

**LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:  
ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE'S POSITIVE  
CORRELATION TO POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC  
PROCESSES IN THE UNITED STATES**

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By

Marilyn Caufield

Professor Elizabeth Coughlan  
Faculty Advisor  
Department of Politics, Policy and International Relations

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### **Abstract**

With this study, I aspire to further evaluate how alternatives to “standard English” within the majority of political process platforms, specifically taboo, explicit, profane, and obscene language, lead to fewer inhibitors when exercising political participation in the United States. This is seen through the suppression of such expressions of profane speech in contrast to the “standard English” used in political processes. An introspection into how freedom of speech is inhibited through real-world examples is illuminated. The ways in which the United States political processes are set up to suppress such alternative linguistic choices and the needs of the constituents to participate to a more free and equitable extent are also consequently shown. This research provides a more in-depth analysis into the ever-growing spectacle on US oppressive behaviors and tactics employed to discourage variants of language choices amongst constituents despite having the freedom to one’s own speech that are continuously being overextended to attempt to encompass both language choices and needs. This is done through analyzing the relationship between political/democratic participation and language choices and needs, specifically looking at profane language in comparison to the accepted and socially preferred “standard English”. The evidence given within this text alludes to the theoretical explanation as to how profane language choices in the US democratic and political spheres are beneficial to participation.

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*To Doctor Elizabeth Coughlan,*

*Even when the odds have been stacked against me, you have been by my side.*

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enough to convey my gratitude. So thank you, Professor, we fucking did it!*

**Introduction**

The policing of language, specifically taboo language, is conducted across all levels of social, political and educational institutions in the United States. Current movements towards social acceptance for the perverse applications of profane language in political and democratic realms create the necessity for profanity in such domains. The education system in the United States constantly suppresses taboo language. This can be seen through the lack of skills taught in a primary public education system on how to protect one's own first amendment rights to use profanity. A platform for such dialogue is also prevented as a result of the teacher-student power dynamic. This provides little ground to defend those rights if the individual feels they are facing some severe consequence such as suspension before successfully defending their rights. This blatant issue of profane and explicit language is prohibited in most public schools paired with a lack of education taught otherwise to the proper use of taboo language. Demonstrations of this are actively shown through negative teacher/professor responses to said taboo language, such as being told to refrain from such speech or asking for limitations on taboo and profane language from individuals in the classroom settings of the United States. The English language is also intentionally inaccessible to many in the education realm based on intersectional identities that influence one's comprehension of the English language and ability to use certain aspects of the English language. As a result, explicit language policing has become institutionalized in society through the lack of normalization of taboo and profane language as young children are influenced by the education system and the socio-cultural ties that influence the ability to participate in US democracy and politics. The restrictions on alternative speech in political discourse intersectionality impact individuals and prevent certain groups of individuals from

participating to a full and equitable extent. Political “success”, or engagement without conflict, is not available to everyone based on these intersectional identities and applications. This leads us to contemplate to what extent explicit language positively affects a person’s capability of participating in a democracy.

For the purpose of this paper, we will be referring specifically to the United States democratic processes, utilizing similar countries’ language barriers in political processes as corroboration. We will be analyzing the liberal democracy of the US, sovereignty held by the people’s representatives, and how the people interact within this sphere to enforce such decisions made by representatives. For further clarification in this text, “political participation” will be defined as an individual’s interaction dependent from citizenship within the public affairs or governmental spheres in the United States, which includes “non-typical” examples of democratic participation. This can be considered as filling out documents for state and federal records and interacting with policing authority figures, such as police and teachers. Other, more typical examples of participation include actions such as jury duty and voting. “Policing” is considered the intentional stopping of profane language used by another person. Profanity, taboo, obscene, foul, and explicit language will be used interchangeably with a set understanding that such language is referring to words that some individuals may find offensive, though not necessarily harmful. For the purpose of further clarification, we will also be referring to “political enforcers” as individuals who push the democratic ideology of the United States. Political discourse is the area of interest we will specifically be referring to, as a veil of “standard English”, the socially permissible uses of English in political discourse, encapsulates politics in the United States at almost all aspects, even in personal one-on-one conversations as to not

appear “uneducated”. This pushes forth the idea that profane language acceptance in political and democratic realms aid in participation through the ubiquitous access it provides and the emotional correlations drawn from its use. The standard to not appear “uneducated”, though not bluntly stated as a rule or law in the political and democratic realms, does not include profanity and explicit language in the “standard” English. As a result of this, profane language choices are systematically oppressed by unwritten requirements for standard English.

