

Profanity

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Entertainment

Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of
episode outline)

So this is one of those topics that I didn't think was ever going to be an episode. I put it in the poll as kind of an afterthought, and in retrospect I totally should have known that it would end up being a landslide victory, because the Insomniacs are just as juvenile as we are. No judgment here, we're all approximately 15 years old when it comes to our senses of humor. So buckle up, we're doing this, this is the *history of profanity*. But a little bit of a disclaimer, as a comedian with at least a tiny amount of self respect, I'm always reluctant to go for the cheapest laugh. Because in comedy, there's this inherent hierarchy of humor, so a joke that relies on profanity is considered a weaker joke. Because it's easy to get people to laugh by cursing. And some of you may be calling BS because we do swear a lot. Notice I'm using the acronym for BS. Cause I'm keeping it classy. But I do

like to think that there's a decent amount of wittiness shoehorned in among the filth that is this podcast. But the reason it's so easy to get laughs with profanity is kind of interesting, there's this whole theory of humor called the benign violation, I'm not going to go deep into it but basically the idea is that people laugh when we're shocked or surprised by an unexpected verbal or visual twist—that's what a punchline is, it's also known as a misdirect—and this works as long as the source of the shock or surprise is benign. So in other words, someone slipping on a banana peel is funny because it's surprising and embarrassing, but if you saw someone slip on a banana peel and bust their head open, less funny. I mean depending on the person. So based on that theory, cursing on stage is a great way to surprise people because it's not something they often hear in public speaking; if someone is swearing in front of an entire group of people it can be very shocking and make those people laugh, but that's not clever, that's not a punchline, that's a cheap laugh.

My point is that this episode probably isn't going to be what some of the Insomniacs who voted for it thought it was going to be. I'm not going to go word by word and talk about the history of the F word and the C word and whatever.

There's a tv show that does that, there's a Netflix series called *the history of swear words*, hosted by Nicolas Cage, and it was ok, I wasn't super invested, partly because I found Nicolas Cage's aggressively dyed beard incredibly distracting. I find it weird when a guy has a craggy face, like age lines, and then a mass of solidly black or brown facial hair, it's like a chin-toupee. Like a lego-person beard, like he just snapped it on. Just let your beard get old, dude. It happens to all beards eventually. You're not fooling anyone with your chin paint. Anyway, we're not going to be rehashing that Netflix show, instead we're going to talk about where profanity comes from, how we use it, why we use it, and why George Carlin's seven dirty words never get old. But we're gonna at least attempt to keep it tasteful, like we always do. MFFI is a dignified and refined podcast, god dammit.

And speaking of God dammit,

The word profanity comes from the Latin word profanus, derived from the prefix "pro" meaning before or outside of, and Fanum, meaning temple. So: outside of religion; ungodly or unholy speech. Basically taking the Lord's name in vain. Think, "holy hell," or the aforementioned "Jesus Christ!" etc. It's crazy that just yelling a guy's

name is a version of cursing. I think we mentioned this, but I hope that someday we achieve the level of fame or infamy necessary to enter the lexicon as exclamations. I'm going to try to get this started, I'll stub my toe and be like, "Duncan MacEwan! Son of a Duncan." So profanity was originally like blasphemy lite, not a full-on bitch slap to the face of god, just mildly disrespectful. We've talked about how people tried to find a loophole via substitutions, like shouting "by Jove!" Or "Gosh" instead of God. A common swearword for years was "zounds" a shortening of the phrase "God's wounds" referring to the crucifixion of Jesus. People really slurred their words back in the day. But I have to say, yelling "God's Wounds," *that does* seem actually blasphemous. That's not blasphemy lite. That's worse than "holy hell" or even "fuck." Maybe don't shout about the torture and murder of your savior every time you bang your knee on a table or whatever. Seems rude to constantly bring that up. "Ouch. Remember that time you got betrayed and tortured and murdered, god?" I mean I guess when you bang your knee on a table you're pissed off, you wanna hit God where it hurts. After all, the lord could've made knees indestructible, but instead he invented nerves and pain and the sharp edges of tables. And then the

Romans came along and delivered lots of pain, they invented karma and irony.

