

# **YOUNG SOUTH AFRICAN ADULTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF OBSCENE LANGUAGE**

**By**

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## Abstract

This study is concerned primarily with the examination of obscene language as it functions in South African society. Specifically, this study aims to discern how young adults perceive obscene language and under which circumstances this type of language is deemed to be socially acceptable. From a theoretical perspective the study is conducted with a pragmatic framework, as the analysis of language use are considered within the context in which it is used. Additionally, it is founded upon the notion of communicative competence, which is understood as the speaker's ability to use appropriate language in a given context to attain a particular objective. The participants who were engaged in the study were first language English speakers within an age range of 18 to 25. The procedure applied to collect data from the participants involved three stages. The first part entails the completion of a questionnaire in which participants are asked to rate a series of obscenities on a scale of 1 to 10. The second part of the data collection process included qualitative interviews. During the interviews the participants were exposed to hypothetical dialogues and were asked to respond to questions about the obscenities used in these scenarios. The third and final part of the data collection methodology involved a focus group in which they were asked to discuss the use of obscene language within a South Africa context. The results from the study revealed that male participants in this age group were more inclined to harness the use of obscenities as a form of social connection with others. The female participants in this group considered the release of overwhelming emotions as being the most powerful function of the use of obscenities. They regarded the alleviation of negative energy also as a primary function of the use of obscene language. Male participants again, considered the use of obscene language as being predominantly the creation of comedy and humour. The results from the study showed conclusively that the use of racist language is considered as being the most offensive type of obscenity that could be used by participants. The data revealed that most participants avoid the use of obscenities in the presence of their parents and elderly persons. It is evident that participants are aware of the existing differences between the various generations in terms of linguistic preferences.

## Oorsig

Hierdie studie is daarop gerig om die beskouinge van jong volwasse Suid-Afrikaners rakende die gebruik van onweloweglike taal onder die loep te plaas. Dis daarop gemik om pertinent te bepaal in welke omstandighede sulke taalgebruik sosiaal en in die werkplek aanvaarbaar sal wees. Teoreties word die studie binne 'n verwysingsraamwerk geloods aangesien taalgebruik beskou word as synde onderhewig aan die konteks waarbinne dit gebesig word. Daarbenewens is dit fundeer op die konsep van kommunikatiewe bevoegdheid, wat op sy beurt dui op 'n spreker se vermoë om die gepaste taal in 'n gegewe konteks te gebruik ten einde 'n vooropgestelde doel te bereik. Deelnemers aan die studie was eerstetaal Engelssprekendes wat geval het binne die ouderdomsgroep 18 tot 25 jaar. Die dataversamelingsprosedure het drie fases behels: eerstens het dit die voltooiing van 'n vraelys vereis waarin die deelnemers gevra is om vloekwoorde op 'n skaal van 1 tot 10 te plaas. Die tweede deel daarvan het deelnemers onderwerp aan 'n deelname aan hipotetiese dialoë en is hulle versoek om te reageer op obsessies wat tydens hierdie sessies ervaar is. Die derde deel is daarop gemik om van deelnemers 'n bespreking te ontlok om die gebruik van onweloweglike taal te bespreek in plaaslike konteks, oftewel, oor die aanwending daarvan hier te lande. Die uitslag hiervan het beslissend getoon dat mans binne die gemelde teikengroep meer geneë is om informele en los taal te gebruik as hulle vroulike tydgenote. Vroue weer wat in hierdie groep resorteer, beskou op hulle beurt, die mees prominente funksie van onbetaamlike taalgebruik as 'n effektiewe werkswyse vir die ontlading van oorweldigende emosies. Mans in hierdie groep weer, het 'n opvatting dat die hoof funksie van die gebruik van gekruide taal gemik is op komedie en humor. Die studie het ook onteenseglik daarop gedui dat die gebruik van rassitiese taal hier te lande aangemerkt word as verreweg die mees aanstootlike vorm en graad van onweloweglike taalgebruik. Die analise van gevalle dui onteenseglik daarop dat hierdie taalgebruik taboe is, veral ten aanhore van oues van dae en senior burgers uit 'n vergange era. Vloekery in hulle teenwoordigheid, veral binne hoorafstand van vroue, is steeds sosiaal verwerplik. Dit is ook eweneens duidelik dat die deelnemers gewis bedag is op die sosiale afkeer teen die gebruik van onweloweglike taal wanneer beide geslagte teenwoordig is in 'n geselskap.

## Content Page

Chapter 1: Introduction	01
Chapter 2: Literature review	05
Chapter 3: Theoretical framework	17
Chapter 4: Research methodology	34
Chapter 5: Analysis	41
Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion	88
List of references	97
Appendix A: Example of questionnaire	100
Appendix B: Transcription of interviews	107
Appendix C: Transcription of focus group	166

## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction:

This study is concerned primarily with the examination of obscene language as it functions in South African society. Specifically, this study aims to discern how young adults perceive obscene language, which includes swear words, taboo language, and derogatory language, and under which circumstances this type of language is deemed to be socially acceptable. The perception of particular words will be analysed within different contexts to discern how young adults view and react to these obscene terms in order to try and establish how obscene language is viewed and used by young adults in South Africa.

Theoretically, this study is conducted within a pragmatic framework as judgments of language use are regarded as being subject to the context in which it is produced, and considers what would motivate an individual to use particular language. The data collected in in this study is analysed according to Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory, Expectancy Violation theory (Burgoon 1993) as well as Hyme's (1965) conceptualisation of 'communicative competence', which is understood as a speaker's ability to use the appropriate language in a given context for the intended purpose (Saleh 2003: 101).

Communicative Competence was first introduced by Hymes (reference) who argued that communicating effectively in any given language requires the speaker to have a good understanding of both the linguistic and socio – cultural aspects of that language. According to this theory, a speaker is deemed to be communicatively competent if he is able to discern which is the most socially appropriate linguistic formulation within the given context. This concept was proposed as a reaction to Chomsky's (cited in Saleh 2003: 101) concept of linguistic competence, which focused solely on the understanding of the grammatical aspects of a given language.

The researcher aims to deduce whether there are linguistic expectations that are particularised to the sample age group residing in the Stellenbosch region with regards to obscenities. The

data analysis process will aim to discern whether linguistic expectancy violations lead to evaluations of the individual/s who breach the norms surrounding obscene language use.

This topic is grounded in this theoretical construct as obscene language can be defined as socially offensive words and are typically considered to be impolite or inappropriate when implemented by a speaker. (Stapleton 2003: 26). As is the case with all social norms, the norms guiding the use of this type of language are constantly in flux and undergo changes. This phenomenon is thus addressed from a perspective of communicative competence as it is necessary to examine in which contexts this type of language may be considered to be appropriate and in which situations it may be deemed inappropriate (Saleh 2003: 101).

## 1.2 Rationale:

South African society is characterised by its diversity and its cultural plurality, giving rise to a multitude of different value systems, beliefs and cultural norms among different discourse communities. These differences pervade into all spheres of society and is reflected in our linguistic preferences. The variance in the linguistic habits of South Africans is a reflection of the diversity of values, cultural norms, and communicative norms that are held by individuals. Subsequently individuals in South Africa have different opinions regarding what they deem to be (in)appropriate language.

## 1.3 Statement of Problem:

Obscenities have been used in conversation more frequently since the 1960s and have become a linguistic norm in contemporary language production (Bylsma et al. 2013: 288). Wide ranging controversy exists around the use of obscene language among individuals as participants in a conversation may have different views regarding whether obscenities are appropriate and also which ones are appropriate. As obscenities have the capacity to shock or disturb, they can have a variety of interpersonal consequences when they are implemented in conversation, including creating solidarity or causing offence. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the South African conversational landscape it is imperative to investigate forms of language which have the potential to offend certain groups or individuals.

Several linguistic studies have been carried out investigating the phenomenon of obscene language in various parts of the world. Academics have considered this phenomenon in terms of the purpose, function and intention of obscenities (Saleh 2003: 101). Although academics have considered the perception of expletive usage in several parts of the world, this subject has not been thoroughly explored in a South African context. This study will therefore fill a void in the current body of research and aid South Africans in understanding how this type of language is perceived by a particular age group. Additionally, language use and perceptions are constantly in flux. This implies that research must be continually updated in order to understand how individuals are presently using such language.

#### 1.4 Research questions:

- i. How do young South African adults perceive obscene language?
- ii. How do young South Africans adults respond to obscene language in different contexts?
- iii. Under which circumstances, if any, do young South African adults deem obscene language to be appropriate?
- iv. Is there a difference in the way male and female participants perceive obscene language? If so, what is the difference?

#### 1.5 Research design

The research was be carried out through qualitative analysis as the aim is to gain a thorough understanding of the perceptions of the participants. Qualitative methods were selected for this particular study as they are successful when examining the preferences and opinions of individuals. The participants that took part in the study were first language English speakers within the age range of 18 to 25. A group of both male and female participants were selected in order to determine whether there is a difference in the perceptions of the two genders. This particular age group was selected in order to keep the group of participants as homogenous as possible. Participants were selected from the social network of the researcher.

The data collection procedure involved three parts. The first part included the compilation of a questionnaire (see Appendix A) in which participants were be asked to rate a series of obscene words on a scale from 1 to 10 according to their perception of how offensive the word is.



Additionally, the participants were asked to indicate how regularly they use the given obscenities.

The second part of the data collection procedure included qualitative interviews (see Appendix B) with a selection of the participants that partook in the first questionnaire. The participants were exposed to hypothetical dialogues and were required to answer questions about the language used in these scenarios. The questions aimed to gather information concerning whether the participants perceive the language to be surprising or unusual and what their perspective of the speaker is. This sample included 20 participants.

The third part of the data collection methodology included a focus group. Participants were selected from the first two parts of the study to ensure that there is a wide spectrum of different individuals involved in the study. This part of the study included 8 participants that were asked to discuss the subject matter of obscene language as it functions within South Africa.

As the subject matter of the study is of a sensitive nature there were certain ethical concerns that had to be taken into consideration. To address ethical concerns participants were be informed of the nature of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Moreover, the participants were informed that their participation is confidential, and that only the researcher will have the contact details of the participants.

## Chapter 2:

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Introduction:

A number of previous studies have examined the notion of obscene language using various approaches to investigate this linguistic phenomenon. In these studies, obscene language has been analysed in terms of its pragmatic function, its sociocultural influence as well as its relevance in language acquisition. Researchers have focused predominantly on how the respective genders use and implement obscene language into their speech as well as the perception of obscene language from an expectancy violations perspective (Wang. 2003: 72). Researchers have implemented qualitative research methodologies to analyse obscenities. A trend among former studies is to create a word list, consisting of obscenities and asking participants to rate these words according to a scale. Additionally, there is an inclination to create open ended dialogues containing obscene language which participants must respond to. The current study will combine two of the data collection methodologies that have been implemented by other studies.

#### 2.2.1 Pragmatic functions of obscene language:

A study was carried out by Wang (2003: 72) to examine the pragmatic functions of obscene language in everyday conversations. The data was collected by selecting a series of naturally occurring conversations which were transcribed and analysed to demonstrate the pragmatic functions of obscene language. The dialogues were examined in terms of the intentions of the speaker when implementing obscenities. The study takes the social norms, expectations and physical environment of the speakers into account.

The results revealed that as a form of emotional expression, obscenities can be implemented as a form of positive emotions. The participants involved in the study used obscene language as a means to express happiness, excitement and surprise (Wang 2003: 73). There was an inclination among participants to use obscenities to reinforce group identity or to establish solidarity. Obscene language among friends was found to demonstrate a measure of group identity and may differentiate it from other social groups. The data also revealed that several

participants used obscene language to demonstrate anger or aggression towards a specific group or individual (Wang, 2003: 75).

A similar study examining the use and function of obscenities was conducted by Daly (2003). The study examined the use and functions of obscenities in interactions between workers in a factory work team (Daly et al. 2003: 955). The work team was extensively recorded in their daily interactions to obtain a corpus of recorded conversation from their workplace. The analysis focused specifically on the use of obscenities in the speech acts of complaint and refusal (Daly et al. 2003: 945). Data was collected by asking a group of volunteers to record a sample of their everyday workplace interactions over a period of several weeks (Daly et al. 2003: 948).

The analysis was structured to consider the socio – pragmatic functions of the expletive and its role as an indicator of membership in a community (Daly et al. 2003: 955). The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the way in which people express complaints and refusals and to gain insights with regards to how obscenities are used for team building (Daly et al. 2003: 947). The analysis revealed that in certain contexts, obscenities are used to express positive politeness or solidarity and may serve the purpose of mitigating conflict. It was thus not considered to be a negative linguistic habit as it reinforces camaraderie among the workers. Obscenities in these interactions were found to foster amity and thus do not function as an offensive term as they do in conventional circumstances (Daly et al. 2003: 955). Obscenities were often used to create a sense of solidarity between members of the teams and thereby acts a positive politeness strategy (Daly et al. 2003: 955).

### 2.2.2 Perceptions of obscene language:

Perceptions of obscene language were examined by Johnson and Lewis (2010: 106) in a study conducted from an expectancy violations perspective. The results revealed that expectancy violations are related to the formality of a given scenario in which the obscene language has occurred. Male and female students were selected to participate in the study. The sample included 59 males and 64 females. The participants were required to complete questionnaires asking them how they interact conversationally with their co-workers. They received a questionnaire asking them to complete 6 separate dialogues and indicate how they would respond in the given scenario. The dialogues included expletive usage in formal working

environments in order to discern how the participants would interpret obscene language in this context (Johnson and Lewis 2010: 106).

The results revealed that hearers view expressions of obscene language in formal settings as more unexpected than obscene language in social settings. Obscene language is considered to be inappropriate but certain elements of a setting can render an expletive more acceptable. It is evident that hearers view certain obscenities as less expected than other obscenities (Johnson and Lewis 2010: 116). The specific message that is being conveyed influences the evaluation of the speaker's language. The status of the speaker did not influence the evaluation of the speaker's language. The results revealed that the situational formality is strongly related to violations of the hearer's expectancies when encountering obscenities in conversation (Johnson and Lewis 2010: 116).

A similar study was conducted by Fine and Johnson (1984: 59) regarding opinions of obscene language forms. A questionnaire was designed to determine the beliefs held by male and female participants about obscene language. A list of obscene words was generated in order to compare responses of male and female participants as well as why this type of language is used. The participants were 84 female participants and 66 male participants who volunteered to take part in the study. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire in which participants were required to create a list of ten phrases containing obscene language. Participants were then required to indicate whether they had ever used these words and at which point they had started to implement them conversationally. In addition, the participants were required to indicate why it is used and how males and females use these words differently (Fine and Johnson 1984: 60).

The results demonstrated that both male and female participants perceive the internal, psychological release of using an expletive as the greatest motive for why speakers implement this type of language conversationally. The majority of the participants rarely indicated that external pressures or externally induced motives served as a reason for using obscene language. There was an inclination among participants to cite linguistic motives rather than sociological motives for using obscene language forms. The researchers therefore concluded that obscene words may be losing their value as they have become more commonplace in everyday language. In addition, the researchers concluded that the increasing participation by women in

the linguistic domain of obscene language has diluted the power of these once taboo words as they were previously dominated by males (Fine and Johnson 1984: 70).

### 2.3 Socio – cultural influences on obscene language:

A qualitative study was conducted by Stapleton (2003: 26) to examine how men and women view the linguistic phenomenon of obscene language in one particular discourse community. The study focused solely on the activities and meaning constructions for one specific group of undergraduate friends in order to examine the meaning of the practice of obscene language. More specifically, the study aimed to explore the meanings of obscene language within a community of Irish students and to discern whether there are gender differences in the perception of obscene language in this speech community. Additionally, the study examined the sociocultural influences which shape the perceptions and use of this type of language and the ways in which this practise defines gender within this community (Stapleton 2003: 28).

The participants that were involved in the study were a group of friends who reside in an Irish town. This group organises itself around a socialising and drinking culture. The majority of the participants were students who were studying at various Universities in the surrounding area. The sample included 30 participants whose ages ranged from between 22 and 30 years old. Data was collected over a two – week period in the form of semi – structured interviews. In the first part of the interview, the participants were presented with a list of common obscenities and were asked which of the words they considered to be obscene and which of the words were regularly used in their social environment. They were then asked whether certain words were more deemed more acceptable to be used by a specific gender (Stapleton 2003: 29).

The results revealed that certain features of language use remain associated with either feminine or masculine speech and that obscene language represents a common linguistic practice. The data revealed that obscene language is considered to be a resource for the construction of masculine identity. It is associated with conversational dominance and aggression when it is used. The results of the study relate solely to the specific group that was studied. The study shows that the respective genders negotiate their identities within a gendered world (Stapleton 2003: 32).

## 2.4 Influential factors on habitual obscene language:

A study was conducted to establish which factors are the most influential on an individual's obscene language habits. A qualitative research methodology was used to determine which factors impact upon an individual's linguistic habits. Specifically, the study aimed to analyse the impact of peers and family members on habitual obscene language. Furthermore, the study aimed to raise the question as to which social environments impact how often individuals swear. The researchers hypothesized that frequent exposure to obscenities from peers has the most significant impact on an individual's obscene language frequency (Bishop et al. 2016: 2).

Data was collected from 763 undergraduate students from who were recruited through psychology courses. The participants were required to complete an online questionnaire. In addition, the participants were required to give demographic information regarding their religiosity, personality characteristics, obscene language exposure and their attitudes regarding obscene language. The demographic questionnaire required participants to indicate their age, ethnic origin, sex and the relationship status of their biological parents. The participants were asked to indicate their level of exposure to obscenities from family during their adolescent years.

The next part of the questionnaire required participants to answer questions relating to their personal history of obscene language (Bishop et al. 2016: 6).

The researchers indicated that the participant sample of the study was comprised of solely university students suggesting that the results may not be generalized to all age groups of the population. The results demonstrated that an individual's mother has the highest correlational influence on obscene language. The research reflects the importance of relationships between mothers and their children as well as the effect that this relationship may have on an individual's linguistic habits. Gaining an understanding of what influences linguistic habits may be beneficial in managing the behaviour and development of children (Bishop et al. 2008: 3).

## 2.5 Observation of spontaneous speech:

A study was conducted at the University of Florida during an eight-week period in which undergraduate students were observed on campus sites. The researchers recorded the

spontaneous speech of the students to investigate how frequently they use obscenities. The researchers worked with spontaneous speech to ensure that the data was naturalistic (Fägersten 2012: 27). Additionally, the study aimed to identify which variables influence how this speech community use obscenities and whether there are differences in how the respective genders respond to obscenities. Undergraduate students who form part of the speech community were enlisted to assist with the data collection procedure (Fägersten 2012: 27).

The sample included 181 female participants and 213 male participants. The collected data was transcribed and categorised in terms of which particular obscenities were implemented and the tone of voice that was used when the utterance was spoken. The reactions of the listeners were categorised in terms of whether the participants rejected the swear word perceived the utterance to be humorous, echoed the obscene language or whether there was no noticeable reaction (Fägersten 2012: 27). Several variables were considered when organising and collecting the data. The study analysed the setting in which the utterance occurred as well as the sex and race of the speaker. The relationship between the speaker and listeners in terms of social distance and status were also taken into account. The topic of conversation was taken into account as well as the tone in which the utterance was spoken. (Fägersten 2012: 27).

The results of the study indicated that male participants implement obscenities more frequently than female participants. Male participants use self – echoic linguistic habits more frequently than females as the latter tend to respond to utterances including obscenities with other utterances (Fägersten 2012: 27). The data revealed that obscenities are more likely to be used in same – sex interactions. Moreover, the data revealed that the majority of the participants do not demonstrate noticeable reactions when exposed to obscene language (Fägersten 2012: 27).

## 2.6 Obscene language in the media:

A study was carried out to examine the relationship between exposure to obscene language in the media and subsequent behaviour in adolescents. The researchers hypothesized that that exposure to obscene language in media would be directly related to beliefs and behaviour regarding obscene language and indirectly to forms of aggressive behaviour. Additionally, it was predicted that exposure to obscene language in media would be related indirectly through attitudes to aggressive behaviour. The study aimed to probe the idea that exposure to obscene language and obscene language in the media could be problematic and a cause of aggressive

behaviour. The researchers examined the exposure to obscene language in multiple types of media, including television and video games (Coyne et al. 2011: 867).

The association between aggression and the media was analysed by means of a qualitative research methodology. The participants were 223 adolescents who were required to complete various questionnaires that were designed to gain information regarding their exposure to media, their inclination to behave aggressively and their attitudes toward obscene language. Physical aggression and relational aggression were measured with particular questions about the participants' day to day life. The answers were analysed by means of a Likert scale. Attitudes towards obscene language were measured by asking participants to identify their favourite television shows and video games. The selected television shows and video games were then rated with respect to the amount of obscene language, relational violence and physical violence. Participants were then required to indicate when they used obscene language in conversation (Coyne et al. 2011: 867).

The results of the study demonstrate the harmful relationship between exposure to obscene language in media and attitudinal behavioural outcomes among adolescents. The researchers concluded that there is a correlation between exposure to obscene language in multiple forms of media and beliefs about obscene language and aggressive behaviour. The attitudes towards obscene language mediated the relationship between exposure to obscene language in media and subsequent aggressive behaviour (Coyne et al. 2011: 867).

## 2.7 Obscene language in advertising:

A study was carried out to examine the effectiveness of implementing obscenities into advertisements. Shock advertising is characterised by content that deliberately startles its target demographic by transgressing and breaching accepted linguistic norms. Marketers who have implemented this technique argue that it is the norm violation aspect of this type of advertising that afford it the ability to capture and maintain the interest of a target market. Obscene language is implemented into advertisements by marketers to gain attention. Offensive language is implemented to create emphasis, shock, humour or intimacy between the audience and the brand. The inclusion of obscenities into advertisements has become increasingly more popular as marketers aim to shock their target audience (Mortimer 2007: 1593).



The study compared controversial advertisements with informative marketing techniques. The controversial advertisements contained obscenities and profane imagery. The sample group consisted of 70 male and 55 female participants. A questionnaire was administered in a controlled classroom environment and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The participants were required to indicate their level of personal offense on a scale and to provide reasoning for why this level of offense was evoked. In addition, the questionnaire included a section gathering demographic information concerning the ethnicity, income bracket, age, religious denomination and sexuality of the participant. This information enabled the researcher to group the data and draw conclusions about the respondents (Mortimer 2007: 1593).

A comparison was made between the female and male participants in order to discern whether the respective genders respond differently to shocking linguistic forms in advertising. A prominent trend among the participants' responses was that the majority were alarmed by advertisements that violated particular religions or belief systems. The study revealed that participants were particularly offended when viewing advertisements containing language that exploited religion or sexuality in order to sell a product. The majority of the participants indicated that they would be offended when confronted with language of this nature. Participants did however indicate that these advertisements were memorable and striking. The researchers therefore concluded that this technique can be beneficial if it is used correctly to obtain publicity and raise awareness of the brand (Mortimer 2007: 1597).

The results of the study revealed that obscene language is implemented into advertisements by marketers in an attempt to gain attention. (Mortimer 2007: 1593). The final perception of the advertisements may be influenced by the severity of the swear word and the audience demography. It is thus necessary for marketing teams to conduct thorough research before choosing to implement obscene language into advertisements in order to predict the effect that the offensive language may have on the target demographic. (Mortimer 2007:1597).

## 2.8 Obscene language in the workplace:

A study was carried out to examine the use of obscene language in the workplace. A qualitative methodology was implemented. The study identifies the relevance of using unconventional and even uncivil language in the work environment. The results revealed that there may be

advantages if those in leadership positions use informal language and this practice may yield positive results. The researcher conducted ethnographic research by collecting data whilst employed in a temporary position in small retail enterprise. In addition, data was collected in focus groups of part time workers of a variety of organisations. (Baruch and Jenkins. 2006: 494).

The data was collected from a mail – order operation that divides its employees between an office and a warehouse environment. The premises included both an administrative department and an office section. The researcher noted that the two working environments gave rise to two separate subcultures. Their physical separation implied that their conversations would not be overheard by the other group. The researcher noted that the male employees did not swear in the presence of females. The data demonstrated that obscenities were directed at inanimate objects, rather than at particular individuals and were uttered out of frustration. Additionally, the results revealed that individuals in leadership positions were inclined to swear more frequently than other employees of the enterprise. The researcher noted that obscene language served as a means by which to be socially accepted by employees in the office (Baruch and Jenkins 2006: 499).

Further data was gathered by conducting six focus group discussions to verify the findings from the first part of the data collection procedure. Part time employees were asked to reflect on the positive and negative effects of obscene language in a working environment. The responses reflected variance across the different occupational groups and sectors. The majority of the participants agreed that there is a clear differentiation between language used in the area where there are customers and the areas in which there are employees. There was a unanimous agreement among participants that obscene language should never be used in relation to or in front of customers. Moreover, the participants agreed that obscene language is used as a means by which to bond with members of the work force (Baruch and Jenkins 2006: 500).

The results from the study were used to create a model which suggests that under certain circumstances obscene language may have a positive outcome in the workplace. The study revealed that obscene language may enable employees to better express their feelings to develop their relationships and connect with other members of the work force and thereby serves as a positive politeness strategy (Baruch and Jenkins 2006: 501). The data demonstrated that obscene language serves as a means to by which to create solidarity in many cases as well

as a mechanism to cope with stress. Therefore, the results indicate that allowing employees to use obscene language as part of their daily discourse may have social benefits (Baruch and Jenkins 2006: 500).

## 2.9 Obscene language in the political domain:

A study was conducted to examine the effect of profane language when used by politicians on their perceived persuasiveness. Specifically, this study focuses on the effects of language on impression formation and decision making in the political field. The study implemented a qualitative research methodology to examine the consequences of using obscenities in political campaigns, in terms of impression of the source and persuasiveness (Cavazza and Guidetti 2014: 537).

Politicians may incorporate obscenities into their political discourse to serve the purpose of intensifying discourse, defining the relationship or reinforcing connection with the audience. Additionally, obscene language may be included into political campaigns. The researchers hypothesized that the use of obscene language may be positive effect in terms of the persuasiveness and that it may be mediated by the language intensity. Furthermore, they speculate that politicians may choose to implement obscenities as they may have learned from previous experience that obscenities may reinforce message effectiveness. The researchers expected that obscene language would increase the perception of language informality as well as language intensity which would positively influence the evaluation of the source (Cavazza and Guidetti 2014: 539).

The participants involved in the study were 110 adults between the ages of 20 to 68. The participants were required to complete an online questionnaire pertaining to political communication. They were asked to read a scenario written by a fictitious politician who would be partaking in the upcoming election. The participants were randomly assigned to two different conditions, containing a neutral text and a text containing obscene language forms. After reading the text, the participants were required to answer a series of questions about the perceived persuasiveness of the text, their impression of the candidate and whether they would consider voting for the candidate during the election (Cavazza and Guidetti 2014: 539).

The results demonstrated that a political candidate's use of obscene language improves the general impression of the speaker as it increases the perception of language informality. The results suggest that the appropriate use of obscenities by politicians may work to their advantage. The perceived language informality allows the general public to feel closer with the politician. These results demonstrate the importance of studying the influential effect of obscene language. Obscene language should thus not only be regarded as expressive behaviour but should be recognized for the strategic function that it often fulfils (Cavazza and Guidetti 2014: 538).

#### 2.10 Similarities between the current study and former studies:

The current study will implement one of the methods used by several previous studies in the first stage of data collection. Previous studies included a word list containing various obscenities. The participants involved in the study were required to rate the word according to a scale. This method yielded objective results that were easily analysed by the researchers. For the purposes of this study the researcher compiled an original word list which will be used to gather data from participants. The words on this list were selected by looking at online lists of commonly used obscenities. This method is selected as it has been used successfully by former researchers to discern the perceptions that individuals may have of certain words or expressions. The resulting data can then be used to determine which obscenities are considered to be the most offensive.

In the second stage of data collection, the current study will implement one of the methods used by several previous studies. The use of hypothetical dialogues can be used to discern how participants perceive words used within specific contexts. This methodology will be used to gain insights with regards to how obscenities are used during various scenarios where different types of relationships are described. This stage of data collection will be structured to analyse the pragmatic functions of obscene language. The purpose of this stage is to gain insights with regards to how obscenities are used conversationally.

The participants will be exposed to obscene language when it is used in a close relationship in an informal setting. The dialogue will be contextualised and described to give the participants information regarding the scenario. They will be asked to consider a dialogue containing obscene language when used in a relationship in which there is a power gap present in a formal

environment. The characters will be described and the scenario will be contextualised. The participants will be exposed to a dialogue containing a social norm violation. The participants will be asked to respond to obscenities and their role as an indicator of membership to a group or community.

### 2.11 Conclusion:

This section of the study included secondary research in which the researcher provided an overview of former studies that have been conducted on the phenomenon of obscene language. The chapter included a comprehensive investigation of previous studies and articles regarding this particular area of study. The literature review allows the researcher to become more familiar with theory surrounding the research question and assisting in the development of a suitable research methodology. The examination of prior research has provided guidance in terms of which types of methodology are successful when analysing the perception of obscene language. Thorough examination of former research ensures that the current study will not redouble efforts that have been undertaken in previous studies. The use of questionnaires containing word lists was a popular method of data collection strategies among the former researchers (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 24). The research methodology of this study is designed to gather information concerning subjective material. This research approach strives to understand the qualities of a specific field of inquiry and is structured to understand and explain social behaviour. Reviewing the resulting information will enable the researcher to find commonalities among the responses (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 40).