An analysis of non-standard English acceptance in the political realm illuminates the positive correlation between language, specifically in favor of explicit language, and the use of such language by means of political participation within the United States democratic system lexicon. With these criteria set, we can conceivably see that there is a direct correlation between the extent to which individuals are able to participate in their governmental systems based on language inhibitors that apply to the political participation of individuals in the US democratic and political systems.

### **Ubiquity and Emotional Correlations**

The use of profanity, though becoming more mainstream especially in the political atmosphere of the United States, is still seen as what Timothy Jay describes perfectly as “taboo.” Institutions of power in a democracy are not aligned to accommodate taboo words, such as explicit language, meaning words like “fuck” and other obscenities (Jay 2009, 153). This is furthered through the child-rearing practices as described previously through education, as well as the overall hostility towards taboo words, which are generally the same ten taboo words or swear words depending on location, that are personalized to individuals. This personal connection or offense to the

potential swear word translates to the emotions that correlate with the word and we can then analyze said interactions. The “socialization of speech practices” as described by Timothy Jay has institutionalized the idea of how profane language should be viewed in the public eye as well as the teaching of profane language and when to wield such language amongst a populace (Jay 2009, 153). Explicit language has multiple situational instances of appropriateness, especially in the area of political discourse, as it is ubiquitous amongst people and cultures. Hostility, or offensiveness associated with taboo language is based on “pragmatic variables,” such as “speaker-listener relationship” and “social-physical setting” (Jay 2009, 154). These pragmatic variables illuminate two relationships, those being: 1) the relationship between the United States democratic and political system enforcers, such as police, lawyers, congressmen, tax collectors, politically inclined individuals, etc. and the citizen through the analysis of the dependant variable of emotion; and 2) the relationship between them in terms of taboo vocabulary being perverse applications and representative of an individual and their needs, signifying ubiquity of profane language in the US. This goes to corroborate that non-standard English can and should be incorporated into the political and democratic realms in the United States. The United States democratic processes are primarily conducted in English, but the way in which people learn the English language and what degree of standard English is taught to people is in direct correlation to the governmental “selection process” for political and democratic participation of the people. People need English in some way, shape, or form to participate politically. There is a dependency on democracy and the basic need for a common language to conduct political and democratic processes.



When referring to race, ethnicity, gender, and other intersectional topics, these taboo words are often emotionally correlated as well. As Timothy Jay suggests, the utilization of explicit and profane language is in direct alignment with the expression of one's emotional state (Jay 2009). Who is to deny one's reflections and actions on behalf of personal emotions, which are a natural occurrence, so long as they are not physically harmful or threatening in nature? It is proven that taboo language does "represent form[s] of emotional expression", and as such, language reflecting such expressions of emotion are protected in the United States (Stephens and Zile 2017,1). Taboo language is argued to be ubiquitous and representative of the instinctual human desire to express feelings through a pervasive platform such as a common understanding in the English lexicon such as taboo words. From an emotional perspective, obscene words in a political and democratic sphere in terms of participation through interactions, then, should be tolerated. Such conclusions can be correlated under the notion that using such ubiquitous language that is known from a young age, applicable to a wide majority of citizens but also able to convey an emotion in a way that is also vastly comprehensible by the masses. Such logical applications of profane language are directly correlated to the expression of emotions and feelings, which is required to communicate efficiently with others in social capacities. This stretches further into political and democratic processes in the United States. As stated before, topics of offense and serious subject matter that permeate the political sphere can be and have been met with profanity to reflect natural human emotions. An example of such is the "All Cops Are Bastards" or ACAB political slogan that reflects severe discontentment of people with the police, which was highly prominent

and remains prominent in the 2020s in the United States in response to the brutal murder of George Floyd and other racially motivated police brutality cases (Woodyard 2020).

People, who are not limited to just the “general public,” but also public officials such as politicians, utilize taboo language out of a need to express large discontentment. However, the utilization of taboo words in a political arena often has ulterior motives, essentially being blatant attempts to gain spotlight and platform opportunities to push a larger agenda. The language used to the advantage of oneself is not uncommon, as people have a tendency to phrase statements and questions in ways which work to their personal advantage. An extreme example of such could be a robber stating, “Put the money in the bag.” The language explicitly used for gain does not always have to be on purpose. However, though it is undeniable that the statement “put the money in the fucking bag” holds a significantly larger urgency to the requirement put forward by the hypothetical robber to obtain the desired product compared to “put the money in the bag.” The language used here can be correlated to a multitude of things, but the main focal point to the statement meant to enhance the situation is profanity. This is dependent on the relationship between the robber and the “socio-political enforcer(s),” by which I am referring to a person or group of people who enforces a social norm or expectation in alignment with US laws, ultimately illuminating the power dynamic structure between the two or more individuals involved in an interaction. In the case of bank robbery between a bank teller and an assumed armed man who just said “put the money in the fucking bag,” the power dynamic is in favor of the robber regardless assuming it is a one on one confrontation. However, the intensity of the situation is heightened through the tactical, though not necessarily purposeful, use of profanity on the robber’s part in order

