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Five Filthy Words: Offensive Language and Primetime Television Programming

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FIVE FILTHY WORDS:

OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE AND PRIMETIME TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

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Primetime television programming is distinctly pervasive, reaching millions of audience members in an instant; consequently, the offensive language broadcast therein — outside of the safe harbor — is often reason for governmental regulation and societal concern. Although the Federal Communications Commission's influence extends only to that aired by broadcast television networks, cable programming is not without its restraints, including advertiser and viewer pressures.

This dissertation employs a content analysis to examine the frequency with which offensive language was aired and bleeped on two broadcast and two cable networks during primetime of the May 2013 sweeps period, focusing primarily on the differences between the numbers and popular linguistic categorizations of the terms aired on these two network types. Furthermore, this dissertation examines the language aired during each half-hour primetime timeslot to explore whether or not offensive language becomes more frequent and/or objectionable as the night progresses.

Statistical analysis of the 224 hours of programming suggests that a significant difference exists between the number of offensive terms aired by broadcast networks and those aired by cable networks during primetime, and it draws a positive correlation between reality programming and bleeped offensive language. Furthermore, an examination of the popular linguistic categorizations of aired and bleeped offensive terms suggests that Carlin's seven dirty words once considered "too hot" for the airwaves have evolved to a list of five filthy words

incessantly bleeped by broadcast and cable television stations, and the recommendation is made that, given contemporary high-profile scandals regarding its utterance, hate speech should be considered a form of offensive language.

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To my brother, Dylan, I owe partial credit for my extensive repertoire of obscene words and phrases. Your mastery of and creativity regarding offensive language is boundless and enviable. To my mother, Zeta, I owe a lifetime of entertainment. I assume few parents would be as supportive as you have been of a child whose research seems consistently to focus on indecent or obscene topics. Thank you for always letting me be me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

In 1992, the United States Court of Appeals supported the Federal Communications Commission's establishment of a safe harbor period, permitting indecent programming on radio and television from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Instead of the 18-hour ban of adult programming established in *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation* (1978) and the 24-hour ban proposed in *Action for Children's Television v. FCC* (1988), the courts permitted the agency to enforce a 16-hour indecency ban on radio and television under the assumption that children may be in the audience during this timeframe (Hilliard and Keith, 2007). Before 10 p.m., stations may not broadcast obscenity of any kind or content that, per the FCC (2012), "in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory organs or activities" (p. 1).

What constitutes "patently offensive" material is subjective and incorporates contextual presence; explicit language presented in a news broadcast may not be considered objectionable, but extended sexual innuendo that does not use outwardly offensive terms but that clearly describes a sexual act may be. During a 1990 morning drive-time broadcast on KGB-FM in San Diego, radio hosts aired the "Candy Wrapper Song," a comedic piece using candy bar names in explicit sexual innuendo, a brief excerpt of which follows: "Well, she immediately went down on my Tootsie Roll, and you know, it was like pure Almond Joy. I couldn't help but grab her delicious Mounds, 'cause it was easy to see that this little Twix had the Red Hots." This broadcast used few blatantly offensive terms; nevertheless, the FCC ordered that the station forfeit $7,500

as penance for airing the song, given the lyrics' extended allusion and inescapable explicit sexual content (Federal Communications Commission, 1998).

In addition to overt sexual and excretory language, George Carlin's seven dirty words — "shit," "piss," "fuck," "cunt," "cocksucker," "motherfucker," and "tits" (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2004) — are notoriously banned from broadcast television; however, these terms likewise may be impervious to government criticism if situated within an appropriate context. A 2006 episode of National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* aired a wiretapped conversation of John Gotti in which the gangster frequently uttered "fuck" and its variations. After reviewing the broadcast, the FCC concluded that, because such language was aired to convey true character during a legitimate news program, it would not pursue NPR for reasons of indecency (National Public Radio, 1996).

According to Levi (2008), the FCC uses three standards to determine if language or material is patently offensive within its context, examining how explicit or graphic a description or depiction is of sexual or excretory organs or activities, whether or not the material dwells on these descriptions, and whether the material "appears to pander or is used to titillate, or whether the material appears to have been presented for its shock value" (p. 15). Thus, indecency and profanity — context permitting — may be broadcast on television outside of the safe harbor free of FCC repercussions. When context is not sufficient to warrant agreeable airing of indecent material, or when societal standards determine the material to be patently offensive, television stations broadcasting indecency after 6 a.m. and before 10 p.m. may incur considerable backlash from the FCC.

Despite longstanding restrictions, television stations continue to air indecent material intentionally or otherwise before 10 p.m., bucking federal regulations and challenging the

motivation and governing power of the FCC. According to Vicini (2012), by 2012, the FCC possessed a backlog of 1.5 million pending indecency complaints involving nearly 10,000 television broadcasts and dating back as far as 2003; however, in a public notice released in April 2013, the FCC (2013) reported that it had reduced its backlog by 70 percent — more than one million grievances — eliminating complaints beyond the statute of limitations and those considered "too stale" to pursue (p.1).

