Profanity vs. Vulgarity Exercise

**Purpose:** 1) Reduce own reliance on swearing

 2) Reduce own reactivity to swearing

**Rationale:** Swearing and name-calling is something that is usually used to capture, convey, or provoke emotional reactions and attitudes. Swearing is about the initial reaction, and not about deeper processing. If you can train the brain to process swearing intellectually, most of the emotional effect of it is gone, and it should also reduce the brain’s urge to use swear-words.

**Directions:** Whenever you think about a swear-word or name-calling, or whenever someone uses it, try to decide which category (discussed below) it belongs to. Don’t get too serious about it. The point isn’t to always be correct about where it belongs - the point is to get used to thinking in those intellectual terms so as to avoid an emotional response to it.

This is an intellectual exercise. Do not do this out loud with the person who swears unless you have a very good relationship, as it may be taken as a provocation.

Almost all swearing, and a lot of name-calling, can be fit into one of the following 4 categories. If you have a hard time placing one, it may be useful to research the historical origins of the insult.

If a term can have two meanings, the worst of the meanings is the one that counts.

Vulgarity: Has to do with sex or bodily functions, or associated body parts

Pseudo-vulgarity: A word or phrase originally used instead of a vulgarity

Profanity: Disrespectful use of a word relating to something that is sacred to someone, or that has to do with religious beliefs.

Pseudo-profanity: A word or phrase originally used instead of a profanity.

!WARNING!

THE NEXT TWO PAGES INCLUDES A LOT OF PROFANITY AND VULGARITY. THESE TWO PAGES ARE PROVIDED TO GIVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE THE PROFANITY vs. VULGARITY EXERCISE SO THAT IT WILL BE EASIER TO USE WHEN YOU NEED IT.

**PRACTICE**

Practice the exercise by trying to figure out which of the 4 categories to place the following in:

1. Yo-mama jokes and insults
2. Darn
3. Bitch
4. Jiminy Crickets
5. Fudge
6. OMG!
7. Holy cow!
8. Douche-bag
9. Shoot

Vulgarity: Has to do with sex or bodily functions, or associated body parts

Pseudo-vulgarity: A word or phrase originally used instead of a vulgarity

Profanity: Disrespectful use of a word relating to something that is sacred to someone, or that has to do with religious beliefs. Some would put insults someone has less worth other humans in this category.

Pseudo-profanity: A word or phrase originally used instead of a profanity.

Suggested answers are provided on the next page

**ANSWERS**

If you disagree with any of these answers, then that is okay. The importance of this exercise is to get used to processing swearing intellectually rather than emotionally. There’s no award for being the person who most accurately categorizes profanity and vulgarity.

Vulgarity: Has to do with sex or bodily functions, or associated body parts

Some yo-mama jokes and insults (many of them make claims about the person’s mother’s sexual behaviors)

Bitch (although technically referring to a female dog, the original use of the phrase as an insult is in reference to the promiscuous tendencies of a female dog in heat)

Douche-bag (device used to clean the vagina)

Pseudo-vulgarity: A word or phrase originally used instead of a vulgarity

Fudge (often used as a replacement for “fuck”)

Shoot (often used instead of “shit”)

Profanity: Disrespectful use of a word relating to something that is sacred to someone, or that has to do with religious beliefs. Some would put insults someone has less worth other humans in this category.

OMG! (Short for “Oh my god!” It could also mean “oh my gosh!,” which would be a pseudo-profanity, but because it is not clear that it is the one over the other, the stronger interpretation is the one to go with).

Holy cow! (A rather mild expletive. Although most American and European profanity makes Judeo-Christian references, this one makes a reference to Hindu religion).

All yo-mama jokes and insults (Almost universally across cultures someone’s mother is considered partially sacred to the person)

Pseudo-profanity: A word or phrase originally used instead of a profanity.

Jiminy Crickets (instead of “Jesus Christ”)

Darn (instead of “damn” – short for damnation - referring to someone being destined for hell)