC had the authority to restrict offensive language on radio. The controversial nature of balancing the right of free speech against the general welfare of the community can be seen in the split decisions in the above cases. Three Supreme Court Justices dissented in the *Roth* decision, and the *Cohen*, *Miller*, and *Pacifica* cases were decided by a five to four vote.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that two longstanding norms have existed concerning conversational swearing. First, as mentioned above, swearing was a male

domain. It was considered unseemly for women or young children to swear (Lakoff 1975; DeKlerk 1991). Second, in the name of protecting the innocence and virtue of the young and the female, it was taboo for men to swear in front of women. Lakoff notes that men drop male conversational styles and topics when women enter the room, especially sexual topics. She takes the observance of such conventions to mean that “. . . women go along with men’s assumption that female anatomy is particularly revolting (p.76).” According to Henle (1977:50):

“Though the terms of the metaphor vary, its underlying male attitude toward sex and woman is obvious. Woman is the enemy, and sex is an act of aggression against her. Copulation is a mode of attack, a way of asserting male dominance by inflicting pain and humiliation upon the women.”

Similar sentiments are reflected in other feminist writings (*e.g.*, Bem 1993; Crawford 1995). This may be a case where relying on intuition rather than hard evidence is a legitimate criticism, considering the extent to which the female anatomy is used in marketing. In addition, this may be giving women too high of a standing in gender relations. De Sade notwithstanding, it is unlikely that most males are thinking about the pain or humiliation of the woman when they are engaged in copulation. These hypotheses also prove to be of limited use in explaining female use of sexual profanity, or why males are overwhelmingly the target.

On the other hand, Kanin (1979) takes a slightly different approach. He believes that coital slang reflects male use of force and deceit, and therefore females identify coitus with misfortune. If this were the case, it would seem that females would have traditionally used and been targeted by the F-word as an insult more frequently than

males (since for males it is fortuitous). Both genders are known to use the euphemistic phrase “get lucky” to refer to having sex.

However, it would seem that impression management and keying concerns may have more explanatory value than the aforementioned approaches. Hughes (1991:157-158) retells an anecdote concerning Samuel Johnson’s publication of a new dictionary in 1755, containing many words that were omitted from previous such works. Johnson visited two female friends, who congratulated him on the publication, and thanked him for leaving out the most offensive words. Johnson replied that the women obviously must have been looking for those words. The topic was abruptly changed!

Similarly, Goffman (1959:130-131) relates Archibald’s (1947) description of interaction on the San Francisco waterfront, where the men would observe a strict taboo against swearing when women were present, even though the women gave “audible proof that the forbidden words were neither unfamiliar nor disturbing.” When internal controls failed to constrain swearing in front of women, informal sanctions could be imposed (Goffman 1959, Tannen 1994).

If language reflects culture, do more liberal attitudes toward sexual profanity correspond to changes in sexual attitudes and behavior? Available evidence certainly seems to support such a conclusion, but the importance of 1960’s protest movements and modern feminism may be overstated. Laumann, *et. al.* (1994) found that among those born between 1953 and 1962, 18.6% of men and 27.4% of women were virgins at marriage. For the 1933-1942 cohort, 26.4% of men and 55.1% of women remained virgins until marriage. The 1963-1974 cohort showed a slight reversal of the trend, however, as 22% of men and 30% of women abstained until marriage. Of those coming of age in the 1950’s & 1960’s, one fourth of men and 45% of women were virgins at age

19, compared to 15% and 17%, respectively, for those coming of age in the 1970's and 1980's. However, Laumann found these changes to be the result of a long-term trend toward earlier intercourse for women, rather than an abrupt shift that would indicate a sexual revolution between 1968 and 1980.

Laumann's results are corroborated by others. Weinberg, Lottes & Gordon (1997) found that among 19-22 year old undergraduates in 1992, 88% of males were nonvirgin, compared to 61% in 1967. Eighty percent of the female sample were nonvirgin, compared to 36% in 1967. The average number of partners for males remained the same, while the number for females rose. Other researchers confirm these trends. The slight reversal among those coming of age in the late 1980's and 1990's is attributed to the threat of AIDS (Murstein & Mercy 1994; Cooksey, Rindfuss & Guilkey 1996; Simon & Gagnon 1986). Again, a long-term pattern of lower age for first intercourse for females has accounted for the change.

An even more dramatic change has occurred concerning attitudes about sexual behavior. In Murstein & Mercy's undergraduate sample, 95.6% of both males and females endorsed premarital sex. Liberalization of attitudes among females has also been found by all of the researches cited above. In 1961, however, Bell & Buerkle reported that 88% of mothers and 55% of daughters believed that it is "very wrong" not to be a virgin at the time of marriage. This trend toward liberalization is not continuous, nor can it be directly related to a "sexual revolution" in the 1960's and 1970's, however. Slevin (1983) found women coming of age in the 1920's and after 1965 had more liberal attitudes toward sex and other social behaviors restricted for women (including swearing) than those growing up during the Depression. Haavio, Roos & Kontula

(1996) found that women coming of age in the 1970's had much more liberal attitudes about sex than their mothers, but those coming of age in the AIDS era were less enthusiastic.

The research just discussed could be taken as evidence that the second and third wave of feminism strongly influenced sexual attitudes and sexual swearing. Although feminism may have provided new models of behavior, the extent to which the movement has had a direct impact on large portions of the general population is questionable (Tannen 1994; Crawford 1995). There are other factors that have affected the lives of women in the twentieth century more directly, and both protest movements and women's liberation movements may be a result rather than a cause.

One of these factors is war. The two world wars and Vietnam have had a noticeable effect on the proliferation of swearing, as large numbers of men were thrown into stressful and uncertain situations (Sagarin 1962; Hughes 1991). These wars also caused a considerable displacement among the very age groups that would normally be establishing stable sexual relationships (Costello 1985). As many men (and some women) are taken from their normal economic activities and shipped overseas, their jobs must be filled by women to ensure full wartime production. Women are thereby allowed to escape domestic captivity and achieve a degree of economic self-sufficiency.

Another and perhaps more important factor is the improvement in feminine hygiene and contraceptive products (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Bem 1993; Laumann, *et. al.*, 1994; Weinberg, Lottes & Gordon 1997). The invention and mass marketing of sanitary pads in the 1920's led to a revolution in women's clothing, allowing much greater freedom of activity. Contraceptive devices have been used since ancient times,



with varying degrees of success. Various forms of penile sheaths were used, but affordable and reliable latex condoms only became available in the 1930's. The woman had to rely on male use of these for protection, however. Various cervical caps, IUD's and spermicidal sponges had been in existence for centuries, but safe and effective ones were only developed between the two world wars. An effective birth control pill was first produced in 1956. The Supreme Court guaranteed a woman's right to abortion in early stages of pregnancy in *Roe v. Wade*, 1967. With these advances, reliable pregnancy protection was not only under the control of the woman, she did not need to plan for sexual activity far in advance. New drugs were developed in the first half of the twentieth century to cure most venereal diseases, and reliable condoms inhibited their transmission.

A third factor is the influence of mass media (Klapp 1969; Winick 1995; Weinberg, Lottes, & Gordon 1997). Historically, literary works and stage dramas reached a limited audience, so any influence they had would be on the educated elite and the well-to-do. Now modern industrial countries have a high literacy rate and novels, newspapers, and magazines are read regularly by millions. Today, radio and television can reach virtually anywhere. Cinema has become a major industry, and X- and R- rated movies are free to depict sexual activity as well as strong language. Lakoff (1975) believed that role models and media images set the standard, even though there may be wide variation in conformity to norms. She writes: “. . . a stereotypical image may be far more influential than a (mere) statistical correlation (p.59).” Societal standards for appropriate gender identities set the boundaries for individual self-presentation, and audience reaction to those self-presentations.

## **Identity and Labeling**

The notion that media images can set cultural standards for behavior involves at least three assumptions. First, a society has cultural ideals that individuals are expected to take into account. Second, that those ideals can change. Finally, individuals must have some internal readiness to conform to those ideals. Certainly the above discussion demonstrates that cultural ideals concerning sexual expression and sexual activity by women have changed. It cannot be determined whether new norms presented in the media changed activity patterns in the general population, or if media presentations are simply reflecting new patterns of activity. There may be a reflexive pattern of modeling and diffusion (Bandura 1977). Whichever scenario is the actual case, the result is new identity possibilities for women, “emancipated” rather than “Madonna.”

Identity is not only pertinent to discussion of changing sexual behavior, but also to sexual insult. As a labeling process, obscene speech defines the cultural boundaries of acceptable sexual behavior and gender role conformity through the imputation of a deviant or devalued identity to the target. By examining society’s patterns of sexual profanity, one can better assess what has actually changed in gender relations, and what has remained the same.

Mead (1934) demonstrated how the individual comes to have a self through an increasing ability to understand the relationship among various social roles, and the individual’s own place among those relationships. The person is therefore able to participate in meaningful social interaction, directing own’s own activities according to a reasonable expectation of the activities of others, and a sense of what others may reasonably expect of the individual. Mead described this as the ability to take the role of the other

In the sense meant by Mead, “role-taking” refers to an individual’s understanding of social relationships and patterns of activity that derive from those relationships. These understandings arise from social interaction, which is made possible through the use of symbols with shared meanings. However, the individual also stands in relationships to others, and therefore can be said to occupy certain roles. Here, “role” is the relational position, and “identity” is the description of one who occupies the position. Role-taking in this sense refers to performance of behavior which takes into account what others expect from one in that particular social position. These positions are generally already culturally defined and ordered. The roles of “mother” and “father” clinically refer to the part taken by females and males in the reproductive process. However, these terms also designate positions within a social structure we have named “family.” As such, the terms also express certain cultural expectations and obligations toward each other and the offspring produced. A father may be expected to be a protector, breadwinner, teacher, and role model. Additionally, these expectations involve hierarchal ordering, in that fathers, mothers, and children have different quantities of power, and these power differentials are embedded in the formalization of norms and values (*e.g.*, the legal system, religion) and the ideology that supports them.

Although roles involve normative behavioral expectations which usually predate and extend beyond the individual occupant, there is considerable room for negotiation and personal interpretation (Foote 1951; Goffman 1959; Scott & Lyman 1968; Turner 1975; Stryker 1980; Burke & Reitzes 1981). Because roles and identities are constantly negotiated, there are both standard and unique elements in every interaction. We therefore attempt to glean important information about the identities of others and a

sense of what interaction is (and is expected to be) taking place from such clues as may be available. Goffman (1976:12) states:

“And note, this deciphering competency . . . does not make us acute about just any set of perceptual details, but rather those which allow us to make conventionally important discriminations; for it is about these matters that are of general social relevance that we will have bothered to accumulate experience.”