Per the 2006 Broadcast Decency Act signed by President George W. Bush, for each incidence of indecency on television, stations may be fined up to a maximum of $325,000. Per day of continuing indecency violations, broadcasters may be fined up to an additional $3 million for any single act or failure to act (Levi, 2008). Furthermore, the FCC (2012) suggests it may issue warnings or revoke station licenses if entities air obscene, indecent, or profane material.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the threats of six- or seven-digit fines and of license revocation, television stations continue to air indecent programming between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. The mere broadcasting of this content is not the most complicated part of the problem, however. Throughout the FCC's history, the Commission's actions in response to family-time indecency have been inconsistent. According to Reuters (2012), when NBC aired the unedited version of *Schindler's List* — featuring graphic violence, profanity, and full frontal nudity — in 1997, the FCC took no action; however, following Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction," — during which Jackson's bare breast was exposed for a brief moment — the FCC handed CBS a $550,000 fine. Although CBS was relieved of the fine in 2011 by the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, the FCC's tradition of action and inaction in the face of indecency violations establishes contemporary television broadcasting as a sort of

Russian roulette for stations wishing to air offensive material outside of the safe harbor period (Reuters, 2012). Additional complication lies in the offensiveness of the utterances and the public reception of each offense when stations broadcast indecent material. FCC enforcement procedures begin with the consumer; as the public files complaints with the organization, FCC staff review the complaints to determine whether or not the organization will pursue fines or license revocations from violators, and the agency acts accordingly (FCC, 2012). Therefore, the offensiveness and frequency of profane and indecent utterances on television have bearing on how the public responds to indecent programming and thus how the FCC acts in response to these complaints (Hilliard and Keith, 2007).

Further confounding the indecent programming issue is advertising revenue, which arguably provides a counterpoint to the FCC's economic threats. Major broadcast networks such as NBC and Fox, whose profits rely largely on advertising and whose actions are directly punishable by the FCC, gain millions of dollars each day in primetime advertising revenue. For Wednesday broadcasts of *American Idol*, Fox charges advertisers approximately $340,000 for a 30-second commercial; one half-minute of airtime during ABC's hit sitcom *Modern Family* costs advertisers more than $330,000 (Steinberg, 2012).

In late 2012, advertisers paid a premium of $545,142 for a 30-second spot during a broadcast of NBC's *Sunday Night Football* (Steinberg, 2012). According to Biderman (2012), in one three-hour NFL broadcast, commercials account for roughly one hour of that airtime; thus, NBC stood to draw more than $65 million in advertising revenue from a single *Sunday Night Football* game. If NBC decided to permit profanity uttered by coaches, players, fans, and announcers to reach the airwaves undisturbed during a Sunday night NFL game, it would need

only three minutes of advertising to offset the FCC's maximum fine per day of continuing indecency violations, which is $3 million (Levi, 2008).

In addition to inconsistent punishments, varying shades of profanity offensiveness, and competing interests, vague FCC guidelines create confusion for television stations that intentionally or unintentionally broadcast indecent programming outside of the safe harbor period. The vague wording of FCC regulations allows for heavily subjective decisions, as supported by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit during the 2010 *FCC v. Fox* case. Justifying its decision, the Court argued that the flexible nature of the English language makes speech difficult to legislate:

> Because "we can never expect mathematical certainty from our language," *Grayned v. City of Rockford*, 408 U.S. 104, 110 (1972), "perfect clarity and precise guidance have never been required even of regulations that restrict expressive activity," *Williams*, 553 U.S. at 304 (quoting *Ward v. Rock Against Racism*, 491 U.S. 781, 794 (1989)). (*Federal Communications Commission and United States of America, Petitioners v. Fox Television Stations, Inc.*, 2010, p. 25)

As recently as June 2012, the Supreme Court addressed the vagueness of FCC guidelines and procedures during a television broadcasting indecency case. At this time, the Court ruled unanimously against the FCC's attempted crackdown on stations as a result of the profanity-laden Billboard Music Awards speeches by Cher and Nicole Richie in 2002 and 2003, respectively, a seven-second shot of a woman's nude buttocks on a 2003 episode of *NYPD Blue*, and Jackson's Super Bowl performance in 2004. The Supreme Court claimed that the regulatory body's guidelines were too vague, and that in these three instances, the Commission failed to give fair warning to broadcasters regarding pertinent policy changes; the ruling did not address

whether or not the FCC's indecency policy violated broadcasters' First Amendment rights (*Federal Communications Commission v. Fox Television Stations,* 2012). The timeliness of the ruling, coupled with the vagueness of FCC guidelines, lends currency to new research regarding aired profanity.

