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# Expletive Deleted: A Good Look At Bad Language



## Synopsis

Have we always "sworn like sailors"? Has creative cursing developed because we can't just slug people when they make us angry? And if such verbal aggression is universal, why is it that some languages (Japanese, for instance) supposedly do not contain any nasty words? Throughout the twentieth century there seems to have been a dramatic escalation in the use and acceptance of offensive language in English, both verbally and in print. Today it seems almost commonplace to hear the "f" word in casual conversation, and even on television. Just how have we become such a bunch of cursers and what does it tell us about our language and ourselves? In *Expletive Deleted*, linguist Ruth Wajnryb offers an entertaining yet thoroughly researched, lighthearted look at this development, seeking to reveal the etymologies of various terms and discover how what was once considered unfit-for-company argot has become standard fare. Wajnryb steps outside the confines of English in her search for answers, exploring whether offensive words in English are mirrored in other languages and examining cultural differences in the usage of dirty words. For instance, why is it that in some languages you can get away with intimating that a person and his camel are more than just good friends, while pouring scorn on a mother's morals guarantees you a seat on the next flight out? An amusing and idiosyncratic look at the power of words to shock, offend, insult, amuse, exaggerate, let off steam, establish relationships, and communicate deep-felt emotions, *Expletive Deleted* is a must-read for anyone who loves language -- or has ever stubbed a toe. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you find obscenity in print shocking, skip this review and stay away from Wajnryb's very objective and entertaining study of the etymology of taboo expressions. Australian linguist Wajnryb, a columnist for the Sydney Morning Herald, doesn't shy away from listing the most offensive English terms. Her wit and informal, anecdotal style are supported by a prodigious amount of research. According to Wajnryb, "cunt" is easily the most insulting word in English whether applied to a man or a woman. The origins of "fuck" are shrouded in mystery (contrary to common belief, it is not Anglo-Saxon); since it's the most widely used curse word and can be employed as a noun, verb or adjective, the author says, it has recently lost some of its impact. Wajnryb points out that men curse, or are reputed to curse, more than women, and frequently designate female organs in a hostile manner intended to humiliate women. Wajnryb also examines blasphemy, utterances that derive their power from degrading religion. Especially interesting is the author's exploration of cross-cultural cursing. Even in Japan, where there are allegedly no taboo words, a closer examination uncovers a complex tongue in which insults are hidden in language that serves to enforce social rank. (July 13) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Fans of the extravagantly profane HBO drama Deadwood now have a boon companion in Wajnryb, who will edify them on the finer points of swearing. And she also appears to have Al Swaengen's refined sense of humor; she opens each chapter with remarks from a famous historical figure (Michelangelo is attributed with the quote, "You want what on the fucking ceiling?"). Wajnryb notes the strong cultural taboos against profanity--even her fellow linguists have a longstanding aversion to investigating its history--and the existence of the language police in the form of an Illinois institute called the Cuss Control Academy and their futile efforts to clean up our vocabulary. She then launches into a detailed categorization, noting the differences between, for example, blasphemy, invective, and vulgarity. She observes that all cultures engage in swearing and analyzes their motivations for doing so, such as the need for letting off steam. She then discusses individual swear words in terms of their flexibility and historical context. In the words of Bono, who was duly fined by the FCC, it's "fucking brilliant." Joanne Wilkinson Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I love this author's writing!

This book appealed to me on two levels. On the more adult level, I have always been interested in linguistics and etymology. I am endlessly fascinated by the science of how languages interact, how they evolve, the history of words, etc. On the slightly more juvenile level, I was entertained by the notion of learning as much as possible about four letter words. I would argue there is still something noble about that juvenile side of ourselves, however. I remember getting into arguments with my parents at a fairly young age over why some words were considered "dirty" while others weren't. Why was it okay to say I had to "poop" but not okay to say I had to "s\*\*\*"? Why was it okay for couples to have "intercourse" but not "f\*\*\*"? I love my parents and both of them are pretty amazing people, but their answers never satisfied me. The concept of swearing or cursing just didn't make sense. So my interest in cursing was more than just snickering with friends over the F-word in the dictionary or trying to test my parents' patience. It was about words, what they mean, how they evolved, and understanding their power. Ruth Wajnryb does an excellent job probing this issue. She highlights all of the most obvious offensive words (F-word, C-word, "blasphemy," etc.). She examines the subtle differences between swearing, cursing, blasphemy, expletives, obscenity, and profanity (did you know they're all technically different?). She focuses both on the individual words themselves and the cultures in which they arose. She discusses why we cuss and how different cultures cultivate their swearing. The best part of the book is that even as an accomplished linguist, Wajnryb pulls it off without making it read like a textbook. This is highly engaging, funny, and accessible to the lay reader. If ever you have longed to learn more about dirty words, now is your chance. Appease your inner child and learn something in the process.

[...] This is the best book ever! I found this gem at a small book store on the Lower East Side of Manhattan when dodging heavy rain. There she was, flirting with me. As a professional speaker, I often am challenged about the use of "bad language" in my workshops and speeches. Even more regularly, a participant will inform me that I am using words or phrases that often offend people yet they don't find themselves offended. Language is fascinating and the building blocks of my career. I find myself making judgments and assumptions about particular campuses, participants, etc., on the walk from my rental car to the venue about how much "bad language" is appropriate or not. There are venues where I purposely carefully choose my words and others where I feel more comfortable

speaking as I would normally. I don't use "bad language" to appeal to the younger crowd (yes, I have actually been asked this many times). I use "bad language" because that is how I talk, how many family spoke, and what I am used to doing when I want to express myself. The question is why? What makes good language good and bad language bad? As Wajnryb states in the subtitle, *Expletive Deleted* is an in-depth review linguistically and anthropologically of the use of words throughout a mostly western historical perspective. I loved this book. Cussing, swearing, and blasphemy, are complicated characters in a humorous and dramatic soap opera involving the Catholic Church, wars, politics, and geography. I now know why the language I use is considered "bad" and feel even more justified in my word choices. :-) I will continue to monitor the impact of my language choices, AND giggle knowing that my words are themselves a form of activism. Jessica Pettitt is the "diversity educator" your family warned you about. Through teaching, writing, and facilitating tough conversations, she has figured out how to BE the change she wants to BE. Now it is your turn! As she travels around the country, you can catch up with Jessica on: Facebook: [...] YouTube: [...] LinkedIn: [...] Twitter: [...]

But this book is one f\*\*\*ing good read!

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