As Christianity became more puritanical, words related to copulation or defecation were deemed increasingly naughty. And that includes even seemingly harmless references to anatomy. For instance, the poultry terms "white meat" and "dark meat" evolved out of a desire to avoid having to mention breasts and limbs. Similarly, the word "sweating" was considered sexual or dirty, and was replaced by "perspiring," while "kissing" briefly became "osculation" before coming back into fashion when someone said the words "Osculate me, darling" and it sounded way more dirty. And is three times as many syllables. Clumsy. So clearly, so-called "Bad" words can be completely arbitrary. The word "tummy" began as a substitute for the word "belly," which was considered more erotic. Maybe because bellies dance, and tummies don't. I've never heard of an erotic tummy dance. If your tummy is dancing, you're going to vomit. So now you know, bellies are just slutty tummies.

We're going to come back to this theme again and again: language is constantly in a state of flux, and profanity is arbitrary. In fact, it

could be argued that words like "fuck" and "shit" don't even qualify as profanity in the modern era. The average person uses swear words around 80 times per day. So in a way, you could say that words that used to be considered profanity are now just modifiers and expletives, and regular god-fearing people pepper their speech with them, although notably, men more than women. Not surprised. We're uncouth. The fluctuating nature of what qualifies as profanity is very similar to the concept of the Overton window...are you familiar with the so-called window of discourse? It's this idea that there is a spectrum of acceptability when it comes to ideas, words, and concepts, and the spectrum ranges from unacceptable to popular. So for instance, there was a time when the idea of segregation was popular and acceptable in America...but today, if you proposed a whites-only water fountain, that would be totally unthinkable, because the Overton window has thankfully shifted. Language is similar. For example, when *Gone with the Wind* was released, the nation was scandalized at Clark Gable's Rhett Butler informing Scarlett O'Hara that frankly, he didn't give a damn. Did you know this? I had no idea that "frankly" was one of the most offensive words at the time, because it referenced

Frankincense, and thus using it flippantly was considered an affront to Jesus. No, the offensive word was damn. That would be stupid. Swear words aren't just specific to their time, they're also specific to location. One of my favorites: in Chile you might be subjected to the insult: "Que te folle un pez" or "I hope you get fucked by a fish." The Dutch have a less humorous insult: "Krijg de kanker": which simply translates to "Get the cancer." Oof. I would rather get fucked by a fish. So in America, words like fuck used to be profane, but now they're really just expletives, while the truly profane words today would include the N-word, and the C-word in America. But again, it's all down to time and location, The C word is one of the third rails in America but is common somewhere like Scotland. So the modern version of profanity is racism and sexism and bigotry. Words that marginalize or demean: the R word, as we know, used to be totally acceptable when you and I were growing up, and is tremendously uncool today. The word cripple isn't defined as profanity, but can you imagine using it to insult someone? That makes me cringe way more than saying fuck. The real F word in America now isn't fuck, it's the slur for homosexual. You can say "fuck" at a work party; you can't bust out with the other F word unless you're

sure there are no cameras present and you already have a new job lined up.

There's just so much about swearing that has to do with context. In that Nicolas Cage "history of swear words" show, I did find one thing interesting, they talked about the word dick. On network television, you can't refer to an actual penis as a dick. But you can talk about someone being a jerk and say that they're being a dick. Like, comedian Nikki Glaser pointed out that if you said on network television "my dick is a dick" they would bleep out only the first instance of the word. It would say "my bleep is a dick." So it's not the word itself, it's how you use it. Same with the F word I mentioned...in England, fag just means a cigarette, but here, as pointed out, that word will get you fired. Or "sacked," if we're sticking with British slang. Or "made redundant." All of my British slang comes from the office. "Made redundant" is so brutal...it's the politest way to say you're useless and unnecessary. You are officially redundant...there are a million of you, and you're not even the best you we could find, so you need to go.

