

# The Treatment of Vulgar Words in Major English Dictionaries (1)<sup>1)</sup>

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## 1. Some Historical Background

The so-called vulgar words had been neglected until recently on the other end of the language studies, lexicography, just as they had been in the rest of the field. Although some has claimed that their "exclusion from dictionaries is a relatively recent phenomenon", and that "most dictionaries gave them with no particular qualms" (Béjoint 1994: 125) until the eighteenth century, it is still undeniable that taboo words on the whole, especially the most 'obscene' and 'vulgar' ones, had not been treated as proper lexica, or words to be defined in dictionaries, for a long time until very recently.

Of course we can find some well-cited examples of pre-reformative dictionaries with many of these words listed such as Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1735) and John Ash's *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* published in 1775 (Read 1934a; Perrin 1992; Béjoint 1992). Perrin states that we can "learn in perfectly dry form" in Ash's dictionary like to *fuck* defined as 'to perform the act of generation', *prick* as 'the penis in low or vulgar language' and *shite* as an intransitive verb meaning 'to void the excrements' (Perrin 1992: 165). But these are rare examples, for the presence of dictionaries themselves were rare then, and were limited for the eyes of special groups of people.

Then came out the one with a historical significance. In his famous *A*

1) This paper is the first part of Chapter 3 from my MA thesis submitted to Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in January 16, 1996, revised and edited. I very grateful to Prof. Nobuyuki Higashi for his kind and patient advice.

*Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), Dr. Samuel Johnson carefully excluded most of the vulgar words not for the reason of being obscene but colloquial. At the same time he did not omit the words he judged were literary even though some were genuine four-letter words (Perrin 1992: 166). He defined *fart*, a highly literary word that appears throughout the Anglo-Saxon literature from Chaucer to Shakespeare, with its usage taken from the six-line poem by Swift: '... So from my lord his passion broke, He *farted* first, and then he spoke.' He also has *piss* in entry, and after defining the verb *to piss* as 'to make water', he illustrates its usage from Shakespeare: 'I charge the *issing* conduit run nothing but claret.' Indeed, *fart* and *piss* are on the weaker end of the four-letter word scale, and Johnson refrained from going further to the other end. However, the fact that he was conscious of his reader's interest in such words is displayed in a remarkable anecdote cited in the *Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*:

He called on them [Mrs Digby and her sister, Mrs Brooke] one day, soon after the publication of his immortal dictionary. The ladies paid him due compliments on the occasion. Among other topics of praise, they very much commended the omission of all naughty words. 'What! my dears! then you have been looking for them?' said the moralist. The ladies, confused at being caught, dropped the subject of the dictionary. (Beste, Memorials, p. 11-12)

Thus there has always existed a current of times regarding the kind of words treated or *untreated* in the dictionaries, and words in the dictionaries surely have reflected the social view of the time. So it is possible that the eighteenth century had been much easier times for taboo words to define themselves in a dictionary than the nineteenth or the first half of the twentieth century. However, as we have seen, what is regarded as taboo can also change in the course of time. Although defining most of the four-letter words in his above-mentioned dictionary including *fuck*, Bailey nevertheless expurgated *onanism*, an old term originally taken from the name of Judah's son, *Onan*, in the Bible (Genesis 38:9), and even *masturbation*, a purely scientific word, because the act itself the words refer to seems to have been "the most indecent act known to the eighteenth century" (Perrin 1992: 164). He surely did not make this selection because *onanism* was

more technical and less popular word than *fuck*, which is obvious if we compare the absence of *onanism* to the presence of *copulation*, a more technical and a less popular synonym for *fuck*. On the contrary, *onanism* seems to have been the most common colloquial term for masturbation in the eighteenth century. It was because masturbation was considered a far more offensive deed and a greater sin than copulation in this period, as is shown in the naming of such euphemisms as *self-pollution* and *self-abuse*.<sup>1)</sup> On the other hand, many of today's leading abridged or students' dictionaries, like *POD*, *OALD* and *LDCE*, have *masturbation* and *fuck* but not *onanism*, the selection obviously based on the popularity of the words. Meanwhile, almost all of the dictionaries, even the unabridged ones, during the long period from the early 19th century to the late 1960s had made their selection of the words exactly the other way round; that is, including the 'physiological' *onanism* and *masturbation*, and excluding the 'obscene' *fuck*.