To the extent that we become socially competent, we learn about many more roles than those we actually perform. We define certain roles as our own, and others as inappropriate or unnecessary. This identification necessitates a process of categorization and naming (Foote 1951; Hogg, Terry & White 1995). We must identify ourselves as well as others, and our corresponding behavior is motivated by our commitment to roles with which we identify. Behavior is also modified by pairing of roles, such as parent-child, teacher-student, or husband- wife (C. W. Mills 1940; Rosenberg 1979; Burke & Reitzes 1981; Riley & Burke 1995). Because the adult self includes numerous role-identities, some will inherently be of more importance to the individual than others. In addition, the particular social situation will require the activation of certain identities rather than others (Stryker 1980; Callero 1985). Some identities are salient in most interactional situations, such as age, race/ethnicity, or gender. Individuals find it very difficult to interact with one another when they cannot determine each other's sex (Ridgeway 1997).

Identity can involve not only who we are, but also who we want to be. Cultural norms define both what is valued and what is appropriate. As introspective beings, we can strive to obtain more desirable identities, or to enhance our performance in roles which we already occupy (Rosenberg 1979). The individual's behavior is thus

motivated by a commitment to that desired identity (Foote 1951; Burke & Reitzes 1981). Actual role performances rarely conform completely to culturally defined ideal standards for that performance (Goffman 1959), but the cultural standards often are very near the heart of society's dearest values (Goffman 1967). This is why Lakoff could give so much weight to stereotypes, even though overconformity may cause one to be labeled as a phony. It is also the norms that are closest to a society's worldview that are the most resistant to change. Durkhiem (Wolfgang, *et.al.*, 1962:12) notes: "Every pattern is an obstacle to new patterns, to the extent that the first pattern is inflexible. The better a structure is articulated, the more it offers a healthy resistance to all modifications; and this is equally true of functional, as of anatomical organization."

Social interaction requires at least two actors. We not only categorize ourselves, we also make assumptions about the identities of others, and use these assumptions to guide our interaction. Because we never have full information to inform our judgements, we must make those judgements from a limited number of facts available (Goffman 1959). The person in question will provide information intentionally and unintentionally. Modes of dress, hairstyles, and other props support verbal information provided. Other clues may be incorporated into a person's presentation to such an extent that they are enacted unconsciously. Gender differences in speech styles, body and hand movements, eye contact, emotional responses, or seating alignment toward others have no biological basis, but are learned behaviors that reinforce our presentations as man or woman (Lorber 1994; Tannen 1994; Wood 1994). Once incorporated, they seem natural. However, the learning process behind these mannerisms is by no means quick or simple (Bandura 1977, Bolin 1988). Thus, an up-

and-coming female singer can admit that as a child, she practiced “breaking down” for her anticipated future Tony Award acceptance speech (Sixty Minutes 1999). This does not mean that the emotional response one feels when so honored is insincere, only that the expression is done in gender-appropriate ways.

Under circumstances in which an individual’s presented identity may be questioned or discounted, the actor may engage in dramatic enhancement of role. Goffman (1959) provides the example of a practical nurse who may employ a variety of bedside mannerisms and behaviors to insure that the patient believes she is properly performing her duties as nurse. A registered nurse may find these dramatic touches unnecessary. Bolin (1988) describes how some male-to-female transsexuals may “dress up” all the time, even though attracting attention increases the risk of being read (*i.e.*, the nature of their true identity uncovered). Similarly, adolescents may engage in exaggerated flirting behaviors (Moore 1995), or feel compelled to engage in “adult” activities such as drinking, smoking, or swearing (Cloward & Ohlin 1961; Miller 1962; G. Fine 1987; Wight 1996).

Categorization of others involves designating meaningful symbols, or labels, to the categories and members thereof. Once we designate a person as a member of a certain social category, we align our behavior toward them in a certain way, and expect certain types of behavior in response (Goffman 1959, 1963a; Becker 1963). As noted above, the individual may strive to acquire a certain label, or it may be applied in a compulsory manner. The acquisition of a new identity will change the way people act toward an individual, and require that the individual make corresponding changes in interaction patterns. Individuals have a certain degree of control over information about

the self that is presented to others, and they may have good reason to withhold discrediting information. On the other hand, the audience is always looking for discrediting information, which may necessitate redefining the individual's identity (Goffman 1959). Because identity is socially constructed, an individual may attempt to redefine the self in a manner more advantageous to current or future concerns. Such redefinition may or may not meet with audience acceptance, however. Groups with stigmatized identities may create subcultures with ideologies that support a higher valuation of the identity (Becker 1963; Goffman 1963; MacKinnon 1994; Smith-Lovin & Douglas 1992). We have identities as men and women, and concepts of expected behavior corresponding to each category. A redefinition of expected behavior means a reconceptualization of the category.

Labeling is not an emotionally neutral phenomenon. Symbols not only designate, they also evoke affective responses. According to our society's values, we make certain relational judgements about objects and activities in our social world, and these valuations become embedded in the terminology we use to describe those objects and activities. Osgoode (1962) found that the dimensions of good/bad, powerful/weak, and active/passive accounted for most of the connotative meanings that we attached to words. Following Osgoode's work, affect control theorists criticize previous identity theories for concentrating on cognitive aspects of categorization and labeling (MacKinnon 1994). According to affect control theory, actors expect members of certain social categories to behave in certain ways corresponding to those categories. Affective semantic dimensions are representations of fundamental sentiments that members of a society have toward the social objects or activities represented. When an

individual acts in a manner inconsistent with expectations, the audience will either redefine the situation or relabel the actor in a way that is more consistent with fundamental sentiments (MacKinnon & Heise 1993; MacKinnon 1994). Using Osgoode's dimensions of evaluation, potency and activity (EPA ratings), affect control theorists have found that males are seen as more powerful while females are rated as nicer (Kroska 1997). In addition, other behaviors tend to confirm gender identities. Metaphor and sexual profanity involve relabeling to evoke connotative response, and the success of sexual metaphor strikes at fundamental ideas about gender-appropriate behavior in America.

### **Gender Identities**

Gender has been identified as a master status, coloring almost all social interaction. Society has normative prescriptions for behavior, dress, and placement in the social hierarchy depending on whether one is categorized as male or female. We are socialized from infancy in the intricacies of proper gender behavior (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994; Tannen 1994). Doyle (1989, in Wood 1994:77-82) lists five culturally defined themes of masculinity:

1. Don't be female.
2. Be successful.
3. Be aggressive.
4. Be sexual- sexual conquest and virility are vital to manhood.
5. Be self-reliant.

Wood also adds five themes of femininity (p.82-87):

1. Appearance still counts.
2. Be sensitive and caring.
3. Negative treatment by others- devaluation of anything feminine.
4. Be superwoman.
5. There is no single meaning of feminine anymore- women have choices.



The themes of masculinity have been documented by numerous researchers (*cf.* Miller 1962; G. Fine 1987; Williamson & van Schie 1989; Wight 1996), and have remained relatively constant. Theme one, “don’t be female,” seems to be of overriding importance. One of the most common locker-room and playground male insults is to compare another male to a woman. In this era of political correctness, a college football coach could be forced to make a public apology for saying in a press conference that his team played “like a bunch of girls (USA Today 1998).” However, one may rest assured that pressure for the apology did not come from team members.

Aggression and success are also part of the male culture of competition. This is not only true in business and athletics, it is also a dominant feature of sexual conquest (Miller 1962; Pleck 1989[1974]; Wight 1996). The competition for the most attractive and desirable women is based on outdoing the other guy, not any misconception that cultural norms of feminine beauty make for a better romantic partner. Because power and dominance create differential status among men, Pleck concludes that granting equal status to women would place some women above weaker men, an intolerable condition in a staunchly patriarchal society.

Masculine themes also combine to form an anti-homosexual ideology, based on deviance from themes one, three, and four. Beatty (1979) found that in Japan and China, masculinity and virility are two separate concepts. Masculinity is based on bonding with other males, while virility refers to how one manages sexual behavior. Homosexuality in these cultures is irrelevant in social relationships. On the other hand, he concludes that these two concepts merge in the United States. Behavior in sex role is taken as a measure of both masculinity and virility. Beatty also noted that in U. S.

prisons, those who take on the aggressive “masculine” role are not considered homosexual. This is reinforced by research into gay male subcultures, where those who play the passive role are devalued more than those who take the active role.<sup>9</sup> Nungesser (1983) cites a variety of research efforts that find stereotypical views of male homosexuals as caricatures of women. Chauncey (1994:81) writes: “A man who allowed himself to be used sexually as a woman, then, risked forfeiting his masculine status . . . so long as they played the ‘man’s’ role, they remained men.” Although Humphries (1975) stated that the most valued role was that of insertee, he later described men who devalued their role as fellators when age prevented them from continuing to perform the male role. Gregerson (1977) concludes that derogatory terms for passive homosexuals (but not “active” ones) seem to be pan-cultural.

Themes of femininity seem to be in a state of flux, according to Wood (1994). Traditional behavioral norms concerning beauty and nurturing remain, but are now overlaid with modern demands of the labor market. Her five themes give one the longstanding sense of secondary status as inferior beings who exist for male pleasure and domestic labor (appearance, nurture, and negative treatment), but now are expected to be wage-workers besides (super-woman). Although certain researchers ( *e.g.*, Klapp 1969; Schmidt 1995; Winick 1995) have made much of the unisex fad of the 1960’s and 1970’s, gender displays generally have not changed much over time. Goffman’s (1976) analysis of advertisements in which women are displayed in childish poses or as a supporting cast for men seems quite current, a finding reinforced by Luebke (1989).

If women are no longer restricted to two narrowly defined roles, one respectable and the other stigmatized, one would expect a great deal of variation in how women

approach modern life. Individual choices and attitudes become more important as cultural scripts become contradictory (Simon & Gagnon 1986; Bandura 1977; Wood 1994). However, individuals may take advantage of certain opportunities that emancipation offers, but are still cognizant of traditional normative gender expectations. Ashford (1998) found that women were reluctant to bring up gender-equity issues in the workplace if they felt they would be seen as pushy or unfeminine. Impression management was more important than equal treatment.