Traditionally, in the post-religious-profanity era, words for genitalia have been the most common forms

of profanity worldwide. In China and Russia, words for the male and female sex organs are common forms of swearing, while in Italy, "if someone cuts you off in traffic, you may shout "*che cazzo*", which could be translated as "What the cock!" But the word for the female organ is usually the more forbidden one." And that tracks, at least in America, where "dick" is pretty mild while the "c" word, again, is probably the strongest swear word available, and borders on the hate-speech that represents today's version of profanity.

When it comes to insults, historically the most effective have, unsurprisingly, targeted the fragile male ego. Anything emasculating, for instance in ancient Rome we meet our old friend *irrumatio*... threatening a man with a sexual act in which he was in the passive position was considered the height of verbal violation. Or I should say, oral violation. For instance, the Roman poet Catullus famously responded to charges of being effeminate by exclaiming "*Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*," threatening oral and anal rape. Accusing a Roman of performing cunnilingus was also incredibly insulting. Only a sucker would want to please his partner. You're a real chump for not being a selfish lover. Horny women with time machines, avoid Rome.

Swear words aren't just received differently than normal words by the target of an insult or the witness to a swearing incident, they are actually processed differently by the brain of the person doing the swearing. As opposed to standard speech, which is produced in the left hemisphere close to the surface of the brain, "Swearing... is generated much deeper in the brain, in regions that are older and more primitive in evolutionary terms...These regions are often found in the right hemisphere in the brain's emotional center, the limbic system." Both Alzheimer's disease and strokes target the left hemisphere of the brain, and as a result, many patients who have experienced brain damage and lost their ability to speak normally can still swear.

"Often cited is a 19th century stroke case, in which a patient with brain damage lost the ability to form and understand speech, a condition known as [aphasia](#), But he was able to swear, saying "I f*ck!" Which just sounds like bragging.

Unfortunately, and this is true, that guy was a priest. That's not bragging, that's a confession. And I want more information as to who he's fucking, because when it comes to priests, details matter.

So the Overton window shifts organically over time, but who gets

to decide when a word or concept or phrase is so offensive that it's actually ILLEGAL to utter? Let's talk about who has historically had the power to decide which words and concepts are considered profane, and the organizations responsible for keeping all those naughty words from infecting the vulnerable public.

Because every modern country in the world regulates speech and expression to some extent. For instance, in most countries, threats of violence are illegal. In America, those threats must be "credible, real, and imminent. If, for example, you threaten to blow up the world unless your bartender doesn't bring your drink to you immediately, no reasonable person hearing it would believe the threat was real. On the other hand, if you walk into a store... and threaten to shoot the clerk unless she gives you a refund, such a threat is credible and specific."

I'm honestly a little more scared of the world-blowing-up-guy. there should be a law against bizarre threats, because those indicate that the threaten her is not OK. But every country has similar restrictions on speech. In Germany it's illegal to deny the holocaust; in Austria it's illegal to call the prophet Muhammed a pedophile. Illegal and also accurate, based on the laws of today, but still rude, you know, it was a different time. When he was 53 he married and consummated

his marriage to a ten year old, but hey Overton window...like, back in the day you couldn't take the lord's name in vain but you could totally fuck kids. Dudes were marrying 12-year-olds left and right. Another reason to avoid time machines.

So every country is different, but we're going to focus on America for obvious reasons, and we've mentioned this before, but the first amendment right to freedom of speech from the American constitution does not allow for obscenity. It also doesn't include yelling fire in a crowded theater, or the aforementioned threats, or engaging in slander. So we Americans have 100% freedom of speech unless you pull a prank or say something mean that hurts another person's reputation, or say something that a judge arbitrarily decides is gross. We don't have freedom of speech, that's an absolute myth and it's confounding to me that Americans believe that we do. From the United States department of justice:

"Obscenity is not protected under First Amendment rights to free speech, and violations of federal obscenity laws are criminal offenses. The U.S. courts use a three-pronged test, commonly referred to as the *Miller* test, to determine if given material is obscene." That material may include, for example, visual

depictions, spoken words, or written text."