Now in America, ever since the birth of this nation, there had been a strong Puritan ethics that repressed all these words from appearing in the eyes of children, and most dictionaries of this time were made for school use. So all the taboo words had not even existed in the pages of American dictionaries until some time after the World War II. Even the American reprints of English dictionaries were expurgated, Johnson's not an exception. This tendency was reinforced and even reimported to Britain by one man so significant in the history of lexicography, Noah Webster. Famous for his proposal and attempt to reform the spelling of English words, he is also notorious for his morbid persistence in purifying the English language. His boast went as "There is not a vocabulary of the English language so free from *local*, *vulgar* and *obscene* words as mine." (Perrin 1992: 167)<sup>2)</sup> Webster planned an expurgated edition of English poems with notes, and even the Bible fell before his hand, actually publishing an edi-

1) It is an ironical fact that D.H. Lawrence, who brought back many of the four-letter words into print, called *masturbation* "an act of self-abuse" and strongly advocated the harm and futility of the deed (Lawrence 1930). Bryson (1995: 366) cites many other euphemisms for *masturbation* as well as interesting episodes concerning how the American society reacted to this 'vicious' deed.

2) Probably cited from Harry R. Warfel, ed., *Letters of Noah Webster* (New York, 1953), p. 73.

tion with "many words and phrases which cannot now be uttered, especially in promiscuous company, without violence to decency" like *suck*, *dung* and *piss* cut out (Read 1934b: 386).<sup>1)</sup> He even felt that Johnson's was full of vulgarisms, attacking him for having "transgressed the rules of lexicography beyond any other compiler, for his work contains more of the lowest of all vulgar words, than any other now extant, Ash excepted" (Read 1934a: 273). He published the *Compendious*, his first and the fifth dictionary compiled in America, in 1806, revised as *An American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1841, shortly before his death. In its preface he wrote:

It is to be remarked that, in general, vulgar words are the oldest and best authorized words in language; and their use is as necessary to the classes of people who use them, as elegant words are to the statesman and the poet. It may be added, that such words are often particularly useful to the lexicographer, in furnishing him with the primary sense, which is no where to be found but in popular use. In this work I have not gone quite so far as Johnson has done, in admitting vulgar words. Some of them are too low to deserve notice. (lxix)

But here is another word by the same man which is quite contradictory to all he said above: "The business of the lexicographer is to collect, arrange and define, as far as possible, *all* the words that belong to a language, and leave the author to select from them, at his pleasure, and according to his own taste and judgment." (Read 1934a: 274)

The influence of Webster was very strong, and his dictionary was reprinted overseas in Europe. Especially in England, harmonizing with the Victorianism and its way of gentility, Webster's dictionary got a favorable response among the Victorian people. The fact that few, if any, dictionaries of importance in the lexicographical history had been compiled during this period in England, until the compilation of *OED* began in the late nineteenth century, tells of its big influence. Therefore we may conclude that the nineteenth century was the hardest and the most neglected time for vulgar words. Flexner calls this the 'blackout' period, more exactly

1) Cited from Webster, ed., the "Introduction" of *The Holy Bible* (New Haven, Conn., 1833), p. xvi.

referring to the time between the late 18th century to the 1940s (Flexner 1976: 157), during which almost no vulgar words could be seen, at least with complete spellings, in literature, dictionaries, publications and even in the conversations of the 'sensible' people, totally crossed out of the society. And they did not see the light of day until about thirty years ago from now.

## 2. Vulgar Words in Modern Dictionaries

These thirty years have brought about the most drastic change in lexicography concerning the entry of vulgar words in dictionaries. From the early 1960s, many of the leading dictionary publishers began to break down the long-lasting tradition of excluding the words in question and go back to the basic principle of lexicography; that is, to quote Webster's words again, 'to collect, arrange and define, as far as possible, *all* the words that belong to a language', including vulgar words as well. Behind this is the social background in which people have gradually begun to accept the existence of the words and their penetration into the social and cultural life. It is obvious that the entry of taboo words into dictionaries was a mere reflection of the society acknowledging them, which had already begun some time after the World War II.