For heterosexuals, male and female are complimentary roles, each offering the other valued social feedback and control of sexual opportunity (Lorber 1994; Wood 1994). Therefore, adherence to traditional gender scripts may entail certain social advantages which override equity concerns. Desirable social feedback includes the acknowledgment by others that we are sexually attractive (C. Johnson 1992). In addition, the ordinary doings of daily life transcend issues which the individual may feel unable to change. This can be seen in assertions made to me by female acquaintances concerning feminism and equal rights. A female graduate student stated: "So men make more than women! That's life; get over it!" The wife of a former coworker put her feelings in more colorful language: "I love having tits, and having men open doors for me."

At the individual level, role enactment is subject to a degree of negotiation and innovation (Turner 1962; Stryker 1980). Turner notes that role behavior is subject to two types of validation. Internal validation emanates from the actor's successful anticipation of the behavior. External validation arises from the judgement of others. The criteria the actor uses for validation may differ from that of others, however.

Pevey, Williams & Ellison (1996) demonstrate how women in religious groups that preach subjugation to the husband reinterpret their status to create role distance. They found an emphasis on the value of feminine traits and on the team concept of marriage. These researchers also discovered a pattern of systematic self-exemption: Other women may conform to the role script, but “I’m not like that!” They note that this may reflect a sample bias, as the wives who were most independent may have been more likely to participate.

Although previously cited research demonstrates a clear pattern of increasing premarital sex by women in the second half of the twentieth century, such a pattern does not indicate that women have as much freedom as men to flaunt their sexual activity. The conflict between sexual freedom and feminine self-presentation is illustrated by a recent (1996) anecdote I observed:

After finishing work at a local restaurant one evening, the chef, a waitress, and her fiancé (a chef’s helper) went to the bar for a couple of drinks. The chef made a remark to his helper about the current show on television. The remark contained a sexual double-entendre, but no profanity. The waitress quickly expressed her offendedness at the sexual content. The chef later confided to me his consternation at the response of the waitress, due to the mild nature of his remark and because he doubted her sexual naivete. The chef was correct in his assessment, as it soon became public knowledge that the waitress would become an unwed mother before the year was over. The timing of the birth was such that the waitress was probably pregnant at the time of this incident.

The above anecdote expresses more than just failed impression management. Gender differences in affective response to verbal sexual expression, and the tension between competing norms of proper feminine behavior are also present. Jackson (1996:28) notes: “the coercive equation of sex=coitus=something men do to women is not an inevitable consequence an anatomical female relating sexually to an anatomical

man, but the product of the social relations under which those bodies meet.” This tells only part of the story. The “double bind” in which women find themselves is not restricted to language, work, or even the unequal distribution of social power that feminists decry (*e.g.*, Lorber 1994; Tannen 1994; Crawford 1995). These arenas expose the problem; however, its main cause is more fundamental. If “maleness” is taken as the norm at the heart of western culture, then being “female” is inevitably removed from that heart. As long as prescriptions for feminine behavior differ from prescriptions for masculine behavior, and masculine behavior is venerated, women are forced to choose between being devalued by complying with norms of being feminine, or being devalued by not conforming to norms of being feminine. Thus, women have to reject their being female in order to gain any measure of equal standing with men (Bullough & Bullough 1977; Lumsden 1985; Sunderland 1995).

For those who conform to society’s norms, gender is inextricably linked to sex, which is an ascribed status not easily changed. One may therefore consider the conventional gender categories to be castes. Once gender is viewed in this light, Milner’s (1992) study of the traditional caste system in India provides striking parallels. He found that subordinate caste members could only raise their status by successfully redefining the caste as having a legitimate claim to a higher social grouping, thereby lifting the casting as a whole. Such a claim would necessarily be accompanied by imitation of the ritual behavior of the higher status social group. Individuals could escape the fate of the caste only by denying their caste membership. Gender, however, provides only two socially legitimized castes. If it can be presumed that the higher caste would strongly resist an inversion of the social order, then any higher status claims by the subordinate caste probably will fail.

The description of gender as either a master status or a caste therefore involves not only categorization, but also a hierarchal ordering. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this is not just a matter of following vestigial rules of the past. Rather, it is constant ongoing process of everyday life. Accordingly, Stets & Burke (1996:193) write: “We see the *status* of gender and the *identity* of gender as simultaneously produced and maintained in interaction [emphasis in original].”

It follows that women would seek to expand their interactional citizenship and trespass rights whenever the opportunity to do so presents itself, but the success of such efforts is constrained by prevailing social norms. The question this paper attempts to address is whether increased verbal sexual expression as a correlate of sexual freedom is indicative of the enhanced status of women. If traditional ideas of appropriate gender behavior remain in the public moral consciousness, then increased use of sexual profanity may simply reinforce the devaluation of women and women’s roles. An understanding of the nature of sexual profanity with reference to gender identity may shed light on these issues

### **Sexual Profanity as Derogation**

As noted above, societies define normative boundaries through their concepts of deviance. Gary Fine (1976) has noted that profanity and sexual humor enforce cultural taboos and reveal correct forms of sexual behavior. DeKlerk’s statement that patterns of expletive usage should change as women’s status changes may be true, but she did not clarify what patterns one should expect in response to what status change. Western civilization has exalted men and devalued women at least from the time of ancient Greece. No small part of this devaluation involves womens’ “passive” sex role, and

their classification as objects of male sexual pleasure. Over the course of western history, this has also developed into an anti-homosexual ideology based on the stereotype of male homosexuals as effeminate objects of other males' pleasure.

An examination of common English language profane terms that imply sexual activity reveals that, with the exception of the non-Anglo *motherf\*\*\*\*r*, all terms impute a female or passive homosexual role to the target (O'Neil 1999). It has been seen above that the derogation of homosexuality extends from the derogation of femininity. When understood in this light, it is not surprising that Jay (1992), who has done the most comprehensive fieldwork on contemporary swearing, finds the target of coital and homosexual insults to be overwhelmingly male. Although the F-word itself can only be traced back to the sixteenth century, the threat to rape one's male enemies was common in ancient Rome. Thus the proper form of the insult would be: "[I will] *f\*\*k* you!" The devil was too late. That is also why the F-word has no negative. A negative statement carries no threat. It is probably not a historical accident that the ontogenesis of nonliteral uses of the F-word occurred in the 1890's. This was a time when homosexuality was being differentiated and pathologized. According to Hughes (1991), the period from then until World War I was also a time of proliferation of slang terms for homosexuals.

If in the male speech community the insulting quality of sexually profane action words derives from the metaphoric imputation of female or homosexual identity (*i.e.*, the passive female sex role) to the target, then the traditional taboo against use of such terms in front of women, and women's greater degree of offendedness, is quite understandable. The lack of automatic keying also undoubtedly plays an important role

in the traditional taboo. Why, then, would women increase public use of such terminology in the name of emancipation? As a manifest function (Merton 1967), an expansion of interactional rights is understandable, but the latent function is to continue the devaluation of women. Other indicators of gender power differentials, such as battering or date rape, do not show improvement. There is still a noticeable discrepancy in income between men and women, largely unchanged over the last two decades (Lorber 1994; Wood 1994; Crawford 1995).

Part of the general increase in swearing is probably due to relaxed regulation of media content, and the greater diffusion potential of mass media. Yet the most offensive words are still prohibited on broadcast television and radio, although cable movie channels and cinema have more leeway. Feminine impression management concerns are still valid, however, according to evidence presented by Ashford (1998). These concerns are also indicated by the Wells and Reiber studies cited above that found higher use of the F-word by feminists and lesbians, two groups that would seem to be less concerned with traditional norms of self-presentation. The mass media approach can therefore take us only so far.

One reason for increased female use of sexual profanity could be that the symbolic referent differs between males and females. The phallic symbol of power and conquest for males is not likely to find the same expression in female experience, nor are females likely to denigrate the female role. Despite the presumed "shared meaning" of significant symbols, Mead's (1934) caveat that imagery must derive from the personal experience of the individual would seem to be fundamental to connotative meaning. In addition, despite feminist rhetoric, the empirical and historical evidence



strongly suggests that the violence and aggression expressed in sexual profanity are directed at males, not females. This does not mean that there aren't men who abuse women. However, whatever personal psychological needs such men satisfy, they gain no status among other men by doing so. As Pleck (1989) noted, men's power derives from competition with other men. Women are only pawns in the struggle. The devaluation inherent in male use of sexual profanity is a two-step process.

This line of argument would also suggest that male and female motives for using sexual profanity would differ, and research seems to support this conclusion. Paletz & Harris' (1975) analysis of campus protests resulted in three primary reasons for using profanity: defiance of authority, cultural linguistic poverty, and exploited shock value. M. Fine & Johnson's (1984) undergraduate study found that both males and females use profanity to express anger and emphasize feelings, but females also used profanity for "sociological reasons," *i.e.*, to get attention. Selnow (1985) noted that males used sexual insult for nonmember differentiation, and to enhance social power. Jay (1992) mentions venting aggression and linguistic poverty.

Other linguists have noted that speech patterns have differed by socioeconomic status of the speaker and the formality of the speech involved (Labov 1972). Gumperz (1971, 1982) notes that this difference varies from society to society with some showing clear variations by economic strata and others exhibiting little or no discernable differences.

Hughes, however, denies the linguistic poverty hypothesis. His historical analysis showed that swearing has been a favorite pastime of upper and lower classes, with backlash coming from the middle class. This parallels Labov's (1972) finding that

lower middle-class speakers tend to “hypercorrect” speech features that may be seen as lower-class as formality of the speech act increases, even to a degree that exceeds the correctness of upper socioeconomic groups’ speech patterns.

There are other problems with the linguistic poverty hypothesis not mentioned by Hughes. According to this popular concept, the continuing increase in educational levels of American society would predict a decrease in swearing through the twentieth century. Also, fundamentalist religious groups that prohibit swearing have traditionally drawn their membership from lower socioeconomic strata (Acock, Wright & McKensie 1981; Photiadis & Schnabel 1977; Tamney & Johnson 1997). The politically oriented New Religious Right tends to draw upper-middle class members, however (Brady & Tedin 1976; Tamney & Johnson 1997). Although lower-class individuals may use more profanity than the middle class, this is probably due to spending more time in informal settings, and fewer self-presentational worries about using slang.

Profanity as a means of venting aggression, emphasizing feelings, and enhancing social power seems to be widely accepted. Female use to get attention would seem reasonable, in light of feminist research on gender and language. Strain theory (Merton 1938, 1961; Agnew 1992; Broidy & Agnew 1992, D. Osgoode, *et. al.*, 1988, 1996) predicts that individuals who accept legitimate goals, but are prevented from attaining them by legitimate means, may resort to illegitimate means to achieve them. Women are hindered in achieving full interactional and citizenship rights because of their gender, but may achieve equality in speech and perhaps partially overcome male conversational dominance by using profanity. Swear words are symbolic resources, which have traditionally been limited to adult and adolescent males.