### Chapter 3:

#### Theoretical Framework

##### 3.1 Introduction:

In this chapter the theoretical framework will be outlined and described. As mentioned in the first chapter of the research paper, the data collected in this study is analysed through two theories, namely Politeness Theory and Communicative Competence. In addition, Expectancy Violation theory forms the basis of the secondary theoretical framework. This chapter includes a definition of obscene language as it is conceptually understood in this study. This section is followed by an explanation of Politeness Theory, Communicative Competence and Expectancy Violation. The chapter is concluded by an explanation of how the data is analysed according to the proposed theories.

##### 3.2 Conceptual understanding of ‘obscene language’:

Obscene language is a complex and multifarious linguistic phenomenon that is prevalent in informal conversational discourse. In this research paper obscene language is understood as language which refers to concepts that are stigmatised in the speaker’s culture and emerge because of societal prohibition. Moreover, obscenities pertain to tabooed spheres and hold the potential to act as cathartic vehicles and terms of abuse (Dynel 2012: 28). There are a variety of categories for obscene language including bodily effluvia, hate speech, diseases, religion, sexual intercourse and body parts (Bylsma et al. 2013: 288). In this study obscenities from each of the afore mentioned categories will be examined in terms of how they are perceived and under which circumstances they are deemed to be appropriate. In this study obscenities will be examined in a variety of contexts to determine how South African adults in the Stellenbosch region respond to this type of language when it is used.

There are various opinions among the speakers of a given language regarding whether a linguistic utterance is deemed to be appropriate (Dynel 2012: 29). This lack of consensus among language users results in complaints about the linguistic habits of others. This study examines this variation in linguistic preference among individuals. Linguistic utterances are not inherently bad as they are rendered inappropriate in the eyes of those who are evaluating

and considering the language. (Andersson and Trudgill 1990: 63). Research concerning obscenities must take the context of interaction into account. In other words, the social status of individuals, setting, formality and interaction goals need to be taken into account when determining the effects and perspectives of obscene language (Johnson. 2010: 108).

In this study contextual information when analysing the implications of obscene language, as meaning is influenced by the context in which words are articulated. Obscene language is considered to be offensive in most Western societies however it is a linguistic phenomenon that continues to pervade into everyday language. Obscenities fulfil a unique communicative function that other linguistic means cannot accomplish (Wang. 2003:71). Obscene language is rarely taught and is unlikely used in formal settings. The didactic use of obscene language is equally uncommon in educational environments. This form of language is learnt by children as a separate and even stigmatised part of language. Subsequently, obscene language becomes one of the main curiosities of language users (Azzaro 2005: 01).

### 3.2.1 Politeness in conversational interaction:

Communicative acts are performed to further plans for specific or nested goals. Frequently communicative acts involve attempting to convince the addressee of a certain belief or attitude. Politeness strategies are performed with the intention of maintaining or changing interpersonal relations. The addressee's attitude or response is the target of a politeness strategy. The structure of the phrase will determine whether the extent to which utterance is accommodating or imposing. In addition, politeness strategies are morphologically formulated to accommodate and show regard for others (Culpeper 2011: 35). Obscene language is used in conversational interaction for various communication functions. The lexical preferences and communicative goal of the speaker will influence their decision in terms of which obscenities to include in the conversational interaction. The level of impoliteness will be determined by the extent to which the effect of obscenities is imposing on the addressee.

The most common denominator among politeness strategies is attempting to avoid imposing on the addressee. Imposition in this context is understood as not impeding the desires of the addressees. A speaker implementing politeness strategies will therefore avoid, mitigate or apologise for asking the addressee to do anything that he does not wish to do. The

implementation of obscenities in spoken discourse will depend on whether the particular word or phrase will be an imposition to the addressee.

Formal politeness is typically understood to occur in situations in which there is an acknowledged difference in power and status between the participants. Formal politeness is characterised as impersonal. The speaker will aim to minimize the extent to which he imposes on the addressee by avoiding references to their shared experiences. In other words, the avoidance of imposition in this context implies not discussing personal problems, not making personal references and not seeking personal opinions. This constitutes upholding a pretence that the speaker and the addressee have no shared experience and limited personhood. Formal politeness typically does not involve the use of emotive language. This type of politeness will include euphemisms or vague expressions. Formal politeness does not typically include the use of obscenities due to the difference in power and status between the participants. Speakers will very likely avoid the use of obscenities as the tone of this type of interaction is impersonal. The study will therefore assess how individuals respond to hypothetical dialogues in which obscenities are used in formal environments by the participants.

Informal politeness is implemented in situations in which the participants have approximately equal status and power, but are not socially close. Informal politeness is characterised by giving suggestions and options, rather than giving direct orders in conversation. This constitutes using language in such a manner that suggestions can be ignored without being rejected or plainly contradicted. The speaker will achieve this end by include mitigating words, sounds or constructions to lessen the impact of the utterance. Informal politeness requires the speaker to phrase his requests or opinions in such a way that the addressee does not have to acknowledge the speaker's intent. Utterances of this nature are often constructed to appear pragmatically ambiguous (Culpeper 2011: 35). The use of obscenities during situations in which informal politeness is required depends will depend on the lexical preferences and conversational goals of the speaker. The communicative goal of the comment, statement or request will influence the lexical choices and thereby influence the use or avoidance of obscene language. The study therefore includes hypothetical dialogues to assess how individuals respond to the use of obscenities used in scenarios in which informal politeness is conventionally implemented.

Friendly or intimate politeness is typically appropriate in situations where close friends are interacting. Participants will implement language that encourages feelings of camaraderie.



Intimate politeness constitutes utterances that are candid and straightforward as opposed to the hedges and suggestions that are present when formal politeness is used. The use of language that has not been softened or mitigated indicates that the participants believe the relationship to be close and that truths do not need to be disguised in any way. In contrast with formal politeness, intimate politeness includes a personal interest in the other participant. The speaker will therefore ask personal questions and make references to their shared experiences. Participants will use intimate forms of address, including nicknames. Intimate politeness includes a wider range of subjects that can be discussed comparatively with formal politeness. Interactions including participants who are close typically encourages the use of emotive language, which is often achieved through the use of obscenities. It is likely participants will discuss tabooed topics or use obscenities in the company of their close friends or acquaintances. Moreover, the participants should not feel compelled to mitigate or soften their ideas or language due to the closeness that is present between the participants in this situation. The use of obscenities is therefore typically welcomed by the interlocutors who are present in this scenario. The study therefore includes hypothetical dialogues to assess how individuals respond to the use of obscene language when it is used among close friends.

### 3.2.2 Aggravating language as a form of impoliteness:

Aggression can be understood as the unprovoked act of beginning a quarrel. It is the most common denominator to conflict and confrontation, which underlies impoliteness. Aggravating language is the rational attempt to hurt or damage the addressee. The intention of this type of language is to interfere with the addressee's freedom of action or to convey that the addressee is disliked by the speaker. Verbal aggression can be symptomatic of problematic interpersonal relationships. Verbal aggression can be further understood as a spoken act that intends to hurt or threaten another. It is used mostly as a strategy to maintain or gain power over others. Aggravation strategies can be implemented through various communicative tactics such as, ambiguous insults, insinuations, hints and ironic comments. Obscenities may be implemented during interaction to fulfil the communicative goal of maintaining or gaining power over others. The use of an obscene term may render the language to be insulting, ironic or hurtful during conversation. The study therefore includes a hypothetical dialogue to assess how individuals will respond to the use of obscenities when used in scenarios with the purpose of creating aggression.

### 3.3 Politeness theory:

Politeness Theory was developed by Brown and Levinson in the 1970s. The theory purports that politeness is dependent on how it affects the self – image of participants in interaction. Scholars often draw on Politeness theory to explain the complexities of compliance gaining during interaction. This theory presupposes that all competent adult members of a society and know each other to have certain rational capacities. Specifically, this theory assumes that competent adult communicators have consistent modes of reasoning to achieve their desired ends in discourse. Additionally, this theory rests on the idea that all competent adult communicators have ‘face’, the public self-image that every member claims for himself. This includes the freedom to action and the freedom from imposition as well as the desire to be liked by others. Essentially this theory can be used to determine the positive and negative effects that language can have on the addressees in conversation. It is therefore useful when aiming to discern the effects that certain obscenities may have on the ‘face’ of others.

The concept of ‘face’ is understood as an individual’s self-worth and how it is affected in conversation. Face is the desire for approval and the aspiration to be free from imposition. The concept can be subdivided into two categories, namely ‘positive face’ and ‘negative face’ (Bousfield 2008: 35). Positive face reflects an individual’s need for his desires to be appreciated in a social context. Negative face reflects an individual’s need for freedom from the imposition of others and the desire that their actions are not impeded upon (Bousfield 2008: 35). This theory is based on the idea that certain speech acts inherently threaten either the speaker or the hearer’s face. Politeness is thus deemed as a necessary component of non-face threatening communication and involving an awareness of positive and negative face (Bousfield 2008: 38). This theory is applicable to use of obscene language as it enables the researcher to assess the effects of its usage on individuals’ face. Specifically, the researcher can assess whether the use of obscene language is an imposition to the addressee. Additionally, this theory enables the researcher to analyse the extent to which obscenities are a form of face threatening communication to either the speaker or the addressee.

Positive politeness strategies aim to enhance familiarity between the speaker and hearer. This requires the speaker to attend to the hearer’s interests and desires. This is achieved when the speaker displays approval or sympathy with the hearer (Bousfield 2008: 35). In addition, the speaker identifies himself as part of the same sub culture or discourse community as the

participants of a conversation by implementing particular slang or jargon. This can be achieved by seeking agreement with the hearer through the discussion safe and noncontroversial subjects. Furthermore, the speaker can presuppose knowledge of the hearer's values and beliefs. The speaker can display positive politeness by emphasizing similarity and familiarity with the hearer and the subject matter of the discussion. Moreover, the speaker can use humour to create a light-hearted atmosphere and to invoke camaraderie (Bousfield 2008: 37). The study investigates whether obscenities can serve as a positive politeness strategy, by emphasizing familiarity and solidarity. Furthermore, the study will gather data regarding the extent to which obscenities can be used to identify as part of a particular group or discourse community. The data collection procedure therefore includes a hypothetical dialogue to assess how individuals will respond to the use of obscenities when used in scenarios with the purpose of creating solidarity and invoking camaraderie.

Negative politeness addresses the hearer's need for freedom and autonomy in conversation. This is achieved by being indirect and displaying deference towards the hearer. The speaker will implement hedges or questions in order to minimize the imposition on the hearer during the interaction (Bousfield 2008: 39). In addition, the speaker may implement obviating linguistic structures by using passives or being apologetic in conversation. These strategies are an attempt to avoid imposition on the hearer (Bousfield 2008: 39). The study investigates the use of obscenities as a means to create negative politeness, by creating a casual tone and being indirect. The study therefore includes a hypothetical dialogue to assess how individuals respond to the use of obscenities when used in scenarios with the purpose of minimizing the imposition on the addressee.

According to Brown and Levinson (Bousfield 2008: 42), the face of an individual is damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others. Face is understood to be formed both on an internal and an external level. Internally it is formed on a cognitive and individual level. Externally it is constituted on a mutual level between the individual and the participants of the conversation. Face is enhanced, threatened or damaged during the conversational exchanges until the communication ends. The individual's understanding of face develops during the interaction and passes into their internal expectations for future interactions (Bousfield 2008: 43). Brown and Levinson (1987 cited in Bousfield 2008: 45) argue that expressions of criticism, ridicule, contempt and disapproval are linguistically threatening and should be mitigated. Politeness theory is used to analyse the effect of obscene language on the face of

individuals. Specifically, this theory is used to determine the maintenance, enhancement or damage that is caused by the implementation of obscene language when it is used.

#### 3.4.1 Types of face threat during interaction:

There are three types of action that may lead to face damage as they can be classified on the basis of the intention behind the act. Face threatening acts can be considered to be intentional, incidental or accidental. Intentional threats to face constitute utterances which are made to aggravate the face of the recipient. The speaker may appear to act maliciously or spitefully with the intention of articulating an insult. (Bousfield 2008: 69).

Incidental threats to face arise as an unplanned by – product, though not out of spite or malice. For example, disagreeing with a participant or denying an appeal does not stem from a place of malice as it does not intend to cause damage to the face of the individual. Accidental face threats constitute utterances which are unintentional and unanticipated (Bousfield 2008: 71).

Impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentional verbal face – threatening acts. These acts are delivered in contexts in which mitigation is required or with deliberate aggression leading to face damage. Impoliteness is successfully conveyed if the speaker intends face – damage and the hearer is able to discern this intention. It then follows that impoliteness is deemed unsuccessful in circumstances where the hearer fails to perceive the speaker’s intent to face – damage (Bousfield 2008: 72).

In essence human beings are social and cultural beings that cannot function in isolation. Harmonious and successful interaction is greatly dependent on the reliance and adherence to social norms (Bousfield 2008: 46). Social norms reflect the historical understanding of politeness which is embraced by the public within the English speaking world (Bousfield 2008: 43). It is understood that each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of explicit rules that prescribe behaviour and a certain type of conduct. This constitutes avoiding topics of conversation which could have direct reference to painful events or circumstances. Moreover, social politeness requires individuals to ensure that they do not question the veracity of any statement made in conversation.

Face threatening language can be understood as spoken discourse that may humiliate, embarrass, disappoint, anger the addressee in conversation. Face is therefore a notion in which the individual is emotionally invested, that can be lost, maintained or even enhanced and should be constantly considered during interaction. It is generally in the best interest of all participants' to maintain each other's face.

Face threatening acts are further distinguished between acts that threaten negative face and those that threaten positive face. Speech acts that predicate a future act by influencing the addressee are considered to be acts that may threaten negative face. Orders and requests that indicate that the speaker's wish for the addressee to do or refrain from doing a particular action are identified as negative face threatening acts. Threats, warnings or dares are speech acts which pressurize the addressee into taking or avoiding a specific course of action, are considered to be acts that may threaten negative face. These acts impede the freedom of the addressee and are thus considered to be face threatening. Suggestions, reminders or advice that put pressure on the addressee to take a particular course of action are considered to be acts that may threaten negative face. Offers in which the speaker indicates that the addressee must decide whether or not to commit himself are seen as speech acts that may threaten negative face. The expression of strong emotion toward the addressee such as, anger, envy, lust or depreciation are seen as face threatening towards the negative face.

Speech acts that threaten the positive face indicate that the speaker does not care for the feelings of the addressee. Strong expressions of disapproval, contempt, ridicule, accusations or insults are perceived to threaten the positive self-image of others. Challenges, contradictions or disagreeing statements that indicate that the speaker believes the addressee to be wrong or misguided about a certain issue are seen as threatening to the positive face.

Expressions of violent emotion that may cause the addressee to believe that he may be harmed by the speaker are face threatening to the positive face. The mentioning of taboo topics which may indicate that the speaker does not respect the values of the addressee are considered to be face damaging. Blatant non – cooperation during an activity are seen as face threatening.

### 3.4.2 Strategies for performing face threatening acts:

Rational communicators will aim to minimize or avoid face threats. Positive politeness strategies involve considering the face of the addressee during the interaction. These strategies include noticing and attending to the addressee's interests, desires and needs. The exaggeration of approval, interest or sympathy with the addressee form positive politeness strategies. The implementation of in-group identity markers serves as a means of attending to the face of the addressee. Additionally, avoiding disagreement and being optimistic during interaction constitute positive politeness strategies.

Negative politeness strategies include apologizing to the addressee or minimizing the imposition on the addressee. The implementation of a pessimistic tone during interaction is considered to be a negative politeness strategy. In addition, the avoidance of personal pronouns is considered to be a negative politeness strategy as it impersonalises the speaker and the hearer.

### 3.4.3 Leech's maxims of politeness:

Leech (1974, cited in Bousfield 2008: 49) theorised a model of politeness in which he identified several maxims that must be adhered to in order to communicate successfully with others. The politeness model identifies six constraints that must be followed during interactions with others. Leech (1974, cited in Bousfield 2008: 49) stipulates that tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy must be incorporated into conversation. The maxim of tact is understood as maximizing benefit and minimizing cost to the participants in the conversation. The maxim of generosity is defined as minimizing benefit to the self and maximising cost to the self. The maxim of approbation involves maximizing praise and minimising the dispraise of the other. The maxim of modesty constitutes minimizing praise of the self and maximising dispraise of the self. The maxim of agreement is defined as minimising disagreement and maximising understanding between the self and the other. The maxim of sympathy is understood as the minimising antipathy between the self and the other (Bousfield 2008: 49).

#### 3.4.4 Hedging used as a politeness strategy:

Hedging patterns are a strategy used to facilitate turn taking, show politeness and mitigate face threats. It is a means of purposefully conveying vagueness in conversation. Additionally, hedging is used as a politeness strategy to save face, thereby playing a prominent role in conversation interactions. Hedging is a means by which speakers take precautionary measures to protect themselves or others from the effects of their utterance.

Hedges can serve as both a form of mitigation and a form of intensity. The appropriate use of hedging reflects a high degree of competency in social interaction, by expressing varying degrees of certainty. Hedging is characterised by a lack of determinism, as the speaker adds a degree of uncertainty or doubt to a word or phrase. Additionally, this is achieved by emphasizing the subjectivity of the utterance. Hedges are used as a protective mechanism during interaction. The speaker may use hedging as a means to decrease the possibility of negation and rejection. Hedges can be formed using modal auxiliaries, lexical verbs, adverbial phrases, approximates of degree or frequency and negative constructions. Conditional clauses and the passive voice can however be used to create a similar effect.

#### 3.4.5 Social - norm violations and impoliteness:

The most prominent indicator of impoliteness is the infringement of social conventions. Norm violation can be derived from a breaching of the established rules and shared expectations that have been fostered through observation and social learning. Individuals acquire a set of rules through observation which are then used to assess and moderate ideas, conduct and behaviour. The acquired set of rules are used to evaluate the spoken utterances. The illocutionary force of obscene language lies in its prohibition and is related to the disruption it can cause on a social and psychological level (Culpeper 2011: 31).

Social norms are rooted in the human's rationality, habits and social obligations. Conventions are driven by conformity and the individual's desire to avoid sanctions or disapproval and are thereby rooted in the human's rationality. Individuals belonging to a given discourse community conform out of self – interest and the desire to be accepted as a member of the community by others. In other words, decisions are constrained and governed by social norms that have been established (Culpeper 2011: 35). It is through habitual practise that we acquire

accepted social norms. It is through the regular exposure to certain contexts and linguistic expressions that individuals are able to discern which types of language are appropriate in particular situations. Deviations from the expected behaviour are predisposed to negative judgement (Culpeper 2011: 35).

Each society or community has a set of guidelines that prescribe certain behaviour in particular contexts. In other words, underlying social conventions exist mutually accepted principles of action. Belonging to a community constitutes agreeing to and accepting these established norms. Deviation from the norm or nonconformist behaviour may result in negative reaction or even rejection from other members of the group. Positive evaluations arise when actions are in congruence with the norm (Culpeper 2011: 36).

### 3.5 Data analysis through politeness theory:

Politeness Theory is selected as a theoretical framework as it considered how the interlocutors of a conversation are affected by linguistic utterances. As this theory emphasizes how linguistic utterances will influence and affect the face of the interlocutors of a conversation, it can be used specifically for the purpose of investigating how obscenities affect and influence individuals. This theory is based on the idea that certain utterances may threaten the speaker or the hearer's face during interaction. This theory therefore affords the researcher a means of assessing how the participants perceive obscenities. The participants' perceptions are analysed in terms of how their self-image is affected by the use of obscene language. The theory is used to determine under which circumstances obscenities may be face threatening to the participants of a conversation. The participants' face may be enhanced, threatened or damaged during the conversational exchanges where obscenities are included. This theory is therefore used as a theoretical framework to develop an understanding of how obscenities may affect and influence the face or 'self-image' of the participants. Additionally, the study will gather data regarding the extent to which obscenities can be used to identify as part of a particular group or discourse community and the extent to which it is used as a politeness strategy.

### 3.6 Communicative competence:

Politeness theory is coupled with Communicative competence to form the theoretical framework of the study. Communicative competence refers to a speaker's ability to use the



appropriate language in a given context and in order to achieve the conversational goal. A speaker requires a good understanding of the linguistic and socio – aspects of norms of their discourse communities in order to communicate effectively. The term was first introduced by Dell Hymes (1955) as a response to the notion of linguistic competence which was introduced by Noam Chomsky in 1965, which focused solely on the linguistic aspects of language production. Language courses are structured and developed to improve the communicative competence of the student (Saleh 2013:101).

### 3.7 The development of the term ‘communicative competence’:

This term refers to the ability to appropriately articulate a message to others and to understand both the content and the illocutionary force of messages within particular contexts. Hymes (Saleh 2013: 102) argued that merely knowing how to produce accurate grammatical structures alone does not render a speaker to be linguistically competent. Canale and Swain (Saleh 2013: 102) developed this idea further in 1980 by introducing a theoretical model of communicative competence. Their model of communicative competence focused on three aspects, namely the grammatical knowledge, socio – linguistic understanding and the strategic competence of the speaker (Saleh 2013: 102).

Grammatical competence refers to having accurate knowledge of vocabulary and sentence construction. It is imperative to understand the syntax, morphology and phonology of a given language in order to articulate and convey messages proficiently. Socio – linguistic competence refers to the language user’s ability to produce language in various social settings. Strategic competence refers to the ability of using language to achieve communicative goals to enhance the effectiveness of communication (Saleh 2013: 102).

### 3.8 Communicative competence and interpersonal relationships:

A lack of communicative competence plays a role in several problematic relational issues. Conflict management and interpersonal aggression can be ameliorated or aggravated by on the level of communicative competence displayed by the interlocutors involved. Conflict is a natural and inevitable part of human relationships. Inextricably interwoven with conflict management is the ability to communicate effectively. Cooperative strategies that aim to reach commonality between individuals and reach compromise suggest high levels of

communicative competence. In contrast, avoidance behaviours and competitive strategies are considered less competent. Satisfaction, control, intimacy and trust among individuals are influenced by their communicative competence (Olsen 2002: 171).

Communicative competence is synonymous with communicative ability and focuses on the speaker's skill to obtain conversational goals. Communicative success is thus measured based on the individual's accuracy in reaching the desired outcomes. In addition, communicative competence is the subjective impression of the speaker's conversational skills. The impression of an individual's competence may be relative to the particular social environment which the interlocutors find themselves in. Competence thus becomes a mechanism by which individuals judge the quality of interactions. Communicative competence is evaluated in terms of its effectiveness and its appropriateness. The effectiveness of a verbal articulation is judged in terms of how accurately it accomplishes its intended goal or objective. Appropriateness is comparable with the perceived politeness displayed conversationally, and the avoidance of violating situational or relational rules in the communicative context. The appropriateness and effectiveness are examined within the specific situation or context. Competent communicators adapt their behaviour to the given social context and use constructive conflict management strategies. Moreover, competent communicators are sensitive to the needs of others whilst maintaining the ability to achieve their conversational goals (Olsen 2002: 173).

### 3.9 Analysing data through communicative competence:

The data is analysed according to this theory as it allows the researcher to determine under which circumstances participants consider the use of obscenities to be appropriate. This theory is used by the researcher to determine which variables are considered by language users when confronted with obscenities in conversational discourse. Furthermore, this theory is used to analyse which socio – linguistic factors may render an utterance to be socially appropriate. Lastly, this theory enables the researcher to discern whether the use of obscenities may enhance the effectiveness of communication.

### 3.10 Expectancy Violation Theory:

Expectancies guide all human behaviour as they serve as a frame of reference from which to predict and explain social interaction. These expectancies may be general, thereby pertaining

to all members of a language community – or they may be particularised relating to a specific subgroup. General linguistic expectancies are grounded in societal norms which indicate which forms of behaviour is appropriate and typical. Communication expectancies derive from three classes of factors: the communicator, the relationship between individuals and the contextual characteristics (Burgoon 1993: 33).

Communicator characteristics are all those features of an individual (such as demographics, personality, physical appearance and communication style) that lead one communicator to anticipate how another will communicate. Relationship factors include characteristics that describe the relationship between the communicators such as the degree of familiarity, attraction, liking or status equality that prevail or exist between them. Context characteristics include environmental constraints and definitions of the situation, such as its privacy, formality, or task orientation that prescribe certain interaction behaviours (Burgoon 1993: 35).

The confluence of these factors dictates the expectancies of a given encounter. Expectancies serve as framing devices that shape our interpersonal interaction. Communication is changed and adapted during an interaction depending on the anticipated responses from other participants in a conversation. Additionally, expectancies serve as perceptual filters that influence the ways in which social information is processed (Burgoon 1993: 36).

### 3.10.1 The nature of expectancies:

Expectations during linguistic interactions are particularized to a community or to an individual. Expectation violations in an interaction lead to an evaluation of the individuals who breach the accepted norms. Expectations develop based on the relationship between the participants of a conversation. The gender of the speaker as well as their position on the social hierarchy will influence the expectations and accepted norms of the interaction (Johnson. 2010: 109).

The gender of the speaker is a communication factor that has been thoroughly researched by academics. The majority of the research that has been conducted suggests that males begin to use obscenities at a younger age in comparison with females. Cross cultural research revealed that the majority of females are less inclined to include obscene language in their speech (Johnson. 2010: 110). The status of the speaker is a significant relationship factor to examine

as this will influence the type of diction that is implemented during the interaction. Prior research has found that adolescents tend to use obscenities more frequently in social contexts with their peers and tend to use this type of language less often when in the presence of adults (Johnson. 2010: 110). The formality of the situation will affect the expectations about which type of language will be used. Obscene language is perceived to be inappropriate in most formal settings and typically tends to occur more frequently in informal environments. (Johnson 2010: 112).

The degree of alarm or surprise that is generated from expletive use relates to the evaluation of the spoken utterance. Individuals who violate the expected behavioural norms are judged by the participants in the conversation. The shock that occurs when a speaker has implemented an obscenity in an unconventional context may result in an evaluation of the speaker. Swearers may be perceived as being socially incompetent in certain situations (Johnson. 2010: 111). The parameter determining the impoliteness level of these words is the audience's sensitivity to them. Several variables will influence the perception of obscene language such as the individual's profession, gender, age and social position (Johnson 2010: 111).

The violation causes attention to be redirected and allocated toward the transgressive behaviour. Subsequently, the participants of the interaction will analyse the meaning of the violation and focus their attention on the characteristics of the communicator (Burgoon 1993: 38). Straying from the expected emotional expression may result in discomfort and a dislike for the speaker who violated the expected norm. Expectancy violation can thus produce fallout during interaction and have a negative impact on interpersonal relationships. Conversely, showing restraint in the midst of frustrating or traumatising circumstances are likely to elicit respect and have a positive outcome (Burgoon 1993: 38).

The attention shift causes participants to instigate a meaning analysis and an evaluation of the utterance. The participants are involved in a process where they attempt to make sense of the violation and then evaluate its meaning. Verbal actions that are frequently used within a language community are usually analysed with intent and have consensually recognizable interpretation. Moreover, behavioural violations have a valence attached to them that define the violation as either positive or negative. Linguistic violations are subject to several interpretations. Situational factors are then used to make sense of the violation (Burgoon 1993: 38).

The strength and valence of a violation is determined by the interpretation of the utterance. Deviations from the expected conduct can be detrimental to the interaction pattern and may result in a negative perception of the participant. Expectancies thus influence the participants' impressions of each other and the outcomes of their interactions (Burgoon 1993: 42).

Each language community may have expectancies regarding how emotions should be displayed during interactions. Participants may therefore have specific expectations about how emotions should be exhibited in public settings. Typically, in public settings it is appropriate to display emotion in moderation but not in excess. Interactions are thus based on underlying sociocultural prescriptions about which emotional expressions are expected. Behaviour that deviates from the expected emotional expression may be considered as a violation (Burgoon 1993: 44).

### 3.10.2 The Application of Expectancy Violation Theory:

Expectancy Violation Theory will be used to analyse the data collected from the participants. The results from this process will consist of opinions and perceptions of obscenities. This theory will be applied to discern under which circumstances and in which contexts, this sample of participants expect to use or hear obscene language. The use of all the various types of obscenities in certain situations will be examined during the three stages of data collection. During the data analysis part of the study, the collected opinions and perceptions of obscenities will be considered in the context of Expectancy Violation Theory.

The researcher aims to discern the communication expectancies surrounding the use of obscene language. This theory provides the researcher with a framework from within which to understand social interaction. Specifically, the researcher aims to determine the general expectancies that pertain to this sample group residing in the Stellenbosch region. The researcher aims to determine the variables that may influence whether the use of an obscenity is considered to be appropriate.

In the context of Expectancy Violation Theory all of the characteristics of the communicator should be considered. In addition, the degree of familiarity and status equality between the interlocutors may influence the type of language that is expected. These characteristics may

lead one communicator to anticipate how another will communicate. The environmental constraints, such as the level of privacy and formality will influence the type of language that is expected. These characteristics will therefore be inserted in the data collection procedure to gather information regarding the participants' perceptions in terms of the type of language they expect in various environments.

## Chapter 4:

### Research design:

#### 4.1 Introduction:

This chapter consists of an explanation of the research design that is followed in this study. The first section of the chapter includes a justification for the researcher methodology. The second section constitutes of a description of the population and sample that are included during the data collection procedure. This section is followed by an explanation of the three stages of data collection methodology that is implemented by the researcher. Finally, the chapter is concluded with an explanation of the data analysis procedure that is used to examine the collected data. A qualitative research methodology is followed as the aim of the study is to understand a specific linguistic aspect of society. The current study replicates data collection methodologies that have been implemented in former studies and that were discussed in the previous chapter.