Let us now examine the treatment of vulgar words in the leading modern dictionaries in the U.S.A. and in England. By looking at the transition of how one dictionary has treated these words differently in several editions, we should be able to draw out a general pattern in proportion to their social acceptance. By comparing more than one dictionary, we can see how they are treated differently in each.

The consequence is arranged into Table 1 below. The criteria for selecting these dictionaries were popularity, historical significance and continuity to the present. Thus we have seven U.S. dictionaries; *ACD*, *AHD*, *RHD*, *RHC*, *W(NI)*, *WNCD*, and *WNW*, and four U.K. dictionaries; *OALD*, *COD*, *LDCE* and *PED*. The treatment of the words in each dictionary will be examined closely in the forthcoming part (2) of this study.

The criteria for selecting the words in Table 1 are regarding sex and/or excretion, but the rest is purely subjective. They are what I have considered essential for the study. Some of the words should have been included

but were omitted from the table, like *hell*, *sod*, *snot*, *scumbag*, etc. The terms for racial and religious slurs were excluded as well; they shall be discussed in another opportunity.

The signs ● and ○ represent respectively that either the word's literal or figurative meaning is given, whereas ⊙ both literal and figurative given. In this issue of the study, we are going to look at this table vertically and see how each word is used as its literal and/or figurative meanings. I have already summarized the diversified usage of *fuck* in my previous study (Uchida 1994: 55), and with slight modification I will apply this list of usage to other vulgar terms to see how flexibly they are used, which is arranged into Table 2 below.

*Fuck* is the most diverse and flexible word listed in Table 1, or maybe of all the English words. If we were to list all the *fuck* usage, it would be an enormous one. Shiedlower (1995) actually tried this, examining every sense of every word containing *fuck*, which eventually got him to comprise an epoch-making 200-page thesaurus. Most of the present-day dictionaries cover only its literal meaning as a noun and a verb, figurative as an expletive, *fucker* as a person,<sup>1)</sup>  *fucking* as an intensive and a few well-used phrasal verbs like *fuck up* and *fuck off*. In other words, *fuck* is too diverse for a general dictionary to cover its every usage. All of the usage in Table 2 is possible for *fuck*, with many other interesting ones not treated here, one of which the 'infixing' of  *fucking*. Sagarin was probably the first to refer to this, like 'imfuckinpossible' and 'irrefuckinsponsible', as he himself admits "this may be the first time that they have been reduced to writing" (Sagarin 1962: 148). Of course he did not forget to mention the previously-cited examples of the two other words used similarly, *bloody* and *goddamn*; e.g. 'absobloodylutely' and 'indegoddampendent'. The condition for this infixing usage may be that the term can be used attributively, like ' *fucking* car' or ' *bloody* bastard'. Other than these three, there seem to be no examples of the terms used in this way so far, but in the near future there

1) The term *fucker*, although defined in many dictionaries, seems much less in use now, owing to the presence of *fuck* and *motherfucker* as personal epithets. This has already been pointed out by Sagarin (1968: 139) almost thirty years ago, but overlooked by most lexicographers.

may be words made up such as 'complishittycated' or 'communi-jerkoffcation'. In any case, this infixing usage is one good evidence to see how difficult it is to account for vulgar words, especially *fuck* in this case, in traditional grammar. And thus it is more than natural that *fuck* should be one of the most burdensome words in lexicography.