De Beauvoir (Jardine 1979, in Hughes 1991:207) is quoted as saying:

“[Language] is inherited from a masculine society, and it contains many male prejudices . . . Women simply have to steal the instrument; they don’t have to break it, or try, *a priori*, to make it something totally different. Steal it, and use it for their own good.”

This is what signal swearers have done throughout western history. Goffman (1959) noted that certain role occupants use dramatic enhancement to impress on the audience their competent fulfillment of role duties. He also describes the necessity of dramatic enhancement of narrative (1974). This form of enhancement involves the speaker’s editing and embellishment of mundane stories in order to obtain and retain the listener’s attention. Such use may be more important to the individual, if not to the sociologist, than shared symbolic meanings. Both a dramaturgical approach and social learning theory (Bandura 1977) indicate that we not only absorb the socialization of norms, values, and behaviors that others present to us, we actively learn through watching and imitating others, incorporating what we find useful into our own self-presentation. If we see that a certain behavior by someone induces a particular response on the part of another, we file that information away for use at an (hopefully) appropriate time. This seems to be the manner in which both male and female children learn to swear. They learn the words before they learn the meaning (Jay 1992). They may not have an appreciation for appropriate time and place, or the social consequences, however. Thus a father may find himself in trouble when his five-year-old daughter tells mommy: “Come see the f\*\*king mess daddy got himself into now!”

## **Summary**

The above presentation has demonstrated how sexual profanity has developed in conjunction with the development of western sexual attitudes. Modern changes in patterns of use of profanity have accompanied a new sexual freedom for women as risks of pregnancy and STD's have decreased. Norms of idealized role behavior provide the standard by which our performance is measured. Because most roles involve other complementary roles, a change in normative behavior for one role probably entails change in the other. This does not necessitate a change in status between the two, however. The world view of a society is embedded in the culture in many ways, including those which at first glance seem innocuous.

Freedom to engage in premarital sex, and freedom to openly use sexual profanity, does not necessarily establish a step forward in gender equity. Laumann (1994:20-21) has noted that the increase in female premarital sex blurs "... the traditional idea that there are two types of women: those 'who will' and those 'who won't.'" Gerson & Lund (1972) ascribe the meteoric rise in popularity of *Playboy* magazine, at a time when magazines sales in general were plummeting, to the fact that the new magazine presented males with the image of respectable women as potential sexual partners. Because male and female are complementary roles, changes in one role would seem to indicate changes in the other. With the decline of family-arranged marriage and the dowry system, there is no longer a market value on virginity. As premarital sex increased among females, and at earlier ages, the male expectation of marrying a virgin bride has been reduced to an extremely unlikely occurrence. On the other hand, there is a great increase in the number of potential premarital sexual

partners. Ideologically, we have done away with Madonna, but not with the other end of the scale. There is no need for males to “respect” any woman, except kin. In a recent interview, actress Sarah Michel Gellar surmised that only early teens are concerned about sexual reputation; adult women are not (Snead 1999). This, of course, could be taken as the demise of the dual sexual standard. However, other indicators reveal the continuing subordination and devaluation of women, in both sexual and other areas of life. If gender equality were to be achieved, one would expect less rather than more sexual profanity, as there would be no derogatory connotation attached to female roles.

Sexual profanity, and swearing in general, can be seen as a somewhat extreme form of dramatic enhancement of narrative, whether used by males or females. Such symbolic enhancement would be expected by those whose position and control of other resources are tentative at best. This can be seen in the defiance of authority motive and the development of oppositional codes. Use of normatively restricted symbolic resources provide a metaphysical balance against those who control other resources. I may not be able to fire you, but I can tell you what to do to yourself when you fire me. The male groups lacking full interactional citizenship include adolescents, young adults, and lower-income groups. The first two are the groups that Jay (1992) found to swear the most, the third is generally accepted as “conventional wisdom.” Once cultural norms concerning public swearing weakened, it is certainly not surprising that women would increase their use, given their subordinate position in society.

Although venting aggression has been widely cited as a motive for using sexual profanity, casual observation of everyday interaction finds frequent use in friendly or jocular interaction. Noting a secondary keying of the insulting metaphor to play

satisfies frame analysis, but tells little about social interaction involved. Here, rather than defiance of authority, one may consider denial of authority and status. To use sexual profanity freely in nonconfrontational settings can be a sign that all actors are to be of equal status, at least in the current strip of activity. Status difference may inhibit the use of dirty words or other casual derogatory terminology. Goffman (1963a) uses the illustrative case of Blacks using the term “nigger” among themselves, but refraining in front of a White playmate until the latter was fully accepted. Similarly, employees who carefully choose their words toward the boss at work may swear freely in front of him at the company picnic. Thus, a woman who uses profanity and shows no sign of offense at others’ swearing, may be granted honorary status as “one of the guys.” There is always the risk that her femininity may be discounted, however. That double bind just won’t go away.

### **The Present Research Question**

The above discussion has presented gender differences in swearing, in no small part, as a function of gender identity and impression management. The traditional gender based swearing patterns and the persistence of the linguistic poverty thesis of swearing would indicate that there are public sentiments concerning what type of person swears. The fact that people categorize and label others is a basic principle of dramaturgy, labeling theories, and identity theories (*cf.* Becker 1963; Goffman 1963a; Foote 1951; Hogg, Terry & White 1995). Such categorization is not an emotionally neutral task, however. We make certain relational judgments about objects and activities in our social world, and these valuations become embedded in the terminology we use to describe them (Morris 1955). Symbols not only denote the object, but also

carry connotative sentiments that arouse emotional responses in the hearer (Jay 1977, 1992; Hughes 1991).

Osgoode (1962) found that dimensions of good/bad, powerful/weak, and active/passive accounted for most of the connotative meanings we attach to words. Affect control theorists use Osgoode's semantic differentials to represent fundamental sentiments that members of a society have toward social objects or activities represented by symbols (MacKinnon & Heise 1993; MacKinnon 1994). These have been formalized into mathematical equations in a computer program known as INTERACT that represent actor-behavior-object statements. When either the identity of the actor/object, or the behavior represented, set forth an interaction that differs from fundamental sentiments (producing large deflections), the program predicts reidentification of behavior or of actors, or realigning actions. The question to be answered by the prediction is: "What type of actor would produce such a behavior toward such an object."

Previous research into use of profanity has focused on "How much do various people swear?", "How do they swear?", and "How offended are people by swear words?" One question suggested by above discussion is "What kind of person swears?" The more specific research questions examined in this study are "What are the underlying affective sentiments of observers toward individuals who swear, as opposed to those who do not swear; and do those sentiments vary according to the gender and socioeconomic strata of the swearer?" If traditional views still hold, then there should be more negative sentiments toward those whose swearing is considered most deviant. That would be women and middle-class individuals. Since we tend to impute a wide

range of negative traits based on the original one (Goffman 1963a:5), one would expect that the negative sentiments will extend over a number of different personal attributes. Attribution theorists have found that people make judgements about others based on wide variety of attributes depending upon the availability of information (Wyer & Carlston 1979; Hewstone 1983). The less information one has, the more important the few clues available become. Byrne (1971:119) describes first impressions as “[response] to the overt stimulus properties of other individuals in terms of their beliefs about the meaning of those properties.” In other words, the judgements we make about others involves not only the information that we can gather from their verbal and physical presentations, but also the value system we have internalized that attaches social and moral significance to certain information.

Although the primary focus of this study is gender, the above discussion has also indicated that social status may be an important variable in speech differences. Whether one accepts defiance of authority, oppositional codes, or linguistic poverty as the most appropriate explanation, it is clear that our society has different expectations concerning speech styles based on the speaker’s social position.

Accordingly, the following empirical analysis is presented to demonstrate how observers’ affective sentiments toward an individual differ depending on whether the target swears. The study also provides manipulations of target gender and social class, to see if these factors alter sentiments. Target gender is the primary independent variable, but the literature cited above concerning class differences in speech, as well as the persistence of the linguistic poverty thesis of swearing indicate that a class variable be included in the model. Differences between reactions of male and female



respondents toward targets are also assessed. Although there are many broad issues of gender presented above that cannot be addressed within the boundaries of this empirical research, the study still provides a means of statistically analyzing the degree to which traditional norms of gender-appropriate behavior survive, at least in regards to sexual language.

## **Endnotes for Chapter 2**

1. Orphic influence can be clearly seen in the works of Clement of Alexandria, a highly influential early Christian steeped in Greek philosophy, who thought Orpheus' teachings were divinely inspired (Metzger 1987).
2. The ensuing discussion of Zoroastrianism primarily follows that of these authors. They also provide the historical chronology important to religious developments in the Near East. The overall political history of the region pertaining to these developments is also presented by Black & Green (1992) and by commentary provided in RKJ as it pertains to Israel/Palestine. Other authors cited in this section provide details pertaining to their more specific time periods, resulting in considerable overlap and redundancy that make individual citations in the text awkward.
3. Neusner (1986) describes two notable exceptions; the first due to excessive zeal on the part of Chief Magus Kartir (and local magi) in establishing the Mazdean Church as the official religion of the Sassanian Empire; the second occurring when the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 311 A. D. The Sassanians suspected that the loyalty of Christians in their territories would be swayed by this event. Such fears turned out to be unfounded.
4. Ehrman (1993) emphasizes the point made in passing by many researchers that charges and countercharges of not only heresy and alteration of sacred writings, but also of licentious behavior were standard criticisms that virtually every sect (Christian and other) used against opponents. Until recently, our knowledge of Gnostic groups was heavily dependent on early orthodox Christian heresiologists opposed to them, and biased accordingly. Twentieth-century discoveries, particularly the *Nag Hammadi* writings, have indicated that by and large Gnostics tended toward asceticism.
5. Besides theological differences, the Montanists also exhibited three traits in their worship that were anathema to catholic Christianity; ecstasy, millenarianism, and gender equity. These have strong parallels in the Cult of Orpheus (*cf.* Macchioro 1930; Metzger 1987 ).

6. Of course, no group is immune to the influence of the surrounding culture, so considerations of gender equity must be taken comparatively. However, the dominant view of “orthodox” Christian leaders was that women could not attain salvation. Some other Gnostic and heterodox Christian sects believed that women could be saved if they shaved their heads and lived as celibate men. This is reflected in the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, Logion (item) 114:

Simon Peter said unto them:

Let Mary go away from us, because women are not worthy of life.