#### 4.2 Justification for research methodology:

Qualitative methods were selected for this particular study as they are successful when examining the preferences and opinions of individuals. The qualitative methodology includes: a questionnaire, a series of interviews and a focus group. These modes of inquiry are appropriate for this study as they enable the researcher to gain gather data regarding the preferences and opinions of the participants. Specifically, these methods are selected to gain information about the participants and their opinions regarding obscene language. Thereby, the researcher is able to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

#### 4.3 Population and sample:

The sample includes first language English male and females between the ages of 18 and 25 that reside within the Stellenbosch region. This sample includes both male and female participants in order to discern whether there is a difference in the perceptions and opinions of the genders. This particular age group is selected in order to keep the group of participants as homogenous as possible. Participants are selected from the social network of the researcher.

The study will be restricted to a South African context and will therefore be limited to the geographic location of Stellenbosch.

#### 4.4 Data collection process:

The data collection procedure involves three parts. The first part of the process includes the compilation of a questionnaire (See Appendix A). This method has been selected as it is a practical means by which to collect data and enables the researcher to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time. Moreover, this method is cost effective and the results can be easily analysed by the researcher. This form of data collection allows the researcher to gather information about the ideas and perceptions of the participants. The questionnaire provides the researcher with pertinent information of the demographics of the sample.

The second part of the data collection procedure includes qualitative interviews (see Appendix B) with a selection of the participants that partook in the questionnaire. This method of data collection is selected as it is a useful means by which to obtain information the participants' sentiments regarding a particular subject. This part of the data collection methodology enables the researcher to view how participants respond when confronted with obscene language.

The third part of the data collection methodology includes a focus group. An interactive setting of this nature provides valuable information about the potential acceptance of obscene language in the Stellenbosch region in South Africa. This environment is informal providing respondents with a comfortable space in which to express their opinions.

#### 4.5 First stage of data collection process:

Questionnaires are a tactic for collecting information by asking participants a set of questions in a specific order. The questions are administered to a sample of individuals that represent a larger population. Questionnaire are implemented to gather psychographic and demographic data. The data generated from questionnaires can be used to support or confirm hypotheses, claims and to understand the opinions of the participants (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 40).

The questionnaire used in this study (Appendix A) requires participants to rate a series of obscene words on a scale from 1 to 10 according to their perception of how offensive the word



is. The second part of the questionnaire requires participants to indicate how frequently they use these obscenities. Words are selected from each category of obscenities, namely: bodily effluvia, profanities, body parts, blasphemies as well as racial and homophobic slurs. Words from each of the aforementioned categories are analysed to determine which obscenities are considered to be the most offensive.

#### 4.6 Second stage of the data collection process:

This stage of the data collection process includes interviews with the participants. This method allows the researcher to gather data about the attitudes and perspectives of the participants without influencing them. The researcher is able to record and analyse how individuals would respond in particular situations.

In these interviews, the participants will be exposed to hypothetical dialogues and will be required to answer questions about the language used in these scenarios. The questions will gather information concerning whether the participants perceive the language to be surprising or unusual and what their perception of the speaker is. This sample will include 20 individuals. The researcher will remain quiet during the interview to ensure that the data is valid.

During the first part of the interview questions were asked to obtain demographic about the participants. Participants were required to indicate whether they identify as male or female. Additionally, they were required to indicate how liberal they are and what their religious views are. The participants were then required to read through a series of hypothetical dialogues (Appendix B) and to answer the series of questions that followed. The dialogues were accompanied by a description of the environment in which the conversation takes place as well the participants who partake in the conversation.

The first dialogue was designed to assess the participants' perception of obscene language when it is used in an informal setting in a close relationship. The hypothetical dialogue occurred in an informal setting in a household environment between a wife and a husband. In the dialogue the wife reprimands her husband for being on his phone after she had told him that she had an important issue to discuss with him. She performs this request in a direct manner and uses curse words to emphasize the severity of the issue she is attempting to discuss with

him. The participants were then asked to indicate whether they consider the language in the scenario to be surprising and to explain which parts of the dialogue they perceive to be unusual.

The second dialogue was designed to assess the participants' perception of obscene language when obscene language is used in a relationship in which there is a power gap between the participants. The hypothetical conversation takes place in a lecturer's office where a lecturer and a student discuss an academic issue. The student appeals to the lecturer to excuse him from a test and wishes to write the paper at a later stage. The lecturer responds in a direct manner and includes a swear word into the response that he gives to the student. The participants were then asked to indicate whether they consider the language in the scenario to be surprising and to explain which parts of the dialogue they perceive to be unusual.

The third dialogue was designed to assess the participants' perception of obscene language when obscene language causes a social norm violation due to the social roles of the participants in the conversation. The hypothetical conversation takes place between a father and a 10-year-old daughter whilst driving during busy traffic. They encounter another driver who has failed to indicate that he is about to turn and may thus cause destruction and danger for other drivers. The father then swears accidentally in front of his daughter, after which he apologises for the language that he used. The participants were then asked to indicate whether they consider the language in the scenario to be surprising and to explain which parts of the dialogue they perceive to be unusual.

The fourth dialogue was designed to assess the participants' perception of obscene language when obscene language causes an expectancy violation. The conversation takes place around a dinner table whilst a family are eating. The mother in the family asks her daughter to pass her the bottle of wine. After examining the bottle of wine she uses obscene language due to a small inconvenience as she discovers that they had opened the white wine instead of the red wine earlier that evening. The participants were then asked to indicate whether they consider the language in the scenario to be surprising and to explain which parts of the dialogue they perceive to be unusual.

The fifth dialogue was designed to assess the participants' perception of obscene language when obscene language is used to cause offense. The hypothetical conversation takes place between two neighbours who are complaining about their landlord and using homophobic

language. After reading the dialogue the participants are asked to explain whether they consider the language in the scenario to be surprising and to explain which parts of the dialogue they perceive to be unusual.

The sixth dialogue was designed to assess the participants' perception of obscene language when obscene language is used towards women. The hypothetical conversation takes place between two boys in a male residence. The two boys discuss a girl and refer to her in derogatory terms. After reading the dialogue the participants are asked to explain whether they consider the language in the scenario to be surprising and to explain which parts of the dialogue they perceive to be unusual.

The participants were asked to explain whether any of the dialogues were more surprising than others. This question was inserted to assess whether certain obscenities used in certain contexts were more unusual than other according to the participants. Additionally, participants were asked to explain which parts are more surprising than others and to explain why they believe this. The next question focused on linguistic preference as the participants were asked to explain whether there are obscenities that they never use and to explain why they choose not to use these words specifically. The question that followed focused on the emotive effects of obscene language as the participants were asked which emotions are evoked when they hear these words. In addition, the participants were asked to reveal their favourite obscenities and why they like these particular words. They were then asked to explain when they would typically use these words and whether there are contexts in which they would not use these words. They were then asked what impression they have of others when they hear this word.

The next part of the interview focused on the function of obscenities. The participants were asked what they believe to be the most common cause of obscene language. The question that followed pertained to whether they swear predominantly when they are alone or when they are with others and under which circumstances they believe it to be appropriate to use obscenities. The participants were then asked whether they considered someone who swears often to have a weak vocabulary and to reveal whether they believed that obscene language should be eradicated from written and spoken language. The last question was an open ended question where the participants could give general thoughts on the subject matter of obscene language.

#### 4.7 Third stage of data collection:

The goal of the focus group is to gain insight into the participants' view about the use and function of obscene language. This form of data collection is different from interviews as it allows for interaction between participants. The focus group will allow interpersonal communication between participants. This type of dialogue can lead to new topics of discussion that were unforeseen by the researcher. In addition, participants feel that their opinions are valued during the discussion which may motivate them to provide thought provoking and insightful answers. Focus groups are an efficient means by which to conduct research as it can be done relatively quickly without huge demands on time and fiscal resources (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 40).

The researcher must remain neutral throughout the session and must not ask questions during the session. This ensures that the data will not be skewed. The researcher is required to moderate the session and to ensure that participants do not deviate from the subject matter at hand. This will ensure that the data is viable for evaluation and that the participants' responses can be used in the study. The group should not consist of more than 10 individuals as it may become difficult for the moderator to facilitate a discussion. A group that is too large may also create distracting side discussions among respondents and therefore some participants might not contribute to the discussion. (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 40). It is essential to consider the individual background of the participants that are partaking in the focus group discussion in order to gather data that is reliable and that can be used during the analysis of the information for the study. This method of data collection is suited to a qualitative study can be used to evaluate and assess the acceptance of a language form (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 41).

Dominant personality types in the focus group may sway the opinions in a particular direction. Careful selection on the part of the researcher may help to prevent this issue. The success of a focus group is based on the assumption that participants are being completely honest. It is therefore beneficial to use more than one form of data collection to confirm the results yielded by the focus group in order to verify the findings (Visocky O'Grady 2009: 41).

Participants will be selected from the first two parts of the study to ensure that there is a wide spectrum of different individuals involved in the study. This part of the study will include 10 participants. Participants will be asked to discuss the subject matter of obscene language. The

administration of a focus group provides the researcher with the opportunity to create an interactive group setting where essential points about the subject matter can be recorded.

#### 4.8 Data analysis methodology:

The collected data will be used to gain an understanding of how individuals respond to obscene language. The data analysis methodology that will be used in the study will be based on an interpretative philosophy. The aim is to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of the qualitative data that has been collected with the questionnaires, focus group and interview. The data will be analysed in term of the theoretical framework, namely Politeness theory and communicative competence. The transcribed content from the focus group will be used to conduct a discourse analysis. The stories that are told by participants during the focus group will be contextualized in order to gain an in depth understanding.

#### 4.9 Limitations of the research:

Although it is practical to use questionnaires as a means to collect data there are also several limitations which should be considered. There is a high level of involvement from the researcher which could influence how participants respond to questions. Additionally, each participant may interpret the questions differently and thus their responses may be based on their personal interpretation which could influence the validity of the responses. Furthermore, it is not possible to discern how truthful the participant is being when completing the questionnaire, partaking in the focus group and answering questions during the interview.

As the subject matter of the study is of a sensitive nature there are certain ethical concerns that must be taken into consideration. To address ethical concerns participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Moreover, the participants will be informed that their participation is confidential, and that only the researcher will have the contact details of the participants.

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction:

This chapter will focus on the results that were obtained during the data collection process. It will discuss the trends and statistics of the three phases of the process. The first section will discuss the results that were obtained from the questionnaire. The second section will analyse and discuss the results from the interviews and finally, the third section will consist of a discussion of the results that were obtained during the focus group.

### 5.2 Questionnaire results:

The first part of the questionnaire gathered demographic information about the participants involved in the study. The participants were required to specify their gender, their religious denomination as well as how liberal they consider themselves to be. The questionnaire included a scale upon which the participants could indicate how liberal they considered themselves to be and how religious they are. This information is pertinent in the data collection process as it enables the researcher to discern the relation between the participant and their perception of language.

The second part of the questionnaire assessed the participants' perception of a series of commonly used obscenities and to indicate how frequently they use the given word. The participants were informed that the questions pertained to their personal perception of the word. Word from each category of obscene language were included in the word list. The words were not given in a particular context and were given without definition as the aim was to discern the attitude that individuals have towards the particular word without priming them for a specific response by giving contextual information. Each word was coupled with a scale from 01 to 10 in order for the participants to indicate how offensive they deemed the obscene word to be. According to this scale 01 is not considered to be offensive and 10 is deemed to be extremely offensive. The list of obscenities included, *Asshole, Bitch, Bullshit, Cock, Cocksucker, Dick, Dipshit, Dyke, Fag, Fuck, Fuck yourself, Fucker, Goddamn-it, Jesus Christ, Nigger, Prick, Retard, Screw, Shit and Whore*. This particular list was compiled as it included

a range of words and would therefore provide the researcher with a thorough portrayal of the participants' perceptions.

This part of the study included 102 participants, who were recruited from the social network of the researcher. The sample included 61 female participants and 41 male participants. The participants were required to indicate how religious they are. Of the 101 participants, 11% indicated that they are extremely religious, 49% indicated that they are moderately religious, 15% indicated that they are not strongly opinionated about religion and 25% indicated that they are not religious at all. In addition, the participants were required to indicate how liberal they consider themselves to be. Of the 101 participants, 19% indicated that they were conservative, 56% indicated that they were moderately liberal and 25% indicated that they were very liberal.

The results of the questionnaire revealed that the word *Nigger* was rated as the most offensive word on the list that was presented to the participants. It is clear that this word is not used frequently by the individuals who partook in the study as 79% indicated that they never use this word and 21% indicated that they occasionally use this word. In terms of Politeness Theory, the use of this word would be face threatening in discourse. The majority of the participants would avoid the use of this word as it would be damaging or threatening to the self-image of the addressee. The use of this word would not likely not be used by this group of participants. The portion of participants who revealed that they use this word occasionally rated the word to be 04 or less on the scale and also indicated that they were very liberal and were male participants. It is evident that this word is not considered to be offensive to those participants who are male and very liberal. For this sub – group the word *Nigger* is not considered to be face threatening or damaging. The use of this word would not violate the social norms or communicative expectancies of this sub – group of participants. The portion of participants who rated this word to be very offensive were either conservative or moderately liberal and consisted of both males and females.

When participants were asked to rate the term *Nigger* on a scale in terms of how offensive they perceive the term to be, 73% rated the word as 07 or higher and 22% 04 or lower on the scale that was presented to them. The majority of the participants consider this term to be highly offensive as 78% never use this word and 22% indicated that they occasionally use this word. None of the participants use this word regularly and it is deemed to be extremely offensive by the majority of the individuals that partook in the study.

The terms, *Cocksucker* and *Fag* were rated as the second most offensive terms on the list with a rating of 9,5. The majority of the participants indicated that they never use this term as 92% revealed that they don't use this term. Even the portion of participants who did not rate *Cocksucker* to be very offensive revealed that they do not use this word regularly. The participants who rated the word as inoffensive were predominantly liberal males. It is evident that this word is not typically used conversationally, even by those who do not deem it to be highly offensive. In terms of Politeness Theory, these terms are considered to be face damaging or threatening by the majority of the participants. Most participants would therefore avoid the use of these terms as it would be damaging or threatening to the face of the addressees.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Cocksucker* on a scale according to their perception of the word's offensiveness. Of the 102 participants, 52% rated the word to be 07 or higher and 39% rated the word as 04 or lower on the scale that they were presented with. Of the 102 participants 92% indicated that they never use this term. It is evident that this word is not commonly implemented into the spoken discourse of the participants. The use of this term would be a violation of the social norms and communicative expectancies of the majority of the participants in this group.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Fag* on a scale in terms of how offensive they consider the word to be. The majority of the participants indicated that they perceive this term to be highly offensive. Of the 102 participants 53% rated the word as 08 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. Of the 102 participants, 16% rated the word as 03 or lower on the scale. Of the 102 participants, 83% indicated that they never use this word, 17% that they occasionally use this word and 5% of the participants. None of the participants indicated that they use this word on a regular basis. These results reveal that this word is considered to be extremely offensive by the participants that partook in the study. The implementation of this term in written or spoken dialogue would be an expectancy violation to the majority of the participants in this group.

The word *whore* was rated as the third most offensive word on the list that was included in the questionnaire. This word is not used frequently by the individuals who partook in the study as 62% revealed that they never use this word. This portion of the participants consisted predominantly of females [both moderately liberal and conservative]. Only 9% of the



participants use the word *whore* on a regularly. This portion of the participants, who use the word regularly, did not include females and comprised only of very liberal males. There is a clear distinction between how this word is perceived and used by males and females. Although the majority of the participants do not use this word regularly, there is a small portion of male participants who indicated that they use this word on a regular basis. The term *whore* is considered to be face damaging to the interlocutors of a conversation by the majority of the participants who partook in the study.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Whore* in terms of how offensive they perceive the word to be. The majority of the participants consider this word to be highly offensive as 69% rated the word to be 06 or higher. Of the 102 participants, 62% indicated that they never use this word, 29% indicated that they occasionally use this word and 9% indicated that they regularly use this word. These statistics reveal that this word is considered to be extremely offensive by most individuals and that its frequency of use is low. The use of this term would be a violation of the social norms and communicative expectancies of the majority of the participants in this group.

The term *Jesus Christ* was rated as the fourth most offensive term on the list that was presented to the participants. The majority of the participants indicated that they never use this word. This portion of the participants consisted mostly of extremely religious and moderately religious individuals [as well as a smaller portion of individuals who are not strongly opinionated about religion]. There were however 22 participants who indicated that they regularly use this word. This portion of participants consisted of males and females who indicated that they are not religious at all and were moderately or very liberal. It is therefore evident that religion is a demographic factor that will influence whether this word is used regularly by this group of participants. The majority of the participants who partook in the study consider this term to be face damaging when used in conversation. The use of this term would be a violation of the communicative expectancies for most of the participants in this group.

The participants were asked to rate the term *Jesus Christ* on a scale in terms of how offensive they perceive the term to be. There was variation among the responses of the participants as 52% rated the term to be 07 or higher and 34% rated the term as 04 or lower on the scale that was presented to them. The majority of the participants perceive this term to be offensive as

68% rated the term to be 05 or higher on the scale. Of the 102 participants, 57% indicated that they never use this term, 21% indicated that they occasionally use this term and 22% indicated that they regularly use this term. The group of participants who indicated that they regularly use this term do not consider it to be a violation of their social norms and communicative expectancies.

The participants who indicated that they consider themselves to be extremely religious were less tolerant of religious related profanities. The word list included the terms *Goddamn it* and *Jesus Christ*, which are obscene terms that relate to religious phenomena. The majority of the participants who were religious rated the term *Goddamn it* as extremely offensive as this group of participants rated the word to be 09 or 10 on the scale that was presented to them. In addition, the majority of the participants who indicated that they are religious rated the term *Jesus Christ* as extremely offensive as all these participants rated the word as 08 or 10 on the scale. For the participants who indicated that they are religious, this term is considered to be highly face damaging.

The participants were asked to rate the term *Goddamn it* on a scale in terms of how offensive they perceive it to be. There was significant variation among the responses of the participants, as 52% of the participants rated this term as 04 or lower and 34% rated the term as 07 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. Of the 102 participants, 54% indicated that they never use this term, 26% indicated that they occasionally use this term and 20% indicated that they regularly use this term. These results suggest that the majority of the participants do not regularly use this term and consider it to be potentially face threatening when it is used in conversation.

Interestingly, the word *Fuck* was not considered to be particularly offensive as it was rated as 1,5 by the participants. The term was however considered to be significantly more offensive when used with reference to a subject. For example, when the term was used with reference to a pronoun it was considered to be significantly more offensive as *Fuck yourself* was rated as 8,0. The majority of the participants indicated that they never use this term and only 14 participants revealed that they use this term regularly. Additionally, the term was considered to be slightly more offensive when used as a noun as *Fucker* was rated as 04 by the participants. It is therefore evident that a word may be rendered as more offensive when it is used with the purpose of insulting a particular subject as opposed to when it is used in isolation.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Fuck* in terms of how offensive they deem the word to be. Of the 102 participants, 51% rated the word as 03 or lower and a mere 8% rated the word as 08 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. The majority of the participants evidently do not consider this word to be offensive. Of the 102 participants, 78% indicated that they regularly use this word and 22% indicated that they occasionally use this word. The term *Fuck* is not perceived as particularly face damaging to most of the participants and its usage would not violate their communicative expectancies as it is considered to be inoffensive by most of the participants.

The participants were asked to rate the phrase *Fuck yourself* on a scale in terms of how offensive they deem the word to be. Of the 102 participants, 41% rated the word as 08 or higher and 23% rated the word as 03 or lower. The vast majority of the participants consider this word to be offensive as 72% rated the word as 05 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. The usage frequency among the participants was low as only 14% of the participants indicated that they use this phrase regularly, 43% indicated that they occasionally use this phrase and 42% indicated that they never use this phrase. These statistics reveal that this phrase is considered to be face threatening as it deemed to be offensive.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Fucker* on a scale in terms of how offensive they deem it to be. There was variation among the responses of the participants, as 45% of the participants and 30% of the participants rated the word as 07 or higher on the scale. There were no particular trends among the responses of the participants in terms of how frequently they use this word. Of the 102 participants, 19% indicated that they regularly use this word, 50% indicated that they occasionally use this word and 30% indicated that they never use this word. These results reveal significant variation among the perceptions of the participants.

The words pertaining to body parts were not considered to be particularly offensive as they were not rated very high on the scale. The words *prick*, *cock*, *dick*, and *asshole* were rated as lower than 04 on the scale by the participants. The perception is shared by both the males and females that partook in the study. There was a slight differentiation between the frequency of use between male and female participants, as the male participants indicated these terms more regularly than their female counterparts. These terms were therefore not considered to be face threatening by the majority of the participants.

The participants were asked to rate the term *Prick* on a scale in terms of how offensive they consider the word to be. The majority of the participants do not deem this word to be extremely offensive as 59% rated the word to be 04 or lower and 22% rated the word as 07 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. The participants in the study do not use this term regularly. Of the 102 participants 64% never use this word and 36% use this word occasionally. These statistics reveal that that this word is not considered to be extremely offensive although it is not implemented in conversation very frequently.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Cock* on a scale according to their perception of the word's offensiveness. There was significant variation among the responses of the participants. Of the 102 participants 39% rated the word as 07 or higher on the scale and 54% rated the word as 04 or lower. Of the 102 participants 69% of the participants indicated that they never use this word, 24% of the participants indicated that they occasionally use this word and a mere 7% of the participants use this word regularly. The results therefore reveal that this word is not commonly or typically used by the individuals who partook in this study.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Dick* on a scale according to their perception of the word's offensiveness. Of the 102 participants, 54% rated the word to be 04 or lower and 26% of the participants rated the word to be 08 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. Of the 102 participants, 43% of the participants indicated that they occasionally use this word, 28% indicated that they regularly use this word and 27% indicated that they never use this word. These statistics reveal that there is variation regarding the frequency of usage among the individuals that partook in the study.

The participants were asked to rate the obscene word *Asshole* on a scale according to their personal perception of this word's offensiveness. The majority of the participants indicated that this word is not offensive. Of the 102 participants 20.6 % rated this word as 01 on a scale of offensiveness. The majority of the participants do not deem this word to be offensive as 64% of the participants indicated the word as 04 or lower on the scale that was presented to them. Moreover, 61% of the participants indicated that they regularly use this word. A mere 13% of the participants indicated that they never use this word. There were no participants who rated this word to be 10 on the scale. These statistics suggest that the word *Asshole* is not considered to be particularly offensive or impolite when individuals are presented or shown this term.

The word *Shit* was rated as the least offensive word on the list with a rating of only 01. The word's usage frequency is extremely high as 84% of the participants indicated that they use this word regularly and 16% of the participants revealed that they use this word occasionally. It is therefore discernible that the individuals who partook in this stage of the study do not deem this word to be particularly offensive and that the majority use this word on a regular basis. The results revealed that even the participants who are conservative or extremely religious indicated that they regularly use this word. The results revealed that this word is used frequently by both males and females. This word is not deemed to be face threatening by most of the participants who partook in the study and the use of this word would not violate the communicative expectancies of the participants.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Shit* in terms of how offensive they consider it to be. The majority of the participants do not consider this word to be extremely offensive as 50% rated the word to be 01 on the scale that was presented to them. This word is not perceived as offensive by most of the individuals that partook in the study as 90% rated the word as 04 or lower on the scale. Of the 102 participants, 80% indicated that they regularly use this word and 16% indicated that they occasionally use this word. None of the participants indicated that they never use this word. These statistics reveal that the majority of the individuals use this word on a frequent basis and that it is not deemed as extremely offensive. This word is not considered to threaten the self image of individuals when used in conversation. Moreover, the use of this word would not flout the social norms of most of the participants in this group.

The participants were asked to rate the obscene word *Bitch* on a scale according to their personal perception of the word's offensiveness. Of the 102 participants 50% rated this word as 04 or lower on the scale that was presented to them. There were however outlying statistics as 14% of the participants rated this word as 08 or higher on the scale revealing that there is slight variation among the participants. Of the 102 participants 45% indicated this word to be between 04 – 07 on the scale. Of the 102 participants 49% revealed that they occasionally use this word whereas a mere 13% indicated that they never use this word. These statistics demonstrate that the participants deem this word to be moderately offensive.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Bullshit* on a scale according to their perception of the word's offensiveness. Of the 102 participants 34% rated this word as 01 on the scale that

was presented to them. The majority of the participants do not consider this term to be offensive as 76% of the participants rated the word as 04 or lower on the scale. A mere 1% of the participants rated the word to be 08 or higher. Of the 102 participants, 49% indicated that they regularly use this word and 43% revealed that they occasionally use this word. This term was not considered to be face threatening by the participants.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Dyke* on a scale regarding how offensive they perceive the word to be. The majority of the participants indicated that they perceive this term to be highly offensive. Of the 102 participants, 43% rated the word as 08 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. A mere 22% of the participants rated the word as 04 or lower on the scale that was presented to them. Of the 102 participants, 90% indicated that they never use this word. These statistics reveal that most of the participants deem this word to be extremely offensive. The term *Dyke* is perceived as extremely face damaging according to the vast majority of the participants.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Retard* on a scale in terms of how offensive they perceive the word to be. Of the 102 participants, 34% rated the word as 04 or lower and 45% rated the word as 07 or higher. There was significant variation among the participants' perception of this word although there was a slight inclination to rate the word as more offensive. The frequency of use was low among the group of individuals that partook in the study as 53% indicated that they never use this word, 39% indicated that they occasionally use this word and 9% indicated that they regularly use this word. These statistics reveal that the majority of the participants do not use this word on a regular basis.

The participants were asked to rate the word *Screw* on a scale in terms of how offensive they perceive it to be. The majority of the participants do not consider this word to be extremely offensive. Of the 102 participants, 66% rated the word to be 03 or less and a mere 4% rated the word as 08 or higher on the scale that was presented to them. This word is not perceived to be face damaging and its use would not violate the communicative expectancies of the participants who partook in the study. The vast majority of the participants do not deem this word to be extremely offensive as 75% rated the word to be 04 or lower. Of the 102 participants, 45% never use this word, 44% occasionally use this word and 11% regularly use this word.

Below is a table presenting the list of words that were provided in the questionnaire with a rating out of 10:

List of words	Rating out of 10
Nigger	10
Cocksucker	9,5
Fag	9,5
Whore	8,5
Jesus Christ	08
Fuck yourself	08
Dyke	07
Goddamnit	06
Retard	06
Fucker	04
Bitch	03
Prick	03
Cock	2,5
Dick	2,5
Dipshit	02
Asshole	02
Screw	2,0
Fuck	1,5
Bullshit	1,5
Shit	01

### 5.3 Analysis of qualitative interviews:

The following section will provide an overview of the main findings of the qualitative interviews that were conducted with 20 participants from the first round of data collection in which they were presented with a number of hypothetical dialogues containing swearwords and asked to comment on the language used in each dialogue. Interview participants were also asked about their views on the appropriateness of obscene language, the functions of obscene language, the impressions that obscene language generate and the swearwords that they use.

#### 5.3.1 First dialogue: obscene language in a close relationship:

Wife: Why the fuck are you still on your phone? I told you I had something important to discuss with you.

Husband: It's for work...

Wife: Well it's really fucking rude.

The majority of the participants found this language to be surprising as 85% of the participants explained that they considered this language to be unusual. There was a trend among the participants to explain that the wife's anger was founded but that she should express her concern without obscene language. The participants explained that although her anger is justified and understandable but she could express her concern in a manner that may resolve the conflict. The majority of the male participants explained that the issue deserved discussion but that the wife should remain calm during their conversation and perceived her language to be irrational. Male participant 1 reacted to the dialogue by saying that "the husband's conduct is quite disgraceful actually, cell phone[s] should be switched off throughout family events. The wife's anger is justified and understandable but she could express her concern, outrage in a healthier way. She really shouldn't speak to her husband like that – not a typical response, well not in a functional relationship." Male participant 3 responded to the dialogue by saying that I find it really surprising because I don't think you should speak to your husband like that. I don't think the situation warrants crass words at all. I would be shocked if someone spoke to me like that". It was evident that the majority of the male participants did not have a positive perception of this type of language. It is an expectancy violation to use obscene language during conflict resolution.



The results revealed that both male and female participants were surprised by the obscenities that were used in the first dialogue. There was consensus among the male and female participants that the conflict should be resolved without obscene language. The language was described as harsh and unnecessary by most of the participants. Both male and female participants were inclined to mention that the obscene language would not serve any particular purpose other than emphasizing the wife's anger toward her husband. The majority of the participants perceived the obscene language in this scenario to be face threatening as they did not feel that the situation warranted crude language.

There was one distinct difference between the responses of the male and female participants. The male participants were inclined to focus on how the language would not aid in resolving the problem at hand. Females tended to recognize the sentiment of the wife but agreed that obscene language would not be beneficial to the situation. Female participant 2 responded to the scenario by saying that "this language is quite surprising – because it doesn't really serve any purpose. It highlights the wife's anger but I don't really see how it is going to resolve her issue." Several female participants explained that this language is disrespectful to use towards a family member. Female participant 6 responded to the dialogue by saying that "language in this scenario is surprising between the wife and the husband. She sounds angry and extremely impatient. She also clearly does not have any respect for him". The majority of the female participants acknowledged that the husband should not be using his phone whilst she is attempting to resolve an issue whereas the male participants did not comment on the husband's use of his cell phone during this situation. The female participants were inclined to recognize the wife's plight in the circumstances described in the dialogue. Despite recognizing her predicament, most female participants explained that the wife should express her concern in a healthier manner and without obscene language at her husband. A portion of the female participants said that the obscene language is indicative of a dysfunctional relationship.