So what is the Miller test? It's also known as the three prong obscenity test, and it has, as you might imagine, four parts. No, it has three. First prong, "Whether "the average person, applying contemporary community standards", would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest.

Second, "Whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct or excretory functions specifically defined by applicable state law,

Third, "Whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

As is probably obvious, this is a completely subjective and useless test relying 100% on the personal opinion of whichever judge is presiding over an obscenity case. How do you define an "average" person? which community determines the "community standards"? Exactly what makes something offensive? We've talked about the Overton window, and how it shifts, and in this case the law actually shifts along with the Overton window, because judgments are based on whatever is considered culturally unacceptable

at the time...or at least unacceptable to the particular segment of culture inhabited by that particular judge at that particular time. Stand up comedians have frequently been targeted by obscenity laws, there is a long history of clashing with the metaphorical morality police. And often the morality police are the literal police. Comedian Lenny Bruce famously battled against obscenity laws...he fought the law, and the law won...In the short term. "In 1963 Manhattan district attorney Frank Hogan, who was working with Francis Cardinal Spellman, the Archbishop of New York, began to investigate [Lenny] Bruce. Undercover police detectives attended his two 1964 appearances at Cafe Au Go Go in Greenwich Village, and they arrested him on obscenity charges after each show. His trial attracted media attention, and artists including Woody Allen and Norman Mailer testified on his behalf. A three-judge panel convicted him of obscenity and sentenced him to serve four months.

After Bruce's conviction, nightclubs across the country blacklisted him for fear they would face obscenity charges. While he was free on parole during his appeal, Bruce died of a drug overdose in 1966 at age 40. The New York Court of Appeals overturned his conviction in

1970." That was nice of them. 4 years after he was in the ground, hey, sorry about that whole harassment-and-persecution-over-a-couple-of-jokes situation, that was awkward. Our bad!

I didn't know this, guess which other comedian got arrested at one of Lenny Bruce's performances? "Cops IDed everyone in the audience, and when they got to a young [George] Carlin, he told them he didn't believe in government IDs. He was hauled down to the station in the same wagon as Bruce. No doubt Carlin was a bit proud when he was slapped with an obscenity charge of his very own for performing his famous "Seven Dirty Words" routine in Milwaukee in 1972." And we'll get to that.

Many other comedians and performers have also incorporated legal-boundary-pushing material into their acts...for instance, famous actress and sex symbol Mae West was jailed for 10 days after writing, producing, and starring in a play that was deemed obscene. The play was called sex. So she wasn't trying to be subtle. Tempting fate there. And that was often the case, many artists were intentionally violating these laws in order to potentially get them overturned via legal challenges, or at least bring publicity to the issue. Jim Morrison

of the doors was arrested after a “profane” performance in which he was accused of exposing...little Jimmie. Nothing has really changed there, you still can’t whip out your dick out on stage at a rock concert. You can whip out your tits on stage at a strip club, but whatever, these laws don’t make sense. Speaking of that Overton window, Hugh Hefner was charged with obscenity in 1963, for obvious reasons, which is hilarious now if you think about what’s available on the Internet today. Playboy magazine was considered obscene. That’s quaint. But of all the art forms, standup comedy still probably provides the best example of shifting societal norms, because many of the bits that got Lenny Bruce in trouble could have easily shown up on HBO specials a few years later with no controversy whatsoever. They just wouldn’t have gotten laughs, because—just like the definition of obscenity—the cultural sense of humor shifts as well. I’m going to play a short Lenny Bruce clip, I don’t think this one will get us in trouble it’s probably 10 seconds. Here’s a hilarious bit from Lenny Bruce’s album “what I was arrested for.” (Play clip) Hilarious! That wasn’t the part he got arrested for, that was just to show how apparently senses of humor have changed over time.