Jesus said:

Lo, I shall lead her in order to make her a male, so that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter into the kingdom of Heaven (Metzger 1987:86).

As one might suspect, many orthodox leaders felt that allowing women to usurp the male role was a far greater evil than denying them salvation.

7. Heavily influenced by Marcion, Gnosticism and Zoroastrianism, Mani shared their distaste for the Jewish religion, and it had no place in his syncretism.

8. As a commentary on the phallogentric nature of western ideology, it is telling that the “female” role in fellatio is considered the passive one.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **Hypotheses**

The above discussion of gender differences in usage and reported offendedness concerning profanity implies that people will disapprove of those who use these words. Such disapproval will be diffuse, and if use of profanity is still considered a male privilege, women who swear will be rated more negatively than men who do so. In addition, since the degree of deviance attached to the use of profanity varies by social setting and context (Jay 1992), more negative ratings will be expected for those who swear in the presence of nonswearers, and for those who swear in white-collar rather than blue-collar work situations (this provides a test of the linguistic poverty thesis and Hughes (1991) observation of middle-class backlash). Because a common definition of the social situation is a prerequisite of continuing interaction (Goffman 1959), swearing that follows another actor's swearing should be regarded as less deviant. The persistence of the linguistic poverty thesis suggests that potency and activity dimensions, as well as evaluation dimensions may differ. Therefore, the following research hypotheses will be tested in this analysis:

#### **Main hypotheses:**

- H1: Observers will rate actors who swear significantly more negatively for evaluation (good/bad) than actors who do not swear.**
- H2: Observers will rate females who swear significantly more negatively for evaluation than they will rate males who swear.**
- H3: The expected differences in impressions of actors who swear will be moderated if the speech act is preceded by another actor swearing, thereby implying social permission.**

### **Secondary hypotheses:**

- H4: Observers will rate actors who swear in white-collar settings significantly more negatively on evaluation, potency, and affect than those actors who swear in blue-collar settings.**
- H5: Observers' affective interpersonal judgements (like/dislike) of actors who swear will be more negative than interpersonal judgements of those who do not swear.**
- H6: Observers' affective interpersonal judgements of females who swear will be more negative than for males who swear.**
- H7: Observers will consider actors who swear to be less attractive than those actors who do not swear.**
- H8: Observers will consider actors who swear to be less moral than those actors who do not swear.**
- H9: The differences in impressions of attractiveness, liking, and morality between actors who swear and actors who do not swear will be greater for female actors than for male actors.**
- H10: If swearing is still considered a male domain, then ratings of potency and activity will be higher for females who swear than for females who do not swear.**

### **Model**

The dependent variables in the above hypotheses are the evaluations of actors by independent observers (respondents) on dimensions of evaluation, potency, activity, attractiveness, morality and liking as used in previous research (see measurement section). Independent variables that are manipulated are gender of actors, setting, and use of profanity by one or both actors. This model required a 2 x 2 x 3 factorial design with cells for male actors/ female actors; blue-collar setting/ white collar setting; and no actor swears/ one actor swears/ both actors swear.

**This model was presented to respondents through written vignettes, in which each of the above independent variables were manipulated. The resulting twelve-cell matrix represented the following scenarios:**

- 1. Two male actors in a blue collar setting- neither swears (comparison).**
- 2. Two male actors in a blue collar setting- actor 2 swears, actor 1 does not.**
- 3. Two male actors in a blue collar setting- both actors swear.**
- 4. Two male actors in a white collar setting- neither swears.**
- 5. Two male actors in a white collar setting- actor 2 swears, actor 1 does not.**
- 6. Two male actors in a white collar setting- both swear.**
- 7. Two female actors in a blue collar setting- neither swears.**
- 8. Two female actors in a blue collar setting- actor 2 swears, actor 1 does not.**
- 9. Two female actors in a blue collar setting- both actors swear.**
- 10. Two female actors in a white collar setting- neither swears.**
- 11. Two female actors in a white collar setting- actor 2 swears, actor 1 does not.**
- 12. Two female actors in a white collar setting- both swear.**

**Vignettes presented a mock scenario in which two same-sex actors have been criticized by a superior for some aspect of their job performance, who then departs. The actors then discuss the unfairness of the criticism (see Appendix II for vignette texts).**

**Workplace scenarios allowed the differential presentation of blue collar and white collar setting more readily than casual interaction would. Within each setting classification, the conversations were identical, except for the names given to the actors (to represent gender) and the insertion of the F-word (as the most common sexual term among men and women according to Jay) into the actors' speech. Across settings, the conversations differed only to the extent necessary to present the desired setting to the**

respondent. The conversations were still comparable to the extent feasible. The F-word was completely spelled out in the vignettes. Consideration was given to the option of asterisking internal letters in the swear word to lessen the offensiveness of the term; however, it was readily apparent that doing so immediately drew visual attention to the word.

Written vignettes were chosen as the research method here for both practical and theoretical reasons. Although vignettes have been criticized as artificial and therefore poor representations of actual social interaction (*cf.* Kenny 1994), they allow experimental manipulation of variables of interest and the immediate reaction of research subjects to those manipulations. Because the dependent variable of interest in this study are ratings made by independent observers, lack of subject interaction should not be of concern, and may reduce confounding effects of cognitive load and impression management. Video representations would require the compensation and training of actors to perform twelve different scenarios, which would involve logistics problems as well as excessive costs. In addition, people tend to rate others differentially on a wide range of attributes according to physical appearance (Goffman 1963; Patzer 1985; Kalick 1988, Deseran & Chung 1979). If respondents' ratings were affected by the appearance of the paid actors, this would introduce a confounding variable which could significantly alter initial ratings and subsequent changes in ratings.

### **Sample**

Research subjects for both pretests and experiments were drawn from a convenience sample of undergraduate sociology students at a major southern university. Although this sample may not be representative of the U. S. population as a whole, it

largely represents age groups (who are often in settings) wherein profanity is most frequently encountered (Jay 1992). Therefore, any differences found in impressions of actors according to the use or nonuse of profanity may be presumed to be at least as strong, if not stronger, among many other segments of the larger population.

The twelve cell research model required a minimum of 240 respondents for the full experiment in order to allow statistical analysis. Vignettes and accompanying questionnaires were randomly distributed to 417 subjects in introductory and marriage and family classes during the month of April, 2000. Subjects were given a brief description of the vignettes as excerpts from a (fictitious) workshop on organizational communication and personnel management techniques, and advised of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the data collection. Of the 417 questionnaires distributed, 377 were completed and 40 were returned unmarked as per instructions for those subjects not wishing to participate, resulting in a 90.6% response rate. Refusals included 27 vignettes in which there was swearing (67.5%), and 13 with no swearing. This replicates as closely as possible the overall distribution of swearing in the vignettes (two-thirds contained swearing). Therefore, the presence of swearing is not considered to be a biasing factor in the response rate.

Subjects were asked to indicate their sex on the questionnaire. Respondents completing the questionnaire included 77 males, 123 females, and 177 who failed to indicate their sex. The high percentage of females in the sample probably reflects both differential enrollment and differential class attendance. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection, it is impossible to determine the sex distribution of those not indicating their sex, or of refusals. However, mean ratings on dependent variables for

those with missing data for respondent sex generally fall between the mean ratings of male and female respondents, but are closer to those of females (see Table 1). This would seem to suggest that the sex distribution of those respondents not providing that data is similar to those who did indicate their sex. By default, respondents with missing data for their sex would be excluded from any computer statistical analysis using that variable.

### **Measurement**

Each respondent received one vignette in the form of a transcript of two coworkers discussing a workplace problem, representing one of twelve possible scenarios described above (see Appendix B, page 118 for sample vignettes). The respondent was asked to rate a specified vignette actor on several personal dimensions listed below, using Likert-type scales.

In accordance with existing datasets used by affect control theorists (MacKinnon & Heise 1993), measurement of dimensions of EVALUATION, POTENCY, and ACTIVITY were made using nine-point Likert type scales with coding ranges from -4 for the lowest rating possible, and +4 for the highest (or most favorable) possible rating within each dimension. The EVALUATION scale was anchored by the terms “good, nice/bad,awful.” POTENCY is anchored by “weak/strong, powerful,” and ACTIVITY by “slow/lively.” Modifiers for the scale points included “infinitely” (-4, +4), “extremely” (-3, +3), “quite” (-2, +2), “slightly” (-1, +1), and “neutral” (zero).

LIKING and MORAL were measured using items from Byrne’s (1971:426-427; also see Robinson & Smith-Lovin 1999:86) Interpersonal Judgment Scale. The LIKING item included seven statements ranging from “I feel that we would probably



like this person very much,” (+7) to “I feel that we would probably dislike this person very much,” (+1). The MORAL item included seven statements ranging from “This person impresses me as being very moral,” (+7) to “This person impresses me as being extremely immoral,”(+1). These items, as well as those discussed below, each provided a centrally placed neutral category.

ATTRACTIVE was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from +1 (very unattractive) to +7 (very attractive), to which respondents answered the question “How attractive is the speaker?”

Respondents were also asked how well they would like to WORK WITH the actor they are rating. This item is a slightly modified version of item six from Byrne’s (1971) Interpersonal Judgment Scale. The original item included seven statements ranging from “I believe that I would very much dislike working with this person in an experiment,” (-3) to “I believe that I would very much enjoy working with this person in an experiment,” (+3). In the present study, the phrase “in an experiment” was dropped from each statement. This item was included to correspond with the representation of the vignettes as a study in personnel management. This variable was recoded to correspond with ATTRACTIVE and other interpersonal items above (+1 to +7)

As a further reinforcement of the face representation of the study, respondents were presented with space to provide an open-ended response to the question “What would you suggest to improve the workplace atmosphere presented above?” These responses were not used in statistical analysis.

Independent dummy variables of SWEARING (=1, no swearing=0), co-worker also swears (COSWEAR=1), target gender (TGENDER, female=1), and workplace

setting (CLASS, blue collar=1) were manipulated by random assignment of vignette versions to respondents. Each version contained a possible combination of the presence of zero, one, two, three, or all four of the experimental conditions (see *Model* section above).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS**

The research hypotheses discussed above predicted that actors who swear would be rated less favorably on the dependent variables, except for potency and activity, than those actors who do not swear. In addition, it was predicted that female actors who swear would be rated less favorably than males who swear; those who swear in a white-collar setting would be rated less favorably than those who swear in a blue-collar setting; and those actors who swear in the presence of a coworker who does not swear would be rated less favorably than those who swear in the presence of one who also swears. Potency and activity ratings were expected to be higher for females who swear than for females who do not swear.