*Cunt* is another infamous word long neglected in lexicography. Its usage is not very wide, and besides its literal meaning as the female sexual organ, there is mostly the figurative usage as an insulting epithet.<sup>1)</sup> Table 1 shows that this figurative meaning of *cunt* has been defined with the literal ever since its appearance in dictionaries. Indeed, *cunt* is a well-used epithet, and a strong one. Allan points out the semantic difference between the figurative usage of *cunt* and *dick/prick*, arguing that *cunt* is 'nasty, malicious, despicable' while *dick* and *prick* are 'stupid, contemptible', and attributes it to the general belief that "vagina . . . is more of a nuisance as a body part than is the penis because it is the source of a greater portion of polluting discharge." (Allan 1990: 171) Perhaps this theory partly explains why many dictionaries exclusively label *cunt* as 'offensive', as we will see later. But Allan also regards *cunt* and *shit* as having similar strength of invoking strong pollution taboo, to which I cannot agree. *Shit* indeed applies more to a 'nasty, malicious, despicable' person than to a 'stupid' one, but its degree of offensiveness must be much weaker than that of *cunt*. Comparing the literal meaning of each word, it is easy to see that the fruit of excretion is less taboo than the sexual organ, and I have already claimed that the degree of taboo of the referent reflects that of the word that refers to it (Uchida 1994). Thus calling a person *cunt* should invoke much stronger contempt and derogation than *shit*. In any case, *cunt* as a figurative is one of the strongest derogatory epithets in the English language, almost equal to *fuck*, *motherfucker* and *cocksucker*.

*Cock* is the only term in the Big Six<sup>2)</sup> that used to be a euphemism itself.

1) Spears (1982) lists the verbal usage 'to insert one's penis' of *cunt*, cited from the limericks, while Partridge (1972) defines the adjectival *cunting* as 'expressive of disgust, reprobation, violence', but these minor examples of *cunt* usage are seldom seen today.

2) The generally-known notion of the Big Six is mentioned in Hughes (1991: 20) but as for which terms are the Big Six, not all English speakers may reach a consensus. There may even be disagreement on whether this notion really exists at all, and it must be reexamined by further research.

It comes from the *cock* as a faucet, and in this sense the *cock* as a male sexual organ can be regarded as the figurative meaning of the original, but here we regard the literal meaning of *cock* as the penis, which is rarely used figuratively. And many dictionaries in Table 1 define its literal only.<sup>1)</sup> *Cock* is sometimes used, chiefly in Britain, as 'nonsense', same as (*bull*)*shit* and *crap*, and therefore possible to form the phrase *full of cock* or *a load of cock*. It is also occasionally used as a verb 'to copulate', but this is only defined in some of the slang dictionaries (see Partridge 1961; Spears 1982).

*Shit* can be used figuratively as a noun, epithet, verb, interjection and intensifier. As an epithet we have seen its usage and compared its meaning with *cunt* above. As a verb it has the meaning 'to lie; exaggerate; deceive', which comes from the noun 'nonsense', not very often defined in dictionaries. In this sense *fuck* is more widely used now. As an interjection it is so much used like water in everyday speech, perhaps much more often than *fuck* because *fuck* is still more restricted in certain situations, and the day might come when *shit* does not carry any more vulgar impact, the same way *damn* and *hell* once followed. *Shit* is sometimes used as an intensifier, and lastly it has an adjectival derivative *shitty*, used fairly often.

*Piss* is the second most diversely-used term of the Big Six. Although it cannot be used as an intensifier, it exceeds the usage scope of *shit*. It has a number of phrasal verbs such as *piss around*, *piss away* and *piss off*, the last one most often defined in general dictionaries. It has a cursing expletive '*Piss you!*' as well as a derivative *pisser*, meaning 'a very difficult job' or 'a person or object with exceptional qualities', either negative or positive. This is something to note of because most vulgar words refer to the negative qualities of things. *Piss* also makes many combining words such as *piss-elegant*, *piss-poor* and *piss call*, which proves its usage as an adverb and adjective.

*Fart* as figurative is mainly used as an epithet to a man, especially an old and/or a stupid one. It is sometimes used as a phrasal verb *fart around* and

1) The chiefly British usage of *cock* as a term of endearment seems to have been in use since before the 17th century, and therefore should not be regarded at the figurative usage of *cock* as a penis, which has been in use for about the same amount of time.

in a phrase 'don't give a *fuck*', in this way similar to *fuck*, *shit* and *damn* but not as strong as the first two.