Purpose of the Study

Because prior research conducted on the topic of profanity aired on broadcast and cable networks is limited and primarily in commentary or qualitative form, the body of existing work suggests a need for new research featuring quantitative or mixed-methods data. The purpose of this dissertation is to add to body of knowledge regarding indecency and television programming by first examining the linguistic categorizations and the frequency of aired profanity on broadcast and cable stations outside of the safe harbor in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot to determine how television stations perform in the face of FCC regulations. An accurate examination of indecency broadcast on television outside of the safe harbor may suggest the strength of the FCC's stronghold on television content in an age of asynchronous programming services such as TiVo and Video on Demand, and the inherent threat the organization's punishments pose to contemporary broadcasters.

Significance of the Study

Given contemporary Supreme Court rulings and ever-vague FCC guidelines, the study is significant because it provides a snapshot of contemporary culture, highlighting current broadcast and cable television practices and regulations, and discussing current social standards surrounding television programming. In part, the study is also significant because the impact of profanity on the marketability and reception of television programming suggests that audience size is determined by the degree of a television station's inclusion of aired profanity in television

programming; because advertising revenue is tied to the demographics and size of television audiences, indecency, audience size, and advertising may be considered in a direct relationship (Vicini, 2012). Because broadcast networks are regulated by the FCC while cable networks are less so, a study comparing the two may highlight any differences between the entities regarding profanity-airing practices, especially considering that, although unregulated, cable networks must consider advertising revenue and audience response when deciding to air profanity (Steinberg, 2009). Furthermore, a study that explores the frequency and linguistic categorizations of aired profanity may emphasize the implicit value of profanity. This dissertation intends to observe the marketability of profanity on broadcast television, examining the profanity aired on cable and broadcast television channels in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot (within the FCC-punishable perimeters of 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.).

Grand Research Questions

To that end, the main questions the study will address include the following:

- RQ_1: How frequently does offensive language (aired and implied) air on primetime, sweeps-period programming in May 2013?
- RQ_2: Do the instances of profanity aired or implied differ between cable and broadcast television networks during primetime?
- RQ_3: Do the most popular categories of on-air profanity differ between cable and broadcast networks in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot?
- RQ_4: Does the amount of profanity (aired and implied) vary according to half-hour timeslot during primetime?

Hypotheses

Given the existing literature, the purpose of the study, and the grand research questions, the null hypotheses to be tested are the following:

- H_0 1: Programming on cable networks will contain the same amount of offensive language as will programming on broadcast networks.
- H_0 2: Programming on cable networks will contain the same most popular linguistic categories of offensive language as will programming on broadcast networks.
- H_0 3: The frequency of profanity aired or implied by cable and broadcast networks will not vary according to half-hour timeslot during primetime sweeps-period programming.

Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions are used to clarify words and concepts featured in the literature review:

- Asynchronous programming service – any of a number of services that allow users to record and/or watch television programming at a date and time other than its original broadcast (e.g. TiVo, DVR, Video on Demand); also referred to in *Sony Corp. of Amer. v. Universal City Studios, Inc.*, as "time-shifting" practices (1984).
- Broadcaster(s) – used in this study to describe any person or group of persons who air(s) programming on television or who make(s) decisions regarding what is aired on television; not limited to those employed by broadcast networks.
- Broadcast television – consists of large, over-the-air television networks that have local markets in which programming varies regionally; governed by the FCC (e.g. NBC, CBS, ABC) (Steinberg, 2009).

- Cable television – consists of subscription-based television networks that use a national schedule and that have no local markets or regional program variation; not subject to FCC regulation (e.g. Nickelodeon, USA, Comedy Central) (Steinberg, 2009; Vicini, 2012).
- Fleeting expletive – a profane term or phrase uttered unplanned on live television (Butler and Fitzgerald, 2011).
- Indecency – "language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory organs or activities" (FCC, 2012, p. 1).
- Obscenity – material must meet a three-pronged test to be considered obscene: "an average person…must find that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; the material must depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law; and the material…must lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value" (FCC, 2012, p. 1).
- Primetime – the television viewing period traditionally recognized as 8-11 p.m., Monday through Friday (Nielsen, 2011).
- Profanity – "language so grossly offensive to members of the public who actually hear it as to amount to a nuisance" (FCC, 2012, p. 1).
- Realism – "the quality or fact of representing a person, thing, or situation accurately or in a way that is true to life" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).
- Safe harbor – the period of time between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., during which television stations may broadcast indecent programming without incurring penalties from the FCC (FCC, 2012).

- Seven dirty words – famously inventoried by comedian George Carlin; a list of words banned from broadcast television that includes “shit,” “piss,” “fuck,” “cunt,” “cocksucker,” “motherfucker,” and “tits” (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2004).

Limitations

Limitations of the study exist in part due to the vast number of available television networks. Because four networks will be studied, results from the sample may or may not be generalizable to the greater population. Because these networks represent the most watched during primetime and draw the highest viewership, they arguably provide a window into the most popular television programming during that time; however, four networks may only be representative of a corpus of more than 250 to a limited degree. A second limitation to this study is the lack of qualitative input from stations concerning their policies and procedures regarding the airing of profanity during primetime broadcasts. Although the four studied networks were contacted for their perspectives as they relate to this study, all chose to decline participation. Furthermore, selected because of their presumed accessibility and their inclusion in the quantitative study, the Youngstown, Ohio, broadcast network affiliates also declined participation after contacting their respective corporate headquarters. Finally, a tertiary limitation of this study is a technical one; given DVR recording capabilities, only four networks’ programming could be recorded simultaneously during primetime.