As predicted, ratings were noticeably lower on all dimensions except potency and activity for actors who swear compared to actors who do not swear (see Table 1). For activity, ratings increased from .25 for actors who did not swear to .64 for actors who swore. Potency ratings changed little across the swearing condition (-.24 to -.22). An interesting result is that female respondents rated actors more negatively on every dependent variable than male respondents did.

The nature of the hypotheses used in this study implied that ratings of interpersonal dimensions as represented by the dependent variables would not covary independently of each other. Respondents' ratings of an actor as being good or bad certainly would be expected to be related to ratings of morality, liking to wanting to work with, etc. Bivariate correlations of dependent variables (Table 2) showed a strong positive relationship between evaluation, liking, working with the target, and morality

**Table 1. Respondents' mean ratings on interpersonal judgement items.**

|                          | No swearing<br>N=123 | Swearing<br>N=254 | Male<br>Resp.<br>N=77 | Female<br>Resp.<br>N=177 | Resp.<br>gender<br>missing<br>N=123 | Overall<br>mean<br>N=377 |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Evaluation<br>(-4 to +4) | .80<br>(1.41)        | .28<br>(1.37)     | .56<br>(1.40)         | .40<br>(1.35)            | .45<br>(1.48)                       | .45<br>(1.40)            |
| Potency<br>(-4 to +4)    | -.24<br>(1.43)       | -.22<br>(1.47)    | .09<br>(1.33)         | -.24<br>(1.45)           | -.41<br>(1.53)                      | -.23<br>(1.46)           |
| Activity<br>(-4 to +4)   | .25<br>(1.35)        | .64<br>(1.40)     | .65<br>(1.36)         | .49<br>(1.35)            | .45<br>(1.47)                       | .51<br>(1.39)            |
| Liking<br>(+1 to +7)     | 4.75<br>(1.27)       | 4.61<br>(1.24)    | 4.79<br>(1.29)        | 4.59<br>(1.22)           | 4.67<br>(1.28)                      | 4.66<br>(1.25)           |
| Work with<br>(+1 to +7)  | 4.12<br>(1.42)       | 3.79<br>(1.38)    | 4.06<br>(1.54)        | 3.87<br>(1.34)           | 3.84<br>(1.41)                      | 3.90<br>(1.40)           |
| Attractive<br>(+1 to +7) | 4.09<br>(1.01)       | 3.95<br>(1.12)    | 4.16<br>(1.04)        | 4.08<br>(1.03)           | 3.76<br>(1.16)                      | 3.99<br>(1.09)           |
| Moral<br>(+1 to +7)      | 4.43<br>(1.15)       | 3.93<br>(1.18)    | 4.18<br>(1.27)        | 4.01<br>(1.17)           | 4.16<br>(1.20)                      | 4.09<br>(1.20)           |

Standard deviations in parentheses.

(minimum  $r = .479, p \leq .01$ ). Because of this intercorrelation, principle components factor analysis using varimax rotation was employed to develop factors that group the dependent variables into indices reflecting the degree to which they do or do not covary. Factor analysis also allowed a simplification of the model by reducing the number of dependent variables (Rummel 1970; Ehrenberg 1982; Wilcox 1987). It also allows the data provided by the respondents to determine the relative weight of each item constituting the factors.

The results of factor analysis are presented in Table 3. Using a factor loading cutoff level of .500 or greater and eigenvalues over one as decisionmaking criteria, two distinct factors were discerned after rotation. The first, which is labeled SOCIABLE, includes the evaluation item (rotated loading at .754), liking the actor (.812), liking to work with the actor (.775), and morality of the actor (.790). It included the items

**Table 2. Bivariate correlations of dependent and independent variables. @  
Dependent with dependent**

|            | Evaluation | Potency | Activity | Liking | Work with | Attractive | Morality |
|------------|------------|---------|----------|--------|-----------|------------|----------|
| Evaluation | 1.00       | .14**   | .35**    | .55**  | .51**     | .23**      | .50**    |
| Potency    |            | 1.00    | .23**    | .12*   | .20**     | .19**      | .06      |
| Activity   |            |         | 1.00     | .34**  | .36**     | .20**      | .16**    |
| Liking     |            |         |          | 1.00   | .66**     | .31**      | .48**    |
| Work with  |            |         |          |        | 1.00      | .27**      | .51**    |
| Attractive |            |         |          |        |           | 1.00       | .31**    |
| Morality   |            |         |          |        |           |            | 1.00     |

**Dependent with independent**

|               | Evaluation | Potency | Activity | Liking | Work with | Attractive | Morality |
|---------------|------------|---------|----------|--------|-----------|------------|----------|
| One swears    | -.18**     | .01     | .13*     | .05    | -.11*     | -.06       | -.19**   |
| Both swear    | -.11*      | -.06    | .05      | -.02   | -.05      | -.11*      | -.08     |
| Target gender | .10        | -.03    | .20**    | .10*   | .08       | .09        | .01      |
| Target class  | .05        | -.04    | -.01     | -.03   | -.04      | .04        | .00      |
| Resp. gender  | -.05       | -.11    | -.05     | -.08   | -.06      | -.03       | -.07     |

\* significant at the  $p \leq .05$  level (two-tailed).

\*\* significant at the  $p \leq .01$  level (two-tailed)

@Intercorrelations of independent variables are a design artifact-see text.

associated with the purported sociability of the actor. This factor had a rotated eigenvalue of 2.69 and explained 38.4% of the variance in the model. The second factor, labeled DYNAMISM, consists of the potency (.863) and activity items (.614). This second factor had a rotated eigenvalue of 1.43 and explained 20.4% of the variance in the model. Cronbach's alpha for these two unweighted indices before rotation were .82 and .37, respectively.<sup>1</sup> The remaining original dependent variable, attractiveness,

**Table 3. Principle component factor loadings of dependent variables using varimax rotation.**

| <b>Variable</b> | <b>Unrotated<br/>Factor 1</b> | <b>Unrotated<br/>Factor 2</b> | <b>Rotated<br/>Factor 1<br/>'sociable'</b> | <b>Rotated<br/>Factor 2<br/>'dynamism'</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Evaluation      | .762                          | -.151                         | .754                                       | .190                                       |
| Potency         | .304                          | .811                          | -.072                                      | .863                                       |
| Activity        | .546                          | .422                          | .313                                       | .614                                       |
| Liking          | .818                          | -.169                         | .812                                       | .196                                       |
| Work with       | .816                          | -.087                         | .775                                       | .270                                       |
| Attractive      | .503                          | .204                          | .368                                       | .400                                       |
| Moral           | .702                          | -.363                         | .790                                       | -.028                                      |

did not load heavily on either factor (.204 and .400, respectively). Therefore, attractiveness appeared to operate independently and was kept as a separate variable.

There is only one significant bivariate correlation among independent variables, that of one actor swearing and both actors swearing. Due to the design of the vignettes, a coworker swearing only occurs in scenarios in which the designated actor for analysis also swears. This results in a very high autocorrelation between the two variables ( $r = .865$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). This not only produces problems for statistical analysis, but also may also have caused a blurring of speech acts for respondents reading the vignettes. A written comment by one respondent is insightful in this case. The respondent wrote: "Jen should swear like Kate. Then they both could have a good time." "Jen" was the actor to be rated, and there would be no scenario in which Kate would swear and Jen would not swear. Therefore, the coswearing variable was dropped from the analysis, and a new variable consisting of any swearing that subsumed either swearing condition was substituted. Because a coworker swearing only occurs when the target actor swears

(in one-half of the swearing cases), this new variable is statistically and analytically identical to the swearing variable.

The use of the new factors, sociability and dynamism, required a restatement of the original hypotheses to be analyzed in order to conform to the consolidation of the original seven dependent variables into three (the two developed from factor analysis above and attractiveness). Hypothesis three (involving the coworker swearing) was dropped from the analysis, as it appeared that this prediction cannot be assessed using present methods. The original hypotheses were revised as follows, with the prefix letter F designating new hypotheses using factors:

**H1: Observers will rate actors who swear significantly more negatively for evaluation (good/bad) than actors who do not swear.**

This hypothesis subsumes H5 (like/dislike) and H8 (morality) and is restated as:

**FH1: Observers will rate actors who swear as significantly less sociable than actors who do not swear.**

Also:

**H2: Observers will rate females who swear as significantly less sociable than they will rate males who swear.**

This hypothesis now must include the target gender\*swearing interaction predictions of liking and morality under H9 for sociability, while leaving a target gender\*swearing interaction for attractiveness. These are now stated as:

**FH2: Observers will rate females who swear as significantly less sociable than they will rate males who swear.**

**FH3: Observers will rate females who swear as less attractive than they will rate males who swear.**

**Also:**

**H3: The expected differences in impressions of actors who swear will be moderated if the speech act is preceded by another actor swearing, thereby implying social permission.**

**This hypothesis was dropped from the analysis due to the high autocorrelation of swearing and coworker swearing, and the probability that respondents also may not have clearly distinguished between the two conditions.**

**Also:**

**H4: Observers will rate actors who swear in white collar settings significantly more negatively on evaluation, potency, and affect than those actors who swear in blue collar settings.**

**This required separation into two hypotheses, designated as FH4 and FH5:**

**FH4: Observers will rate actors who swear in white collar settings as less sociable than actors who swear in blue collar settings. (There will be a swearing\*class interaction for sociability).**

**FH5: Observers will rate actors who swear in white collar settings as less dynamic actors who swear in blue collar settings. (There will be a swearing\*class interaction for dynamism).**

**The remaining hypotheses may be used as stated:**

**H7: Observers will consider actors who swear to be less attractive than those actors who do not swear.**

**H10: If swearing is still considered a male domain, then ratings of potency and activity (now combined as dynamism) will be higher for females who swear than for females who do not swear. (There will be a swearing\*target gender interaction for dynamism).**

**These new hypotheses were analyzed using MANOVA in an SPSS statistical program to determine if significant differences in respondents' mean ratings of actors in the twelve vignettes exist. The vignettes provided manipulations to ascertain main and interaction effects of independent variables of swearing, target gender, and**



**Table 4. Respondents' mean factor ratings of actors by swearing condition.**

|                                | <u>Male Respondents</u> |                |               |                |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
|                                | Male target             |                | Female target |                |
|                                | No swearing             | Swearing       | No swearing   | Swearing       |
| Sociability<br>(Standard Dev.) | .46<br>(.92)            | -.25<br>(1.13) | .55<br>(.79)  | .07<br>(1.04)  |
| Dynamism                       | -.07<br>(1.01)          | .26<br>(.82)   | .49<br>(.99)  | .12<br>(.99)   |
| Attractiveness                 | 4.11<br>(.78)           | 4.06<br>(.93)  | 4.87<br>(.92) | 3.80<br>(1.20) |

  

|                | <u>Female Respondents</u> |                |               |                |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
|                | Male target               |                | Female target |                |
|                | No swearing               | Swearing       | No swearing   | Swearing       |
| Sociability    | .08<br>(1.16)             | -.18<br>(.95)  | .23<br>(.91)  | -.08<br>(1.01) |
| Dynamism       | -.57<br>(1.23)            | .18<br>(.95)   | -.01<br>(.82) | .20<br>(.97)   |
| Attractiveness | 3.81<br>(1.17)            | 4.00<br>(1.10) | 4.20<br>(.82) | 4.24<br>(.98)  |

blue/white-collar work setting on those mean ratings (see Table 4) of dependent variables sociability, dynamism, and attractiveness. Differences between ratings provided by male and female respondents were also assessed using MANOVA, a commonly used statistical tool for simultaneously analyzing the effects of independent variables on multiple dependent variables using F-tests (Everett 1983; Bryman & Cramer 1997).