*Motherfucker* and *cocksucker* are the two strongest and most notorious compound words including the Big Six. Above all, *motherfucker* may be the severest taboo word in the English language due to the infusion of two taboos; copulation and incest. It is hardly used literally, and its chief usage is as an epithet and intensifying adjective/adverb *motherfucking*. It also has an interjection usage. Shiedlower (1995) even cites a rare usage of the derivative *motherfuck* as a transitive verb and intensifier. *Cocksucker* is also seldom used literally, but many dictionaries define its literal meaning as 'one who performs the act of fellatio'. It is not very often used to refer to a woman in a literal sense, and never in a figurative, for the presence of another term *cock-teaser*. Thus we see a homosexual nuance in *cocksucker*; used figuratively to a man, it carries maximum contempt. Many dictionaries still omit the two terms despite their popular use, perhaps owing to their offensiveness and degree of taboo.

*Bullshit* is not used literally, and its main usage is as noun, verb and interjection. As noun/verb meaning '(to talk) nonsense; lie' it is used in general. As interjection, it is used to attack someone specifically who is talking nonsense or lying, not to curse generally at uncomfortable circumstances like '*Fuck!*' or '*Shit!*', in this sense rather close to cursing expletives '*Fuck you!*' or '*Fuck it!*'. It also has a less-used personal *bullshitter*, meaning no more than 'one who lies or exaggerates', perhaps a little too weak as a personal epithet.

*Asshole* is now used not so much in its literal sense as a figurative epithet. It can refer negatively to a contemptible person, but also positively or friendly to a person of a close relationship. Being the same 'polluted' hole of the body part as in Allan's sense above, this is considerably different from *cunt*, which can only be used negatively. Its adjectival/adverbial usage can be seen in phrases like *asshole friend* and *asshole deep*. The former shows again how *asshole* is being used positively without any vulgar sense, for here it means 'a good friend' humorously. *Asshole* had long been neglected in dictionaries, but now all the newest editions in Table 1 have it listed. There is also a term similar but somewhat weaker in meaning,

*butthole*.

*Jerk off* is a phrasal verb meaning 'to masturbate'. This term has long been considered vulgar in its literal sense, but in a figurative sense it means 'to idle about', and hence comes the personal meaning 'a useless person'. Only one dictionary, *RHD*<sup>2</sup>, has defined it so far.

*Son of a bitch* is another term that is so popular now that not many people consider it vulgar anymore. Its original meaning is similar to *bastard*, and formerly it was a strong taboo word, making euphemisms such as *S.O.B.* and *son of a gun*. But now it can refer to a thing or a person with remarkable quality, and calling someone *son of a bitch* does not necessarily invoke negative impact anymore.

*Screw* is a very popular slang which began as a euphemism for *fuck*. Its usage is very similar to its original, but much limited. *Screw* can not be used as a personal by itself, though it can refer to a person, more often a woman, as a sex object. It is not used as an intensifier or interjection. It has an adjectival *screwy*, but not adverbial. Its figurative meaning 'to take advantage of; swindle' is rapidly losing the vulgar impact, which can also be said to a number of its phrasal verbs as *screw around* and *screw up*. In addition, dictionaries such as *RHD* and *WNW*<sup>2</sup> treated this term comparatively early, which is something to note of for later inquiries.

The two popular terms for female sexual organs, *pussy* and *twat*, are very much limited in their usage just as *cunt* is. Their figurative usage is mostly limited to personal epithets. *Pussy* as figurative has a very popular usage, especially in America, as 'a weak or effeminate male', which has strangely been overlooked by most of the dictionaries so far. Even Allan seems to miss the fact that *pussy* can be used as an epithet, making a false remark that "The terms *poontang*, *pussy* . . . are also inappropriate as epithets or terms of abuse; they rather seem to be terms of endearment." (Allan 1990: 164) *Twat* is mainly a British term not very popular in the U.S., and many dictionaries label it *old-fashioned*. Allan (1990) does not give enough account on why *twat* is less offensive than *cunt*, but probably the reason lies in the currency and popularity of the latter as compared to the former.