to arguably gain compliance and speed from the teller putting the money in the bag. This robber, hopefully, is then met with a socially less taboo use of profanity and arguably even appropriate given the hypothetical circumstance of the bank robbery, “get on the fucking ground” from a political enforcer.

Urgent situations such as phone calls and interactions with 911 and other pressing situations, even as small as something like stubbing your toe, evoke obscene language under many circumstances in order to convey messages of importance and gain a higher sense of attention from the desired target audience (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, 269). “Speech involving profane words has a stronger impact on people than regular speech and has been shown to be processed on a deeper level in people’s minds” (Ashwindren, Shankar, and Zarei 2018, 1977). This signifies the practicality of ubiquitous and emotionally charged profane language in all situations. This can be furthered by the necessity of alternative explicit language in political discourse.

The applications of taboo language and the intersectional implications that come with language overall impact non-standard English variations and the influence they can have on political and democratic participation. In order to have a deeper understanding, we must work to understand what has occurred in the past decade in the political “popular culture,” as a rise to profanity and explicit language through oral orientation has become a popular strategy amongst political opponents. Beto O’rourke, a former Democratic presidential candidate in the 2020 elections, was popular in the presidential debates for his display of explicit language used during the debates. The word “Fuck” was used commonly throughout his campaign as a way to express discontentment with the current political climate (Bergen 2019). Profanities and explicit language are being

used more commonly as an avenue to grab the audience's attention, especially in the political arena, and therefore through ubiquitous use promotes the overall use of explicit language in the political and democratic interactions in the United States. This signifies a shift in political language choice, also seen through the New York Times referring to President Donald Trump as the "profanity president" for the constant use of foul and "improper" language (Baker 2019). This is furthered by Market Watch's graph on obscenities used by political officials, which shows an astronomical jump in the use of such obscenities within the past three years (Pesce 2019). This reveals an increase in explicit language use in the political arena without severe public backlash. The lack of public backlash is especially important as that is one of the largest indicators of acceptance especially in the 2020's "cancel culture".

### **Intersectional Implications of Profanity**

#### **BIPOC Community Implications**

Democracy is, in essence, government by the people. In the United States specifically, this is more indirectly done through set representatives casting votes on behalf of the people based on the votes of the people. Through an analysis of how obscene language impacts democratic participation, we can see a direct impact on BIPOC community member participation as a result of the suppression of language, especially profane language. The use of language is indisputably necessary for democracy and for creating policies to assist and run everyday life as we know it. Democratic participation, as we have noted from a citizen-governmental relationship, is largely due to the positive or negative interaction between the two which catalyzes or impedes political participation. As suggested by Noam Chomsky, one of the main factors behind the

suppression of minority groups and specifically language choice variations is due to the power imbalance in favor of those who have access to such language variations within English (Orelus and Chomsky 2014, 56). This in turn signifies a power imbalance between different spheres, as we will explore later with “policing” and “education” sections in this text. A demonstration of certain groups of individuals dominating different spheres of power through having the most opportunities linguistically to be involved in and participate in democracy can be seen through the domination of white men in Congress historically and currently. Such a system is contested by a sort of “democratic power”, or in this case, the ability of the individuals within a society to shift the ideology of the United States in favor of the US people. This alludes to the idea that democratic power applications assist the political and democratic spheres in adapting to suit the needs of minoritized groups that require the use of profane and non-standards of English to assist in democratic and political participation.