Summary

Today’s television stations — broadcast or cable — that opt for gritty language likely must accept that their programs will not be readily available in schools, in public places (e.g. restaurants, bus terminals, physicians’ offices), and in conservative households, and that some parents will prohibit their children from watching these broadcasts. What inspires stations to air

indecent programming may vary from increased advertising revenue to pursuits of realism, which may be explained as dialogue or actions of a character meant to bring a sense of genuineness to a program. A construction worker who smashes his finger with a hammer is often more likely to shout “Fuck!” or “Son of a bitch!” than “Gee!” or “Shucks!” The opposite, perhaps, is true for an elderly nun. Thus, determining how a character is most likely to act or speak in a given scenario is a writer’s pursuit for realism.

Further inspiration for stations to air profanity on television includes increased comedic or shock value. For example, a May 2, 2013, episode of *The Office* featured the following profanity-dependent give-and-take between characters Andy Bernard and Nellie Bertram:

Andy: “It’s better than sticking around here and half-assing it, right?”

Nellie: “What if you were to stay here, you know, and ‘full-ass’ it?”

Without profane wordplay, Nellie’s retort loses all comedic value; thus, in this instance, *The Office* writers chose laughs over safe dialogue. Profanity for the sake of comedy or shock value only adds to the questionable nature of indecency broadcast outside of the safe harbor period when the potential for seven-figure fines and license revocations from the FCC exist as punishment for assessed violations.

The conceptual foundation of this study includes profanity broadcast intentionally or unintentionally outside of the safe harbor. Furthermore, the study examines historical, potential, and enforced FCC backlash on institutions airing indecent material and the debate between freedom of speech and public interest.

Study Organization

Chapter 1 presented the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, grand research questions, hypotheses, theoretical justification, terms

and definitions, and limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of the research. Chapter 2 will contain a review of related literature that focuses on a theoretical justification for the study, the realism of profanity versus potential audience size, advertising and television, the nuances of profanity, instances of profanity on television, legal implications of profanity, the brief legal precedence of media indecency and profanity, and free speech versus public interest. Chapter 3 will feature the methodology and procedures employed to gather quantitative data for the study. The results and analyses from the study will be contained in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 will feature a summary of the study and of the findings, potential implications of the study, and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

A brief examination of the literature related to profanity on television unearths a theoretical justification for the study as well as several distinct research categories — realism of profanity versus potential audience size, broadcasters' relationship with advertisers, the nuances of profanity, instances of profanity on television, legal implications of profanity coupled with FCC regulations, the brief legal precedence of media indecency and profanity, and free speech versus public interest.

Theoretical Justification

This study will employ the use of speech act theory as a theoretical basis for research. Most often associated with the work of John Searle (1969), speech act theory compares the nuances of language with the intentions of the speaker. According to Searle, language is an intentional behavior; thus, it may be considered a form of action (University of Twente, 2010). Considering Searle's speech act theory and earlier work by Austin (1962), Cohen (1996) separated speech acts into five functional categories: representatives (e.g. assertions, reports), directives (e.g. suggestions, commands), expressives (e.g. apologies, complaints), comissives (e.g. promises, threats), and declaratives (e.g. decrees, declarations). Because speech act theory attempts to explain how speakers use language to accomplish actions and how listeners acquire meaning from this language, profanity aired on television may be examined accordingly to determine the functions of the terms and to explain how the terms establish cultural meaning between stations and audience members (Jaworowska, 2012). Furthermore, these offensive terms may be examined linguistically to explore stations' choices along the sliding scale between

marketability and realism when factoring in the potential for FCC backlash and loss of advertising revenue. By using profane language in a broadcast, actors, scriptwriters, and producers are acting intentionally to convey a specific meaning; by allowing profane language to hit the airwaves, television stations are acting intentionally, airing words used to express heightened cultural meaning. Speech act theory is relevant to this study because it gives linguistic and motivational value to indecency and profanity. Offensive terms and phrases in this case may not be easily eliminated from television programming as meaningless noise; thus, they must be given appropriate consideration when determining patent offensiveness, potential societal backlash, and monetary value as it relates to advertising revenue and viewership.

Realism of Profanity vs. Potential Audience Size

As stated in Chapter 1, television stations that air profanity must accept that their programs will not be considered appropriate for all audiences, but those that avoid airing profanity may risk their works lacking in realism. In “The Pottymouth Paradox,” Patty Campbell (2007) discusses this profanity-centered dichotomy as it exists in young adult publishing, suggesting that two categories of these works exist: publications that are “fuck-free” and publications that are “chock-full-o’-fuck.” The “fuck-free” works are available to the widest variety of audiences, but they may not possess the most realistic dialogue, according to Campbell. Additionally, Campbell argues that both “fuck-free” and “chock-full-o’-fuck” works may be worthy of cultural recognition and significance; the only difference between the two styles is audience size and the preference of authors to steer toward or away from profanity-laden text, a dichotomy displayed in Figure 1.