In the Patreon version we’ll play a

longer clip, the specific bit that actually got him in trouble, it's titled "to is a preposition, come is a verb." Which involved banging a drum and ringing a bell and chanting "did you come good," and then, "I can't come" over and over, it was a different time. That wouldn't be remotely controversial today, it would just be annoying. I'm not sure how it wasn't annoying back then, but again it was a different time. Lots of low-quality weed went into that performance. That was the obscene influence of shake. I'm going to play some of that clip for Duncan, and the full clip will be on the Patreon. (Play longer clip).

So just a few years later in the late 70s and 80s, chanting "I can't cum" in a comedy special would've been fine, from a legal perspective. But today the Overton window has shifted again, and even though all of the material from those decades would still be technically legal, many of the comedy specials from the 80s, like Eddie Murphy's *Delirious*, would be completely unacceptable today, what with the raging homophobia and misogyny. There are some funny parts of *Delirious* and I love Eddie Murphy, but those specials are super cringy. It really shows how much times have changed, and how the Overton window shifts in both directions. Which is why I don't necessarily think it's fair to judge comedians,

performers, and humans in general based on things they said 20 years ago. The question is: are they still saying those things, or standing by their outdated views? That's what matters.

So let's get a little more granular and look at how obscenity laws have traditionally been formulated and applied. It wasn't until the development of public broadcasting via radio and television and now the Internet, that speech could be piped directly into people's homes, so naturally the government had to find ways to control these new mediums. Long before HBO, the first publicly available long-distance-communication device was the radio. Before that I guess there were smoke signals, which to my knowledge did not include profanity, and then there was the telegraph, which was censored primarily by inconvenience.

Communicating by telegraph was a laborious process of tappy-tap tapping, and adding random curse words to a message would have been an exercise in impressive determination. You had to be rulllll mad. So it was the proliferation of radio that first allowed audio messages to be sent directly into individual homes via broadcast programming, and the first attempt to control radio communication was the radio act of 1912, which

established the requirement of licenses for radio stations...licenses which could be revoked. But not typically due to content—at that point radio was really just used by the government/military, so no one was freestylin or trying to be edgy. There was no Happy Harry Hardon. Pump up the Volume reference. Great terrible movie. The establishment of commercial radio stations in the twenties spawned the radio act of 1927, which created the Federal radio commission. Stations were now required to prove that they were “in the public interest” in order to be licensed. In 1934 the federal government wiped the slate clean and created a brand new organization that we all know today: the federal communication commission. The FCC was given the power of levying fines for indecency and obscenity, and revoking licenses if necessary to protect the fragile ears and brains of vulnerable Americans. That power would be put to the test, long after radio was no longer the dominant force in media...on October 3, 1973, radio station WBAI (W Ba ee? Sounds like you doing a Christopher Walken impression) in New York City aired a news segment discussing societal attitudes about language, and as part of the broadcast they played comedian George Carlin’s “seven dirty words” routine, and the fallout would eventually reach the Supreme

Court. Those seven words, btw, according to Carlin are "shit", "piss", "fuck", "cunt", "cocksucker", "motherfucker", and "tits."

To avoid any copyright issues, we're not putting a clip of it on the main feed, but we'll include one on the Patreon feed because I'm not particularly worried about getting taken down by Patreon.