The increased probability of finding significant results as an artifact of multiple comparisons were adjusted using the Bonferri method (the default method in SPSS). Because directionality had been specified, one-tailed tests were used. Significance

levels were set at  $p < .10$  throughout for rejection of null hypotheses that respondents' ratings of vignette actors are not affected by the actors' swearing, gender, or workplace setting.

#### **Endnotes for Chapter 4**

1. This reliability statistic is calculated on unrotated indices and is sensitive to both ordering and the number of items available from which to create the indices (Gorusch 1983:117). Of only seven items used in this analysis, two items (potency and activity) loaded heavily on the dynamism factor, and the activity item only loaded at better than .500 after rotation. Given the long use of these two items in semantic differentials and INTERACT programs, they theoretically belong in the model. Each were modeled separately in analysis not shown but weakened the model. The significant positive correlation (.230,  $p \leq .01$ ) between these two items and amount of variance explained reinforce the intuitive usefulness of this factor combining both.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Main effects

Overall, the MANOVA results support the general predictions delineated above (see Table 5). Multivariate tests demonstrate that the presence of swearing ( $F= 3.45, p \leq .02$ ) significantly affects respondents' ratings of vignette actors, in the negative direction. Target gender also affected the ratings ( $F= 2.37, p \leq .07$ ), and the effects of swearing differed depending on whether the target was male or female (swearing\*target gender  $F= 2.76, p \leq .04$ ). Target class and respondent gender were not significant in the multivariate model. The lack of multivariate significance for respondent gender is somewhat surprising considering female respondents' ratings were more negative for every original dependent variable (see Table 1 for mean ratings). However, being a female respondent was not correlated significantly with any original dependent variable (see Table 2). No other interactions were significant at the multivariate level.

Tests of between-subjects effects (tests of variability between group means) show that no independent variable significantly affected every dependent variable. Swearing was significantly related to more negative sociability ratings ( $F= 6.80, p \leq .01$ ) and significantly associated with more positive dynamism ratings, apparently largely driven by the activity component of that factor. Target gender (female= 1) showed significant positive main effects for dynamism ( $F= .427, p \leq .04$ ) and attractiveness ( $F= 4.71, p \leq .03$ ). There were no significant main effects for target class or respondent gender.

**Table 5. MANOVA F-values and significance levels**

| variable                            | multivariate effects  | between-subjects effects |          |            |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------|
|                                     |                       | sociability              | dynamism | attractive |
| <u>Main effects</u>                 |                       |                          |          |            |
| Intercept                           | 1180.87***            | 1.47                     | .66      | 2773.61*   |
| Swearing                            | 3.45**                | 6.80***                  | 2.80*    | 1.35       |
| Target gender                       | 2.37*                 | 1.41                     | 4.28**   | 4.71**     |
| Target class                        | .65                   | 1.00                     | .65      | 1.19       |
| Respondent gender                   | 1.22                  | 1.18                     | 2.37     | .52        |
| <u>Two-way interactions</u>         |                       |                          |          |            |
| Swearing*target gender              | 2.76*                 | .00                      | 5.92**   | 5.04**     |
| Swearing*class                      | .69                   | .72                      | .00      | 1.75       |
| Target gender*class                 | .84                   | .15                      | 1.60     | 1.87       |
| Swearing*resp. gender               | 1.45                  | .62                      | 2.25     | 3.48*      |
| Target gender*resp. gender          | .07                   | .19                      | .02      | .01        |
| Class*resp. gender                  | .67                   | .08                      | .67      | 1.90       |
| <u>3-way interactions</u>           |                       |                          |          |            |
| Swearing*target gender*class        | 1.89                  | .57                      | 3.37*    | 4.27**     |
| Swearing*target gender*resp. gender | 1.22                  | .08                      | .42      | 2.91*      |
| Swearing*class*resp. gender         | .41                   | .06                      | .86      | .59        |
| Target gender*class*resp. gender    | .36                   | .23                      | .78      | .01        |
| * $p \leq .10$                      | <u>Model</u>          |                          |          |            |
| ** $p \leq .05$                     | <u>Type III</u>       |                          |          |            |
| *** $p \leq .01$                    | <u>Sum of squares</u> | 17.46                    | 25.52    | 27.86      |
|                                     | <u>R-squared</u>      | .07                      | .10      | .10        |
|                                     | <u>Adj. R-squared</u> | .01                      | .04      | .05        |

## **Interactions**

There were several significant two- and three-way interactions in the MANOVA results presented in Table 5, including some which were predicted and some that were not expected. Interactions involved only dynamism and attractiveness dependent variables. Apparently the strong overall devaluation of swearers on sociability did not vary significantly across conditions of target gender or target class, nor did it vary between male and female respondents.

Ratings on dynamism were affected by a two-way interaction of swearing and target gender ( $F= 5.92, p \leq .02$ ) and a three-way interaction of swearing, target gender, and class ( $F= 3.37, p \leq .07$ ). Both blue collar and white collar male targets were seen as much less dynamic in the nonswearing condition than female targets (with a much greater gender disparity for the white collar setting), but males in both workplace settings gained significantly on the dynamism dimension if they swore. Blue collar females were rated slightly more dynamic if they swore. However white collar females, rated the most dynamic in the nonswearing condition, were rated less dynamic if they swore. In the swearing condition, white collar females were rated less dynamic than white collar males. Although the three-way interaction of swearing, class, and respondent gender did not reach significance, the plots indicate that male respondents rated blue collar swearers more dynamic than blue collar nonswearers, but rated white collar swearers as less dynamic. Female respondents, on the other hand, rated both blue collar and white collar swearers as more dynamic than nonswearers. This produced a significant four-way interaction of swearing, target gender, class, and respondent gender ( $F= 2.85, p \leq .09$ ).

Attractiveness variable was affected by a two-way interaction of swearing and target gender ( $F= 5.04, p \leq .03$ ) and swearing and respondent gender ( $F= 3.48, p \leq .06$ ). There were also significant three-way interactions of swearing, target gender, and class ( $F= 4.27, p \leq .04$ ) and swearing, target gender, and respondent gender ( $F= 2.91, p \leq .09$ ). Female nonswearers were considered more attractive than male nonswearers by both male and female respondents. However, females who swore were considered less attractive, while male actors who swore were not considered less attractive. This lower rating of female swearers on attractiveness is due to male respondents' strong devaluation. Female respondents did not rate female swearers less attractive, but they did rate male swearers more attractive than male nonswearers. This increased attractiveness of male swearers among female respondents was especially true for white collar swearers (rated the least attractive if they did not swear). Males found both white collar and blue collar actors less attractive if they swore, and female respondents found blue collar swearers less attractive.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study generally confirm the basic theoretical positions presented above that observers will devalue actors who swear, and that the devaluation will differ depending on whether the swearer is male or female. Where results do not support the research hypotheses tested above, they can still be explained by the settings presented in the vignettes without seriously compromising the basic arguments above.

#### **Main Hypotheses**

Hypothesis FH1, that observers would rate actors who swear as less nice than actors who do not swear was confirmed. The presence of swearing negatively affected sociability ratings more significantly in both multivariate tests and between-subjects tests than any other result.

The second hypothesis (FH2), that females who swear would be considered significantly less nice than males who swear was not supported. This hypothesis specified an interaction between swearing and target gender for sociability. This interaction was not significant. The overall devaluation of swearers on sociability did not differ by target gender. Females were rated more sociable than males in the nonswearing condition by both male and female targets, and were devalued similarly for swearing. Differences between ratings of male and female actors would only appear for the other two dependent variables.

The hypothesis that the devaluation of a swearer would be moderated if another actor previously swore (H3) was dropped from this analysis. Although this hypothesis

pertaining to the effects of social permission remains intuitively probable, the use of written vignettes clearly was not the method for assessing such an effect.

### **Secondary Hypotheses**

Hypothesis FH3 specified an interaction between target gender and swearing for attractiveness ratings. This interaction was significant, but in large part because of the three-way interaction between swearing, target gender, and respondent gender. This was one of the most telling results. Female nonswearing targets were rated much more attractive than male nonswearing targets by both male and female respondents. Female respondents did not devalue female targets for swearing, but considered male swearers slightly more attractive if they swore. On the other hand, male respondents considered female swearers to be much less attractive than female nonswearers.

Hypothesis FH4 stated that actors who swore in white collar settings would be rated less nice than actors who swore in blue collar settings. As in hypothesis FH2, the overall devaluation of swearers for sociability did not differ between workplace settings. The specified interaction of swearing and target class was not significant for sociability.

Hypothesis FH5 specified an interaction of swearing and class for dynamism. It predicted that actors who swear in white collar settings would be rated less dynamic than actors who swear in blue collar settings. Here the results were in the opposite direction from what was expected. Although the two-way interaction of swearing and target class was not significant, a three-way interaction of swearing, target gender, and target class was significant. There was also a significant four-way interaction adding respondent gender. Male targets and white-collar targets were initially seen as far less dynamic than their female and blue collar counterparts. Male targets and blue collar



targets gained in dynamism ratings if they swore. Male respondents rated female targets and white collar targets as less dynamic if they swore. Female respondents rated all targets more dynamic if they swore. Among female respondents, white collar targets who swore increased their dynamism rating to a higher level than blue collar targets.