Discontentment in the political realm is not an unheard-of sentiment, as many people in the United States who celebrate holidays such as Thanksgiving have reported significant increases in partisanship straining familial ties, leading to a decrease in the number of time families with partisan beliefs spend at such federal holiday events (Chen and Rohla 2018, 1020). However, discontentment and language overlap significantly when referring to serious political matters and issues in United States society such as racial injustice. Bridgette Hylton looks at how politeness should not be complemented when referencing the issue of racial injustice and at how doing so furthers the lack of respect BIPOC community members receive in the United States (2021). This is furthered by Tressie McMillan Cottom who argues that BIPOC community members are

forced to no more than whisper bad words for fear of “causing a problem” (Cottom 2019, 12). The issue with language’s perception being more important than the underlying structural issues at hand is seen as problematic in the sense that the verbiage of one’s message takes prominence over the message itself, undermining the meaning of the message and the impact of the words (Hylton 2021). In this sense, language restriction in terms of profanity usage is forced on people in an attempt to suppress the way someone was raised, essentially aiming to standardize language acceptance. Linguistic suppression is based on socio-economic background, assigned sex, chosen gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and a multiplicity of other socio-cultural influences and intersects with individual identity. This is done through inhibitors put on an individual’s personality, choices, language, and identity, through policing of explicit language. This henceforth illuminates the classist, sexist, racist, and harmful-to-cultures policing techniques similar to the “whitewashing” to be discussed later. Such use of explicit language, if they are in fact a result of one’s socio-cultural influences, should then be permitted within the political and democratic arenas.

The use of language as a means to represent and express oneself is a natural given right in the United States, which extends past the right to whichever language one chooses to communicate in, but also the right to use language however one pleases so long as it is not inciteful of harm. Speaking about topics that are infuriating such as police brutality, racial injustice, sexism, xenophobia, and many more political and social issues in the United States is no exception to such language choices by individuals to express such discontentment over political matters. Though the “choice” of language and “politeness” over certain similar subject matters is attainable by many, it is important to

note that such choices are not attainable by all and therefore not truly a choice, but a privilege. Ms. Hylton states that the language one chooses is a result of one's socio-cultural surroundings, especially their education, which is inequitable varying from state to state. This is extended even further as "many people of color and other marginalized people are denied access to [politeness in certain subject matters such as racial injustice] in this country because of racism, classism, and xenophobia, and many years of education which many people of color and other marginalized people are also denied in this country" (Hylton 2021), because of the three severe offenses described above. This is mirrored by the work of Tressie Cottom that details the experiences of female BIPOC community members in the United States. Such correlations between BIPOC community struggles to obtain equitable value in expressions of discontentment free from the judgment of profane or harsh language and tone can be drawn and is supported through Laura L. Jacobi's work. The data concluded a correlation between skin color and the judgment of profanity and its offensiveness to individuals (2014). With this perception in place, it is arguably more difficult for people who are afforded fewer advantages in society to achieve the sort of "politeness" in reference to lack of profanity from a person's verbiage Ms. Hylton refers specifically to. This is assisted by Ms. Jacobi's reference to the perception of people of color, specifically black individuals, and their use of taboo language being perceived as more offensive in comparison to white participants of the study. The notion of ulterior socio-economic, and cultural differences evolving the way people speak in terms of profanity from one another is further argued by S. Ashwindren, V. Shankar, and N. Zarei, who argue that "Factors like gender, age, social class, education, and religion, may have a small or big impact on the particular use of

profane words by an individual. These factors may not only influence one's language use in general, but also their choices of vocabulary; regional, ethnic, political, and class differences by a diversity of pragmatic norms as they are by linguistic variations" (Ashwindren, Shankar, and Zarei 2018, 1979). With an understanding of the correlational connections between profanity and social, cultural, and ethnic influences, it becomes transparent that the link between profanity and upbringing and surroundings impact such speech. With this, it can also be concluded that unequal distribution of "politeness" education is generally largely unavailable to all individuals at varying degrees, signifying intersectional impacts and implications with the use of profane and explicit language.

### **Implications for Female Identifying Individuals**

The use of taboo language in the political and democratic realms has intersectional applications to female-identifying individuals. Women especially are held to a differing standard of English in comparison to their male counterparts. As a cis-born woman in the United States, I can attest to the institutionalized prejudice against female-presenting individuals' use of explicit language. Oftentimes in my educational career, I have been asked to refrain from the use of profane and explicit language, in both textual works as well as in the traditional and virtual classroom settings. It is important to note I have been asked by both men and women of various ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds to accommodate such requests imposed on my speech, as well as having this matter of my personal use of profane speech brought up at various ages of my life up until the current moment of 21. I foresee my profane language also being policed in the future, especially in areas of political discourse, as I have quite a bit to say, especially in today's age and time. I have been asked by peers and professors alike to refrain from using such speech or