There was consensus among both male and female participants that the language is not suitable in a close relationship. A common trend among the participants was that this type of language has become very pervasive in daily conversations and that it is therefore not surprising that it may infiltrate into everyday discussions. Female participant 4 explained that the obscene language "is inappropriate, but probably happens quite often" in this type of situation. Many participants however, added that obscene language in this specific context is not necessary and may even

be detrimental to the relationship. Male participant 7 responded to the dialogue by explaining that “this type of obscene language is rarely, if ever, necessary. In this case I think there are many other ways to convey your message more effectively. It’s also very offensive in this scenario and not particularly helpful. The F-word has become very pervasive in conversation. In this case the obscene language doesn’t carry value and it’s therefore really necessary. It would probably be quite detrimental to the relationship”. It is evident that the majority of the participants considered the type of language used in this dialogue to be face threatening.

### 5.3.2 Second dialogue: obscene language with a power gap and social distance:

Student: Why can I not take the sick test?

Lecturer: I have explained to you that you do not qualify to write the sick test for this module, why the hell are you still asking me about this?

Student: Well, it’s just that I feel that I do qualify with my doctor’s note.

The majority of the participants did not consider the dialogue between the student and the lecturer to be appropriate because of the social distance between the interlocutors. Obscene language use in the context of a formal environment is considered to be face threatening by most participants. There was consensus among the participants that the lecturer risks not being respected by her students if she cannot avoid using obscene language and that her language should represent the institution that she is employed by. Male participant 7 responded by saying that “The lecturer’s response is not typical. I wouldn’t expect a lecturer to respond like this. I would imagine that the lecturer would try to come up with a solution but not to retaliate in this way”.

Several participants referred to the location as an element which should be considered when conversing with others. Of the 20 participants, 50% made a distinction between language that is acceptable in a public space and language that may be permissible only in a private domain. The moderately and very liberal participants were inclined to explain that this language is permissible in private spaces only. They explained that they do not consider this type of language to be appropriate in a working environment or in a public space. The use of this type of language in a working environment would be damaging to the self-image and face of the interlocutors who are present.

The conservative participants were inclined to say that they do not consider the language used in the dialogue to be appropriate under any conditions. They emphasized that individuals in positions of authority should set the example of professionalism for others. Additionally, this group of participants felt that the lecturer should attempt to resolve the issue and should use language that will achieve this end. Several conservative participants explained that the lecturer's tone is not permissible in a working environment. Moreover, her reaction will not succeed in resolving the issue that the student is attempting to solve. They explained that the language used in this dialogue is not formal when considering the environment in which it takes place and that students may lose respect for a person in an authoritative position who speaks to others in this manner. Male participant 19 responded to this dialogue by saying that "This is surprising, I find that this response is not appropriate between lecturer and student, nor is it at all professional. The lecturer should, despite any irritations, behave in a professional and supportive manner in all instances. Female participant 20 responded to the dialogue by saying that "this type of language is unprofessional in the case where a lecturer and a student communicate". Several conservative participants explained that healthy relationships between lecturers and their students were essential in order to encourage students to work hard and to succeed in their studies.

The female participants were inclined to explain that the lecturer's linguistic style is not appropriate considering that it takes place in a working environment. This portion of the participants argued that this type of language would not in a professional environment. Additionally, female participants were prone to argue that the student should have used formal language to set the tone at the outset of the conversation. The majority of the female participants indicated that the lecturer's response is not typical and that they would expect the lecturer to solve the issue rather than to retaliate in this way. Female participant 4 responded by saying that "this lecturers' response is surprising – I wouldn't expect this type of thing from someone who should be giving helpful advice to students and their colleagues. I don't know whether I'd be able to approach the lecturer again after this [conversation]."

A small portion of very liberal participants explained that this language is common when an individual is experiencing severe annoyance. This portion of participants emphasized that the language may be permissible due to heightened energy level during a crisis. Several participants within this group commented on how the language used in the situation may be reflective of the agitated mood of the lecturer. Male participant 5 responded by saying that I

could imagine that if the lecturer is annoyed they might use this type of language. The student may have been doing something really wrong which could have annoyed the lecturer quite a lot and caused the strong language”. Female participant 6 responded by saying that “It seems that he is dealing with a naging student who does not do his work and that he is not in a position to receive a sick test. Two participants within this group said that the lecturer’s agitation may be founded due to the laziness and attitude of the student. These two participants explained that the context of the situation warranted this type of language from the lecturer.

### 5.3.3 Third dialogue: obscene language in front of a child due to annoyance:

Daughter: the driver in front of you hasn’t indicated, what is he doing?

Father: Holy shit! Ah sorry, sorry – I really didn’t mean to say that.

There was consensus among the participants that this type of language is acceptable in this particular context. The majority of the participants revealed that they have heard this type of language frequently when driving in traffic with others. This experience was identified by 60% of the participants as a source of frustration and outrage, explaining that obscene language is a common result of driving in traffic and the language was thus perceived as understandable when experiencing annoyance. Several participants referred to experiencing severe annoyance whilst driving, explaining that this experience would evoke a similar reaction for most drivers faced with these conditions. Male participant 1 responded to the dialogue by saying that “this language is understandable – driving in traffic can cause outrage and frustration. The [obscene language] slipped out in the heat of the moment – the dad obviously didn’t mean any harm as he apologizes straight afterwards. He actually makes it quite clear to his daughter that this language is not appropriate and that he shouldn’t use the word. I don’t find the language surprising – road rage causes anger. The dad’s language doesn’t cause any harm and he demonstrates that it is wrong right after he swears”.

Both male and female participants recognized that the father apologized after uttering the swear word and that the language was therefore permissible. The majority of the participants revealed that they have often been in situations where this type of language was used in their presence during similar circumstances. Additionally, the majority of the participants explained that they did not believe that the father intended to cause any harm and that he acknowledges his folly straight after uttering the swear word. His obscene language is not perceived to be harmful or

offensive by the majority of the participants who partook in this stage of data collection. Female participant 2 responded by saying that “I don’t think that this language is surprising, it seems like a very typical situation on the road to me. I’d also be pretty annoyed if someone didn’t indicate where they were going while they were driving”. Many of the participants identified with the speaker in this dialogue explaining that they would have responded in a similar manner. Male participant 3 responds by saying that “This is very typical and happens quite often I think. He apologizes for obscene language and it seems he didn’t mean to be harmful” with [his] words”. Male participant 5 responded by saying that “This doesn’t surprise me - I often swear while I’m driving – especially if I’m alone or sitting in traffic. You can’t always predict what’s going to happen on the road and other drivers can drive so terribly sometimes. This seems [like] pretty normal behaviour to me”. There was consensus among the majority of the participants that this language is not face threatening in this scenario.

A small portion of the conservative participants explained that the language is unnecessary as it does not serve any specific purpose in this situation. This group of participants however did not deem the language to be unusual or surprising but explained that the father should not swear in the presence of young and easily susceptible children.

There was no correlation between the religious denomination of participants and their perception of the language used in this situation. Of the participants who partook in this stage of the data collection procedure, 90% revealed that they did not perceive the language used in this dialogue to be surprising and attributed the obscene language to fear and shock due to unforeseen circumstances. Several participants commented on the unpredictability whilst driving, a factor which may lead to heightened energy on the part of the driver. This type of language is evidently not perceived to be severely face threatening in this context by the majority of the participants.

#### 5.3.4 Fourth dialogue: obscene language in front of a family member as a result of a small inconvenience:

Mother: could you pass that wine bottle to me, please?

Daughter: [She says while passing the wine] Here you go...

Mother: Ah CHRIST! We opened the white wine and I actually wanted to be drinking red wine tonight.

The majority of both the male and female participants did not consider this type of language to be appropriate or acceptable. Several characteristics were identified that rendered the language to be inappropriate in the circumstances of the situation. Both male and female participants commented on how the language used by the wife was an overreaction in the context of the situation. Several participants explained that mild language would be sufficient to demonstrate her shock and that she could use language that would not offend others. Male participant 1 responded to the dialogue by saying “This language is not acceptable, especially in a household setting. It’s also irresponsible for a mother to use this type of language in front of her children – it creates the idea that it’s acceptable to use this type of language. Blasphemy is very disrespectful to those around you – even if you’re not very religious. I really don’t appreciate this type of language and I find it irritating when people use it to try and be funny. There’s nothing amusing about it. I can’t think of a situation in which this type of language is appropriate”. The majority of the participants considered this type of language to be inappropriate.

The location was identified by both the male and female participants as a factor that should be taken into consideration when speaking. The household environment was mentioned as a location where speakers should not use crude or obscene language. Several participants explained that they would expect members of a household to use warm and respectful language when addressing others. Female participant 2 responded to the language by saying “her language seems very strong given the situation. It also seems inappropriate to use language like this during a family dinner when there should be quite a serene and happy atmosphere”. Male participant 3 responded to the dialogue by saying “the language is very disrespectful and not really adding value to the conversation so it doesn’t make sense to swear here. I find the blasphemy unnecessary – my family never uses language like that so it’s strange for me to think that it’s okay”. The majority of the participants considered the use of obscene language to be face threatening in this context.

The presence of children was identified by 60% of the female participants as a factor that should be considered when speaking. This portion of participants argued that children are easily influenced by their parents and that which they observe in their households. These participants commented on a responsibility which they think parents have towards their children by setting a good example in terms of their linguistic habits. The wife’s language was interpreted by most

participants as strong given the situation and location of the dialogue. Male participant 7 responded by saying “I don’t think this language should be used in the context of the situation – particularly because it’s a family situation in which children are involved that must still learn which types of behavior are acceptable. It can be difficult to raise children to be considerate of others if they’re exposed to this type of language from a young age”. It is evident that the majority of the female participants considered obscene language to be face threatening when used in a family environment or in the presence of children.

The religious participants identified the blasphemy used by the wife as disrespectful and unacceptable. One of the participants in this group explained that this type of language is inconsiderate to others who may be religious and that it is annoying when it is used as it does not serve any particular purpose. In addition, several participants within this group referred to their own households in which this type of language would not be used. They argued that language used in a household setting should typically create a serene and peaceful environment. Female participant 10 responded by saying “the word Christ was uncalled for and was also not a good example to her children”.

The very liberal participants indicated that this dialogue does not shock or surprise them. This group of participants explained that they have often heard this type of language as a reaction to a mistake. Several participants within this group argued that this language is acceptable because it occurs in a private space in which the speakers may express themselves as they wish. Of the liberal participants, 70% did not consider this dialogue to be disrespectful, unusual or surprising. Male participant 5 responded to the dialogue by saying that “This doesn’t surprise me – the language is quite common I think. She’s obscene language because of her mistake, which is usually why people swear I think. Her choice of words is quite strong but understandable given the fact that she just realised that she opened the wrong bottle. It seems like a perfectly normal situation to me”.

### 5.3.5 Fifth dialogue: obscene language in solidarity in an informal work environment:

Worker #1: Goddamn weeds, so many Goddamn weeds!

Worker #2: Yeah, we should ask for a raise.



A variety of opinions emerged among the participants when participants considered the fifth dialogue. The liberal male participants perceived this language as understandable in the context of the dialogue. Several participants in this group commented on how strong language may be acceptable when completing a tiresome task. Within this group, 3 participants revealed that they use similar language when completing tedious or difficult tasks. Additionally, this group of participants explained that this language is not surprising given that that task at hand sounds time consuming and painstaking. Frustration was given as an example by several participants as a source of strong language. The dialogue was considered as typical among this group of participants due to the fatigue that the workers are experiencing whilst pulling out weeds. This group of participants indicated that they do not consider this type of language to be offensive. One of the participants in the group revealed that this type of language is common among workers performing manual labour on a daily basis and that this dialogue would therefore not be shocking. Male participant 17 responded to the dialogue by saying “this is quite typical but it would depend on the background and education of the people that are involved here. It is quite typical for workers to speak like this when completing a task that they find annoying I would imagine”.

The liberal female participants indicated that this language would not be appropriate when sitting at a dinner table. They did not however, consider the language to be offensive when used in the context that is described in the dialogue. This group perceived the language as typical for the speakers in the conversation and did not deem it to be inappropriate. Moreover, the language was described as harmless by this group of participants. One of the participants in this group indicated that this type of language is permissible because the co-workers have a casual relationship and there is no hierarchy present among the interlocutors. Female participant 7 responded to the dialogue by saying that “the relationship between these two coworkers seems casual so it is acceptable since it takes place as a work complaint without any hierarchy [in the] relationship”. It is evident that this specific group of individuals do not deem this type of language to be face damaging when used in this particular context.

The liberal male participants did not perceive this dialogue to be offensive. Several participants in this group commented on how this type of language has become prevalent in everyday conversation and therefore has lost its impact. These participants did not perceive this language to be shocking or unusual and consider the conversation to be typical for workers in this environment. One of the participants explained that the language could be seen as a comical



remark and as it is not directed at a particular individual it is not offensive or harmful. Additionally, there was consensus among this group of participants that the obscene language is used to convey mutual frustration with the task and it is not harmful to a group or individual. Male participant 1 responded by saying “well I guess it’s understandable that one needs an outlet when finishing a tiresome task, like these men who are gardening - although you shouldn’t really swear in your work environment. It is more acceptable to swear in your own space than in the place you work. Considering the context of the situation, the language doesn’t surprise me, it’s quite normal to swear when you are frustrated although its best to keep your language clean when you’re at work I think”. Male participant 3 had a similar reaction to this dialogue saying “this is typical, after a long day of hard work, it seems quite normal to me that you would swear because you’re just tired”. Male participant 7 responded in a similar manner saying that “this language doesn’t surprise me it seems quite typical of the characters who are present and the job they are doing”. It is evident that this type of language is not considered to be face threatening to this group of participants.

The conservative male and female participants perceived the language as controversial and disrespectful. The blasphemy was described as unnecessary and inappropriate. Several participants in this group indicated that blasphemy should be avoided and that this type of language is not appropriate under any circumstance. One of the female participants revealed that this type of language gave the impression that the speakers are not well educated and that they may not have a religious background. Female participant 16 responded by saying that “yes, well I find it surprising – I certainly would not use this type of language because I perceive it to be disrespectful”. Female participant 10 responded in a similar manner by saying that “I never use blasphemous language – even if I’m frustrated. The language surprises me because I would never use this type of language, specifically in public or in a work environment.”

### 5.3.6 Sixth dialogue: using homophobic hate speech as solidarity in a private setting:

Neighbour #1: Every day, every single day I have to greet this faggot’s stupid face.

Neighbour #2: Ditto.

The majority of both the male and the participants did not consider the obscene language in this dialogue to be appropriate. The use of the word “faggot” was perceived by most participants as offensive and surprising. Several participants revealed that they do not enjoy

hearing this type of language and that they consider it to be harmful. The majority of the participants considered this type of obscenity to be face threatening.

A portion of the liberal male participants revealed that they do not perceive the language to be offensive because of the setting in which the conversation occurs. Many of the participants in this group argued that it is a private discussion and that the speakers may express their sentiments in whichever language they wish. They argued that because the conversation occurs in a private space they are not harming a specific person or addressing someone directly. Male participant 5 responded to the dialogue by saying “I don’t think this language is harmful because it’s a private setting and no one is being harmed through the language. Several participants did however mention that it would not be acceptable to speak to a person and use the word “faggot” to refer to them directly. They render this language to be acceptable on the basis that it occurs in a private space. Several participants within this group explained that they consider “faggot” to be a figure of speech, which can be used merely to imply that they are annoyed, rather than as a reference to homosexual individuals. Male participant 1 responded to the language by saying “I suppose since the conversation is private they are free to call him what they like and use any language that they choose. The language isn’t surprising because it’s a private conversation and they are free to use any language they choose – they are not harming anyone in the process”. Female participant 4 responded to this dialogue by saying “I’ve heard and seen this often before so I’m not really surprised by the conversation”. This group of participants did not perceive this type of obscenity to be offensive due to the environment in which the conversation occurs. Several participants in the group identified the private setting that renders this use of obscene language to be acceptable.

The conservative male and female participants revealed that they do not perceive the word “faggot” to be permissible. This group of participants indicated that this type of language is shocking and unusual. One of the female participants indicated that this type of language can never be justified and it should be understood by all members of society that it is an unacceptable way to speak to another person. The majority of the participants in this group view the use of this word as offensive because it is seen as oppressive language and hateful to a specific group. A conservative male participant mentioned that he has only heard the word “faggot” in films and does not hear this type of language in spoken discourse. All of the participants in this group indicated that this type of language is surprising and unusual. Female participant 2 responded to the dialogue saying “I find it very offensive and I don’t really

understand how there are still people that use this type of language – surely it’s understood that it just isn’t okay to refer to people like this. I find it shocking actually that there are people who believe it to be justifiable. I don’t accept language that is used to oppress other people or language that is hateful to a group. It is never appropriate to use language like this – I find this dialogue shocking”. Male participant 3 responded in a similar manner by saying that “I don’t think hate speech is ever okay and I don’t approve of this type of language”.

### 5.3.7 Seventh dialogue: using hate speech against women in a private setting:

Student A: That girl is the worst – such a whore.

Student B: [laughs] Why, what happened?

Student A: Don’t you remember what happened at that dinner party?

The majority of the participants indicated that this dialogue is not surprising or unusual when considering the context and the speaker in the dialogue. Both the male and female participants perceived this language to be offensive and derogatory towards women. The language in the dialogue was described by several female participants as sexist, chauvinistic and unacceptable. Many of the female participants perceived this dialogue to be degrading towards women. The majority of the female participants revealed that this type of language seems typical for male students and that they might even use the term “whore” frequently. One of the liberal female participants explained that the use of this type of language demonstrates that gender inequality continues to infiltrate speech habits despite efforts to equalize the position between males and females. This participant responded to the dialogue by saying “I find this language very disrespectful towards women but I think it has become more typical the last few years. It shouldn’t be normal, but it seems to have become quite common. I think it demonstrates that there is still much gender inequality.” Female participant 10 responded to the dialogue by saying that the language is “degrading and sexist and very chauvinistic”. Several female participants strongly expressed that they did not approve of this type of language and consider it to be face threatening.

The liberal male participants indicated that it is not unusual or surprising to imagine that this is the type of language that would typically be used when referring to women that are disliked by male students. Several participants within this group revealed that they hear this often when they are with other male friends but that there are circumstances under which this type of

language is not appropriate. They explained that this type of language would not be used around parents. Male participant 1 responded to the dialogue by saying that “this language is not surprising, considering who the speakers are. Male students would probably use this type of language quite frequently. It is not unusual or surprising for me to imagine that this is the type of language that they would typically use when referring to women that they dislike. This seems to be very typical considering that the speakers are students”. Male participant 7 responded with a similar response by saying that “this is quite typical of boys I think. I hear this often when I’m with friends. There are obviously times when this is not really appropriate – like in very serious situations or when there are parents around. This type of thing is said when we’re just in our group so it isn’t really used to offend others”. This group of participants did not consider this type of language to be face damaging when used in this context.

There was consensus among 90% of the participants who partook in this stage of data collection that this dialogue is typical. The majority of the participants perceived this type of language to be disrespectful towards women as 80% of the participants revealed that they consider this language to be offensive. A mere 3% of the participants explained that they use this type of language occasionally around their peer group but that they would not use this type of language in formal or serious situations. There was a trend among the liberal participants who partook in this study obscene language is common when an individual is experiencing severe annoyance. This portion of participants emphasized that the language may be permissible due to heightened energy levels during crises.

#### 5.3.8 Participants’ perception of offensive language:

When asked about the (un)acceptability of obscene language, there was an inclination among the participants to explain that obscene language in a close relationship or in a household environment is unusual and unacceptable. The female participants were inclined to reveal that the use of obscenities in a close relationship is indicative of a dysfunctional relationship; the male participants tended to comment on how obscenities are not appropriate during conflict resolution; and there was consensus among the participants that obscene language may be detrimental when used in close relationships.

Further, physical location was identified by both the male and female participants as a variable that influence linguistic choices. The household environment was mentioned by the majority

of the participants as a location where speakers should not use crude or obscene language. The presence of children was identified by 60% of the female participants as a factor that should be considered when speaking, however, this variable was not mentioned by the male participants who partook in this stage of the data collection process.

The location was identified by both the male and female participants as a variable that influence linguistic choices. The household environment was mentioned by the majority of the participants as a location where speakers should not use crude or obscene language. The presence of children was identified by 60% of the female participants as a factor that should be considered when speaking. The variable was however not mentioned by the male participants who partook in this stage of the data collection process.

In line with this, the majority of the participants perceived the use of obscenities during the household environment (dialogue 4) as the most shocking dialogue as 55% of the participants indicated that this scenario was most unusual to them. The female participants in this group indicated that the presence of children rendered the language to be inappropriate as children often mimic the linguistic habits of their parents and family members. Several of these female participants mentioned that the parents should set an example with their behaviour and habits. The male participants in this group commented on the reaction of the mother using the word “Christ” when she realises that she has opened the wrong bottle of wine. They argued that this language indicates an overreaction in the context of her folly. Her mistake is not regarded by the male participants as a grave error and her language is therefore not warranted in the context of the situation.

The liberal female participants in this group commented on the use of crude language in a household context explaining they that deemed the language to be inappropriate. Their reasoning was that they believed that a household environment should have a warm and serene atmosphere. They argued that the wife’s language would not contribute in creating a calm atmosphere but perceived the language to be harsh. The religious participants in this group commented on the use of the word “Christ” explaining that blasphemy is not acceptable even for those who are not particularly religious as it is disrespectful to those who may have religious beliefs. This dialogue was considered to be the most offensive for the majority of the participants as there was consensus among the participants that this type of language is unnecessary in the context of a household dinner conversation. The religious participants

identified the use of blasphemous language as disrespectful and unacceptable. Several religious participants in this group explained that this type of language is inconsiderate to others who may be religious and that it is annoying when it is used as it does not serve any particular purpose. The use of blasphemous language is considered to be face threatening by the religious participants.

The second most surprising dialogue was the conversation between the wife and her husband as 15% of the participants considered this scenario to be unusual. The language used by the wife when speaking to her husband is considered to be disrespectful by most participants. The female participants mentioned that this type of language should not be used in a close relationship and that it may be evidence of a dysfunctional relationship. The male participants considered the language to be inappropriate in the context of the situation because they perceived it to be unnecessary. Furthermore, the male participants reasoned that a rational approach would be better suited and would succeed in resolving the issue. The majority of the participants indicated that this dialogue is shocking due to type of relationship that is present in the scenario and the lack of respect that the language demonstrates. The participants reasoned that this language should not occur in a close relationship and that this language will not be beneficial for the couple in any way.

The third most shocking dialogue was the conversation including homophobic language as 10% of the participants considered the term “faggot” to be highly offensive. They commented on the use of this term and were shocked that there are individuals who consider it appropriate to refer to others using homophobic language. The majority of these participants explained that they do not use this type of language and that they do not move in social circles where this type of language is acceptable. This term was described as oppressive and demoralising language. Furthermore, several participants explained that it is distressing and displays a complete lack of empathy and understanding for others.

The very liberal participants revealed that none of the situations seemed particularly unusual or shocking to them. These four participants explained that these dialogues seemed typical and that they did not seem unusual. They explained that the dialogues did not shock them and that they believe that these types of scenarios have become common nowadays. Additionally, they reasoned that in the context of the dialogue they did not consider the language to be abnormal or surprising.

None of the participants deemed apologizing after obscene language to be particularly offensive. Most participants commented on this habit by revealing that they believed this habit to be typical and normal in everyday situations. Many participants explained that they identify with the dialogue in which the father apologizes after obscene language. Moreover, the mentioned that they have had similar reactions in this situation themselves and that they do not consider obscene language in this manner to be highly offensive. Several female participants within this group indicated that this form of obscene language should not be considered offensive because the speaker does not wish to harm an individual or group through his utterance. There was consensus among the participants that this dialogue is not highly offensive.

#### 5.3.9 Obscene terms that this group of participants would not use:

The majority of the participants indicated that they would not use blasphemous language. Of the 20 participants who partook in this stage of the data collection, 55% indicated that they would not use blasphemous language. This language was described as disrespectful and uncalled for by this group of participants. All the participants who indicated that they are religious revealed that they would never use blasphemous language. Their reasoning for this statement was because of their religious beliefs they deemed it to be disrespectful. The terms *Jesus, Christ, God, Lord* and *Goddamn-it* were given as examples of blasphemy that these participants would not use. There was a trend among both religious and non – religious participants to avoid using blasphemous language. Several participants perceived this type of language inconsiderate and careless towards others. The religious participants particularly identified the use of blasphemous language as disrespectful and unacceptable. Several religious participants in this group explained that this type of language is inconsiderate to others who may be religious and that it is annoying when it is used as it does not serve any particular purpose.

A common trend among the participants was the inclination to avoid language that may harm a specific group or cause an individual to feel inferior. Of the 20 participants who partook in the study 40% indicated that they would not use derogatory language that will offend others. Several participants mentioned that they do not deem racist language to be acceptable under any circumstances and that they avoid using this type of language. The term *nigger* was given as an example of a racist term that participants would not use under any conditions. Several



participants revealed that they consider those who use racist language to be prejudiced and uneducated.

An inclination among female participants was to avoid using words related to body parts, sexually related words and orientation slurs. The terms *cunt*, *fag*, *pussy* and *dyke* were mentioned here by these participants as examples of words that they would avoid using. Their reasoning for avoiding these terms was that they perceive these words as degrading to women and to minority groups. This group of participants explained that they did not deem language that offends a group or individual to be acceptable. Moreover, this group of participants explained that they would not use terms that have historically been used to oppress, shame or demean others.

An inclination among the very conservative participants was to avoid habitual obscene language completely. These participants explained that they do not have a habit of obscene language or that they do not swear frequently when speaking. One of the females within this group explained that she used expressive words to convey her emotions and that she did not believe that obscene language is ever necessary. Many of these participants argued that there are various means of conveying an idea and that sentences can be articulated without the inclusion of obscenities.

#### 5.3.10 Participants' perceptions of others that use obscenities:

The majority of the participants indicated that they would not form a positive perception of others who use obscene language. Several participants explained that they would feel disgust and disappointment towards the speaker. Many of the female participants revealed that they would not befriend an individual who used this type of language on a regular basis. Of the participants who partook in the study 35% revealed that they would feel sympathy toward the group or individual towards whom the language was directed. Several participants explained that this feeling would be coupled with frustration and disrespect towards the speaker using the offensive language. The liberal female participants mentioned that they would feel annoyance when hearing offensive language because the speaker is aware of the value that is placed on the word. The female participants gave lengthy responses in comparison with their male counterparts and their answers reflected stronger sentiments with regards to offensive



language. There was an inclination among the conservative female participants to explain that they felt uncomfortable and awkward when they are exposed to offensive language.

Several liberal male participants revealed that they do not form an opinion of another person based solely on their speech habits. Of the 20 participants who partook in this stage of the data collection process, 6 males revealed that they do not form an opinion of others based on their lexical choices but rather on personality traits and behaviour. One of these participants mentioned that speech habits do not influence his opinion of others as he does not attach emotion to specific words or terms. Several male participants revealed that their perception would be dependent on the tone that was used by the speaker when articulating the offensive language. The male participants in this group indicated that often offensive language should be viewed as a figure of speech rather than a reflection of malice. The male participants were less perturbed by offensive language than the female participants.

#### 5.3.11 Most preferable obscenities among the participants:

The most preferable swear word among this group of participants was the word *shit* as 50% of the participants indicated that they use this swear word the most frequently. The majority of the participants revealed that this word is used because it's sharp and is not offensive to a specific group or individual. The conservative female participants who partook in the study revealed that they use this term when they experience a negative feeling or hurt themselves. One of the moderately liberal female explained that her most preferable form of this word is *shitload*, which she says is an expressive term used to describe a busy schedule.

The majority of the participants indicated that they preferred this term comparatively with other obscenities because they perceive it to be less offensive. Several female participants added that the word is not demeaning or oppressive in any way and that it is therefore less harmful than several other obscenities. The participants indicated that they use this word to express contempt, annoyance or as a means to temporarily relieve physical pain.

The second most preferable swear word among this group of participants is the term *fuck*, as 40% of the participants indicated that they use variations of this word frequently. The majority of the participants indicated that this word can be used to effectively to convey feelings or sentiments towards a particular subject. The participants within this group explained that they

use this term because it is versatile and can be used to form expressive descriptions. The female participants in this group explained that the word *fuck* is adjustable and can thus be used in various forms.

One of the female participants revealed that her most preferred swear word is *fok*, which she uses when experiencing frustration to create humour. She explained that because the word is comedic when used in an English sentence because its origin is Afrikaans. Additionally, she explained that the word is pragmatically useful because it can be used in various forms. Lastly, this participant mentioned that she would not use it to offend an individual directly but would limit its usage for descriptive purposes.

The male participants within this group explained that they use this term most frequently around their friends as they will appreciate this type of language. Several participants explained that certain friends are more accepting of this type of language than others and that it should be used judiciously when speaking. Moreover, these participants explained that friends who are more traditional in their habits and belief systems would not appreciate this type of language. They would therefore refrain from using variations of the word *fuck* in their company. Furthermore, this group of participants explained that they would use this word around individuals that would not judge them for using this word. One of the male participants within this group argued that the word *fuck* has lost its brutality due to its frequency of use and is therefore not considered to be a highly offensive word in his opinion.