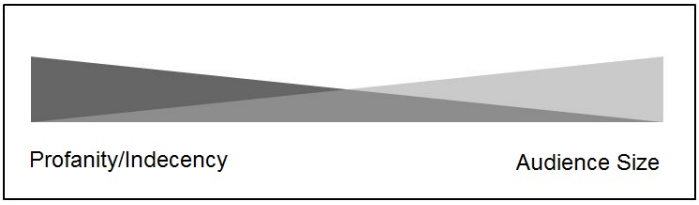

Figure 1. The "value" of profanity.

From the perspective of televised broadcasts, Krcmar and Sohn (2004) agree that for certain characters, profane language is more realistic than squeaky-clean dialogue. The researchers discuss the 2002 production of a documentary about basketball coach Bobby Knight, which featured significant amounts of profanity. According to Krcmar and Sohn, then-Senior Vice President of ESPN Mark Shapiro stated that executives decided to include the offensive terms in an effort to increase the realism of the program.

Not only does profanity aid in setting a realistic scene or in carrying out a genuine conversation, but its use — and the choices therein — may help a writer or a broadcaster to develop or convey a character, as these offensive terms may suggest a person's age, gender, or ethnicity, among other things. For example, on a May 2013 episode of *Dateline* on NBC, a young woman accused of murder was alleged to have bragged about killing her husband using the words "I killed the bastard." To this accusation, the woman responded "'Bastard?' What am I, 40?" Her retort suggests that "bastard" is not commonly employed by younger individuals; as such, a character's use of the term may be indicative of his or her advanced age. From the perspective of ethnicity, panelists of National Geographic television network's *Slang Hunters* suggested that what may be considered offensive language in one country may not be so in another; thus, a scriptwriter's use of a term such as "whoreson," which is not widely recognized by American audiences as profane, may work against the writer's establishment of a character as American (2013).

Lileks (2010) argues that the debate about profanity on television is valid given the breadth of television audiences and the stigma attached to foul language. He suggests that the airing of profanity reflects and influences culture, which is why both sides of the heated debate have forceful constituents. Lileks contends that foul language is useful for spicing up television programming, making character speech entertaining and compelling. He also notes that historical examples of non-profanity, like "fug" from Norman Mailer's first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, seem awkward and inaccurate. To add this "realistic excitement" to programming, television stations often allow profane language, violence, or sexuality to reach the airwaves, and the airing of this mature content puts broadcasters at risk for financial or social backlash.

Steinberg (2009) discusses these potential risks for networks specifically as they relate to the crime-drama genre of television programming, suggesting that even though broadcast and cable networks air foul language for the sake of realism, they risk negative reactions from family groups, religious groups, and other organizations that police the airwaves, and they jeopardize losing significant numbers of audience members and advertising dollars. Of these losses, perhaps the most important to stations is advertising revenue, given the massive amounts of money and time devoted to television advertising each year.

Advertising and Television

Each year, television advertisers spend billions of dollars to pitch their products and services to television consumers. According to the Television Bureau of Advertising (2013), television advertising expenditures totaled more than $68 billion in 2011, with automotive, communications, and restaurant industries leading the spending. In "The Media and Advertising: A Tale of Two-sided Markets," Anderson and Gabszewicz (2005) discuss the importance of advertising for television, suggesting that all television networks — even those that are

subscription-based — require advertising revenue to survive. Anderson and Gabszewicz (2005) further elaborate upon the relationship between media and advertising, noting that the primary goal of media industries is drawing advertisers and money, while the main focus of advertisers is reaching the largest possible customer base. Justifiably, programs resting atop Nielsen charts and attracting millions of viewers, such as CBS's *NCIS*, which drew more than 17 million viewers the week of April 8, 2013, gain significant advertiser attention due to their ability to reach an extensive viewership (Nielsen, 2013).

Because much advertising is directed at particular audiences, advertising firms compete for airtime during programming tailored to and attracting specific demographics. Given the ability of television programming to lure these specified audiences of considerable size, Anderson and Gabszewicz (2005) suggest that advertising "forms and reflects popular culture" (p. 3); companies advertising during popular broadcasts may form popular culture by injecting themselves into the consciousness of significant audiences, and mere advertising costs may reflect popular culture because the programs drawing the greatest audiences generally draw the greatest advertising revenue.

In "Swearing During Family Hour? Who Gives a $#*!," Brian Steinberg (2010) analyzes profanity's effect on television advertising, arguing that profane programming deters few advertisers. Steinberg uses the since-canceled CBS sitcom *$#*! My Dad Says* — stylized in such a way to obscure "Shit" — to highlight advertisers' opinions regarding indecent television, suggesting that advertisers prefer to pursue edgy programming for the larger audiences it draws. Steinberg's (2010) article features input from University of North Texas assistant professor Derek Johnson, who theorizes that television advertising is dependent upon audience

demographics, and barring significant cultural backlash, advertisers likely will not hesitate to tie their promotional materials to indecent programming:

> If you want to reach a specific demographic, it makes more sense to develop content that is really going to speak to them…In the process of speaking to one group, you are likely going to alienate another, but it's really just fine if it's not the audience you want to reach that's getting alienated. (n.p.)