to “tone it down”, even when speaking about the systematic practices in the United States set forth by laws and upheld by society over my body and rights. I am also very aware, I am not the only female-presenting individual to have been asked these things and had their speech policed. As a clear motivation behind the reason for this work has been established, we can further delve into the inequities sex-wise that result from the use of obscenity in the English language and how the use of such language inhibits political and democratic participation. This idea permeates through all aspects of political and democratic interactions. Female candidates have gained a small stage in US politics as a result of recent feminist movements and the push for the need for more equitable representation of ethnicities, sexual orientations, and other intersectional characteristics in political spheres. A representation of this claim is seen in the recent historical prominence of female politicians such as Elizabeth Warren, Hillary Clinton, and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. However, I would be remiss in not acknowledging the large counter-movements towards feminist movements and legislative matters as it is the explanation as to why the platform is so small. The ability for women to grow within a political and democratic realm is influenced by women’s access to education, socio-economic status, and many other factors that impede political participation and access to standard “English”. There is a double standard imposed upon women in order for them to conform to a patriarchal society that imposes a sort of chastity from swearing as it is often seen as “unladylike.” Melanie DeFrank and Patricia Kahlbaugh suggest that profanity, in general, is seen as “unintelligent” and creates a worse impression than someone who chooses to abstain from using obscenities. They also conclude that men generally come off as more offensive when they use explicit language in their

conversations (DeFrank and Kahlbaug, 2018, 26). According to Benjamin Bergen, Elizabeth Warren said her personal favorite and preference of profanity is the word “poop” (2019). Contrastingly enough, Beto O’rourke had campaign merchandise with the word “fuck” on them in order to fund his campaign after he gained popularity for his use of profanity (Bergen 2019). The use of profanity in the 2020 presidential debates reached such a level that the candidates were asked to abstain from the use of profanity by broadcasting network ABC (Forgey 2019). The use of profanity impacts at varying degrees as yes, poop is a “taboo” word, though considered a “low taboo” word according to Jay and Janschewitz (2008, 276). Higher taboo, as well as low taboo, words are only viewed as “acceptable” depending on certain variables and situations, gender being one especially. Explicit language choice is becoming more widespread amongst political figures as well as in female-identifying individuals partly due to such political cleavages caused largely by the ever-growing inequities that plague US society as a result of these findings.

As stated earlier, Elizabeth Warren’s favorite swear word is poop (Bergen 2019). This is significant because this not only is rated as a low taboo word but is also due to patriarchal implications that constantly work to suppress female use of explicit and profane language as within the United States, “The English language represents misogyny and sexism” (Knirnschild 2019, 29). As a result, we have findings such as women utilizing their rights to profane language to be nearly six times as offensive as if a male were to use the same profane language within the same contexts. (Knirnschild 2019, 36). With findings as such, a direct correlation between an acceptance within US society of female usage of profane and explicit language and the suppression female-identifying

individuals have faced as a result of patriarchal suppression and policing. With this idea applied to political and democratic discourse, examples of historical suppression of women's voices are illuminated. This can be seen through the 19th amendment with partial female enfranchisement, a voice in political matters, though it is negotiable as to when women started to gain equitable rights within the United States political and democratic history. Restrictions imposed upon women are still as demonstrated through the explicit and profane uses of “poop” versus “fuck” in 2020, though aided by Jacobi’s research that reflects female hesitation and restraint in using profanity. However, gender research in this area of profanity is inconsistent from sample to sample and situation to situation (2014). Situational aspects are key when using profane language in political discourse specifically. It is, nevertheless, fair to draw a linear correlation between the female-specific inequitable access to standardly accepted English and the use of explicit language in political and democratic realms. Such correlations are seen through society by providing intolerable grounds for such uses of profanity and explicit language from females due to residual patriarchal influences that deter female use of profanity.

### **Education**

The intersection between English education and explicit language reveals that younger children have an early development of the use of profanity (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, 272). These groups also generally have a longer learning curve over the appropriateness of taboo language within the English language along with contextual and comprehension issues associated with others’ use of taboo language to a non-native speaker (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, 272). Mr. Jay and Ms. Janschewitz outline an experiment run on university students in California that concluded no direct correlation