Several participants revealed that they use the term *asshole* most frequently. Of the 20 participants who partook in the study, 5 males indicated that this is the swear word they use most often. They explained that the term is useful when an individual displays stupidity or as a way of relieving tension after having dealt with a challenging situation.

Two of the very conservative female participants revealed that they do not swear. Occasionally however they admitted to using the word *damn* or *darn* to express annoyance, irritation or unwanted emotions. One of these females explained that she refrains from using this word when she is in public spaces and limits its usage to her home environment. Moreover, she explained that she censors her language in most conversation and refrains from using any crude language in formal situations and her office environment.

### 5.3.12 Perceptions regarding the function of obscene language:

According to the majority of the participants, frustration is perceived to be the main function of obscene language. The male participants within this group explained that they believed that obscene language is used as a means by which to relieve anger or to vent. The female participants however, indicated that they thought releasing sudden bursts of emotion was the most common purpose of obscene language. Many of these female participants explained that obscene language is used most frequently to release negative energy during challenging situations. Many of the male participants mentioned that the feeling of impatience was the most common source of obscene language and offensive language. This group of participants added that exaggeration was a common source of obscene language to emphasize emotional disposition towards a situation or phenomenon.

All of the participants that partook in this study indicated that there are situations in which they would not swear. The majority of the participants indicated that they would not swear during formal situations or in the presence of authority figures. The male participants were inclined to explain that they would not swear in front of authority figures. Job interviews, interactions with employers and meetings with colleagues were mentioned as examples of scenarios in which they would refrain from obscene language.

The female participants were inclined to reveal that they would not swear in the company of elderly people or in the presence of children. Their reasoning was that it is disrespectful to swear in the presence of parents or elderly people. Moreover, this group of females explained that adults should censor their language carefully in the presence of children as they may not have the insight to understand the controversial language and cannot interpret the emotions that are coupled with the obscenities. The female participants were inclined to mention family orientated situations when explaining under which circumstances they would not swear. The male participants however, were inclined to mention work related environments when commenting on the types of situations in which they would refrain from obscene language.

### 5.3.13 Similarities and trends among the participants:

Several liberal male participants explained that obscene language can be highly effective when used appropriately. They explained that obscene language can be comedic, entertaining and

can lighten an atmosphere. In addition, they explained that obscene language can be used to establish a casual and laid back environment. Moreover, obscene language should not be perceived as offensive when used in the appropriate context. This group of participants added that obscenities should not be removed from speech entirely as it serves as a useful mechanism to convey emotions. This group of participants revealed that they swear mostly in situations where their peer group is present because this type of language is used frequently by the group.

The majority of the liberal female participants revealed that they do not support oppressive language or hate speech. They explained that they believe obscene language to be permissible in situations where it is not harmful to others. They added that obscene language can create a positive impression of a speaker when it is used to convey passion about a subject. Two of the liberal female participants mentioned that they hoped that they could conjure up new, imaginative obscenities. They explained that typical obscenities are currently over used and have thus lost their appeal. These two females explained that they condone obscene language as a means of adding emphasis to a description or situation but that they did not deem it appropriate to swear with the purpose of offending others. Several liberal female participants commented on the use of obscene language in plays and films, explaining that obscenities are a useful tool in these mediums as the audience can relate to the characters through their strong language.

One of the very liberal male participants explained that cannot discern exactly which obscenities may be appropriate for a particular situation. He revealed that it would be helpful to establish a universal set of guidelines that could be followed during interactions to establish whether specific words are appropriate in particular situations. He admitted that he has unintentionally offended others in situations without aiming to cause any harm.

Several conservative female participants explained that habitual obscene language is unacceptable and that it creates a negative impression of the speaker. These female participants argued that speakers should not swear habitually as it may offend others unnecessarily. Several conservative female participants added that there are alternative semantic combinations that can be used rather than using obscene language. A few of these participants revealed that there are linguistic combinations that can produce the same effect as a swear word without offending others.

One of the conservative male participants revealed that he occasionally swears accidentally. He explained that he hopes to break this habit of accidental obscene language as he fears that it may happen unexpectedly during formal situations. He added that he considered a person to be unattractive if they swear constantly when speaking to him. In addition, he explained that he admires speakers who can exercise self-restraint by refraining from obscene language habitually.

#### 5.4 Results from focus group:

The third stage of the data collection process included a focus group. The participants involved in the focus group were recruited from the social network of the researcher. The group consisted of 4 males and 4 female participants who were willing to partake in this stage of the study. The participants were informed about the nature of the topic under discussion prior to the focus group.

The participants were welcomed by the researcher and asked to sit down. They were informed that their names would not be used in the research paper and that they may opt out of the focus group at any point should they prefer not to continue. They were then each presented with a piece of paper clearly stating the subject that would be discussed. They were asked to speak freely about the subject and discuss any relevant aspects of obscene language that come to mind. The researcher then switched on the recording device and the participants were able to begin their discussion.

##### 5.4.1 Discussion of racial slurs:

The discussion produced various opinions regarding the subject of obscene language as it functions in South African society and what is presently considered to constitute obscene language. There was consensus among the participants that derogatory language aimed at a particular group or individual is not acceptable under any given circumstances. There was a strong agreement among the participants that racist terms are unacceptable, particularly in the South African conversational landscape. The political history of South Africa was mentioned as one of the variables that significantly influences speech habits. Furthermore, the participants agreed that it is not socially acceptable to use terms or phrases that marginalize a group that has been socially oppressed.

This group of participants were particularly sensitive about racial and ethnic slurs that were previously used in South Africa [during the oppressive political regime of the 1980s and 1990s]. This language was described by male participant 1 as hate speech as it incites harm and promotes hatred. It was agreed during the discussion that this type of language degrades, undermines and may strip individuals of their dignity and humanity. The participants referred to the *K – word* as a term that is racially offensive as it was previously used in an injurious sense in South Africa. Moreover, the participants agreed that this word was previously used to hurt and denigrate Africans. Female participant 2 explained that recent political movements, such as ‘fees must fall’, enlighten society about inequalities that previously prevailed and successfully raise awareness with regards to inequalities [which may inadvertently infiltrate into spoken discourse].

The focus of the discussion gradually moved toward other examples of racial terms that have been used. The term *Nigger* was discussed in terms of whether it is an appropriate word to use conversationally. Two different outlooks were aroused by this term as half of the participants expressed that this word is unacceptable. The other participants argued that the context of the word would influence whether it is acceptable to be used. Both views were substantiated with socio – cultural ideals.

The four participants who argued that this word is unacceptable based their sentiment on the historical background of the term. [The word was used in a derogatory manner as a racial slur against black persons during the Atlantic slave trade. The word has since then been used as an insult toward those of African descent. Historically the term *Nigger* defined and ridiculed black persons]. These participants agreed that this word remains an expression of racism and that its usage conveys explicit devaluation. Moreover, these participants explained that this term reflects the extent of anti – Black prejudice that has prevailed in several parts of the globe. These four participants attempted to substantiate their sentiment by explaining that the historical background of a word should be considered when determining its appropriateness. According to these participants it can be understood as a term of exclusion and discrimination. They agreed that the term should not be used as it strengthens the hatred that previously prevailed. Their view regarding this word was therefore that it may never be used in any form of written or spoken discourse.

The other four participants responded by agreeing with the basic premises of this argument, although they offered a more diversified view explaining that there are circumstances under which they deem this word to be appropriate. They agreed that this word indeed has been used in an oppressive manner historically and that it has been used to demean others in the past. They agreed that the term *Nigger* should not be used to denigrate or shame others. These four participants agreed with the other participants that the word has a negative connotation when it is used in this context.

However, they argued that the process of determining the aptness of a term involves the consideration of other variables. They argued that the historical background of a given word should be considered along with the intention and tone that are conveyed by the speaker. Additionally, they explained that the historical background alone cannot contextualize a term in every domain of its use and should therefore be considered in terms of the objective and attitude of the speaker.

This group of participants argued that the word *Nigger* has been reformed in popular culture after a period of relative dormancy in which it was not used. The participants commented on the use of this term in films and on social media platforms, explaining that it is not used in a derogatory manner but has become a term of empowerment. The connotations of this word as it is used in present times were described by female participant 3 as ‘hard edged’ and ‘streetwise’. The participants explained that in their opinion the word *Nigger* has been used to desensitize the derogatory meaning behind it. They argued that the term has become a widely used form of slang and was popularized by hip hop artists and well known comedians. They argued that the word is synonymous with the terms ‘friend’ or ‘mate’ and that in this context it is not used to incite harm. Furthermore, they explained that it cannot be considered as hate speech when it is used to foster solidarity or camaraderie. They did however explain that this term is reserved for usage only to those belonging to the black ethnic group. Their perception of the word is that it has become a term of positive endearment for those belonging to this group.

All the participants agreed that it is not socially acceptable to use terms or phrases that marginalize a group that has been socially oppressed. They agreed that the term *Nigger* should not be used as a form of oppression. There were however two different outlooks that emerged from the conversation. Four of the participants had a stringent opinion of this word as they

view it to be an expression of racism and it conveys explicit devaluation. The other participants however argued that the word's meaning has been reformed to desensitize the derogatory meaning behind it. There were thus two strong opinions that emerged from the focus group about the use of this obscenity as it is used conversationally.

#### 5.4.2 Discussion of derogatory phrases:

The focus of the discussion was then directed towards words and phrases that have previously been used in an oppressive sense but that are presently used in a comedic sense conversationally. The participants commented on how terms that were previously used to refer to minority groups in a derogatory manner have been reformed and are used in a playful sense. The participants gave opinions with regard to the use of obscene language when it fulfills the function of teasing in a playful tone. Several points were raised by this group of participants which lead to the deduction that these types of obscenities in this context should be used with caution. The participants agreed that these terms are used by their peers in a lackadaisical fashion without a thorough understanding of the connotations of the word.

At the outset the participants discussed the origins of many of these types obscene terms. The participants commented on the use of this type of language among their peers. The words *lame*, *retard*, *gay* and *faggot* were given as examples of obscenities that are used in daily conversations among their respective peer groups. [These words were previously used as derogatory terms to refer to homosexual males, mentally retarded individuals and those who are physically disabled].

Four of the participants emphasized the notion that these words should not be used conversationally as they have negative connotations attached to them. It was argued that their origin stems from a discrimination towards these particular groups and that their usage is therefore not acceptable. The terms *gay* and *faggot* were previously used aggressively by anti – gay extremists who believed that homosexual individuals were diseased or psychologically ill. These four participants argued that these terms should not be used under any conditions as these obscenities have historically been used to denigrate these groups. The participants then discussed the use of these words by their peers when they are used in jest. These terms are not used to refer to an individual's sexual orientation and are not used to incite shame. The participants explained that their peers use it to tease others in their social group in a jovial



manner. The participants argued that the words are not used to harm others or to discriminate against a particular group or individual.

Several participants argued that the word *retard* should not be used under any circumstances. They argued that it is considered to be hate speech as it offends those with intellectual and developmental disabilities and thereby alienates and excludes them. Moreover, these participants added that the term has become a casual description for that which is flawed or negative. The focus of the discussion then moved towards the intention that underlies this type of language when it is used. The participants argued that they have heard their peers use this word in a playful sense. The word *retard* is used in jest by adolescents to tease another individual for a mishap. They argued that the intention underlying the word when used in this context is for banter and to create a lighthearted atmosphere.

Four of the participants argued that the word is not used in this context to refer to someone who is mentally disabled. They argued that their peers use it as a form of positive endearment towards a member of their group when they have made a mistake of some kind. The meaning of the word has therefore been redefined as it does not carry the oppressive connotation of its historical origin. Male participant 2 explained that the word is not meant in its literal sense but rather “just for banter”. The objective of the speaker in this context is to generate and build repartee. The tone that is conveyed by the speaker is cheerful and his message is jovial. The participants therefore inferred that a speaker should not be chastised for using this word, however speakers should be weary of the tone that is used when expressing this term as it may offend listeners who do not understand the meaning of the word in this context.

After discussing these examples and the contexts in which they occur the participants deduced that the appropriateness of a given word must be examined within the context and the environment within which it is uttered. The historical background must be considered along with the intention and tone in which these obscenities are used. Female participant 4 explained that she didn’t think terms “like ‘gay’, or ‘faggot’ should ever be used to mock a person’s sexuality”. The participants agreed that the words *faggot* and *gay* should not be used to incite hate towards those of a particular sexual orientation.

### 5.4.3 Discussion of obscenities used in conversation:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards obscene language that is frequently used in daily conversation. The participants mentioned *shit* and *fuck* as examples of obscenities that are regularly used within their social environments. Female participant 2 described these words as “light obscenities” and that they are “harmless”. These two words were identified by the participants as the most frequently used obscenities among their peers. Male participant 2 explained that he “use[s] those words daily and hear[s] them often”. Two different outlooks emerged regarding the use and appropriateness of these words. Five of the participants argued that there are alternative semantic combinations that should be used to replace these words. The other participants argued that the context in which the word is used will determine whether it should be used. The participants deduced that these words can be used in contexts in which they do not cause offense or harm to other interlocutors of a given conversation.

The participants identified *shit* and *fuck* as words that they hear very frequently on a daily basis. Female participant 2 noted that “these words are used in social environments, included on social media platforms and in popular films”. Female participant 1 revealed that the words are not necessarily used to refer to “their literal meanings” but rather that they are often used in a metaphorical sense. These words are used mostly to convey a particular “feeling or sentiment with regards to a subject” that is being discussed according to the participants. The words are viewed as instruments to convey an emotional charge by this group. Several participants revealed that these words are part of their daily lexicon and that they use these words frequently. The participants that use these words regularly admitted that frequent exposure to these terms resulted in an increase of their implementation in their spoken discourse. Male participant 2 and female participant 3 explained that they are confronted with these words in their “daily social environments”.

A distinct view that emerged from the discussion related to alternative semantic combinations that speakers can use to replace obscene terms. The participants that advocated this idea proposed that there are various synonyms that can be used to refer to an idea or phenomenon. Subsequently, they argued that speakers have several semantic choices at their disposal when articulating thoughts. These participants maintained that an expression may have stronger as well as mitigated versions as female participant 4 explained that in her opinion “most ideas can be expressed in a harsh and mitigated form”. They therefore argued that speakers can articulate

ideas and refer to entities without evoking negative connotations in the minds of those they are addressing. Female participant 4 explained that speakers can “make a statement conveying [their] sentiment without being crude”. This group of participants argued that speakers should alleviate negative connotations from their spoken discourse by avoiding obscenities and replacing these terms with their milder linguistic counterparts. Female participant 1 suggested that “offense can be avoided by removing all obscenity from your speech”. There was consensus among this group of participants that obscenities like *shit* and *fuck* should be avoided from spoken discourse and should be replaced with milder linguistic forms.

The other participants responded to this idea by explaining that obscene language offers the speaker the option of evoking an emotional response in an audience. They explained that it may be useful to convey distress during certain scenarios. Male participant 4 explained argued that “obscene language can be useful depending on the objective [that] the speaker” wishes to fulfill when addressing the listener. This group of participants argued that obscenities may assist a speaker in achieving a specific communicative goal by subjecting the listener to the negative connotations that are conveyed through the language. Male participant 3 argued that “the speaker may need to express an unpleasant idea”. Their view is rooted in the need that speakers may have to express negative ideas or thoughts.

The participants then discussed the possible outcomes of using these terms during interactions. The effect that these terms may have on listeners was discussed in detail. Several participants revealed that the use of these terms indicates a typicality of their peer group and may foster camaraderie between members of the group. Female participant 2 explained that “language may be relative to the group of individuals that are present”. The participants discussed the capacity of these words to charge language with emotion or create humour during conversation. The focus of the discussion then moved towards negative effects that this type of language may have on an individual or audience.

Four of the participants in the focus group explained that the terms *shit* and *fuck* are typical words in the jargon that has been adopted by their friends. They explained that the use of these terms is not considered to be strange or shocking. These terms are therefore familiar to this group of individuals. The participants revealed that their respective peer groups use jargon that is specific to their group. They explained that the regular use of certain words is a means of solidifying membership to their group and that these words are not considered to be offensive.

Additionally, they explained that close friendships allow for strict norms to be breached. The use of obscene language creates a relaxed environment and allows controversial terms to be appropriate. Female participant 1 “suggested that obscene language creates a less formal environment” and thereby allows for controversial terms to be appropriate. It is evident that these participants view the use of these words as a means to confirming their social identity within a particular group or community.

The participants discussed the descriptive purpose served by these words. Several participants explained that these words are used because they carry a powerful emotional charge in a given sentence. They agreed that aggression and anger can be conveyed easily through the implementation of these words into spoken discourse. The participants explained that these obscenities are often used among their friends to convey strong emotion with regards to a subject. Sport events or games were identified as activities where these words are used particularly frequently.

#### 5.4.4 Discussion of obscenities during social events:

The participants discussed sport as an activity that often evoked strong language within the ranks of spectators. Several participants mentioned that they watched rugby and soccer matches with friends on a regular basis. The participants agreed that emotions are elevated and heightened as the match progresses. Male participant 1 explained that “obscenities are used more often when watching sport”. The audience becomes invested and engrossed in the performance of the team they support. The participants explained that spectators can become anxious whilst watching their team and may even become restless during the match. Male participant 2 explained that he becomes invested in the outcomes of the match which may influence [his] speech.” The heightened energy evoked by the match may influence the behavior of the audience. Several participants explained that one of the behavioral elements that is most effected by the high anxiety is undoubtedly the language that is used during the course of the match.

The participants revealed that their peers become invested in the progression of the match. This emotional investment in the sports match is clear in their diction. Their language is described as “cryptic, expressive” and “crude” by two of the participants. The words *shit* and *fuck* were identified as obscenities that are frequently used during sport by female participant 3. The

words are often used in response “to an action on the playing field” according to male participant 3. Male participant 4 agreed with this idea by explaining that in his opinion “the language will reveal the speaker’s sentiment towards the progression of the match”. The participants explained that these words are “used repeatedly when the opposing team performs well” or scores points. Additionally, the participants revealed that these obscenities are used to express positive emotions during the match. These terms are used to convey excitement when their team performs well or scores points. The participants discussed the implications and functions that these words serve when they are used in this context.

The participants agreed that these sport orientated activities are attended and enjoyed mostly by males. This suggested that the South African sport community is strongly supported by males who convene to share team spirit. Female participant 4 argued that because this activity is a male dominated interest “the language is typically crasser” by nature. Several participants explained that these words serve a cathartic function when they are used in this context. Male participant 2 explained that these “terms release emotion” when they are used in the environment. He argued that these words are not used to offend or “insult others but rather to express passion” and excitement. The participants therefore agreed that these words are appropriate when they are used in this context as they are not directed at particular individuals.

The participants deduced that the terms *shit* and *fuck* are not considered to be offensive when these terms are uttered in isolation. Their usage is rendered to be offensive when they are used with reference to a particular subject. The participants discussed the phenomenon of insults in spoken discourse. They agreed that obscenities are often used as a mechanism to offend or shame others. The participants agreed that obscenities are considered to be offensive when they are used with reference to an individual. These terms are used to form curses or to enhance insults with greater emotion. They agreed that these terms are considered offensive when used to demean a group or individual. They concluded that the intention of the speaker should be examined when determining the offensiveness of the obscene word or phrase.

#### 5.4.5 Discussion of gender as a factor that may influence the use of obscene language:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards gender as an element that may influence the use of obscenities. The participants agreed that males used obscenities more liberally than females in the South African conversational landscape. Female participant 1 explained that she

“hear[s] her male friends using obscenities far more often than [her] female friends”. She explained that in her opinion females are “more inclined to use obscene language more often because gender dynamics have significantly transformed in recent years”. The participants agreed that within their peer groups both males and females incorporated obscenities into their speech. Male participant 3 explained that in his opinion “females use[d] milder obscenities than males”. The participants concluded that males used stronger obscenities than their female counterparts.

The focus of the discussion then moved towards circumstances in which the participants would not use any form of obscenity. Several examples were given of situations in which the participants would avoid using obscene language. Female participant 1 explained that she would not use obscene language in “the presence of parents or elderly persons”. This was mentioned as a variable which would influence the type of language that is used. In addition, “the formality of the environment” was mentioned by male participant 2 as an example of whether obscene language would be used. The majority of the participants revealed that speakers should tailor their language according to the expectations of a given scenario.

#### 5.4.6 Discussion of obscene language in the presence of parents or elderly persons:

The participants discussed the use of obscenities in the presence of parents or elderly persons. The majority of the participants agreed that there is a social distance between them and their parents. Male participant 2 explained that there is “a hierarchical gap between [him] and [his] parents”. They reasoned that their parents did not use strong obscenities in their household environments and thereby set a precedent for the type of language that they considered to be appropriate. Female participant 3 explained that she “refrain[s] from using harsh obscenities in the presence of [her] parents” and that habitual obscene language occurred mostly in the company of their friends. Several participants however agreed they would comfortably use crass language in the presence of their parents under certain conditions, although they would refrain from using severely strong language. These participants explained that during alarming situations they would use milder obscenities in their household environments. Male participant 2 explained that during “stressful situations [he] uses crude language” in his home environment. The participants agreed that using severely strong language would result in disapproval from their parents and would be perceived as disrespectful. Female participant 1

explained that her “parents consider obscenities to be disrespectful” when used in their household.

The participants agreed that they would avoid using obscenities in the presence of elderly persons. They attributed this change in linguistic preference to the age and social gap prevalent under these conditions. The participants recognized that obscenities are more socially acceptable to adolescents than to elderly persons who are accustomed to vastly different social norms. Female participant 3 explained that elderly persons would “not understand the context of the obscenities” that are used by adolescents and that this type of language would be considered disrespectful. The participants agreed that they would refrain from using any form of obscene language in the presence of elderly persons. The use of obscenities by adolescents in the presence of elderly persons was considered to be a social norm violation by the participants in the focus group.

The participants discussed the formality of a situation as a variable that would influence the type of language that they would use. Female participant 4 explained she will “avoid using obscenities during formal situations” due to the serious atmosphere that prevails in these environments. Several participants mentioned that they would not use obscenities during a job interview or in their working environment. They argued that their objective during these types of situations would be to influence their employer or colleagues in a positive manner. Male participant 3 explained that in his opinion the use of obscenities “may negatively influence the impression that is formed” during formal situations. Several participants argued that they would use obscenities solely during interactions with individuals that they are close with. The participants deduced that they would avoid using obscenities due to the social gap prevalent in these interactions.

#### 5.4.7 Discussion of blasphemous language:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards blasphemous language and its use in conversation. There was controversy regarding the use of blasphemous language among the participants. Two outlooks emerged from the conversation. Four of the participants explained that they perceived this type of language to be inconsiderate and unnecessary. The other participants argued that speakers should be free to use this type of language without judgment



from others. The participants did not reach a consensus regarding the subject of blasphemous language.

The participants discussed the use of blasphemous language as it is used conversationally. The terms *Jesus*, *Jirre*, *Christ* and *God* were given as examples of blasphemous terms that are frequently used conversationally in their social circles. Male participant 3 explained that in his opinion “these terms are used as a means of expressing surprise or shock” during alarming situations. Four of the participants explained that they did not consider this type of language to be acceptable as it is disrespectful to religious groups. Female participant 1 expressed that she “does not believe it to be appropriate under any circumstances to use blasphemous language”. She explained that there are several means of articulating surprise that would not be offensive. Female participant 4 explained that in her opinion the articulation of a blasphemous term would “not alleviate the alarm” that catalyzed the obscenity. These participants therefore argued that speakers should avoid using any form of blasphemy and should rely on other words or means of expressing their surprise. These participants inferred that speakers could express their shock by descriptive phrases. They deduced that in this manner, speakers can achieve their communicative goals without causing offense to others in their social environment.

Two of the male participants explained that they did not consider blasphemy to be offensive when it is used to convey surprise. Male participant 3 explained that in this context the word serves a cathartic purpose of expressing their shock in a given situation. His argument was rooted in the idea that blasphemous terms do not serve the purpose of demeaning a group or individual but merely serve as a mechanism to convey an emotion. He argued that the use of blasphemy in this context should be considered “a means of communication”. Moreover, they argued that blasphemous terms are emotionally charged due to their controversial nature. These words therefore serve as effective vehicles to accurately convey a strong sentiment. The participants did not reach consensus with regards to the use of function of blasphemous language.

#### 5.4.8 Discussion of the function of obscenities during conversation:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards the function of obscenities. The participants discussed the various purposes that this type of language can serve in spoken discourse. Several participants indicated that they use obscene language to enhance descriptions during



conversation. They discussed the use of obscene language to create a casual and lighthearted atmosphere. The use of obscenities to strengthen group dynamics and relationships was mentioned as a function of this type of language. Lastly, the participants discussed the use of obscene language during challenging or frustrating situations.

The participants discussed the use of obscenities to enhance descriptions during conversations. Several participants explained that obscenities serve as a mechanism to strengthen descriptions as they carry an emotional charge. They mentioned that obscenities can be included into spoken discourse to emphasize and draw attention to certain aspects of a description. Male participant 3 explained that he can “add emphasis to a description” by using an obscenity. The speaker can dramatize or emphasize particular points during interactions with others by incorporating obscene language into parts of a story. The participants agreed that speakers in their social circle implement obscenities to fulfill this communicative goal.

Additionally, the participants discussed the function of obscenities to create a casual atmosphere during a social gathering. They agreed that obscene language is controversial by nature and that its usage automatically renders an environment to be informal. Male participant 2 explained that obscenities “create a casual environment”. The participants conveyed that obscenities were frequently used in their social circles for the purpose of creating a laid back atmosphere. They mentioned that speakers often use obscene language to establish a relaxed environment. Male participant 4 explained that in his opinion an audience or group of people is “more relaxed when addressed in casual language”. The participants concluded that obscene language can fulfill the function of creating an informal atmosphere.

#### 5.4.9 Discussion of obscenities to foster solidarity:

The participants discussed the use of obscenities to strengthen group dynamics and relationships. Several participants explained that linguistic habits are popularized through their frequent use among popular culture. They agreed that this usage infiltrates into their daily conversation and interactions in their social environments. Furthermore, this language is fostered through its repeated usage in their peer groups. Male participant 4 explained in his circle of friends the use of “obscenities and slang strengthens their membership to the group”. They agreed that obscenities gain popularity through their circulation in their social groups.

Male participant 3 explains that a certain word or term will become popular “through its usage on social media by members of the friend group.

#### 5.4.10 Discussion of obscenities to alleviate frustration:

The participants discussed the use of obscene language as a mechanism to alleviate frustration during challenging situations. Several participants mentioned that they use obscene language when they experience physical pain as a response to that which they are feeling. They argued that obscene language is used in this context to alleviate unwanted feelings or emotions. Male participant 1 explained that “obscene language is a response to pain”. He explained that he often uses obscenities when he experiences “physical pain or annoyance”. Female participant 2 explained that she “swears unintentionally when [she] experiences surprise or shock”. The participants drew the conclusion that obscenities are used in this context as a means of temporary pain relief and the release of unwanted emotions.

#### 5.4.11 Discussion of derogatory language towards women:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards language that may be derogatory towards women. There was consensus among the participants that language should reflect respect for both genders. They agreed that derogatory language should be avoided and mentioned examples of obscenities that should be avoided. The participants agreed that derogatory language prevails occasionally during interactions in their social circles. Furthermore, they commented on the disregard and ignorance toward appropriate gender related terminology in their social circles.

The participants discussed the use of obscenities that are directed at females. Several participants commented on gender inequalities that have permeated into spoken discourse. Female participant 3 explained that females are often “slandered for promiscuous activity during conversation”. The notion that females are slandered for promiscuous activity was discussed by the participants. They listed *whore*, *ho*, *slut*, *los*, and *loose* as examples of obscenities that are used in their social circles. Female participant 2 expressed that in her opinion this language is used “to shame women”. The participants discussed the use of this type of language to refer to females who have violated the traditional expectations for sexual behavior. This type of language is used to refer to females who have violated the traditional

expectations for sexual behavior. The participants agreed that obscene language is occasionally used to refer to females who have transgressed the accepted norms for appropriate sexual conduct.

The participants discussed the use of this type of language on social media platforms. Several participants discussed the popularization of these terms through popular culture and films. The participants agreed that these obscenities are used nonchalantly on various social media platforms. The terms become normalized through their frequent usage on various platforms.

The female participants involved in the discussion explained that they rarely use this type of language. Female participant 4 said that she “never uses language that could be demeaning to women”. The female participants considered this type of language to be offensive and avoid using this type of language. The male participants explained that these terms are occasionally used in their social circles. The male participants added that these terms are rarely used in the company of females and that they are predominantly used in single sex groups.

This language reflects a negative perception of the female that is being discussed. The participants agreed that the use of this language can result in social isolation for the females under scrutiny. Additionally, they agreed that males do not face the risk of being slandered for their sexual behavior. There was consensus among the participants that these obscenities should not be used to refer to females. They agreed that these terms are used nonchalantly without regard of the implications that the use of this language may have on the female at whom the language is directed.

#### 5.4.12 Discussion of obscenities in films:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards the use of obscenities in current films and television shows. The participants agreed that current films include strong language and obscenities. Two outlooks emerged from the discussion of obscene language as it is used in modern films. Four of the participants explained that strict censorship may impede the director’s capacity to accurately convey a particular message. The other participants argued that films should be harshly censored as this type of language creates a negative precedent for acceptable behavior. There was clear controversy regarding the inclusion of this type of language in modern films.