Steinberg (2011) suggests that the proliferation of technology has added to the pressure on television networks to broadcast gritty programming. For example, traditional television networks must air more indecent programming to retain viewers who may be allured by the generally unregulated and unrestricted content of online programming or of video subscription services such as Netflix, and because these increasingly indecent programs draw eyeballs, advertising revenue follows.

Somewhat contrarily, Grimm (2004) argues that advertising plays a primary role in discouraging television networks from airing profanity, suggesting that stations not only feel pressure to develop content that appeals to particular demographics, but also to air programming that does not offend other audiences. In these instances, advertisers can comfortably attach their products to particular programs with little fear of societal backlash. To this point, Lileks (2010) notes that the Parents Television Council sent warning letters to 300 advertisers who planned to advertise during *$#*! My Dad Says*, discouraging the advertisers from associating with a program that "shove[d] harsh profanity into the faces of Americans through [its] title" (p. 52).

Nuances of Profanity

Not only are audience size, legal repercussions, and advertising dollars dependent upon the use and frequency of profanity on television, they are also contingent with the linguistic

categorizations of these profane terms. Because profanity is host to a range of linguistic gradations, certain terms and types of terms may offend specific audiences, while others may not.

In delivering the decision for *Towne v. Eisner* (1918), which debated the legality of a single term, "income," Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes spoke to the malleability of the English language: "A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged, it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used" (p. 425).

To this end, profanity is no exception. Depending upon their context, profane terms may be used in a variety of manners (e.g. sexual or nonsexual, excretory or non-excretory) to serve a range of purposes (e.g. to entertain, to shock, to emphasize); as such, these words may be categorized according to a number of linguistic classifications.

In his *Cardozo Law Review* article titled simply "Fuck," Christopher Fairman (2007) discusses the sexual and non-sexual nuances of "fuck" and the repercussions of each usage. Using the distinction between the gradations of "fuck" inspired by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Fairman (2009) determines that courts recognize the distinction between "fuck" in the sense of a sexual act (e.g. "Go fuck yourself") — which holds more taboo — and "fuck" in the non-sexual sense (e.g. "I don't fucking care"), and punishes accused verbal sexual harassment offenders accordingly. Considering these nuances, Fairman (2007) notes that the distinction is not always recognized outside of the courts: "This [consideration] stands in stark contrast to the broadcast regulation by the FCC where every use of *fuck* is deemed per se sexual — turning a blind eye to the linguistic distinction and a model for its legal application" (p. 51).

Citing the results of a study in which they asked participants to rank 20 terms in order of objectionableness, Sapolsky et al. (2011) propose a hierarchy regarding the offensiveness of

profane terms (sexual and non-sexual), listing “cunt” as most offensive in all instances, followed by “motherfucker,” “cocksucker,” and “pussy,” with “fuck” falling at fifth-most offensive. The authors suggest that, from an offensiveness standpoint, racial pejoratives — not just sexual and non-sexual profanities — also have weight, positing that racial terms over time have become more taboo than sexual words. Furthering the linguistic gradation discussion, Sapolsky and Kaye (2005) and Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) categorize profanity into five categories, including the FCC’s seven dirty words, sexual words, excretory words, mild other words, and strong other words (see Appendix A).

The evolution of profane words complicates the ease with which those terms may be regulated. Pinker (2008) notes that once-taboo words transition over time into terms just edgy enough to garner attention: “This progression explains why many speakers are unaware that ‘sucker,’ ‘sucks,’ ‘bites,’ and ‘blows’ originally referred to fellatio, or that a ‘jerk’ was a masturbator” (p. 29). According to Hilliard and Keith (2007), a list of words and phrases “too hot” for radio in 1935 included “belly,” “gagging,” and “gooey” (pp. 119-120).

Figure 2. Words and phrases “too hot” to air on radio in 1935.

On an episode of *Slang Hunters* on the National Geographic television network, University of Michigan English language and literature professor Anne Curzan discussed the evolution of offensive terminology in the English language: “The question of what makes a word bad is a fascinating one, because it has to be social agreement about what is a bad word and what is a good word, and you see a change over time.” To her discussion, Curzan added that the phrases “white meat” and “dark meat” arose during Victorian times because people wanted to avoid using “breast” at the dinner table (2013). In contemporary society, “breast,” used frequently on meat packaging in grocery stores or as the more-acceptable version of “boob” or “tit,” has evolved as such that it is no longer a term that causes speakers and listeners alike to cringe. Arguably, then, this linguistic progression may justify why words like “hell” and “damn” are further down Sapolsky’s and Kaye’s hierarchy than are “fuck” or “cunt,” and why words like “diarrhea” or “pus” may make audience members cringe but not invite action from the FCC.