It was also predicted that observers will consider actors who swear to be less attractive than those actors who do not swear (H7). Main effects for this hypothesis were not significant. However, there were significant two and three-way interaction of swearing and respondent gender, and swearing, target gender and respondent gender for attractiveness. Male respondents rated females who swore as less attractive than females who did not swear, while female respondents rated males who swore as more attractive than males who did not swear. Main effects may therefore reflect the cancelling out of opposing ratings by male and female respondents.

## **Discussion**

The results presented above demonstrate that use of sexual profanity is still considered deviant by both male and female respondents. This is reflected in the overall devaluation of swearers, particularly for sociability. This devaluation on sociability did not differ regardless of respondent gender or the manipulations of target gender and target class.

The effect of target gender was particularly apparent in attractiveness ratings, however. It is not surprising that female targets would be rated as more sociable and more attractive in the nonswearing condition than male targets, given the cultural emphasis on female beauty and female accommodation to others. In the interaction of swearing, target gender, and respondent gender female targets who swear were

considered much less attractive by male respondents than females who don't swear, while female respondents rated men who swore as more attractive. If, as noted above, conformity to norms of gender appropriate behavior results in social approval by those of the opposite gender, then there are clear indications that such swearing is viewed as gender-appropriate for males and inappropriate for females.

On the surface, the ratings for dynamism seem counterintuitive. Conventional wisdom would seem to predict that males would be considered more dynamic than females, although a case could be argued either way for white-collar workers vs. blue-collar workers (social status vs. physical activity). However, female targets were rated much more dynamic than male targets, and white-collar males were rated the least dynamic of all. This can be understood by considering the interactional position of the actors presented in the vignette compared to normative expectations of their purported social position. The actors have just been criticized by a superior for some aspect of their job performance. They are in a subordinate interaction with respect to both person and activity. Males and people in white-collar positions are expected to be in more superordinate positions, therefore the difference between vignette position and normative expectations is both large and negative. In affect control theory terms, for these actors the interaction produces a large deflection from fundamental sentiments among the observers providing the ratings.

Females and blue-collar workers, on the other hand, are expected to be socially subordinate to males and people in white-collar positions, respectively. Therefore, their representation in a subordinate social interaction conforms to cultural norms and does not negatively affect dynamism ratings. It is both possible and logical that blue-collar

workers would be rated more dynamic than white-collar workers because their work is seen as more physically active and strenuous. If so, this cannot be separated from the deviation from cultural norms explanation provided above, and it fails to account for the differences in male-female respondents' dynamism ratings.

One can therefore conclude that society's normative expectations for behavior continue to differ by gender. The ratings presented above support the view that females are expected to be subordinate and compliant, and not engage in deviant behavior (such as swearing) that is considered male behavior. If one's presentation of self violates these gender expectations, the audience will think less highly of that person. Although observers were given no indications concerning actors' physical appearance in the vignettes, there are obvious expectations that appearance is more important for females than for males. These norms are also highly dependent on appropriate gender behavior, however.

### **Limitations**

The use of a convenience sample of undergraduate students was addressed in the discussion of methods. Although not representative of the U. S. population as a whole, it is still a reasonably appropriate sample for a study involving sexual profanity because it is drawn from a social category that uses profanity the most frequently. Therefore the differences found using this sample can be expected to be at least as compelling as any that might be produced in a more representative sample.

Another limitation concerns the racial/ ethnic composition of the sample. In order to provide respondents with anonymity, the only identifying information elicited was their gender. Although one might expect to see differences between social groups

with respect to their use and tolerance of profanity, I do not believe such differences could be assessed in this study for two reasons. First, college students who are members of disadvantaged minority groups cannot be assumed to be representative of most members of those groups. Secondly, further division of the sample may result in unstable findings due to small cell sizes.

A more critical sample bias for this study could be the use of students at a southern university. The southern region of the United States is noted for having more conservative social attitudes than the rest of the nation (Rice & Coates 1995). Three factors tend to mitigate this bias. First, a major flagship university draws its student population from a far more diverse arena than just local residents. Second, more liberal attitudes toward appropriate gender behavior in recent years are due more to population turnover rather than attitude change among older adults (Firebaugh 1992). In other words, younger people are more liberal than older adults. Third, the location of this university in a metropolitan area of southern Louisiana places it in a different social milieu than “Bible belt” (or if one prefers, “cotton belt”) institutions. A recent survey of Baton Rouge residents (Delgado 2000) indicates that the local population is more educated and in some respects more liberal socially than the south as a whole, when compared to regional GSS data from recent years.

After acknowledging these moderating factors, it still must be granted that this study provides only cross-sectional data that may be biased due to use of a nonrepresentative sample. Therefore the external validity of the results cannot be firmly established, and the conclusions drawn from them should be generalized with caution until further research can provide comparisons. Nonetheless, new data can lend support

to existing propositions or stimulate the formulation of new ones; therefore they provide essential building blocks of knowledge. The results presented here will hopefully provide a stimulus for further research that expands our understanding of the production of gender and gender polarization in everyday interaction.

### **Implications**

Both the theoretical arguments and the empirical results presented above provide stimuli for further research applicable to social psychology, gender studies, and deviance. It would seem that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been under-utilized in research into both mainstream and nonconformist language, the latter being an area that itself has only attracted the attention of a handful of researchers. If language both reflects and shapes culture, does the use of dialects or cant necessarily dictate a different world view from that dominant culture? Symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical approaches would seem to indicate notable implications for both personal and societal identity, but we lack enough information to make any generalizations.

This study has indicated that the dramaturgical value of any particular act (verbal or otherwise) may outweigh any necessity of shared denotative meaning. Politicians, preachers, and unethical pollsters have long been aware of this fact. No doubt the ordinary individual is well aware of this, also, even though he or she may not make a living exploiting it. The actor may still employ dramatic stratagems in personal relations, however. Tannen (1994) has noted that research into miscommunication has usually overlooked this point.

The change in norms for sexual profanity touches not only on symbolism and face-to-face interaction, but also on formal and informal systems of social control. As

marginal deviance, profanity has been subject to both official and unofficial efforts at censorship. The *Buffkins* case and continued regulation of media demonstrate that formal sanctions may still be imposed. Formal social controls can be readily ascertained, but informal ones are generally only theorized. Field research on swearing (as well as other aspects of deviance) has often focused on counting and classifying, rather than on aspects of the interactional process that guides the path of the strip of activity. The use and effectiveness of various forms of informal sanctions could be better understood if there were better data available.

The discussion of gender here and elsewhere has often used terminology in a trite, formulaic manner without considering the theoretical implications suggested thereby. If one is to speak of a "cult of masculinity," there is the implicit suggestion that one should find cultic and ritual behavior attending membership in the cult. To what extent do gender behaviors take on a ritual or sacred character? Given the persistent nature of differential gender presentation that apparently is supported by members of both groups, can a "cult of femininity" with its own attendant rituals also be identified? Would it be more appropriate to speak of gender *moieties* rather than castes? Perhaps the exogamous marriage norms of American society with respect to gender would make this latter term more appropriate. If so, then the hope of doing away with hierarchal ordering may be more readily realized..

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **SUPREME COURT CASES CITED**

*Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire* 315 U.S. 568, 62 S.Ct. 766 (1942)

*Roth v. United States* 354 U.S. 476, 77 S.Ct. 1304 1 L.Ed.2d 1498 (1957)

*Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184, 197 84 S.Ct. 1676,1683 (1964)

*A Book Named 'John Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure' v. Attorney General of Massachusetts* 383 U.S. 413, 86 S.Ct. 975 (1966). Commonly known as *Memoirs v. Massachusetts*.

*Cohen v. California* 403 U.S. 15, 91 S.Ct. 1780, 29 L.Ed.2d 284 (1971)

*Miller v. California* 413 U.S. 15,93 S.Ct. 2607, 37 L.Ed2d 419 (1973)

*Roe v. Wade* 410 U.S. 113, 93 S.Ct. 705 35 L.Ed.2d 147 (1973)

*Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation* 438 U.S.15, 91 S.Ct. 1780, 29 L.Ed.2d 284 (1978)



**Sample Two. Male blue-collar swearer.**

**Instructions:** In this instance, two co-workers in a restaurant have just been criticized by their boss because certain tasks have not been done on time. The boss has left the room, and co-workers are discussing the situation between themselves.

Transcript mbs2

person for analysis: **JOHN**

[Notes on reading the transcript: Numbers to the far left are simply line numbers for transcription analysis. Brackets { . . . } Indicate overlapping speech- one person starts speaking before the other finishes.]

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53 FRANK: He's really something, huh?  
54 JOHN: Yeah, he's pretty stressed out about all the parties this year.  
55 FRANK: { what gets }  
56 me is we're takin' the fuckin' heat for stuff that's not our fault. It's  
57 JOHN: { right }  
58 FRANK: like we made half the waitresses quit 'cause he won't give 'em enough  
59 hours.  
60 JOHN: { or the }  
61 fuckin' Rotary rescheduling at the last minute  
62 FRANK: Maybe the new one will help. She seems pretty sharp  
63 JOHN: { Hope so . . . }  
64 A few more days and they're done.  
65 FRANK: He'll mellow out a little once the holidays are over.  
66 JOHN: The . . . , I'm not sure I want to stay that long.  
67 FRANK: Come on! Where would this kitchen be without you? He knows that.  
68 JOHN: { Yeah, but . . . }  
69 will he make it worth it? What time is it?

**Note**

Nonswearing vignettes were identical except profanity deleted. Female vignettes were identical except for the substitution of the names "Kate" and "Jen" were substituted for "Frank" and "John," respectively.

## **VITA**

**Robert P. O'Neil was born on September 14, 1950. He received a bachelor of arts from Stephen F. Austin in 1989 with a major in political science and a minor in sociology. He earned a master of arts in sociology from East Carolina University in 1995, and is currently teaching at Louisiana State University.**



DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

**Candidate:** Robert P. O'Neil

**Major Field:** Sociology

**Title of Dissertation:** Sexual Profanity and Interpersonal Judgement

**Approved:**

*David J. Kolm co-chair*  
Major Professor and Chairman  
*John M. Larkin*  
Dean of the Graduate School

**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

*John A. Dea — co-chair*  
*William B. Gantman*  
*Kathleen Brown*

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**Date of Examination:**

June 22, 2001