between offensiveness perceived from the taboo language in native versus non-native English-speaking peoples. This highlights the ubiquitous use of taboo language amongst people. This ubiquitous application of explicit language signifies perverse applications of profanity within the use of language, specifically English, in political discourse. This is essential to understanding political discourse because of the power dynamic created. The democratic institution, in this case being the education center, has influence over what the students learn and what access to profane language students may have. This in turn creates a dominant institution that actively inhibits honest representation of emotion through taboo language. This theory that profane language suppression occurs in the education realm applies directly to democratic participation through the institutional sphere. Often, especially within the United States, public schooling is provided on a state or federal level, tying such spheres to the democratic processes of the United States. The education sphere is tied to political discourse in two ways. The first is the federal and state ties via funding. The second is from the power dynamic created between the teacher, or the “political enforcer”, and the student. The political enforcer in this instance is responsible for teaching others what is proper to use in political discourse or within democratic spheres to the “younger generation,” or the students in the classes learning how to converse and speak on all platforms. The “whitewashing” techniques used in the educational realm, as explored later, promote the idea that, though “everyone” within the United States is protected on a governmental level, not everyone has the same level of protection afforded to them. With the idea that students have the right to their own speech within appropriate parameters, the use of profane language is brought to the center stage.

Identity, whether it be cultural, personal, virtual, etc is expressed through various mediums, i.e., visual and textual representations. However, suppression of freedom of choice in language among individuals specifically in the educational sphere displays the manipulation of the people through the institutional sphere. This also is an example of an uneven power distribution among people based on cultural and socio-economic aspects in which the institution dominates the people and forms them into what they would like them to be. This boils down to the ability to participate in democratic processes with the speech taught in the educational sphere and how those linguistic educational opportunities reflect upon the individual's ability to participate in the democratic processes of the United States. However, as we know with US American history specifically, looking at subjects such as tolerance of other than white European cultural influences, increased leniency towards other expressions of culture especially through language choice and ability has not always been tolerated. However, shifts in civil rights movements can be correlated with the shift away from the standard English associated with political and democratic participation and towards profanity, as explored with Beto O'Rourke and other examples given in this text.

The use of language in a democracy, especially within the context of US democracy, is not overtly restricted and has very few laws imposed upon speech as a whole, so long as it is a "standard" English, one free of slang, profane and explicit language, with proper politeness, pronunciation, and grammatical rules. However, this has not thwarted attempts at policing on language. Though governmental freedoms in speech exist, that has not eliminated the social constructs that influence policing of obscenity by the political institutions. "Democracy, Dialect, and the Power of Every

Voice” discusses minority groups' integration into the public school system through the English language. As the article suggests, public school systems tend to "whitewash" their students of various backgrounds other than those who grew up speaking English in their households, highlighting an intersectional issue (Huntington and Figgins 2005, 42). The majority of the English language taught to minority group students comes from their schooling and effectively diminishes any sort of encouragement of various choices along with their use of English (Huntington and Figgins 2005, 42). This then is furthered into the fight for students' rights to their own speech and dialects in an attempt to promote diversity among students. Some universities have adopted policies such as the "student's right to their own language" policies because of the movement. However, the societal pressure to conform to standard English remains nevertheless with an intersectional impact prevalent on the BIPOC community seen through Ms. Cottom's example of being coached to lose a southern accent (2019, 57). This relates to democracy in the sense that this suppression of identity in a way forms and dictates our interactions in society. If we are educating children on what English variations to use, it is then able to be drawn that only the standard English preferred in such political and democratic entities such as public schooling as elaborated on in the article by Huntington and Figgins would be pushed. This supports the idea that children's cultures are whitewashed, with one of the largest impacted groups being minority students. This notion of suppression of language in democracy and political participation impacts at an educational level in the classroom as stated in the earlier education section of this text. Education is primarily delivered via bureaucratic means (Cottom 2019, 35). This is supported by schooling being enforced on an institutional level, or even funded on some institutional level like government aid.

From this, such political and democratic interactions between political enforcers (like teachers) and people (in this case students) can be drawn. Henceforth, the inequitable power dynamic as previously aforementioned can also be concluded between the educational “political enforcer” and the individual interacting with it.

State universities like Salem State University and a plethora of other state universities alike, as well as state public education like non-private K-12 education centers, receive funding in some way, shape, or form from the federal government. This creates the responsibility of education centers tied to the political and democratic realms to respect your rights as a natural human being as federally protected rights, of course, still apply to the individual. The *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* landmark case was a case of prominence over the policing of language in the educational sphere (*Tinker v. Des Moines* 1969). The freedom of speech over political matters, once again being the Vietnam War in this instance, is protected in a classroom setting as a result of the ruling of this case (*Tinker v. Des Moines* 1969). This case, and many other cases in which a student’s freedom of speech is brought into question, calls attention to the tactics of policing such profane language is also examined consequently. The *Tinker v. Des Moines* case is echoed through the ruling of the *Bethel School District No. 403. V. Fraser* case. This simultaneously set the parameters of the use of taboo speech within public schools as not being prohibitable unless found as “vulgar, lewd, or plainly offensive” (487 US 675). However, as we see through the demonstration of the *Fraser* case, these parameters are loose and malleable to different scenarios. Though, like in *Fraser v. Bethel* ruling, restrictions of what may seemingly be “crude and offensive” or “sexually explicit” do not directly correlate to a breach of first amendment rights. If a