Although the options are limited, euphemisms may provide broadcasters with an opportunity to convey the topics and situations they desire without sacrificing audience members due to gritty language. On one hand, euphemisms for things like sexual acts may add variety to a program and may allow broadcasters to discuss sex without using outwardly graphic terms; on the other, linguistic substitutions may turn off viewers with tacky, unrealistic terminology. The choice for a broadcaster ultimately comes down to “screw you” versus “fuck you,” for example, and the airing of either can determine a work’s ultimate impact. In the editorial column, “Expletive Deleted,” readers of the *School Library Journal* debate the use of foul language in *The Upstairs Room.* “Surely life, which is sometimes regrettably shabby, can be truthfully depicted without the use of dirty, irreverent language…” writes one reader (p. 48). Campbell

(2007) disagrees, siding with realism: “Saying ‘Goodness gracious!’ instead of ‘What the fuck?’ is opting for dishonesty” (p. 315).

In addition to employing euphemisms, broadcasters may obscure or imply profanity by bleeping the offensive terms and allowing audience members to examine context to determine the masked words. Krcmar and Sohn (2004) used a 2 x 2 x 2 design to explore how warning labels, bleeping, and gender affect viewers’ perceptions and enjoyment of ESPN’s *A Season on the Brink*. From the perspective of bleeping, the researchers found that audience members were not fazed by veiled profanity, and bleeping did not affect their perceptions of the program’s realism or hinder their ability to enjoy the program. Furthermore, the researchers hypothesized that bleeping decreases viewers’ perceptions of program offensiveness but heightens their perceptions of profanity frequency. Like euphemisms, bleeping may give broadcasters an opportunity for compromise — a way to imply profanity and draw viewership while still appealing to conservative viewer sensibilities and cautious advertisers. Steinberg (2009) argues that although bleeping may obscure profane terms, viewers often know precisely which terms are being uttered. Regardless, bleeping indecency is often enough to pacify family watchdog groups. According to a *TIME* article by James Poniewozik (2010), following a profanity-heavy NBA Finals in 2010, the Parents Television Council commended ABC for its diligent bleeping during the live sporting event, and PTC President Tim Winter offered to take those who had manned the bleep button during the championship to lunch as a token of his appreciation.

Instances of Profanity on Television

One area of research regarding profanity on television is that of the discrepancies between broadcast and cable regulation and presentation. According to Steinberg (2009), although fewer distinctions exist between broadcast and cable than did previously, broadcast is

still the medium in which it is most difficult to air offensive terminology. He mentions that the FCC began cracking down on broadcast networks following Janet Jackson's 2004 "wardrobe malfunction," and as a result, these networks began taking greater precautions when airing live television. For example, CBS, which aired the ill-fated Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show, instituted a video delay system for the following Sunday's 46th Annual Grammy Awards in an effort to avoid another offensive incident (*The Associated Press*, 2004). However, Steinberg (2009) suggests that in recent years, broadcast channels have taken greater liberties when airing profanity in scripted television. From a cable standpoint, Steinberg said the networks are freer to do as they please, but cable channels (especially advertising-based cable channels) like FX may follow their own set of best practices. For example, FX does not allow "fuck" to air, and it broadcasts its mature dramas after 10 p.m. Because different rules exist regarding profanity and indecency for broadcast and cable channels, different programming is aired on these two outlets.

Gabler (2010) adds that a significant difference between broadcast and cable programming is that broadcast television — governed by the FCC and available in the majority of households — airs programs featuring redeemable characters with optimistic worldviews, while cable television airs grittier, darker material with incorrigible characters and cruel environments. Thus, given the "demeanor" of cable television and the fact that the FCC's jurisdiction does not extend to cable, a more accepting environment for profanity and indecency-laced programming exists in the cable television realm.

Sapolsky and Kaye (2005) studied profanity on primetime broadcast television and its juxtaposition with gender roles, tallying 621 instances of offensive language during 152 primetime programs. They found that swearing on television most often occurred between two male characters, and the seven dirty words were most prevalent in these situations. Overall, the

researchers found that, in 64 percent of instances, profanity uttered on primetime television was mild (e.g. “hell” or “damn”); mild profanity was followed by excretory terms (13 percent) and sexual terms (12 percent), with the seven dirty words reaching the air more than three percent of the time. Sapolsky and Kaye concluded that competition with cable networks may drive broadcast channels to air indecency in an effort to draw viewers and advertisers with shock value, and increasing trends of aired profanity may result in a loosening of television standards regarding offensive language.