So here's how it all went down. On one sunny Tuesday in 1973 (once again I don't know if it was actually sunny, but just like in the rivalries episode, I'm going to be adding dubious weather details to all of my stories for flavor. but this was Santa Monica so it was probably sunny. My odds are good). Anyway, on a sunny Tuesday in Santa Monica in the year of our lord 1973, on the day before Halloween—so it was a brisk sunny day—John Douglas and his 15-year-old son were driving from Yale University in Connecticut back to New York. "Douglas, a CBS executive and a member of a pornography watchdog group called Morality in Media, was flipping through the radio when he landed on 99.5 WBAI-FM. Paul Gorman, the host of WBAI's "Lunch Pail" afternoon program, warned listeners that he was about to play Carlin's "Filthy Words" bit, a modified version of "Seven Dirty Words" recorded on the Occupation: Foole album, and that some of the language could be

deemed as offensive." Notably, Douglas did not change the channel. The radio station was like, "We're going to play something absolutely filthy, and if you are easily offended, I recommend you turn off your radio." And he was like, "Funny you should mention it, I *am* easily offended. Proceed." "A month later, Douglas filed a complaint with the FCC, calling the monologue "garbage." "He was the funniest comedian of his generation," Douglas [told](#) the Chicago Sun-Sentinel in 2008, shortly after Carlin's death. "I didn't turn him in. I was turning in WBAI." What a weird, mixed message. "I'm not mad at Carlin, he's a comedic genius, I'm just mad at the radio station for playing his crappy garbage jokes." I hope Carlin haunted him.

The case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, where Carlin's bit was declared "indecent but not obscene," yet the court still ruled 5-4 in favor of the FCC's right to censor indecent content between the hours of 6 AM and 10 PM, because children might be listening. Guess no one is worried about Insomniac children who stay up late listening to podcasts, all of you midnight masses are a lost cause. That's why fans of our show are so twisted, you get all of the indecent content after 10pm. The rationale for the Supreme Court decision was that it was considered an invasion

of a listener's privacy if a radio station broadcast objectionable content during the day...content that the listener voluntarily tuned into. It would be like if I walked up to your house, put my ear up to the mail slot, and I heard you having sex, and I complained that you had invaded my privacy by broadcasting your obscene behavior. Like, a listener had to choose to go out of their way to listen to a particular station. And even if a radio is being broadcast loudly, just walk away. So the comedy bit that got Carlin in trouble is also known as the "the seven words you can't say on television," because like radio, television was also under the purview of the FCC. Television broadcasts originated in the 1920s, but went mainstream in the 1950s in the wake of WWII, and with the introduction of live broadcasts came the danger of unscripted profanity.

The official Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters was issued in 1952, and it covered a lot more than seven words. "The code prohibited the use of profanity, the negative portrayal of family life, irreverence for God and religion, illicit sex, drunkenness and biochemical addiction, presentation of cruelty, detailed techniques of crime, the use of horror for its own sake, and the negative portrayal of law enforcement officials, among

others." Soooo...Netflix. And HBO. That pretty much just describes every show I enjoy. Now of course, Netflix and HBO are streaming services, and before them there was cable television, and none of those are available without a subscription and thus the codes of conduct don't apply. It's honestly not very fair that CBS has to play by different rules than Netflix now that most people are getting all of their TV content through the Internet. Do you know anyone who still has an antenna, remember rabbit ears on tvs? I'm old enough to remember when you could improve a TV signal by holding the antenna, so me and Tomo would take turns holding the antennas so the other one could watch. Anyway, the code went even further, describing how performers could dress and even how they had to move in order to be within the "bounds of decency". Also—and this one blew my mind—news reporting was to be "factual, fair and without bias" and commentary and analysis should be "clearly defined as such". Holy fuck. When did we decide this was a bad idea? I'll tell you when, 1989 was the year the fairness died. The "fairness doctrine," as it was known, was abolished in America by the Republican-led FCC in 1989, and an attempt to reinstate it legislatively was vetoed by Ronald Reagan. Because of course it was. Fairness

is very inconvenient when you have an agenda that is not fair. Not everyone is entitled to fairness, that wouldn't be fair...you can't just all have fairness. Some people deserve more fairness than others, but don't worry, fairness works its way down, it's the trickle-down theory of fairness. This is a tangent. Back to filth.