beyond-reasonable doubt violation was present, then such policing within the educational realm would be justified. Nevertheless, unless such infringements are made, policing language in such a manner similar to those used in the *Fraser v. Bethel* case are direct violations of a citizen's rights protected in the Constitution (*Fraser v. Bethel* 1986). The protection of such naturally given rights is essential to US political processes and at all ages and institutions both public as well as private regardless of ethnicity, race, sex, gender, language dialect, etc. This is done in order for individuals to be able to interact with the institutions as well as other people in day-to-day activities, a concept mentioned in the previous section and will be furthered by the section on ubiquitous applications.

A correlational relationship can be drawn between the suppression of taboo language in school and impediments on political participation. Many are asked not to use profane and explicit language within a classroom setting, though as seen with the cases above, as language engagement and dismissal are situationally motivated. The lack of political and democratic platforms available as a result of the policing in the educational sphere illuminates how engagement in political discourse within this sphere from a person-governmental institution impedes political and democratic participation. This is a type of policing of language, as many non-harmful displays of profane language lead to institutionalized suppression from a very young age. The findings of the *Des Moines* and *Fraser* cases back up the first amendment rights of individuals. In addition to the findings already presented, intolerance surrounding taboo language within the establishment meant to teach you about the democratic and political process of the United States offers bias in favor of what the institutional establishment desires. In the case of public schooling, the absence of profanity in students' everyday language is harmful to political



participation heightened by intersectional implications at an educational level. This, often paired with the failure of education in the equity of English language capabilities as explained throughout this text, disproportionately leads to unfair advancements within the education system. This works to show the failures in the US educational system through the inability to teach the proper tools necessary for political and democratic participation. This in turn correlates to the unequal access available to specific individuals on a situational basis, which can and does significantly impact a large portion of people.

### **Policing**

We can continue under the firm impression that an uneven power dynamic exists between the democratic systems of the United States and the citizen's ability to express themselves within those systems through the use of their personal language choices. Language choices that are primarily used by the individual may or may not be English, and may or may not be taboo as a result of the first amendment of the Constitution of the United States allowing the freedom of speech with certain exceptions. This creates a situational environment in which one gets to control which speech they choose to use at a given time. An illustrative example of this instance is displayed in the supreme court case, referred to as the Cohen v. California case. This case was a landmark US supreme court case in which Paul Robert Cohen received a previous ruling of "disturbing the peace" and "offensive conduct". This was in response to Mr. Cohen arriving at the Los Angeles County Courthouse adorned in a jacket inscribed with the words "Fuck The Draft" on the back. Though Mr. Cohen did not verbally say anything, the taboo nature of the word fuck in the public setting meant that the words on the jacket, an expression of Mr. Cohen's sentiments, were taken in offense (Cohen v. California 1971). We can see

through the power dynamic between the democratic institution, whose institutional powers are wielded by police in this instance, and the citizen, that being Mr. Cohen. This, paired along with a socio-physical setting of a courthouse paired with the ongoing tensions in the United States due to a divide amongst people over the US involvement in the Vietnam war catalyzed action on the institutional end (Cohen v. California 1971). However, as was decided by the Supreme court in the landmark case, Mr. Cohen did nothing to incite violence nor engage or threaten to engage in any sort of violent acts by linguistic means. Mr. Cohen's claim was that the jacket was a reflection and expression of his sentiments towards the Vietnam war and the effects the war had on society at that time. It is important to note that Mr. Cohen was a white male individual, as explained in this text that intersectionality of language and political and democratic interactions influences the result of the interaction. It was argued and upheld that this was in fact fair use of the first and fourteenth amendments of the United States Constitution. This led to the court ruling protecting the use of profanity under the first amendment.