*Dick* and *prick*, the two most popular slangs for male sexual organs, refer

restrictively to males in its figurative epithet usage as well. This semantic asymmetry is an interesting point compared to the fact that the terms above for female sexual organs, *cunt*, *pussy* and *twat*, can refer to both males and females figuratively. *Dick* comes from the rhyming slang of *prick*, which itself used to be another euphemism for *penis* besides *cock*. *Dick* is much widely used; as a compound *dickhead*, a verb 'to have sex with' and a phrasal verb *dick around* similar to *screw around*. But as is clear from Table 1, not many dictionaries have the figurative of *dick* defined as compared to *prick*.

*Crap* and *turd* are two popular terms regarding excretion besides *shit*. The two are rather different in their usage. *Crap* cannot be used as an epithet, though it has a derivative *crapper* similar to *bullshitter*. It also has an adjectival *crappy*, and it can be used as a verb and an interjection. On the whole, *crap* has approximately the same usage and meaning as *bullshit*. On the other hand, *turd* is very limited in its usage, mainly as a figurative epithet.

*Tit* is a popular term for a female breast, which originally referred just to a nipple, or a teat. Defining the original sense was not a problem to the dictionaries, but when it came to mean the whole breast, it was considered too vulgar. The interjection '*Tits!*' can mean 'great' or 'wonderful', another positive usage of a vulgar term, and although not very popular, *tit* can refer to a foolish person as an epithet.

*Ass* is an American variant of *arse*, and thus its etymology differs from the *ass* as a donkey. But *ass* the donkey has referred figuratively to a stupid person, and so has *ass* the buttocks. *Ass* may often carry sexual connotations; as referring to a female like 'She's a good *ass*.' or to a sexual act itself like 'He's out looking for *ass*'. *Ass* cannot be used as an interjection by itself, but when accompanied by *my* ('*My ass!*'), it shows strong disbelief or surprise. *Ass* also has a number of special phrases such as 'Kiss my *ass!*', 'a pain in the *ass*', etc.

*Balls*, usually in plural, refer to the testicles. In a figurative sense it can mean 'nonsense', also used as an interjection just like *bullshit*. But *balls* is popular for another figurative sense 'courage'. Here is another example of a 'positive' vulgar word.

The two derogatory terms for women, *bitch* and *whore*, have the long-used history. Calling a woman *bitch* was originally a figurative usage of *bitch* as a female dog. But now *bitch* as a lewd or disgusting woman can be used in many figurative ways; as a noun to refer to anything unpleasant, a verb meaning 'to complain/to cheat', *bitching* as an adjective to mean 'excellent' and as an adverb to mean 'extremely'. *Whore* is originally a Biblical term to refer to a prostitute, and it was, 'in mid C.19–20, considered a vulgarism' (Partridge 1972).<sup>1)</sup> Naturally it also refers to a non-professional lewd woman or even man figuratively. Its somewhat minor usage is as a verb 'to womanize'. *Bitch* and *whore* are not really considered vulgar anymore, but they can be derogatory or even offensive if men used it to refer to women in the feminism society. But for now, the two are widely used in both literal and figurative sense.

On the other hand, the well-used two terms for homosexuals, *faggot* and *queer*, have been treated as derogatory and/or offensive words ever since they appeared in dictionaries, and with the spread of gay power and rights in the modern society, we must be very careful in using them. The two are solely used literally. *Faggot* in old Brit. English was originally a term of contempt for women, hence applied to men who have sexual desire for the same sex. *Queer* is an adjective in original describing strangeness, applied to the sexually deviant.

I have classified *bastard* and *bugger* as classical terms because of their long use in history, and also because they are not strictly slang. *Bastard* means 'illegitimate child' literally, hence a general term of contempt. *Bugger* has been used almost as diversely as *fuck* in Britain, and its vulgar impact is much stronger than in the U.S. The flexibility of *bugger* is precisely examined in Hughes (1991).