We haven't discussed movies...film obviously came before television, and you might have heard of the Hays Code, which governed the content of American movies from 1930 until the late 1960s. The Hays Code is amazing, there's no better example of the Overton window in action. It prohibited multiple forms of speech and expression. First, Vulgarity: "The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects should always be subject to the dictates of good taste and a regard for the sensibilities of the audience." So make sure that you maintain good taste in all your depictions of disgusting vulgarity. Also forbidden, in addition to vulgarity, obscenity: "Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even when likely to be understood only by part of the audience) is forbidden." So I guess "but most of our audience is stupid" isn't an acceptable defense. I

assume they meant kids. Like, you can't make jokes for adults in a kids' show, even if kids won't get it. Which would bankrupt Pixar. That's their bread and butter. That's the only way you can make animated movies tolerable for parents. Gotta throw the adults a few bones.

In addition to vulgarity and obscenity, Profanity was of course also strictly forbidden in the Hays code, and that "includes the words, God, Lord, Jesus, Christ – unless used reverently – Hell, S.O.B., damn, Gawd), [so don't try to get around the God ban by extending those vowels] or every other profane or vulgar expression however used, is forbidden."

Enforcement of the Hays Code gradually dwindled in the 50s and 60s with the rise of counterculture, and also competition from all of those dirty foreign movies—I'm looking at you, France. Filthy, heathen foreign directors began putting pressure on American filmmakers by competing for theatergoers. Turns out it's kind of fun to watch a movie in which people are bulgar and obscene... like, fucking and saying fuck, excuse my French—and eventually it became clear that the government couldn't stop movies from being dirty, but they could at least restrict access and warn the public about what to expect. In 1968, the Hays Code was officially replaced by a

rating system devised and overseen by the MPAA—Motion Picture Association of America. A rating system that is bonkers and makes no sense. Like, in a PG film like Temple of Doom you could show a beating heart ripped out of a chest, but can't show a boob. So a lady's naked chest, not ok—you can't show what's under a *shirt*, but if you tear open the actual chest you can show what's under the *skin*. I guess you just have to skip a layer. You can show shirt or ribcage, just skip the flesh. Makes total sense. These rules are not remotely arbitrary.

So we've covered some of the history of profanity and who—at least in America—gets to define and regulate it; now let's talk about the functions of swearing. Why do we do it?

"According to [Steven Pinker](#), there are five possible functions of swearing: [\[31\]](#)

- [Abusive](#) swearing, intended to offend, intimidate or otherwise cause emotional or psychological harm

I wouldn't know anything about that, you dumb motherfucker.

- [Cathartic](#) swearing, used in response to pain or misfortune

Motherfucker!

- Dysphemistic swearing, used to convey that the speaker thinks negatively of the subject matter and to make the listener do the same

Fuck this motherfucker.

- Emphatic swearing, intended to draw additional attention to what is considered to be worth paying attention to

Fuck *this*, motherfucker. Not *that* motherfucker, this one in particular.

- Idiomatic swearing, used for no other particular purpose, but as a sign that the conversation and relationship between speaker and listener is informal
Give me a hug, motherfucker.

And then there's Coprolalia, which is an occasional characteristic of tic disorders, is involuntary swearing or the involuntary utterance of obscene words or socially inappropriate and derogatory remarks. [32] It encompasses words and phrases that are

culturally [taboo](#) or generally unsuitable for acceptable social use, when used out of context. The term is not used to describe contextual swearing. [\[33\]](#) It can be distinguished from voluntary profanity by characteristics such as interrupting the flow of dialogue, differences in tone and volume relative to a normal voice, variable frequency that increases with anxiety, and association with brain disorders. [\[32\]](#) It is usually expressed out of social or emotional context, and may be spoken in a louder tone or different cadence or pitch than normal conversation. It can be a single word, or complex phrases"

So that's for profanity, I promised it would be classy, I failed, I tried my best but we are not that kind of show, I guess. It's the thought that counts.

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<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Profanity>

[Swearing: "Vulture's Secret History of Television" Episode 5 - YouTube](#)

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