#### 5.4.13 Discussion of self – control during conversation:

The focus of the discussion then moved towards the notion of self-control during interactions. Two outlooks emerged from the discussion of self-control during spoken discourse. Four of the participants explained that speakers should be mindful of their environment and should always discipline themselves during interactions. These participants argued that the regular use of obscene language indicates that a speaker does not have self-control. The other participants explained that speakers should not be impeded by their own censorship when communicating. They argued that speakers should articulate their ideas without inhibiting their capacity to express themselves.

The discussion was concluded by articulating which factors speakers should consider when discerning which type of language to use in particular situations. The participants agreed that speakers should consider certain elements of their immediate environment when deciding how they should express themselves. Female participant 3 explained that in her opinion obscenities should be “used cautiously” as they are “not appropriate or useful in all contexts”. They agreed that the formality and age group are the most significant aspects to consider when discerning which type of language to be appropriate in a given scenario. Male participant 1 explained that the “formality of the environment” and “age of the [addressee] will influence the type of language that should be used. In addition, there was consensus that speakers should use obscenities sparingly and that obscenities should not be used constantly during spoken discourse. The researcher then greeted and thanked the eight individuals for participating in the data collection procedure.

## Chapter 6:

## Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction:

This study aimed to examine the perception of obscene language as it functions in South African society. Specifically, it sought to discern what is presently considered to constitute obscene language and how individuals view this type of language. The perception of particular obscenities was analysed within different contexts to ascertain how individuals view these terms within specific scenarios. Additionally, the study aimed to determine how participants react to obscene language. The underlying patterns of the data were analysed within a pragmatic framework to answer the research questions. This analysis was carried out to establish what is deemed to be appropriate language according to South African adolescents.

The research methodology was designed to answer the research questions and to gain a deeper understanding of obscene language. The first stage of the data collection procedure included a questionnaire aimed at determining which obscenities are deemed to be most offensive. This stage of the data collection was aimed at ascertaining what is presently deemed to be obscene language according to South African adolescents. The second stage of the data collection procedure included qualitative interviews to determine how individuals respond to obscenities in particular contexts and under which circumstances individuals deem the use of obscenities to be appropriate. The third and final stage of the data collection process was carried out to determine the perception of obscene language within the South African context. This data was gathered by conducting a focus group, in which various aspects of obscenities were discussed. The resulting data constituted various outlooks regarding the subject of obscene language which was examined for trends and patterns.

### 6.2. Obscene language in the context of norm violations:

The interpretation of obscene language depends on the conversational expectancies held by the interlocutors of a conversation. These expectancies serve as a frame of reference from which to predict and explain social interaction. The participants of a conversation will evaluate the appropriateness of obscene language according to their communicative expectancies. In other

words, the participants of an interaction will judge the aptness of obscene language according to the linguistic expectancies grounded in societal norms.

The results of the study indicate that young South Africans have a series of expectancies that guide their evaluation of obscene language. It is discernible that in the South African context, obscenities are perceived to be inappropriate in most formal settings and typically tends to occur more frequently in informal environments. The degree of alarm or surprise that is generated from the use of an obscenity relates to the evaluation of the spoken utterance. Individuals who violate the expected behavioural norms are judged by the participants in the conversation. The results of the study reveal that a speaker using obscene language in an inappropriate conversational setting may be perceived as being socially incompetent. Furthermore, the results indicate that several variables will influence the perception of obscene language such as the individual's profession, gender and age.

### 6.3 Obscene language in the context of 'Communicative competence' and social norms:

The norms guiding the use of this type of language in a conversational environment undergo changes. It is evident that terms and phrases that were previously considered to be inappropriate have become norms under certain circumstances for South African adolescents residing in the Stellenbosch region. The results from the various stages of data collection reveal that there are certain inclinations in terms of linguistics preferences among the South Africans that represent this demographic. These linguistic preferences reflect an open minded attitude and a more progressive value system amongst the youth.

The results revealed that individuals who stray severely from the accepted linguistic norms are perceived in a negative light by others within this demographic. It is clear that the use of obscenities during inappropriate circumstances will cause disturbance when used in the presence of young South Africans. The results from the study demonstrate that the participants of a conversation have expectations from those with whom they interact. These expectations are typically particularised to the relationship between the individuals and the contextual characteristics. The participants that partook in this study identified several factors that they believe influence communication styles. The privacy and formality were identified as the most prominent contextual characteristics that prescribe acceptable and appropriate behaviour.

Language producers will be considered to incompetent communicators if they fail to consider the environmental factors when speaking. Specifically, this group of individuals deem it important to consider the privacy and the formality of the conversation. This group will likely consider a language producer to be an incompetent communicator if they use obscenities in public or formal situations. The use of harsh obscenities in formal or in public situations will be considered to be face threatening behaviour, as this is an imposition to the addressee. The results from the study indicated that the majority of individuals who fall within this sample group will avoid the use of obscenities in formal situations as it is considered to a social norm violation. Furthermore, the use of obscene language in a public or formal situation would constitute a violation of their communicative expectancies.

The results from the study confirm that South African society is characterised as diverse consisting of several different value systems and cultural norms. These differences are inadvertently reflected within the language that is implemented conversationally. The variance in the linguistic habits of South Africans is a reflection of the diversity of communicative norms that are held by individuals. The results confirmed that there is wide ranging opinion regarding the use of obscene language among South African individuals. It is discernible that obscenities can have a variety of interpersonal consequences when they are used conversationally.

The results revealed that speakers within this age group respond well to communication that is fair, inoffensive and humorous. The research indicates that the media and popular culture play an influential role in determining linguistic norms. In addition, these platforms can lead to an increase in popularity for specific phrases. It is clear that South Africans within this age group have become better informed, more empowered and enlightened through various political movements. Consequently, conversational habits have undergone a transformation. In other words, phrases that may have resonated well with speakers previously may not be well received in present times. Competent communicators are characterised by being able to understand cultural shifts and nuances.

#### 6.4 Evaluation in the context of the research question: what do young South Africans deem to be obscene language?

The results from the study suggest that racist language is the most offensive type of obscenity. It is discernible that this type of language is not used frequently by South African adolescents.

The results reveal a sensitivity and a controversy regarding the use of racist language. It is evident that the majority of South African adolescents who fall within this sample group do not consider this type of language to be appropriate. This particular result may not be applicable to all members of South African society and is related only to the age group and region involved in the study. The use of racist language is considered to be face threatening to the addressees of a conversation by most of the individuals in this group. Additionally, the use of this type of language would constitute a social norm violation. A language producer using racist language would be perceived as an incompetent communicator.

The results from the study suggest that derogatory language aimed at homosexual persons is considered to be a highly offensive type of obscenity. It is discernible that this type of language is rarely used by South African adolescents and that this type of language is not considered to be acceptable. This result demonstrates an informed outlook regarding the use of derogatory language. From the focus group discussion it is evident that South African adolescents who fall within this group recognize the former struggle and plight of this minority group as they avoid using these types of obscenities.

The results from the study suggest that derogatory language directed at females is considered to be highly offensive by most individuals within this demographic. It is discernible that the majority of South Africans within this age group deem this type of language to be offensive and face threatening in nature. These types of obscenities are however occasionally used by South African adolescents, despite the negative perceptions that result from the use of the type of language. This suggests that gender inequalities and sexism remain part of our society and regrettably still permeate into spoken discourse. The results indicate that there are South African adolescents who use this type of language occasionally. This reveals a lack of sensitivity towards females and their marginalized role in society.

The results revealed controversy regarding the use of blasphemous language. Two strong outlooks emerged from the data collection of the study. It is evident that many South African adolescents perceive this type of language to be inconsiderate, offensive and unnecessary. This group perceives blasphemous language to be face threatening and a violation of their social norms as well as of their communicative expectancies. Other individuals within this demographic argue that speakers should be free to use this type of language without judgment



from others. It is therefore discernible that controversy and disagreement remain regarding the use of blasphemous language within this group of individuals.

These types of obscenities arouse strong opinions regarding the implementation into spoken discourse. Many adolescents within this demographic find these types of obscenities to be unacceptable. They hold the opinion that speakers can achieve their communicative goals without using obscenities and offending others in their social environment. Others do not perceive this type of language to be offensive when it is used to convey surprise and serves as a mechanism to convey strong emotion. The results reveal that there is disagreement considering the use of blasphemous language. In a culturally diverse nation various belief systems may infiltrate into spoken language and may influence the linguistic preferences of a nation. It is clear that there is variation among the perceptions of South African adolescents residing in the Stellenbosch region in terms of these types of obscenities.

The results from the study demonstrated that obscenities are perceived as offensive and unacceptable when used as a mechanism to shame or demean others. Obscenities that serve the purpose of shaming or oppressing others are perceived to be face threatening when used conversationally. These results reveal a compassion among the South African youth. Moreover, this indicates a progression compared to previous generations who have used oppressive language in the past. Furthermore, it is encouraging to observe that young South African have adopted an attitude of sensitivity, which has infiltrated into their spoken discourse and linguistic preferences.

#### 6.5 Obscene language in different contexts:

The results from the study suggest that the use of obscenities in the context of a household environment is not acceptable. The data revealed that most South African adolescents avoid using obscenities in the presence of parents and elderly persons. It is evident that South African adolescents are aware of the differences between the various generations. This awareness clearly permeates the linguistic preferences of young South Africans. The use of obscene language in the presence of elderly persons constitutes face threatening behaviour to the majority of the individuals within this group.

The results revealed that it is risky to implement obscenities regularly in conversation as there is a possibility of creating a negative impression. This type of language may alarm and shock other participants of an interaction, thereby violating communicative expectancies. The results indicated that obscene language can be well received by others when used to create humour and where there is no intention of offending or harming a group or individual in the process. The creation of humour is considered to be face enhancing behaviour by the majority of the participants who participated in this study.

#### 6.6 Gender differences in terms of obscenities:

Obscenities evoke an emotional response in females within the ages of 18 and 25 group as they are inclined to connect the words to their literal meanings. Males within this age group are less inclined to consider the metaphorical meanings that underlie obscenities and are therefore desensitized to them. This result suggests that speakers may implement alternative conversational strategies depending on the group they are addressing.

Additionally, males within this age group are more prone to use slang, jargon and informal language comparatively with their female counterparts. The males within this age group were more inclined to use obscenities as a form of social connection with others. The females within this group considered the release of overwhelming emotions to be the most prominent function of obscenities and to alleviate negative energy. The males within this group considered the creation of comedy and humour to be the main function of obscene language.

#### 6.7 Limitations of the study:

The sample that was used during the data collection phase of the study was relatively homogenous in terms of socio - economic background. A limitation of the study can be identified as a possible lack of diversity in the sample and the results may therefore not be applicable to all South Africans within the age group material to this study. Future research should attempt to replicate this methodology with different groups in order to generalize the results. A limitation of the current study can be identified as the sample size. The findings may therefore not be generalizable to all members of this age group. Future research should include a larger number of participants to obtain more accurate results.

This study considers certain aspects of obscene language and how it is perceived by the stipulated demographic. A further limitation of the study is that it does not consider every aspect and function of obscene language. Future researchers could thus broaden the scope of the study to collect more accurate results. The nature of the subject that is analysed may cause participants to be shocked or startled thereby impeding their capacity to answer questions thoroughly during the data collection process. This may influence the accuracy of the resulting data. Future researchers should design their questions in a manner that does not inhibit the participants' ability to honestly and thoroughly partake in the study. Additionally, the study was conducted in the Western Cape and may therefore not account for South Africans from other parts of the country. Future studies could therefore collect samples from various parts of South Africa. This would ensure that the results are representative of a larger group.

#### 6.8 Future research:

Future studies should include a sample of participants that constitute individuals from different socio - economic backgrounds. In addition, future studies should include a larger sample of participants in order to generalize the results. These proposed studies could analyse every aspect and function of obscene language. Moreover, researchers could include psychologists' data and insights to gain a more comprehensive view of obscene language. Future studies could focus on the harmful effects and possible aversive reactions of obscene language. Researchers should include extended observational data and corpus to refine and validate the results. Future studies could measure changes in the perceptions of obscenities by comparing various generations in terms of how they view particular terms. Such studies could investigate the increasing use of obscenities by females. The implications of including obscene language in language acquisition curriculums should be investigated.

#### 6.9 Ethical implications of the study:

It was imperative to consider the ethical implications of the study as obscenities are of a sensitive nature. The researcher of the study was however able to ensure that all the elements of the study were ethical and that all participants were treated fairly during the data collection procedure. Prior to the various stages of the data collection procedure, participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and should they feel uncomfortable at any stage of the interviewing process they may forfeit the focus group, interview or completion of the

questionnaire. The nature of the subject matter was explained to the participants before the data collection procedure commenced. The study did not include violent imagery or profanities as these phenomena may have caused ethical concerns. The well-being of the participants was therefore protected throughout the research procedure. The researcher therefore succeeded in conducting a study without breaching ethical guidelines.

#### 6.10 Conclusion:

The results from this study demonstrate that the lexical choices between raw forms and their mitigated counterparts are relative to the degree of formality of a situation. Obscene linguistic expressions should therefore be considered within their communicative context and should not be analysed in isolation from their social framework.

Competent communicators should adjust their linguistic style according to the setting and environment in which the utterance is made. The speaker's stylistic choice typically reflects a particular attitude toward the subject matter under discussion and creates a certain impression. The speaker should determine which linguistic style to implement based on the desired conversational goal. The speaker should accurately ascertain their role in relation to the other participants in the conversation. Appropriate semantic choices will greatly depend on the social distance between the speaker and the listeners of the interaction. It is the consideration and analysis of the environmental factors which will determine whether obscenities are appropriate in a given situation.

Obscene language can be affectively implemented when the speaker's conversational goal is to evoke an emotional response in the other participants of the interaction. It can be affectively implemented when the speaker wishes to emphasize, describe or entertain other participants of an interaction. Obscene language should not be used in order to evoke offense or verbal abuse. The results of the study illustrate that obscene language used in an abusive manner is not perceived to be appropriate under any circumstances. The results revealed that individuals may view commentary containing obscene language as comedic under certain circumstances. This suggests that many individuals within this demographic would enjoy the company of a speaker who uses obscenities in a witty manner. In addition, this type of language may be used to successfully alleviate tension during interactions.

Obscenities provide speakers with a useful mechanism with which strong emotions can be conveyed. This type of language should be differentiated from other forms of language because of its cathartic effect and the emotive connotation that it carries. Obscenities offer a unique linguistic tool as their effects can indeed be descriptive, humorous or even poignant. This form of language recruits our expressive faculties by triggering our imagination and incorporating emotional responses. The pragmatic implications of obscene language reveal that there are times when this type of language should be criticized as well as times where it should be welcomed, or even applauded. We should celebrate those who have the knack to harness this communicative tool to their advantage.

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Appendix A:

Department of General Linguistics:

Masters Research Questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire. Your participation will remain anonymous and you may choose to opt out of the questionnaire at any point should you feel uncomfortable.

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Please specify your gender:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

What is your religious denomination?

- ☐ Not strongly opinionated about religion
- ☐ Not religious at all
- ☐ Moderately religious
- ☐ Extremely religious

How liberal would you consider yourself to be politically?

- ☐ Very liberal
- ☐ Moderately liberal
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Very conservative

Rate the following words on a scale from 01 to 10 according to your perception of their offensiveness. On this scale 0 is not considered to be offensive and 100 is deemed to be extremely offensive.

- Asshole
- Bitch
- Bullshit
- Cock
- Cocksucker

- Dick
- Dipshit
- Dyke
- Faggot
- Fuck
- Fuck yourself
- Fucker
- Jesus Christ
- Nigger
- Prick
- Retard
- Screw
- Shit
- Whore

Please consider the following dialogues and answer the questions that follow. Your participation will remain anonymous and you may choose to opt out of the questionnaire at any point should you feel uncomfortable.

Questions for second stage of data collection:

Participant's gender:

Male

Female

Participant's religious denomination:

Not strongly opinionated about religion

Not religious at all

Moderately religious

Extremely religious

Participant's political positioning:

Very liberal

Moderately liberal

Conservative

Obscene language in a close relationship in an informal setting

The following conversation takes place in a household setting where a wife reprimands her husband for using his phone whilst she is attempting to discuss an issue that is concerning her.

Wife: Why the fuck are you still on your phone? I told you I had something important to discuss with you.

Husband: It's for work...

Wife: Well it's really fucking rude.

1. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

**Obscene language in a relationship with a big power gap in a formal setting**

The following conversation takes place in a lecturer's office. A lecturer and a student discuss an academic issue.

Student: Why can I not take the sick test?

Lecturer: I have explained to you that you do not qualify to write the sick test for this module, why the hell are you still asking me about this?

Student: Well, it's just that I feel that I do qualify with my doctor's note.

2. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

**Apologizing for obscene language due to social norm violation due to social roles**

The following conversation takes place between a father and a 10-year-old daughter whilst driving during busy traffic. They encounter another driver who hasn't indicated that he is about to turn.

Daughter: the driver in front of you hasn't indicated, what is he doing?

Father: Holy shit! Ah sorry, sorry – I really didn't mean to say that.

3. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

**Expectancy violation due to small inconvenience**

The following conversation takes place around a dinner table whilst a family are eating.

Mother: could you pass that wine bottle to me, please?

Daughter: [She says while passing the wine] Here you go...

Mother: Ah CHRIST! We opened the white wine and I actually wanted to be drinking red wine tonight.

4. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

#### Obscene language in solidarity

The following conversation takes place between two gardeners that are working together and attempting to pull weeds out of a patch of grass.

Worker #1: Goddamn weeds, so many Goddamn weeds!

Worker #2: Yeah, we should ask for a raise.

5. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

#### Obscene language offensively in a homophobic context

The following conversation takes places between two neighbors who are complaining about their landlord.

Neighbour #1: Every day, every single day I have to greet this faggot's stupid face.

Neighbour #2: Ditto.

6. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

#### Speaking offensively about women

The following conversation takes place between two boys in a male residence.

Student A: That girl is the worst – such a whore.

Student B: [laughs] Why, what happened?

Student A: Don't you remember what happened at that dinner party?

7. Do you consider the language used in this scenario to be surprising or is this a typical response in the given scenario?

8. Are any of the dialogues more surprising than others?
9. Which parts do you find more unusual or surprising?
10. Are there any obscenities that you would never use? [Which obscenities would you never use?]
11. Why do you hate those words specifically?
12. What emotion do you feel when these words are used?
13. What is your favorite swear word?
14. Why do you like this word?
15. When would you typically use this word?
16. Are there contexts in which you would not use this word?
17. What impression do you have when others use this word?
18. What is the most common cause/ function of obscene language in your opinion?
19. Do you swear predominantly around others or when you are alone?
20. What impression do you form of someone who swears very frequently when speaking?
21. Under which circumstances do you believe it to be appropriate to swear?
22. Do you consider someone who swears often to have a weak vocabulary?
23. Do you believe that obscene language should be removed from written language and spoken discourse?

24. Do you have any other thoughts on the subject of obscene language that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX B:

### Interview transcriptions

Participant number 1:

Male

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. I think the husband's conduct is quite disgraceful actually, your cell phone should be switched off throughout family events. The wife's anger is justified and understandable but she could express her concern, outrage in a healthier way, you know. She really shouldn't speak to her husband like that – not a typical response, well not in a functional relationship. I think if there's conflict a rational response has a better chance of succeeding in resolving the issue; she would probably anger her husband more by using this language. The language is not really surprising given the situation but there are better ways of dealing [with this situation]. This problem clearly deserves discussion, she won't achieve a helpful response from her partner if she cannot stay collected and calm during their conversation. I just don't think that her response is helpful.
2. The language used by the lecturer is not really appropriate, because she's in a position of authority. [Her] language doesn't set a good example for [her] students and she risks not being respected. In her personal space or at home she can say anything she likes but when she is at work she should represent the institution that employs her. The lecturer should not try to resolve an issue by obscene language at her student – even if she is irritable. It is part of her job to help students and she is failing to do this in the situation. The student should perhaps have used more formal language – maybe the informal tone of the student angered the lecturer. The language use in this conversation is not formal enough for the environment in which the conversation is in. The lecturer's language strikes me as rude and harsh, I wouldn't respect someone in authority if this is how they responded to problems in the work environment.
3. This language is understandable – driving in traffic can cause outrage and frustration as I'm sure you know. The obscene language clearly just slipped out in the heat of the moment – the dad obviously didn't mean any harm as he apologizes straight afterwards.



He actually makes it quite clear to his daughter that this language is not appropriate and that he shouldn't use the word. I don't find the language surprising – road rage causes anger. The dad's language doesn't cause any harm and he demonstrates that it is wrong right after he swears.

4. This language is not acceptable, especially in a household setting. It's also irresponsible for a mother to use this type of language in front of her children – it creates the idea that its acceptable to use this type of language. Blasphemy is very disrespectful to those around you – even if you're not very religious. I really don't appreciate this type of language and I find it irritating when people use it to try and be funny. There's nothing amusing about it. I can't think of a situation in which this type of language is appropriate.
5. Well I guess it's understandable that one needs an outlet when finishing a tiresome task, like these men who are gardening - although you shouldn't really swear in your work environment. It it more acceptable to swear in your own space than in the place you work. It could create a bad impression with your employer, that's not ideal. Considering the context of the situation, the language doesn't surprise me, it's quite normal to swear when you are frustrated although its best to keep your language clean when you're at work I think.
6. This is obviously a private discussion between unhappy tenants. The landlord is obviously a difficult person and is clearly disliked by the tenants. I suppose since the conversation is private they are free to call him what they like and use any language that they choose. The language isn't surprising because it's a private conversation and they are free to use any language they choose – they are not harming anyone in the process.
7. Well this language doesn't surprise considering who the speakers are. Male students would probably use this type of language quite frequently. It is not unusual or surprising for me to imagine that this is the type of language that they would typically use when referring to women that they dislike. This seems to be very typical considering that the speakers are students.

8. Yes, the dialogue where there's obscene language in the household environment is quite shocking and a little more unusual for me than the other dialogues.
9. Expressing such rudeness in your home environment is really concerning and not acceptable -especially since there are children present in this dialogue. It's shocking also because she isn't actually contributing to the conversation in any way by obscene language – it has almost no purpose in the conversation.
10. Christ, God, and Lord
11. Because I'm religious and I don't think it is ever appropriate. I was obviously taught that it's disrespectful to speak like that so I avoid language like that.
12. Probably anger and disappointment towards the person who used the words.
13. I've never actually thought of that. Asshole [laughs] I guess. It's really useful sometimes [laughs]
14. I wouldn't say that I like obscenities but they are quite a useful outlet I think. Or they can be depending on how you use them. If they're used in good taste and they don't actually harm or disturb anyone then they're not harmful.
15. I guess when someone displays stupidity, or annoys me then I would use this word. I wouldn't really use it when I'm talking to someone only when I'm in my own space. It's a way of relieving tension when I've dealt with a difficult situation and someone has been making my life hard.
16. Yes, well preferably when no one is around and they can't hear me. I try not to be crude when I'm around other people.
17. A negative impression most of the time. Although it can be really funny sometimes so it depends on the context. It depends on whether the person is trying to harm someone else or not.

18. To vent frustration, I guess. It's an easy way of relieving anger.
19. Definitely when I'm alone and not around other people.
20. A negative impression, especially if the obscene language is in bad taste. If its unwarranted and unnecessary then I would probably form a negative impression of the person or if someone is being harmed by the obscene language.
21. To release anger in a tough situation. It can be quite useful then.
22. Yes, most likely.
23. No I wouldn't say that it should be removed from spoken language but maybe from written language as you have more time to think of how to formulate what you're trying to say.
24. I wish I could come up with a few new useful obscenities.

Participant 2:

Female

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. This language is quite surprising – because it doesn't really serve any purpose. I guess it highlights the wife's anger but I don't really see how it is going to resolve her issue. She hasn't really given her partner time to explain what's going on so her language is quite harsh. It's quite rude to speak to your husband the way that she does. I think if you want to be respected in relationships it's better to try using kindness to get your partner to listen.
2. I don't think I've ever had a lecturer speak to me like this before so I find it surprising. I don't think that a professional person would speak to a colleague or a student like this. Even if the student was being irritating I think that it's important to treat your students well especially if you want to encourage them to work hard and succeed. It could be really off putting for students to interact with lecturers if this is how they respond to a problem. This type of language is probably acceptable when you're in your home space but not when you're in a professional environment.
3. I don't think that this language is surprising, it seems like a very typical situation on the road to me. I'd also be pretty annoyed if someone didn't indicate where they were going while they were driving so I really get why he called the driver an asshole. It's good that he apologises for his obscene language – he clearly didn't really mean to cause offense. It just happens – often when you're driving [laughs]
4. I think the mother is overreacting to something that's not really a big issue. Her language seems very strong given the situation. It also seems inappropriate to use language like this during a family dinner when there should be quite a serene and happy atmosphere. I do find this unusual – probably because in my house we wouldn't use language like this at the table and it doesn't really create a nice mood for the people around you. It's quite inconsiderate of those around you.

5. The workers are using quite controversial terms – I don't really think you should use anti – religious words but I do understand that everyone has a different background and therefore will feel differently about these words. We can assume that these guys in the dialogue aren't religious but I wouldn't use this type of language myself because I have a religious background. I guess it depends on your personal beliefs and what you consider to be appropriate.
6. I don't really enjoy hearing this type of language. I find it very offensive and I don't really understand how there are still people that use this type of language – surely it's understood that it just isn't okay to refer to people like this. I find it shocking actually that there are people who believe it to be justifiable. I don't accept language that is used to oppress other people or language that is hateful to a group. It is never appropriate to use language like this – I find this dialogue shocking.
7. This language is not surprising – I think it has become normal for boys to talk about women like this. I find this language very disrespectful towards women but I think it has become more typical the last few years. It shouldn't be normal, but it seems to have become quite common. I think it demonstrates that there is still much gender inequality.
8. The language used by the neighbours when speaking about their landlord is very surprising – I wouldn't have thought that there are people who think that this type of language is acceptable. I would never use this type of language to harm a group of people like they are doing here in this conversation.
9. I find the oppressive language very surprising and unacceptable. I think this type of language is demoralising and it is distressing that we have not succeeded in educating people that this language is not appropriate. It is hurtful and displays a complete lack of empathy and understanding for others.
10. I never use language that singles out a group or language that makes someone feel inferior. I wouldn't use derogatory language and try never to offend others. I would never use racist language or language that offends a specific religious group. I also don't use language that refers to female body parts because I find it degrading to women to use language like this.

11. I don't approve of this type of language because I feel that it can be really offensive and hurtful.
12. I guess I feel disgust when I hear this type of language and I also assume that the speaker is not a nice person. Usually I don't want to befriend someone who uses this type of language.
13. The F word is probably my favourite – although I try not to use it all the time. I use it to be entertaining or when I'm telling a story.
14. I don't know, I like it [pause] I think it can be really funny if it is used in a humorous way. It can be used effectively to convey your feelings about something.
15. I use it in social environments when I'm with close friends, who I know will appreciate this type of humour. I know some of my friends are more accepting of this type of language than others so I definitely think about who I'm with when I'm using this type of language. Some of my friends are more traditional and wouldn't really appreciate hearing this. I always try to take my friend's values and lifestyle into consideration when we're chatting.
16. I wouldn't use it around people that I don't know well or around people that are older than I am. So I use it selectively and not all the time.
17. It depends on how they use it – it can seem crude if the person uses it too often and if it has no purpose. I can find it very entertaining and hilarious even so it all depends on how the word is used.
18. I think humour. Many comedians use controversial subjects to make the audience laugh and controversial language is used in social settings to make people laugh.
19. I guess I swear mostly with others – it doesn't really make sense to swear out loud when you're alone. Unless it's by accident. I guess I might swear when I'm alone if I'm in pain.

20. I don't usually have a positive impression of others when I hear them swear. I don't think it's necessary or that it adds to the conversation. You can say the same message without using all the obscenities.
21. I think when you're with people of your age group then it's acceptable to swear. I wouldn't swear in front of elderly people though or in front of my boss. I think it's acceptable to swear if you know that the language won't really offend the group of people that you're with.
22. Not necessarily, it depends on how they use the swear word. It can be very clever to use obscene language to create humour. If the obscenities are used too frequently then I don't really think that they serving any purpose.
23. No I don't think that it should be removed but I do believe that it should be used wisely. I don't think that obscene language is always necessary – there are sometimes better ways of expressing yourself.
24. I wish I knew exactly which words are appropriate for which situations. It would make socialising very easy if I knew exactly how I should speak and what is acceptable for the people I am with.

Participant 3:

Male

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. I find it really surprising because I don't think you should speak to your husband like that. I don't think the situation warrants crass words at all. I would be shocked if someone spoke to me like that.
2. I think this is surprising because I don't think that a lecturer should speak to a student like this. It's a formal space so I just don't think that a lecturer should use language like this when speaking to a student unless they are close.
3. This is very typical – this happens quite often I think. Driving causes annoyance so I understand that [he] would swear if he was in this situation. And he apologizes for obscene language so it seems he didn't mean to be harming with [his] words.
4. This is surprising to be because I don't think that obscene language is necessary in this situation. The language is very disrespectful and not really adding value to the conversation so it doesn't make sense to swear here. I find the blasphemy unnecessary – my family never uses language like that so it's strange for me to think that it's okay.
5. This is typical, I understand obscene language when it happens due to fatigue and long hours of tasks. After a long day of hard work, it seems quite normal to me that you would swear because you're just over it.
6. I find this surprising even though it's a private discussion I don't think this type of language is appropriate or acceptable. I don't think hate speech is ever okay and I don't approve of this type of language.
7. This is surprising I don't think that this language is acceptable. I don't use terms like this myself and I don't move in circles where we speak like this. It's not appropriate to refer to women in this way. I've never used this type of language myself.



