

My Case Against the F-Bomb

By Cathie M. Clark

“F--- this”, “F--- that” — “F---ing this AND that.” Everybody talks that way now, right? Well, not everybody. I don’t, but I feel quite alone sometimes in an ocean of the F-bomb and other such profanities that for some people have lost their shock value. There is a definite difference in how I feel when I hear the word used by someone talking to someone else and when they are talking to ME that way. I don’t like it and tell them so. They always apologize because they know it’s rude and crude and promise not to do it again. But in many cases, it has become so integrated into their subconscious that it comes out automatically, like the merely annoying “y’know?” thrown in after every phrase. Some will defend their use of it: “Oh, c’mon -- it’s just a word. No big deal.” But to me, it IS a big deal on many levels.

First of all, it is intended to be shocking and attention-getting. And it succeeds at that. But with continued frequent use, it really means nothing to the users. The actual definition of the F-word is that it describes sexual intercourse. Throwing that in everywhere in everyday conversation is improper usage, to be technical. Members of the military use it -- to get the attention of their sex-deprived subordinates, and it does work. Once they are out of the military and adjusting to civilian life, however, they find it hard to get out of the habit.

Second of all, children are listening. I recall being at a fast food establishment standing behind a couple with their 3-year old son. He was swinging at the end of his father’s hand repeating over and over: “I don’t futtin’ care...” His parents were ignoring him, but it generated gasps of astonishment from those of us watching and someone critically remarked “Wonder where he heard THAT!”, casting a disgusted eye at his parents. I also knew of another young boy -- a neighbor -- whose parents swore at each other regularly. In joining neighborhood children for backyard play, he was sent home often for dropping the F-bomb at those children. He ended up being forbidden from playing with them -- basically ostracizing him. He also got sent home from school for using it, and on that afternoon as he visited me in my kitchen he told me that he didn’t understand why his teacher was so angry at him. He didn’t think he had done anything wrong. I did explain it, trying not to express judgement of his parents’ language, but I don’t think it did any good. He never came to visit me again, and years later his name kept popping up in the local paper’s Police Log.

Third, usage in anger at your loved ones is injurious to the success of those relationships. It is a most disrespectful thing to do and drives the already present anger to the highest of levels, not to mention sometimes violence. Some of the most volatile relationships I have seen were made worse with use of obscenities. A male acquaintance of mine was complaining to me about his latest argument with the girlfriend and when he told me what he said to her, I was shocked and asked “You talk to her that way?” He nodded, puzzled. “Does she talk to YOU that way?” Again, he nodded, wondering what I was getting at. When I stated that I didn’t think anyone should swear at someone they supposedly love, he was silent ... and thinking busily about the new concept I just presented. I told him he and she both needed

to make a determined effort to stop with the swearing and to talk to each other more civilly. He agreed it might help -- but it was going to be hard. Of course it was.

Some of the un-funniest “comedians” I have seen and heard lately use the term like punctuation. It doesn’t make them funnier, but they seem satisfied with laughter generated by embarrassment and shock reflexes. The classic comedians of our time could not use profanities on TV -- and their routines were genuinely funny. It’s a lost art. The great Red Skelton (the so-called “Clown Prince of the Airwaves”) once said: “I don’t think anybody should have to pay money at the box office to hear what they can read on restroom walls.” His statement must have been responsible for the creation of the term “bathroom humor”.

An otherwise impressive former Marine I recently met was lamenting that it was impossible to meet a “nice” girl. The fact that his salty language had gotten him expelled from the establishment in which I met him did nothing to clue him into the fact that the same vocabulary would be off-putting to the high-quality woman he hoped to meet. I regretfully did not launch into my usual lecture on the subject, but he is the reason I am writing this now. Adam, wherever you are, CLEAN IT UP, buddy!

As Judge Judy often says “You have two ears and one mouth for a reason.” You can’t un-hear something said to you, and while it’s true words cannot kill you, they do certainly have the power to hurt. That hurt can -- and in my opinion WILL -- prevent any kind of success in human relationships. A dirty mouth can also dead-end your career. As I explained to my fresh-out-of-the-Navy (then-future) husband: “I work in a professional office. If I get used to hearing it, at some point that word is going to pop out of MY mouth, and I will be fired...” Out of respect for my earning power and its importance to the relationship, he stopped. If he hadn’t, I would have dumped him. In retrospect, I should have anyway -- it turned out to be a preview of his disrespect for me and troubles to come.

Communication with others is as necessary to us as is air to breathe -- we speak to be understood. Value of the conversation is therefore important, and use of obscenities diminishes that value. It also is an isolating thing -- in these times of turmoil we need to be closer to the people we value and whatever work opportunities are available.

Today, I make a point to avoid persistent users of profanity. I truly believe society in general would benefit greatly from everyone freely expressing their disapproval when they hear vulgar language instead of silently trying to overlook it.

The views and opinions expressed in this *CMC Opinion* article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Cathie M. Clark Consulting, LLC.

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