Finally, the two well-known profanity terms *bloody* and *damn* are no longer strong enough to have impact in the modern society. The death of their vulgarness has already been mentioned decades ago by Mencken

1) In defining *whore*, Partridge continues: "*harlot* is considered preferable, but in C.20, archaic." Read (1934b: 389) tells how Webster deleted every instance of *whore* from the Bible and changed it to *harlot* and several other expressions, claiming that even in the 1930s "the word *harlot* has little or no stigma attached to it, while the word *whore* is in disrepute."

(1936) and Withington (1930), and it is not worth repeating here.

(To be continued.)

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Appendices

	A C D	A H D	A H D	A C H D	R H D	R H D	R H C	W 2	W 3	W 7	W N C	W N C	W N C	W N W	W N W	W N W	O A L	O A L	O A L	C O D	C O D	C O D	C O D	L D D	L D D	P E D	
<i>the Big Six</i>																											
fuck	×	○	○	○	×	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
cunt	×	○	○	○	×	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
cock	×	●	●	●	×	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
shit	×	○	○	○	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
piss	×	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
fart	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<i>compound</i>																											
motherfucker	×	×	×	○	×	○	×	×	○	×	○	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	○	○	○	○	×	×	×	×
cocksucker	×	×	×	○	×	○	×	×	○	×	○	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	○	○	○	○	×	×	×	×
bullshit	×	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
asshole	×	×	×	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
jerk off	×	●	●	●	×	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
son of a bitch	×	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<i>popular slang</i>																											
screw	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
pussy	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
twat	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
dick	×	●	●	●	●	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	×	×	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
prick	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
crap	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
turd	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
tit(s)	×	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
arse, ass	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
ball(s)	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<i>female derog</i>																											
bitch	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
whore	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<i>homosexual</i>																											
fag, faggot	×	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
queer	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<i>classical</i>																											
bastard	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
bugger	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<i>profanity</i>																											
bloody	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
damn	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

× ... not given ● ... literal ○ ... figurative ○ ... literal + ... figurative

Table 1. Major vulgar words in major modern dictionaries.



## Categorization

- 1) noun
- 2) personal: 'You ——!'
- 3) personal compound: '—— face', '—— head'
- 4) intransitive verb
- 5) transitive verb: 'to —— someone'
- 6) phrasal verb: '—— around', '—— off'
- 7) adjectival: 'a —— / —— ing shame'
- 8) adverbial: '—— ing good'
- 9) cursing expletive: '—— you!', '—— it!'
- 10) general interjection of anger, frustration, annoyance: '——!'
- 11) intensifier: 'What the —— is that?'
- 12) other special phrases: 'don't give a ——', '—— one's mind', 'full of ——', etc.

terms	category											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
fuck	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
cunt	○	○	○	×	×	○	○	×	×	×	×	○
cock	○	×	×	×	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	○
shit	○	○	○	○	○	×	△	×	×	○	○	○
piss	○	△	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	×	○
fart	○	○	○	○	×	○	×	×	×	×	×	○
motherfucker	○	○	×	×	△	×	△	△	×	○	△	×
cocksucker	○	○	×	×	×	×	△	△	×	×	×	×
bullshit	○	×	×	○	○	×	×	×	×	○	×	○
asshole	○	○	×	×	×	×	○	○	×	×	×	○
jerk off	○	○	×	-	-	○	○	×	×	×	×	×
son of a bitch	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	×	×
screw	○	×	○	○	○	○	△	×	○	×	×	×
pussy	○	○	×	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	×
twat	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
dick	○	○	○	○	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×
prick	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
crap	○	×	×	○	○	×	△	×	×	○	×	○
turd	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	○
tit(s)	○	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	×	×
arse / ass	○	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
ball(s)	○	×	×	○	○	○	×	×	×	○	×	○
bitch	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	×	×	×	×
whore	○	○	×	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
fag / faggot	○	○	×	×	×	×	△	×	×	×	×	×
queer	○	○	×	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	×
bastard	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
bugger	○	○	×	○	○	○	△	×	○	○	×	○
bloody	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	○	×	×	×	×
damn	○	×	×	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	×	○

○ ... usage × ... lack of usage ○ ... usage in derived forms (e.g. shit → shitty)

Table 2. Flexibility of vulgar words.

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