8. The wife and husband situation, and the mom-wine scenario are the most surprising to me. These scenes don't seem to warrant the crude language.
9. In the first situation, the rude response to the husband who is busy working and in the blasphemy used in front of the children.
10. I don't use any blasphemous language, sexually originated obscenities or orientation slurs.
11. Cunt and fag are the worst ones to me I'd say - They sound the crassest and they are the most hurtful, I think.
12. Unease and disgust are mostly what I'd feel.
13. Shit
14. It's short and sharp and it isn't too intense.
15. When I forget something, hurt myself or feel a negative feeling.
16. When there are young kids around, also not around most adults. I don't think its respectful.
17. A neutral impression of the person.
18. To release a burst of emotion that I'm feeling at that moment.
19. When I'm alone I guess.
20. Sometimes I wonder about their vocabulary and think they go out of their way to swear.
21. When badly hurt or for the sake of a joke.
22. No not necessarily.

23. No I don't think that it should be removed.

24. Uhm, nothing particular.

Participant number 4:

Female

Not strongly opinionated about religion

Moderately liberal

1. It is inappropriate, but probably happens quite often I'd imagine.
2. I find this lecturer's response surprising – I wouldn't expect this type of thing from someone who should be giving helpful advice to students and their colleagues. I don't know whether I'd be able to approach the lecturer again after this [conversation].
3. This is quite typical I think – I've heard similar conversations to this often before so it doesn't really shock me.
4. This is quite unusual. This language seems very rude in this situation. I wouldn't use this type of language because I think it can offend other people and I usually try not to be offensive when I speak.
5. This seems very typical to me although I don't really speak like this myself. But I've heard and seen this often before so I'm not really surprised by the conversation.
6. I find it both surprising and inappropriate and would be uncomfortable if I had overheard this language.
7. Typical but it's not excusable. This has become common but it shouldn't be.
8. The lecturer-student dialogue: usually older individuals in more esteemed position in society are less likely to use foul language like this so it's the most shocking to me.
9. The use of crude language is surprising to me.
10. Cunt, nigger are the most offensive I think.
11. The harsh sounds are hard on the ear.

12. Disgust

13. Fuck

14. It is short and versatile – can be used to form good descriptions so I use it to be expressive most of the time.

15. Around peers, and people that I trust and know won't judge me.

16. Yes.

17. That they are irritated

18. Frustration or sometimes to mitigate frustration – that's the most common [cause] I think.

19. Alone, silently in my head.

20. That they are abrasive and probably not cultivated

21. To add dramatic flair to an entertaining story or anecdote.

22. Not necessarily

23. No I think it has a place but we should know when not to use it – some written and spoken work should never contain crass language.

24. Obscene language can be highly effective when used appropriately in conversation.

Participant number 5:

Male

Not religious

Very liberal

1. I think this language is uncalled for but I know this happens now and then with people that you're close to. It's not surprising to me, I think this happens often between couples. I try not to swear at people that I'm close to but [laughs] it does happen from time to time even though I know it's not the best way to speak to friends.
2. It is surprising but not unheard of, I could imagine that if the lecturer is annoyed they might use this type of language. The student may have been doing something really wrong which could have annoyed the lecturer quite a lot and caused the strong language.
3. This doesn't surprise me - I often swear while I'm driving – especially if I'm alone or sitting in traffic. You can't always predict what's going to happen on the road and other drivers can drive so terribly sometimes. This seems [like] pretty normal behaviour to me.
4. This doesn't surprise me – the language is quite common I think. She's obscene language because of her mistake, which is usually why people swear I think. Her choice of words is quite strong but understandable given the fact that she just realised that she opened the wrong bottle. It seems like a perfectly normal situation to me.
5. This response seems quite normal to me because the men have been working hard. They are obviously obscene language because they're struggling with the job they're doing. I don't find the language particularly offensive and I've often used this type of language myself when I'm frustrated.
6. I find this dialogue quite funny – I haven't really heard that word in conversation in a while. I find it surprising because it's not something that I hear often. But I don't think this language is harmful because it's a private setting and no one is being harmed through the language.

7. This is quite typical of boys I think. I hear this often when I'm with friends. There are obviously times when this is not really appropriate – like in very serious situations or when there are parents around. This type of thing is said when we're just in our group so it isn't really used to offend others.
8. The first dialogue is very surprising for me because I wouldn't swear at someone that I'm close with in an offensive way and I don't think that it's good communication.
9. I find it offensive that the wife swears at her husband to insult him and make a point which she can do without being hurtful.
10. I wouldn't use racist words.
11. I think it's disrespectful and unnecessary.
12. I feel sympathy for the person that has to tolerate it.
13. Fuck and shit are my favourites I think
14. It's a really expressive word.
15. I use it descriptively sometimes or to show how strongly I feel about something. I also use it mostly when I'm with my friends who use this word quite often too. I use it during annoying, frustrating situations too – it's an easy outlet to get rid of unwanted feelings.
16. I wouldn't really use it during something serious like an interview and I'd try to say it less around older people because I know they prefer more traditional language.
17. I assume that they're quite liberal and not necessarily a traditional type of person. It can make the person seem rude so it depends on how it is used. It can indicate passion or strong emotion.

18. I think letting go of negativity and negative emotion during difficult situations is probably the most common cause or function of obscene language. It can also be used to entertain others.
19. When I'm with people of my age group most of the time.
20. I assume that they are trying to create a certain impression of themselves and that they believe this type of language to be suited to their environment.
21. When I'm with people of my age group or when I'm with people that I know well. I also think it's acceptable to swear to make a story funny or to make others laugh.
22. No not at all.
23. No I don't think so because it's a useful tool that helps us during frustrating times.
24. I wish I could stop myself from obscene language during times that its not quite appropriate.

Participant number 6:

Female

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. Language in this scenario is surprising between the wife and the husband. She sounds angry and extremely impatient. She also clearly does not have any respect for him. It seems that it is something he often does and she finds it very disturbing.
2. The language of the lecturer is not so surprising, but he sounds rather agitated. It seems that he is dealing with a nagging student who does not do his work and that he is not in a position to receive a sick test.
3. I do think the language of the father is surprising, but maybe he was very surprised by what the other driver was doing. So his reaction might be in shock fear for being in a dangerous situation with his daughter.
4. I do find the response of the mother surprising, although if she is not religious it could be her normal reaction. Sometimes people fall into a habitat of using certain words or phrases, if one would point it out to them they could think before they speak if it is offensive or insensitive they could actually control their word use.
5. I do not find the two gardener's responses surprising it is a typical response. They are obviously bored and frustrated and irritated by weeds growing again and again. They need more money to better their lives and have this utterly boring way of earning a living.
6. This is not a typical response it is very offensive. The neighbour just sounds rude and not at all tolerant in this situation.
7. Being students I do not think the response is surprising. Students seem to think they can do and say what they want. It is their student time to do whatever and say whatever they want. Students conduct themselves in a manner that the world owes them a good time while they are young and often act irresponsibly.



8. I do not find any dialogues more surprising than others.
9. This is the way people talk, although in different circumstances. So I do not find it so unusual or surprising.
10. I would never use faggot, goddamn, fucking rude, holy shit, and ach christ!
11. I find the abovementioned words, either crude or offensive in a religious context.
12. I feel an emotion of shame, when these words are used.
13. My favorite swear word is damn or sometimes shit.
14. I do not like these words, I guess I just got use to saying them. I will not often use them in conversation or in public, more likely when I am alone or when I am driving.
15. I will more likely use them when I am alone.
16. In certain conversations and just in general in public I would not use these words.
17. I have the impression that people who use these words, either have no respect for the people in whose company they use these words, or that they have just become use to that kind of language and do not make the effort to use different forms of expression.
18. People swear when they are angry, frustrated, aggressive or when they get a sudden fright.
19. I swear predominantly when I am alone.
20. When people swear frequently I feel they are lazy to find better means /words to express themselves. Sometimes it is just a habit and it can be changed if they are asked or challenged to do so.

21. Yes I do think obscene language is ok if someone is surprised or has an unexpected fright.
22. Yes I do consider someone who swears to have a weak vocabulary.
23. No I do not think obscene language should be removed from written language or spoken discourse.
24. I do think one should take care with obscene language and young children as they do not have the insight to understanding the use of bad language. They cannot interpret emotions that often go with obscene language.

Participant 7:

Male

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. Yes, the language is surprising. This type of obscene language is rarely, if ever, necessary. In this case I think there are many other ways to convey your message more effectively. It's also very offensive in this scenario and not particularly helpful. The F-word has become very pervasive in conversation. In this case the obscene language doesn't carry value and it's therefore really necessary. It would probably be quite detrimental to the relationship.
2. The lecturer's response is not typical. I wouldn't expect a lecturer to respond like this. I would imagine that the lecturer would try to come up with a solution but not to retaliate in this way.
3. This seems quite normal to me but the language is still unnecessary – I can't see how this language is beneficial in the situation. I don't really think that its appropriate given the presence of the child.
4. I don't think this language should be used in the context of the situation – particularly because it's a family situation in which children are involved that must still learn which types of behavior are acceptable. It can be difficult to raise children to be considerate of others if they're exposed to this type of language from a young age.
5. This language doesn't surprise me it seems quite typical of the characters who are present and the job they are doing. I don't think this language would be okay at a dinner table but I understand that for them it wouldn't seem harmless.
6. This language is surprising to me - there is entirely too much obscene language in today's society. It is not only bad because it's offensive, but it is bad because there are almost always more descriptive words to use. In this case its quite meaningless and makes me think that these characters must be poorly educated if they think its fine to speak like this.

7. This language is not acceptable. These types of words should be used with caution. I think there are better ways to express what you're thinking and that its not helpful in this situation really.
8. The dialogue where the wife swears at her husband is the most surprising. I find this disturbing because you shouldn't swear at someone you are with – it is highly disrespectful. I also find the obscene language at the dinner table in the family environment quite shocking.
9. I find it concerning that family members are spoken to like this – I don't think its kind or appropriate to speak to family members like this. The obscene language isn't required for the speakers to carry their message across.
10. I don't swear generally. I always try to speak without obscene language.
11. I particularly dislike words that insult minority groups and racist language. I wouldn't use words that fall within these categories.
12. I feel annoyance - It is rude and offensive. I usually don't have a good impression of the people that use this type of language.
13. I don't swear but I say "darn" or "damn" occasionally.
14. It's not severely offensive but still allows me to get rid of unwanted emotions.
15. If I was annoyed, or frustrated or if I've made a mistake that I could have avoided then I might use these words but I do try to avoid obscene language if I can.
16. I only really use it when I am alone and I don't really use it around others because I would not want to offend anyone.
17. I think it's good that they've chosen milder crass word and I guess I admire that they've chosen words that are less offensive than the extreme ones.

18. The need to release strong emotion and specifically impatience.
19. Only ever if I am alone but as I mentioned I try to avoid obscene language as much as I can. I'll always try to come up with an alternative word and try to avoid using the offensive language.
20. I assume that they are uneducated, not well mannered and generally not someone that I would be close with. It's a sign that there is little consideration for others and little concern for the well-being of those that may be offended.
21. Only when you're alone or if when you are sure that you will not offend anyone through your speech.
22. Not necessarily, but they should try to come up with more descriptive better suited language.
23. It would be a good idea if offensive language were avoided completely yes, but I can't see how this could happen as obscene language is so pervasive in our current time.
24. Just that I don't think it should be used and that there are usually other alternatives which should actually be considered.

Participant 8:

Female

Not strongly opinionated about religion

Very liberal

1. Quite surprising considering the obscene language – it makes the complaint really rude and it's not necessary.
2. Surprising as I don't think the rude language is necessary in this situation.
3. Typical, I've heard this quite often and I do it quite often when I'm in a similar position.
4. Typical, this happens quite often and I wouldn't be surprised if I heard language like this is in this type of situation.
5. Typical, this seems like something that would happen quite often.
6. Surprising, as I can't see why you need to swear in a situation like this.
7. Typical, although that doesn't mean I agree with it - it just happens far too frequently).
8. No, most of them are quite typical – although personally I would try not to swear if I was in that situation myself I think.
9. The blasphemy is quite surprising but not unheard of.
10. Cunt, faggot, the N word; I generally those that sway towards racial slurs, homophobia, sexual references – I try always to avoid those.
11. I consider myself quite an empathetic person, and I find these words could potentially offend people around me. Considering we're meant to be living in a liberal society, these words are jarring and unnecessary.

12. Shame and embarrassment probably
13. Shit, is the one I use the most.
14. It has multiple purposes, and can be equally emotive in various different situations. I'd also rank it on the slightly less offensive scale when it comes to obscenities. As many people use it frequently, it doesn't have the same "shock factor" attached to it.
15. When I'm cross, angry or frustrated.
16. I wouldn't use it in conversation with my superiors in a working environment, and I used to be careful about using it around my parents but that's decreasing the older I get. Otherwise, I use it quite freely.
17. I would understand that they're pissed off about something, but I wouldn't think any less of them since it's a word I use quite freely myself.
18. Increased emotion, generally with feelings of angry, frustration and sadness.
19. Mostly around others. When I swear on my own, this will generally be a result of mild road rage.
20. I find it unnecessary, especially when offensive language is used. Sometimes it makes me think slightly less of them, especially in terms of emotional intelligence. I sometimes view it as a way to show-off (like, let's see how many obscenities I can put in this sentence today) which is not an appealing characteristic to me.
21. Sometimes when you need get an emotion off your chest that's weighing heavy on you, I think it's necessary to swear to get it off your chest (especially if the alternative is to act out aggressively). It's not the best way of coping with emotion, but sometimes it's the only way.
22. Yes, I definitely think their vocab is weaker.

23. No, I think to some extent it has a place in culture, and makes each culture unique.

24. I'm not really someone who swears often, but I as you can tell I'm not against it completely either.



Participant 9:

Male

Not strongly opinionated about religion

Moderately liberal

1. No not surprising at all, I see it as an ordinary response given the situation.
2. I see this as a typical response in a situation like this. [The] boy seems frustrated and lecturer seems unnecessarily stern.
3. Very typical, when growing up, I experienced many situations much like this.
4. Typical, I see the use of “Christ” as a commonly used word in the world we live in today used more as a figure of speech rather than a reference to Christ himself.
5. Typical, the gardeners are working hard and are wishing they were earning more to make the hard work feel more rewarding
6. Typical, I too see faggot as a figure of speech – like reference to someone who irritates them) rather than a reference to homosexual individuals.
7. I wouldn’t say a typical response given the situation, however this kind of dialogue is common.
8. No, they all seemed present in today’s society. None of the situations seem particularly strange or unusual.
9. The mother and daughter wine matter, as the use of “Christ” as a figure of speech dates quite some time back.
10. No, I would pretty much use them all given the situation

11. There aren't any words that I wouldn't use, in these specific contexts my responses would be quite similar.
12. Depending on the tone in which they were said – if said with meaning, I would be upset or angry, however, used in a verbal rant about something not very important, then I wouldn't be bothered – would see it as more a figure of speech.
13. Fuck
14. The word is easy to pronounce, it can be used in a sentence in more than one way, it's lost some of its "brutality" as it's used so commonly these days.
15. I will use this word when I'm feeling angry, sad, frustrated, happy, excited, nervous. I would use it almost all the time.
16. Not really. Maybe in an extremely formal and professional situation where words like "fuck" are not appropriate like church.
17. I don't see it as reducing their image at all. The word has evolved into a commonly used figure of speech, which is molded based on the emotion the individual is feeling.
18. For me personally, it's my go to word when needing to verbally express my emotions.
19. It all depends on the crowd. Upon first impression, I'll identify if the crowd are individuals who commonly use the phrase, or if they are more conservative individuals (many people still see the negative characteristics of the word). Obscene language isn't a factor that will affect my impression of someone.
20. I think it would be appropriate to swear whenever the environment you are in will allow it, or given your situation regardless of the location or circumstances.
21. No I do not, I see it as an outlet.
22. No, because I think it's quite useful in certain situations.

23. No I do not, as many do not throw the word around as freely as I do, many conservative people have a very different perspective, one that favors the more negative side of the words

24. I find obscene language quite useful in some situations.

Participant 10:

Female

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. The language used by the wife is totally uncalled for. I think it was plain rude of her to use the word "fuck". I do think its rude of him to use his phone.
2. The lecturer could have used better words than to snap at the student with the words "why the hell" in her sentence.
3. I would have preferred the father not to use the words "Holy Shit" in front of his daughter, but I feel it was softened by his apology.
4. The word "CHRIST" was uncalled for and was also not a good example to her children.
5. I would have preferred the gardener not to use the words "Goddamn" over and over again in his sentence. I never use blasphemous language – even if I'm frustrated. The language surprises me because I would never use this type of language, specifically in public or in a work environment
6. To me the word "faggot" is a very horrible and spiteful word to use to describe a person.
7. The language used to describe the girl is not what I would want any man to use towards any woman. It is degrading and sexist and very chauvinistic.
8. Yes, to me some of the dialogues are more uncalled for than others – like the one in the household environment was very shocking.
9. The most surprising dialogues for me and also the most uncalled for are the boys calling a girl a whore and the mother calling out "CHRIST". Also the neighbors calling their landlord a "faggot".

10. I cannot think of any words now, but there are probably words that I would prefer never to use. One of them can be: "O my God!" I am actually born and bred in Afrikaans, many English obscenities are not very known to me.
11. God is always called upon in situations that is not appropriate! Even non-Christians use the words "Oh my God!"
12. When I hear the above words I usually feel uneasy and I cringe inside.
13. I have no favorite swear word. I unfortunately use the expression "Flippen Hell" a lot. I do not know whether it is a real swear word.
14. I think I heard it from someone and it stuck.
15. I find that I use it when I get a fright, am angry, irritated, shocked or amazed at something.
16. I have never thought about it, but I would probably not use it in certain places or in the company of certain people or in certain contexts.
17. I would probably not notice it.
18. Many people say it is a shortage of vocabulary, but I think that it is more than that. Many times it is disgust, or irritation of a certain situation or a way to express your disgust or anger.
19. Not when I am alone, but when someone says something amazing or shocking.
20. It depends what words are used. Sometimes it is irritating or it just does not suit somebody. Sometimes I do not notice or find it too much.
21. I think in an ideal world, no one should swear!
22. I think that most of the time it is a stupid mannerism that is picked up from someone else or the person grew up hearing it all day.
23. No, I think writers will not be able to give a true understanding of a character in a book across to their readers.

24. Obscene language is a very touchy or sensitive subject. I wish everyone could stop using obscenities in any form.

Participant 11:

Female

Not strongly opinionated about religion

Moderately liberal

1. I find this conversation not warm enough in a couple's relationship, too rude but he shouldn't use his phone when he's talking to her.
2. The relationship between a teacher and a student should be more respectful, I would think.
3. This language is acceptable since it takes place in a situation of stress and because the dad shows regret.
4. This language is a bit too rude for this situation, it's an overreaction.
5. The relationship between these two coworkers seems casual so it is acceptable since it takes place as a work complaint without any hierarchy [in the] relationship.
6. This is the type of language that young people, say students, would use, but I would find it surprising if the two neighbors were older.
7. This language is not surprising in the context of a young men relationship, in a fraternity for instance it is an example of typical language used.
8. I find swearwords in a couple, or in a family relationship not acceptable or not adapted.
9. I find the use of swearwords more common between young people, at a student age for instance, and also less surprising between men than between women.
10. "faggot's stupid face" "goddamn" "christ" – I wouldn't use any of those terms.
11. I usually don't use swearwords that are pointing out someone in particular. I don't really use swearwords relative to religion since I am not religious this is just not a use.

12. I find swearwords pointing out someone very offensive and unacceptable because really disrespectful.
13. Fuck
14. Because it is linguistically adaptable to any sentence and works for any emotion you want to express.
15. If I hurt myself or break something.
16. To insult someone.
17. It always seems rude when used by someone else but acceptable in my own mouth, it is more chocking to hear than to say.
18. When someone hurts himself or does something clumsy.
19. More when I am alone.
20. I find it surprising and am less likely to listen to the real meaning of his sayings.
21. When someone is alone it is totally acceptable in order to let go frustrations, or when with friends.
22. It is not directly linked in my opinion, someone who often swears seems rude or not well-educated, but it doesn't mean that he lacks of vocabulary.
23. It would make the language prettier for sure. I wouldn't be against this idea.
24. The use of obscene language is very personal and can be interpreted very differently from a person to another.



Participant 12:

Female

Not strongly opinionated about religion

Very liberal

1. The language that was used in this scenario seems to be quite harsh. It's not really a typical response that one has when trying to get someone's attention long enough to tell them something important. However, if the scenario had occurred in a situation where the wife had asked the husband multiple times that she had something important to discuss then it would not be as surprising. I think it would depend on the context around the scenario.
2. This response is not a typical response in the scenario as a lecturer or any person in a superior professional position is thought to be acting in a manner that is professional and obscene language free.
3. I think that this is a typical response most people accidentally swear in front of their children and many people swear in the traffic.
4. I think that it is a surprising response as it is quite an outburst for the wrong wine.
5. I do not consider it surprising as gardener's use of the word 'goddamn' shows his frustration and many people use similar or the same word to show their frustration.
6. I think this is a surprising response as there are many words that are slurs that should not be used in any situation. Conversations where racial or ethnic slurs - are make many people, including, myself uncomfortable and the response to it should definitely not be 'ditto'.
7. It is a typical response. It's not a morally correct response but unfortunately that is how some people speak to one another. It is really wrong but has become common place.
8. The dialogues containing blasphemy are the most surprising in my opinion.

9. That a person could so blatantly use hate speech in a sentence and nobody says anything.
10. Anything that is racially offensive or is degrading to people of a different sexual orientation or the c word – don't even want to say it.
11. They make me really annoyed for some reason. I do not think people who use them are particularly nice people or people I want to associate myself with.
12. Anger or frustration
13. Shit
14. I just like how it sounds and its less offensive than other options
15. When I'm really annoyed
16. When I'm speaking to somebody that I want to have a professional relationship with or a person that I have just met for the first time.
17. It doesn't particularly bother me.
18. Frustration
19. When I'm alone I probably swear more.
20. Depending on how many times in a sentence and what words are used. Sometimes it doesn't bother me but if they use words that I don't think are appropriate in any situation I get a bad impression from them
21. When you are frustrated. Never in an argument.
22. No I don't think language alone will affect my impression – there are other factors that will influence me more [than others].

23. No, unless they have a link to hate speech then I think they should.

24. I'm very much against hate speech or obscene language when used in arguments.

Participant 13:

Female

Extremely religious

Moderately liberal

1. Surprising, and also very rude to speak to someone you're close to like that.
2. Surprising, the lecturer's use of "why the hell" is inappropriate.
3. Typical, the Dad responded completely without thinking and then apologized upon realizing his mistake.
4. I think it is surprising as it is an unnecessary use of blasphemy, having said that it might be typical, depending on the mood of the mother and the nature of her day and the fact that some people use the word "Christ" relatively loosely. (I would never say that nor would my mother, but at a friend or relative's home I wouldn't be too surprised to hear that.)
5. I would be surprised initially, but wouldn't give much thought to it immediately afterward, as it is relatively common to hear "Goddam" however the use thereof never goes unnoticed and is not well received on my behalf.
6. Surprising!! The use of faggot is something I only really hear on TV.
7. Typical, the word whore does not have the connotations it once did. There are certain people who would say it and I wouldn't be surprised to hear it.
8. The obscene language wife is just unnecessary, and the landlord one is just in poor taste
9. The wife using F#\$k, and the combination of stupid and faggot.
10. Almost all of them haha (particularly blasphemous words), C%nt, P#%s, derogatory words for people groups.

11. It goes against my religion, also I haven't been brought up hearing bad language- I've been taught it is in bad taste and not very classy. And using bad words for people groups shows small mindedness and a lack of understanding.
12. Not anything strongly, it is off putting and reflects badly on a person, but I do not let it get me down, usually just fleeting irritation. I extreme cases particularly bad blasphemy or for people groups it can make me feel a little sick.
13. Shitload [laughs].
14. Doesn't feel like too much of a swear word, but is very descriptive
15. When I'm trying to describe a shitload of things.
16. Yes in front of my family or parents or possible employers, any formal setting actually now that I think about it.
17. Nothing, it's a harmless one (I probably think that only 'cause I use it) It will be eliminated out of my vocabulary soon though.
18. Anger, frustration, irritation or lack of vocabulary when trying to be descriptive and phrase something strongly.
19. An equal amount for both spaces.
20. If it's a girl sometimes it's interesting because it can gives across the message that she is very confident in herself (She doesn't give a sh#t what people think). A boy it can be expected from. If anyone's obscene language is particularly bad it is off putting and I am left wondering what they are trying to prove, as it isn't necessary, it can also show immaturity.
21. Pain or fright is what my mum always said! Sometimes to describe something to a peer no other word could do it better.

22. No, I find obscene language more linked to emotional message than the lack of a better word.
23. Definitely from written language, then the emotional message and tone isn't delivered, it always comes across harshly on paper, there is always a better word to be used in this case! The spoken language is perhaps different, as it can convey an emotional message, but really derogatory hurtful words should go.
24. I find the act of obscene language aloud in comparison to writing it is very different which I find very interesting.

Participant 14:

Male

Not religious at all

Very liberal

1. Surprising – although you never know the backend of the conversation, maybe the husband is constantly on his phone / maybe the wife has had a terrible day. But in the current context, it is surprising.
2. Surprising – unless the student always uses a sick note as an excuse, then it maybe seem typical between the two of them.
3. Typical – the father generally doesn't speak like that in front of his daughter
4. Surprising – personally I don't think it is a huge issue opening the wrong bottle of wine but maybe they were saving the white for a different occasion.
5. Typical – most people think that hard work deserves a raise and especially when working in a job such as gardening where it is long hours.
6. Surprising
7. Surprising, I wouldn't use this word to describe someone else and its not a word I hear often I must say.
8. Yes, the last one and the first one
9. Calling people derogatory words i.e “faggot” and “whore”.
10. I wouldn't use the words faggot and whore. Occasionally the word fuck slips out – normally when watching sport or out with friends and having a few drinks. Obscenities I would never use are most words that are used to describe the vagina – so cunt, poes to give examples - I also try refrain from using fuck.

11. I find them really derogatory.
12. The literally give me the chills, I feel awkward.
13. If I had to pick one it would probably be fuck.
14. I wouldn't say that I like it but it may slip out, now and then.
15. If my team concedes a goal or something spontaneous happens (because my team always concedes goals) such a dropping a drink, stubbing a toe etc.
16. Yes, definitely there are places that I think it would be very inappropriate – like when meeting a new person.
17. If it is in general conversation then not a very good impression, but if it is when they drop a drink etc. then I guess it is okay.
18. When you're angry or in pain.
19. Probably when I'm around.
20. That they aren't very nice people or have a lack of vocab.
21. When you are in pain
22. Yes, definitely [laughs].
23. No, it can sometimes be used to enhance a storyline or show emotion.
24. I think obscene language is good when it is done correctly – such as in books, plays, movies and other forms of art. It show's emotion and allows you to relate with the actor/ess or the book. But someone who is constantly obscene language is not very attractive.



Participant 15:

Male

Not religious at all

Very liberal

1. It is surprising because it is a conversation between a wife and her husband, who are supposed to treat each other with respect. Their relationship does not seem healthy.
2. It is surprising as the lecturer should treat students with respect when a question is posed to the lecturer by the students.
3. It is relatively surprising as the daughter is of a young age – young children adopt bad language easily and could pick up bad habits. She shouldn't learn to use harsh language at such a young age.
4. Typical, depending on the age of the children around the dinner table and religious beliefs of the family. It is common for adults to say "Christ" when they're annoyed.
5. Quite typical, depending on the religious beliefs of the speakers. I would imagine that people who are very religious would rather not use language like this.
6. Surprising, this isn't language that I hear anyone use and it seems uncalled for in this scenario.
7. Surprising, women should never be referred to as whores regardless of what they may have done.
8. The dialogue where the woman is called a whore is particularly surprising.
9. The derogatory language is most surprising in the dialogue.
10. Yes, I would never use obscenities that would offend other people.

11. I do not use any degrading racial slurs but I generally don't have an issue with common obscenities if they are used as an expression of emotion as opposed to hurtful intent.
12. I feel irritation when I hear hate speech.
13. "fuck"
14. It has quite a special place in the English language as it can be used in numerous ways whilst still being extremely descriptive. Also, it is not degrading if it is used not to harm others.
15. I use the word either alone or in a phrase to express anger, annoyance, contempt, impatience or just for emphasis.
16. When speaking to someone of authority I would not use this word.
17. My impression of others does not change when they use the word as it is a commonly used word in my personal life.
18. Description or as an expression of emotion that one is feeling.
19. Both, it depends on the situation.
20. I form an impression of someone who enjoys the use of obscenities. The context of the obscene language will determine what I think and whether this impression is good or not.
21. It is appropriate to swear whenever you like if it is not considered verbal abuse, slut shaming, or racism to name a few examples.
22. It is dependent on the use of obscenities. I feel as though some individuals may be more descriptive than others and have less cause for concern when using obscenities. But yes, in some instances I would consider them to have a weak vocabulary.