The use of the English language in the instance with Mr. Cohen, however, led to a negative democratic and political process interaction. This can be correlated to the failure of taboo words being socially acceptable, though generally seen as ubiquitous with very few exceptions as we will explore later with ubiquitous applications and have touched upon already. The main reason for the conflict was in fact the free exercise of speech by Mr. Cohen, but the perception of the speech, though enraging to the cop, was in fact not harmful or inciteful. In the instance of Cohen v. California, the personal opinion of the police officer and the external factors of the time, that being the Vietnam War, influenced the officer's opinion of the speech displayed on the back of the jacket. Mr. Cohen hadn't,

however, physically done anything other than exercise freedoms in a polite manner even, not wanting to cause conflict, removing the jacket before entering the courtroom. This led to the removal of Mr. Cohen in an unjust way. If Mr. Cohen had, say, said “I’ll fucking kill you” to the police officer, a justification could have been made. This would be due to the potential of harm that can be caused to the police officer as Mr. Cohen would have then theoretically put the officer in some sort of danger that would have warranted the removal of the individual.

Policing of profane language is largely situational, as we have argued throughout this text. This can be seen in political and democratic spheres in the United States through the example of “yelling fire in a crowded theater” as seen with the *Schenck v. United States* ruling. This led to the commonly noted restrictions on the freedoms of speech in the United States. These situational restrictions indicate that there are restrictions able to be put on speech through legal precedent. These instances often involve violence in some way, shape, or form. This is seen through the desire to incite panic and terror in the instance of *Schenck v. the United States*. The utilization of language to evoke a strong, violent response, however, can be both aided and impeded through profanity. This can be seen through the common American male phrase “I fucked your mother” which incites violence in certain situations. The situational aspects of a statement, however, are key. If Mr. Cohen were to wear the same jacket into a courthouse today, with little to no draft controversies at the current moment in the political climate of the early 2020s, one could argue that he may not be penalized for such actions. This is also key to the previously stated examples of “I fucked your mother” as it is also a statement used to make individuals laugh in the United States. And as stated earlier, interactions can be aided,

such as “Get on the fucking ground”. Yelling fire is not illegal if there is a fire in the theater, or if you have some reason you had to and did within reason and do not intentionally work to insight panic. However, as in many cases involving the freedom of speech such as the case with Mr. Cohen and the case examined earlier, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the ability for one to use language open to interpretation, and the situational applications of such instances play a key role in the appropriateness of the application of such language.

### **Conclusion**

We need language in some way shape or form to communicate. If you just witnessed me smash my foot into the corner of a table, and I looked at you and said “my fucking toe hurts”, it is generally comprehended that the degree of pain I’m feeling is quite intense. This is because of the ubiquitous understanding that profane language comes from the emotions a person releases as a result of an interaction. In the example above, that’s my toe vs the table. It is argued by theorists such as Timothy Jay that profane language is ubiquitously comprehensible from a young age, as well as emotionally charged (2008, 272). Such correlations call to action the need for profane language acceptance in society. When applied to political discourse, however, the use of profanity in political discourse is suppressed at varying degrees based on intersectional identities. The interaction surrounding political discourse between the institution v.s the people engaging with it is essential to understanding why political discourse is different from everyday profane language use. The power dynamic between the institution and the people never changes, as the institution will always have the upper hand. The use of “standard English” is accessed via the education system. With that comes the institutional

influence on young minds over the variations of accepted English, intersectionality, disproportionately impacting the BIPOC community through the restriction of access to politically accepted variations of English. We also see restrictions imposed upon all individual uses of profanity in the educational sphere by means of policing language through punishments handed down by the democratic and political institutions. Policing of language also exists outside of the academic realm, in areas like US court systems and even presidential debate stages. Through this, the implications of female-identifying profane language use are highlighted to show indications of disproportionate policing compared to men in the United States.

With the policing of profane language, a protected right in the United States that disproportionately affects all individuals with more significant impacts on Female Identifying Individuals and the BIPOC community, natural expressions of emotions are inhibited. Is this what should be happening? Do you feel a person shouldn't be able to say "Fuck the Draft" in response to a war a large percentage of American people contested? Who do you feel has the right to tell a female sexual assault survivor "could you please tone down your language" when swearing in frustration as to everything they experienced? Who feels it is appropriate to tell a Black individual who grew up during the Jim Crow Era that their language is too strong when speaking about their experiences and recalling their past with segregation? Not me. Nope. There is a platform for profanity in the political and democratic processes within the United States. With such a platform provided, more people would be able to participate in such political and democratic processes within the United States as more than the standard English would be accepted. This makes sense when a large portion of people who reside within the United States are

restricted to access to standard English but are also prevented from using ubiquitously comprehensible profanity. This leaves room for one to argue why the fuck not utilize profane language in the proper political and democratic realms if it is ubiquitously comprehensible and a natural expression of emotions, and to quit policing people's fucking language.

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