23. No, it should not. It is a brilliant form of expression.

24. I believe the use of language is subjective and the authoritarian belief that individuals should express themselves in a certain way is quite backward. If you are passionate and gain utility from obscene language without harming others, this isn't a problem. Religious beliefs dictated the use of English to the point where it became a sin to make use of certain words in contexts, irrespective of whether it was used as an expression or as a tool to harm others who may be different beliefs. I think that in the correct context a word itself has absolutely no harm but when used as a tool to harm others, it should be frowned upon to make use of certain words.

Participant 16:

Female

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. The language used in this scenario is fairly surprising. The outrage expressed by the obscenities is not consistent with the context in which it is used, but it is not personally as strong as other words which are used to insult a person's lifestyle or religion.
2. The language used in this scenario is quite surprising due to the typically impersonal nature of relationships between lecturers and students. The lecturer is acting in his/her professional capacity, thus should be formal. "Hell" is not a professional word to use in this context.
3. The language used here is not very surprising. Although the daughter is young, the words used are not very bad and was in a relevant context.
4. Yes, the language used is surprising as I find blasphemy offensive.
5. Yes, well I find it surprising because it is associated with religion.
6. The language used is surprising, because the word used is not just crude its very offensive to a large group of people. It has a much broader meaning and background than other obscenities such as "shit" and "fuck".
7. Yes, the language is surprising as the word "whore" is very insulting to whomever it is said and again has a background and context which makes it even worse.
8. Yes, dialogue 4, 5 and 6 are more surprising than the others.
9. The parts that are more unusual are the fact that they are not just obscene language at a mistake or frustration in general but are making a personal remark about someone or are religious.

10. Any religious obscenities, like Christ, God, Jesus, Hemel, Lord or any words that have a religious origin.
11. They insult my religion, but I find any other religious obscenities (of another faith) equally as insulting as every religion should be respected.
12. Anger, frustration.
13. Fok
14. It has so many uses and its origin is Afrikaans so it often makes an English sentence really funny to others.
15. An adjective to describe many things, basically instead of saying “very”.
16. Yes, I would not use this word in its literal meaning and in formal environments.
17. I am quite nonchalant about it.
18. When [people] are frustrated I would say.
19. I would say equally.
20. Depending on what words they use I would either not mind or think that they are offensive and small-minded.
21. When you’ve hurt yourself, are frustrated or are describing something.
22. No, obscene language does not indicate a weak vocabulary to me.
23. No, obscene language is a very useful tool in everyday language.

24. Obscene language should not be as offensive when used in the correct context, it can be really useful if its used right. I'm not against obscenities at all, but they should be used with caution and you should really take your crowd into thought when speaking.

Participant 17:

Male

Not religious at all

Very liberal

1. This is surprising – I would not expect a married couple to display such animosity towards each other. In a liberal household a conversation like this would not surprise me – the conservative couples that I know would not converse like this. For a liberal family this type of language would not be unusual in my opinion.
2. This is not surprising but it depends on the background of the lecturer and what the relationship between the student and authoritative figure are like. If the student and lecturer know each other well then this would not be surprising but in a classic relationship between lecturers and students this would not be appropriate,
3. This conversation seems very typical given the context of the situation – this happens very often when driving. It is also common for a parent to apologize for obscene language by accidently in front of children.
4. This dialogue seems quite typical for a liberal household but it would depend on the background of the family whether it is considered to be surprising or unusual.
5. This is quite typical but it would depend on the background and education of the people that are involved here. It is quite typical for workers to speak like this when completing a task that they find annoying I would imagine.
6. This seems quite typical to me – because it's a private discussion. It would be unusual to say that to someone's face.
7. This dialogue seems quite typical considering that the speakers are male students – I wouldn't say that this type of conversation would shock or surprise me very much.
8. These dialogues don't surprise me, they seem quite typical and I don't find them very unusual.

9. No, I don't find the conversations surprising because they are private – the obscene language would shock if it occurred in a more public environment.
10. No there aren't any words that I would never use but there are words that I would be careful not to use around certain groups of people who I think could be deeply triggered by a specific word. I wouldn't use typically derogatory words that have [historically] been used to oppress, shame or demean others like nigger, faggot.
11. I don't like the idea of psychologically hurting people, and some words have a very violent history with persisting damaging effects. It is worth while trying to understand the history and it is worthwhile to not hurt people.
12. I don't really attach any emotion to the words specifically. But if I see or hear someone using hateful language towards someone in a malicious way it makes me feel sad and angry that someone would purposely try hurt someone else.
13. The one I use the most is "holy – fuckin – shit" [laughs] I say that really often actually.
14. It's fun to say and I often use it in situations where I am really surprised.
15. Any situation where I am thoroughly surprised and not around people who would find obscene language extremely off putting.
16. In a strictly formal or professional setting and around people who are very easily offended.
17. They probably watch the same TV shows and movies as I do and they obviously aren't offended by this type of language.
18. To mark surprise or anger is most common or to emphasize a point is another common function.
19. Probably alone and around close friends I think.



20. If they use words maliciously to hurt others or to speak lowly of others, then I won't think highly of them obviously. In most other situations it won't bother me at all.
21. Whenever you want as long as you aren't doing it to hurt other people or offending people in the process.
22. No. Unless they are obscene language 100 times a minute and not speaking coherently – then it does not make sense to swear at all. Your language doesn't need to be clean in my opinion, but it should still be logical and others should be able to understand your statement or message. Jargon or slang or obscene language can sometimes make it difficult to understand what someone is saying if they do it too much or too often so I do think it should be limited to a degree.
23. No and I don't think its will. I think obscene language will continue to change but there will always be certain words that some groups find offensive.
24. It's important to remember that language is subjective and that meaning depends on the consensus in the group.

Participant 18

Male

Not religious

Moderately liberal

1. Surprising, very surprising to me. This doesn't seem like a typical situation to me. This language is not helpful in the situation. I would express what I wanted to say in a calmer way if it were me – this language seems like it could lead to conflict or arguing you know.
2. Surprising, I wouldn't enjoy being confronted with this type of language in this situation you know.
3. Typical – I have heard this type of language in this kind of situation often.
4. Typical, I have used this type of obscene language before myself. So it doesn't shock or surprise me specifically.
5. Typical. I think this is actually sort of common – I've heard this really often before so it doesn't really surprise or bother me, per se.
6. Surprising, I don't really see how this type of language is useful in the scenario and I can think of other ways to express the same message without being offensive or harsh.
7. Surprising – this is very surprising I haven't been in a situation like this myself nor would I use this type of language myself if I were in this situation.
8. The dialogue where the guy refers to the woman as a whore.
9. Someone obscene language to personally offend someone else – I think that's really awful.
10. Depends on the crowd I am with – my language will probably change a bit depending on who I'm with, like if its my friends then I will say almost anything. If I'm at work

with colleagues I would probably be a little more careful in terms profanities you know – because it's a professional atmosphere.

11. There are no words that I specifically hate, but if the words are not sensitive towards the listeners I don't think it's acceptable.
12. I don't really attach emotion to any specific word but I always avoid using racist language that may offend someone. I think its cruel to use that type of language and I do my best
13. Fuck [laughs]
14. Gives great emphasis to thoughts or ideas.
15. When exaggerating something or trying to make something very clear – or if there is an emotional element to what I am saying.
16. In front of family or anyone that I fear might be offended.
17. Depends on the context.
18. Exaggeration I would say, I think it's useful for adding emphasis or stressing a part of your sentence.
19. Around others I think.
20. No judgment unless the person swears in an inappropriate situation.
21. When you are around people who would judge I would say but it also depends on where you are. I think the environment will impact your language. When I'm with say people my age or friends I feel I can say whatever really but in front of my grandparents I wouldn't really use a crude word. They're kind of old school [laughs].
22. Not at all

23. No I don't think so because it can be useful sometimes, there are definitely times when obscenities can be useful to express how you're feeling or to express your opinion about a subject.
24. As long as you're not using obscene language to offend other people I think its quite acceptable to swear and to speak freely. It generally doesn't bother me – I'd say I'm quite open minded about other people's language.

Participant 19:

Male

Not strongly opinionated about religion [But raised in a fairly religious home and uphold many religious principles. I have not formed an opinion on religion yet].

Conservative

1. I find this surprising, appalling even. This is not the manner in which an individual should converse with an individual that they supposedly love. It does not denote any sense of love and personally I would be extremely taken aback, that conduct is distasteful.
2. This is surprising, I find that this response is not appropriate between lecturer and student, nor is it at all professional. The lecturer should, despite any irritations, behave in a professional and supportive manner in all instances.
3. I am not surprised, it is an exclamation, and the adult apologized for the behavior. Seemingly a typical situation. Not directed at an individual, therefore not directly offensive.
4. This is surprising, regardless of whether this was a child, this is not a typical response to a seemingly unimportant overlooked situation. Clearly the woman really has a thing for wine.
5. No, this is typical, 'Goddamn' has lost its' impact as a form of cussing. And between two adult coworkers, this could be seen as a comical remark. It is also not directed at any individual and thus not offensive.
6. This is not typical, it is an aggressive and insulting remark, I'm sure anybody referred to in that manner would take serious offense to the statement.
7. While this is seen as typical, I would not call this unsurprising language as it is offensive and would not be spoken openly in public.

8. Probably the most surprising is the manner in which the woman spoke to her husband. This is the most offensive and insensitive language because of the context. I believe nobody should ever speak to their partner in that manner and it is unacceptable by me.
9. The use of the term *Fuck*, *Christ*, *Whore* and *Stupid Faggot* are probably the most offensive terms used.
10. I have used almost every swear word, this does not denote that I use them all frequently or believe that they are typical words to use in any context. To answer the question, no, there are no words that I would never use. I would like to think that I would never use Jesus Christ, as this is for me the most offensive word, but I have and probably use it again.
11. I've grown up in a religious household and that word has the greatest value in that religious structure, while being unsure of my opinion of religion, I still think it is not wise to use a word that a large group of people value so highly.
12. Offense, and disappointment, because people are aware of the value placed on the word.
13. Most definitely Fuck.
14. It is a unique word, its use can range from verb to adjective to noun and more. It can be used both in elation, sorrow and for offense. It is a utility swear word of high impact.
15. In instances of great emotion, like it was fucking awesome.
16. Yes, in times requiring professionalism and respect - such as engaging in a business meeting or with an elder or child.
17. I cannot form an opinion, it is neutral to the extent that I feel the word was used in a-n appropriate context. If not, I can be unimpressed or disappointed.

18. To emphasize my emotional disposition regarding a situation. Both greatly positive and /or greatly negative, never in between situations. [to express heightened emotion in situations of great positivity or great negativity].
19. Predominantly around others.
20. Often it indicates a lack of variety in language, but it also depends on the situations at hand. If it is used nonchalant, then the impression is less positive, if it is comical, possibly more. It is difficult to define without a context. That said, overuse of obscene language is in my opinion not a good impression.
21. I suppose it is never truly appropriate within the guidelines of chivalrous behaviours, but in moments of great delight or great negative emotion I would deem it somewhat appropriate to swear.
22. Yes, as mentioned above, but this also depends - obscene language can be a show of poor vocabulary but can also show a cleverness with words if used in a creative manner.
23. Logically this is not possible, words spoken shall forever remain within the discourse of that individual, but perhaps it would be better for society as a whole if self-restraint was encouraged, especially around children. There are more intellectual words which could often take the place of a cuss.
24. It is interesting, I often receive negative feedback regarding my obscene language from partner. My views on obscene language are conservative, yet I swear frequently. I have integrated cussing into my vocabulary for such a long time it is a habit hard to break. But I think it would be positive to show more self-restraint and to explore more intellectual words as a replacement.

Participant 20:

Female

Moderately religious

Moderately liberal

1. I find this surprising. From my perspective, it is very rude to speak like that to your spouse.
2. Although this language seems more calm, it is still unprofessional in the case where a lecturer and a student communicate
3. I wouldn't say typical. But in this case it is evident that the use of "Holy shit" is a habit that the father has and he does not want to pass it on to his daughter, because he wouldn't want her speaking that way.
4. I think it depends on the way she said it. If the mother just said "Ah, Christ", without being mad at her daughter, I would say that it is not surprising. I think it depends if the word was used in a "oops" way it is fine, but if it is to scold the daughter it is inappropriate.
5. I think it is typical. The language use is between peers and they both agree on the concept, so the obscene language is used to convey mutual frustration with the task.
6. I don't think this is surprising. Just hope my next landlord is not the same that I have to call him a faggot. That shit is intense.
7. Boys are the worst. [laughs]. It is between surprising and typical. The sound of the language is not as harsh - the meaning is worse.
8. The first example was the most surprising. Mainly because you will find it hard to respect someone who speaks to you like that.
9. The very disrespectful language – where the obscene language is used to offend.



10. I avoid blasphemous swearwords as I think it's disrespectful to others and to my religion.
11. I am Christian so I don't believe in using blasphemous language ever. I really do try to avoid using blasphemous language.
12. Frustration from other people's ignorance and complete disrespect
13. Fok and fuck
14. It is short, effective and very versatile.
15. To say oops or to acknowledge that a mistake was made accidentally – or if I stumble or trip then I might swear unintentionally.
16. To be disrespectful towards someone or in the presence of someone superior or young children.
17. These people are fearless to express themselves. But overuse can take away the effect of a word. Save it for when you need it.
18. When you've made a mistake.
19. Both I guess – alone and around other people.
20. I am fine with obscene language as long as it is not towards another person
21. When you are shocked.
22. Actually, yes. Often I feel that they use swearwords to replace many (more effective) adjectives.
23. No, I don't think that it should be removed – It can be quite effective at times.

24. I don't specifically mind obscene language as long as it doesn't offend anyone.

Appendix C:

## Transcription of focus group

This part of the data collection methodology includes a focus group. This part of the data collection methodology includes 8 participants. Participants are asked to discuss the subject matter of obscene language as it functions within South Africa. The names of the participants are not mentioned in the transcription of the focus group. The speakers are identified as male participant 1, male participant 2, male participant 3, male participant 4, female participant 1, female participant 2, female participant 3 and female participant 4.

## Participants:

Male participant 1 – 20 years old.

Male participant 2 – 21 years old.

Male participant 3 – 20 years old.

Male participant 4 – 20 years old.

Female participant 2 – 20 years old.

Female participant 3 – 21 years old.

Female participant 4 – 21 years old.

Male participant 1: This subject though, with some of my habits I'm quite an expert. [laughs]

Male participant 2: And me.

Female participant 3: Well as far as obscenities go, I'm definitely not pro racial lingo, slang, that kinda thing. But I'm not really exposed to that often -

Female participant 2: [Interrupts] Same, I don't move in circles where that's a thing really.

Female participant 3: But I'm sure it still happens, just not with our age group. I think there are still people that talk like that and that don't have the same mentality that [we] do.

Male participant 4: or the same education. I don't really have friends who ever use super racist language but I know [it] does still happen.

Female participant 1: I think since 94' our friends are pretty careful not to use language that is racist.

Male participant 3: Yeah, everyone in our age group seems to know that it's not acceptable to speak like that or use lingo that purposefully oppresses a group that has been disadvantaged.

Female participant 3: Yeah, I rarely hear friends or even anyone using racist language in like social settings or conversations. I think most [South Africans] are quite sensitive to minorities, since we have a turbulent past with oppression and that.

Male participant 2: It's been quite drilled into us that we shouldn't [use this type of language]. I haven't heard someone of my age ever use the *k-word* before, but I know it was obviously used before by people here [in South Africa]. I can't imagine that [word] being used to refer to someone now and I can't think that anyone considers it to be acceptable in any type of situation.

Male participant 3: Yeah, so many bad connotations and associations to that word and must be really painful to some when it is used.

Male participant 2: You mean historically?

Male participant 3: Yeah, because of how it was used in the past you know.

Female participant 1: I actually probably wouldn't want to be friends with someone who uses that type of language to be honest. I like to think that all of my close friends are considerate – you know in their communication. I can't think of one who uses racist language or lingo that would hurt someone.

Female participant 2: I don't know anyone personally, that speaks like that, and I also wouldn't really pursue a relationship with someone who uses that type of language often. I think maybe all the recent protests have also made people more sensitive to language that is racially offensive, 'cause they seem to enlighten us about inequalities.

Male participant 1: I think there are many racist terms that older generations may have used that are thankfully not used as frequently or loosely today anymore. I hear 'nigger' used really often though – like in music and movies. It's become a norm and used in everyday language. I think –

Female participant 3: [Interrupts] I – ah sorry -

Male participant 1: No it's chilled.

Female participant 3: I think it's used often but it's not used to hurt or harm others. It's used in a brotherly sense not to incite hurt, you know.

Female participant 1: I hear what you're saying, but the word's origin reminds us of a time of oppression, when the word was used negatively.

Female participant 3: but –

Female participant 2: [interrupts]

Female participant 1: The N word has negative connotations attached to it – it's symbolic of racism and conveys black prejudice. We need to look at the roots of the word when we decide whether it's okay to use it.

Female participant 4: Yeah, agree with that – even if it's meant in say a brotherly type of context, the word still carries and holds negativity.

Male participant 4: Yeah, I think it can still cause pain and offense for some people who may have been exposed to racial oppression in the past so it's best to be avoided even if the intentions are actually not malicious.

Male participant 1: I don't think it should be 'banned' or seen as derogatory if it's used with the purpose of creating, like humour or if it's said light heartedly between friends. I actually just translates to 'friend' or 'member' [of the group] so I don't think you can label it as racist.

You kind of need to look at the context and decide. Sure, if it's being used to degrade someone or make them feel bad then it's not cool but if it's used harmlessly then it should be allowed.

Female participant 4: I understand that but I think there will be always be a very harsh and negative connotation attached to the word – it makes me think of exclusion and discrimination and people being treated generally quite badly. That's why I really don't think that it's ever acceptable to speak like that. It just shouldn't be seen as okay even if it's not meant specifically to hurt others. I think the term strengthens former hatred and prejudice so it shouldn't be used in any forms or situations.

Male participant 2: I understand that we should always take the root or context [of words] into consideration when deciding whether a word is okay to use or not but there are situations in which I don't think that the word can cause any harm. Under certain circumstances I think that it's acceptable and that it doesn't carry those negative associations. It all about the context and how it's used. I do agree with you though, if it's used to cause offense it's not okay [to use].

Female participant 4: But even if the speaker doesn't mean to offend, those negative associations remain and can still remind us of the times in which black people were marginalised and treated badly. I don't think it should be used by anyone really.

Female participant 3: Yeah I get where you're coming from with that, but I don't think you should only consider the historical background – you should consider the attitude of the speaker and what they are trying to say. There's no need for offense if something's said in jest. Rappers use that word all the time, and don't mean it in a derogatory way or anything. They say it like 'brother' they don't say it to stigmatise at all. If anything it's kind of smart to change those bad associations and make it something empowering rather. The connotations of 'Nigger' in this type of context is like 'streetwise' or 'hard edged', it doesn't at all try to discriminate.

Male participant 2: Yeah it's like a term for 'mate'. But I think it should only be used by people that actually belong to the black ethnic group. It shouldn't be used by others to make reference to someone's race.

Female participant 2: Well I think we can agree that terms that deliberately discriminate a group of people are not socially acceptable – or in any context really and should be avoided.

Male participant 3: but what if the word is actually used for endearment? Like saying ‘ag you retard or fag’ to your friend when they do something stupid. We don’t literally comment on their intelligence or their sexual preferences, it’s just used because we find it real funny. I know obviously there are places where we should completely avoid this type of language but I don’t think that these words are harmful when we use them socially with friends who understand the underlying meaning of the term. In my friend group we’ll call someone an idiot or retard if they miss the joke or act like a moron but we don’t mean in, say the clinical sense of it.

Male participant 2: Yeah, the words are not at all taken literally, they are used in a fun way with friends. I wouldn’t say that to someone who is genetically impaired or disabled in any way.

Female participant 1: Hmm, I just think it needs to be used with caution as not everyone will find it equally funny. Like you never know if someone has an ill member of their family or something so it could actually be really tricky to make sure that you’re not doing any harm to anyone – I’m all for fun and games and what but I just think you need to be careful because not everyone is going to feel the same. It’s more diplomatic to use lingo that won’t make someone feel insulted. Again, we’re back at connotations that are attached to words.

Female participant 4: Yeah, I still think that we don’t really ever get rid of the origins of the words – those initial connotations will always be there and it’s hard to use the word without actually reminding people of the origins. I don’t think that these types of terms like ‘gay’, or ‘faggot’ should ever be used to mock a person’s sexuality– even if they are actually just being used in jest. They were used in such cruel conditions in the past, and were definitely used to incite shame so I just don’t think of it as appropriate.

Male participant 2: Yeah, I get that and in some situations it’s probably not the best type of thing to say but when we hear it used among friends it’s definitely not used to discriminate at all. It’s really just used to tease your friend or to get their attention, or point out what they did that was funny. I think you should always consider what the person meant in the bigger picture – obviously if they’re verbally abusing other people it’s not acceptable.

Male participant 3: Yeah I agree, when I hear it with people of our age group it's really not said to cause pain in anyone's life and you have to think about what the speaker is actually meaning.

Female participant 1: But I mean retard is seen as a form of hate speech by some people – it's surprising to me that some find that funny. I mean I can think of many other terms that can be used playfully that probably wouldn't be insulting to anyone or to any group at all. I don't think the word retard should be used ever. I can't think of any situations in which it would be acceptable to use.

Female participant 4: Yeah, but I do agree though that you should be careful of the tone that you use if you say these types of words.

Male participant 2: But the way it's used with friends has changed the meaning – it doesn't refer to a disability and therefore does not carry the discriminatory nature. It's just for banter.

Female participant 4: Even if it's just for banter or for comedy – you should still be wary about how you use it.

Female participant 3: Yeah, feel the same.

Male participant 2: Yeah, the same.

Female participant 1: I use light obscenities quite often though.

Female participants 2: Like 'shit' or fuck, you mean? Yeah those are light definitely – they're really harmless.

Male participant 2: I use them daily – and hear them often.

Male participant 3: They don't really shock me either – with friends I use them and hear them often but I think again you should be careful where you use them. I wouldn't use them in a formal context.



Female participant 2: 'shit' and the 'f word' are used in social environments, and included on social media platforms and also used in popular films so I guess we just don't really consider them to be as bad as some of the other words.

Female participant 1: The words are not necessarily used to refer to their literal meanings but rather that they are used in a metaphorical sense.

I think they're used mostly to convey emotion.

Male participant 2: Agree – I hear the words mostly in reference to emotion or strong feeling of some kind. Or in terms of someone's feeling regarding a subject.

Female participant 3: I hear these words whenever I socialize – in most social setting I would probably hear these words a couple times.

Male participant 3: I think I probably use them more, the more I hear them being used. You know? I mean, I also hear them daily in my social environment.

Male participant 1: I don't necessarily use them daily but I definitely hear them daily – they don't shock me really and I'm not particularly offended when they're used but I do sometimes feel like you should be able to come up with other words.

Female participant 4: I'm not offended or insulted by the use of these words but I do feel like there are many other words that can be used that aren't crude by any standard – most ideas can be expressed in a harsh or a mild term. I feel you can make a statement conveying your sentiment without being crude.

Male participant 2: Yeah.

Male participant 3: Yeah, suppose that is true.

Female participant 1: I feel like there is almost always a kinder or milder way of saying what you want – offense can be avoided by removing all obscenity from your speech.

Male participant 4: But obscene language can be useful depending on the objective of the speaker – it depends what type of reaction he is hoping for.

Male participant 2: Yeah, maybe the speaker has a specific goal in mind – making him rely on obscenities for that reason.

Male participant 3: Yeah, the speaker may need to express an unpleasant idea.

Female participant 2: It is also dependent on the social group – language may be relative to the group of individuals that are present.

Female participant 1: I think obscenities create a less formal environment. Obscenities can really charge phrases with emotion or even create humour for some people.

Male participant 1: Definitely, people swear more when watching the game. That's for sure – it's not meant in an offensive way though. It's completely inoffensive.

Male participant 2: I become so invested in the outcomes of the match which probably influences how I speak, what I say and how I say it you know. It's almost like I can't even help what comes out.

Female participant 2: Yeah, I've seen that with my dad when he watches the game – like yelling and screaming sometimes. It's bizarre at times. I notice the language becomes kind of cryptic, expressive and emotional.

Female participant 3: Yeah, crude even – you'd hear a lot of crass language around a rugby game.

Male participant 3: Yeah, but I feel the language isn't directed at a person in particular you know – it's completely directed at the game. It's a response to an action on the playing field I'd say – it not at all offensive in nature because there's no intention to offend.

Male participant 2: Yeah, agree with that – the language will reveal the speaker's sentiment towards the progression of the match.

Male participant 3: These words are used repeatedly when the opposing team performs well I'd say.

Female participant 4: These matches or events are usually attended by guys I think though.

Female participant 1: I do enjoy watching sports now and then though but I hear you – it's mostly guys yeah.

Female participant 4: I think because it mostly attracts guys the language is typically crasser

Male participant 2: The terms release emotion during the game though – that's why they're used. It's not to insult others but rather to express passion for the team.

Female participant 3: These words are offensive when they are used alone – only really when they are used to refer to something or to someone.

Female participant 4: You should always think about the intention behind the words that are being said.

Male participant 4: Yeah – unless it's offensive it should be fine to say.

Female participant 1: I must say though I hear my male friends using obscenities far more often than my female friends. Girls are more inclined to use obscene language more often because gender dynamics have significantly transformed in recent years.

Female participant 3: Yeah, that may be true but I don't think girls are as crass as guys.

Male participant 4: I think guys still use stronger language than girls.

Male participant 3: yeah I think females use milder obscenities than males.

Female participant 1: the presence of parents or elderly persons

Male participant 2: the formality of the environment

Female participant 3: Well I refrain from using harsh obscenities in the presence of my parents – or other people’s parents for that matter [giggles]

Male participant 2: Yeah there is definitely a hierarchical gap between my parents and I  
Only during stressful situations would I use crude language in front of my folks.

Female participant 1: Well my parents consider obscenities to be disrespectful so I wouldn’t ever use them in our house.

Female participant 3: older people will not understand the context of the obscenities that people of our age would use sometimes.

Female participant 4: I will always avoid using obscenities during formal situations because of the seriousness of the situation.

Male participant 3: Yeah, I totally agree the use of obscenities may negatively influence the impression that is formed during any formal situation. I say ‘Christ’ and ‘Jirre’ sometimes – but not really to be offensive. For me these terms are used as a means of expressing surprise or shock even – sometimes I don’t even really register that it’s blasphemous to some people because I don’t say it to offend sometimes religion you know.

Female participant 1: No but really I do not believe it to be appropriate under any circumstances to use blasphemous language – even if you’re not religious you shouldn’t be saying that type of thing. Just because you don’t know who could be offended around you.

Female participant 4: Yeah and the articulation of a blasphemous term will not alleviate the alarm that caused the obscenity to be used, you know?

Male participant 3: I don’t think its offensive when blasphemous language is used to convey shock – it is not used to marginalise a group or person. It should be seen as a means of communication.

Female participant 2: Yeah it depends on the function of the obscene word, I feel – obscenities can fulfil different functions and it's not necessarily used to offend a person or people.

Male participant 3: Well I can add emphasis to a description by using an obscenity.

Male participant 2: Obscenities create a casual environment.

Male participant 4: Yeah an audience is more relaxed when addressed in casual language I think – I think my friends seem way more chilled when we speak in slang or swear. Our group all speak in a similar way I feel – we use the same type of language when we communicate. In a way that's how you know someone is part of the group.

With my friends I see that obscenities and slang strengthen our membership to the group.

Male participant 3: Yeah and a term will become popular through its usage on social media by the friends.

Male participant: for me obscene language is a response to pain. I often use obscenities when I experience physical pain – or annoyance, frustration.

Female participant 2: Yeah I swear unintentionally when I experiences surprise or shock me.

Female participant 3: Yeah, what still kind of surprises me is when people think it's okay to slander a girl for her habits. I hear strong terms like *slut* used quite easily specifically when guys talk about a girl.

Female participant 1: Hmm, *loose*, *ho* and *los* – I hear those quite often in my social circles when a girl goes out a lot. Those are also used quite often.

Female participant 2: I think this language is used to shame women – well for women who have violated the traditional expectations for sexual behavior. But it doesn't count for men.

Female participant 4: I never use this type of language – or any language that could be demeaning to women.

Male participant 3: I think these words are used by guys but not typically in front of other girls.

Female participant 3: Obscenities are used cautiously as they are not appropriate or useful in all contexts.

Male participant 2: Yeah, well I think obscenities should be used sparingly or at least with some caution.

Male participant 1: The formality of the environment and age of the guys will influence the type of language that we should use. Like in an interview for example, I would monitor my language probably a lot more closely and I wouldn't swear when I speak. I don't think it would come across as professional if I swear at work or in front of colleagues.

Male participant 3: I definitely consider who's in the room when I speak – I kind of tailor my language based on who's there and what they're like. Like, with older people or teachers and that I don't swear as much if ever. It's generally around my guy friends that I swear and not really around others.

Female participant 2: Well I think we can agree that the age of the individuals who are present will be one of the most influential factors that will determine how we speak and the formality of the situation – I agree with JC that you should try not to swear in front of colleagues or people that you work with. Language at work should be clean – you don't always know exactly what your colleagues' backgrounds are like so you don't really know what's going to offend them really. So yeah I guess the age and the type of situation you're in will definitely have an impact on the types of words you would choose.

Researcher: Okay guys, thank you for your time and for your ideas. This was really such a productive session. I'm grateful that you were here to help with my research.