In 2005, Kaye and Sapolsky conducted a content analysis regarding the types of profanity aired on cable and broadcast networks, finding that 9 of 10 programs on both broadcast and cable used one indecent word or phrase; 3,560 instances of profanity occurred over 283 hours of programming. The researchers also found that profanity aired more frequently on cable networks than on broadcast networks, with 15 instances and 10 instances per hour, respectively. Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) found that, of the broadcast channels, NBC (304 total) and CBS (274 total) aired profanities most frequently; of the cable channels, MTV (649 total) and USA (473 total) aired profanities most frequently. Finally, more than half of the aired profanities fell within the researchers’ mild category, while the next-most aired category was the seven dirty words (mostly implied with bleeps or pixels).

In addition to scripted television, stations must be conscious of fleeting expletives — those uttered unscripted on live television — when considering potential public responses to their programming. Butler and Fitzgerald (2011) presented readers with a case study of fleeting expletives per Goffman’s ethnomethodological conversation analysis research regarding slips and gaffes, using examples of “fucking” spoken on live television by actresses Helen Mirren and Diane Keaton. In both cases, the actresses were unaware or had forgotten that they were part of

live broadcasts, and they apologized to the shows' hosts after realizing the potential impact of their slipups. Butler and Fitzgerald (2011) concluded that "expletives themselves are not problematic — it is the context in which they are used (including who the recipient and listeners are) that shapes how they are treated" (p. 547).

To this end, broadcasters must exercise caution when airing live programming; Billboard Music Awards incidents involving profanity uttered on live television by Cher and Nicole Richie placed Fox squarely in the FCC hot seat in the early 2000s. After the celebrities used expletives during consecutive years of the awards show, the FCC pursued Fox for airing incidents the commission considered "patently offensive" (*Federal Communications Commission v. Fox Television Stations*, 2010). Although the Supreme Court ruled against the FCC in 2012, the threats of significant fines and license revocations remain for broadcasters who continue to air indecent language (*Federal Communications Commission v. Fox Television Stations*, 2012).

Legal Implications of Profanity

Broadly speaking, the government restricts (if not entirely prohibits) profanity in particular contexts; thus, in some cases, profanity has no legal standing. In these situations, discussions of profanity's value are moot. In television, however, profanity has a receptive audience and a legal outlet, albeit with certain restrictions. Not only may profane broadcasts be criticized from an ethical angle, they may be regulated according to First Amendment and FCC standards.

Day and Weatherby (2012) suggest that legally, the FCC's power of enforcement evolves from 18 U.S.C. § 1464, which states that "[w]hoever utters any obscene, indecent, or profane language by means of radio communication shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years, or both" (p. 482). With an established stronghold in radio, the FCC's control over

the airwaves developed after the airing of Carlin's *Filthy Words* broadcast, when the FCC pursued the Pacifica Foundation — the organization that broadcast the satirical monologue — for reparations for broadcasting its newly-defined indecency standard. In *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation*, the Supreme Court determined that the FCC could in fact limit on-air speech because of the nature of broadcasting to be pervasive and accessible, and the FCC agreed to pursue only the seven dirty words as part of its enforcement policy, pardoning those used in fleeting and isolated situations (1978). Context depending, explicit or fleeting indecency present in a news broadcast may not be considered objectionable. However, as argued by the FCC in its *Notice of Apparent Liability* to St. Louis radio station KSD-FM, the newsworthiness of a topic is not sufficient to warrant an indecency free-for-all on broadcast airwaves:

> While the newsworthy nature of broadcast material and its presentation in a serious, newsworthy manner would be relevant contextual considerations in an indecency determination, they are not, in themselves, dispositive factors. (1990, p. 3689)

Indecent language situated in an appropriate context may not be considered objectionable. However, extended sexual innuendo that does not use outwardly offensive terms but that clearly describes a sexual act may be (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2004). In response to an innuendo-packed song broadcast by San Jose, California, radio station KSJO-FM, the FCC ruled that "not only was the language understandable and clearly capable of a specific sexual or excretory meaning, but because of the context, the sexual and excretory import was inescapable" (Hilliard and Keith, 2007, p. 106). Therefore, although it may not feature traditionally offensive language, explicit sexual and excretory innuendo aired outside of the safe harbor may cross the boundaries of indecency, leaving broadcasters susceptible to FCC penalties.

The FCC has jurisdiction only over the programming aired by broadcast networks, but federal law prohibits even cable networks from airing obscene material, which is never granted First Amendment protection (Steinberg, 2009; “FCC Encyclopedia,” 2012). Considering the FCC’s role in policing the airwaves, Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) point out that the regulatory agency is legally prohibited from censoring broadcasts pre-emptively — using “prior restraint.” Television broadcasters may only face legal repercussions for airing profanity after the fact, and the FCC may only respond to viewers’ complaints retroactively to determine if aired terms are indecent or not.

To dole out punishments, the FCC refers to its definition of indecency — see Chapter 1 “Terms and Definitions” section — to determine whether or not particular instances are in violation of the Commission’s policies. Taking into consideration the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act (2006), Kaye and Sapolsky argue that, from the broadcasters’ perspective, profanity guidelines are too muddled; although broadcasters are aware they may be punished for airing profanity, profanity regulations are too unclear for television executives to determine if they have crossed the legal line when airing potentially offensive terms.

To this discussion, Gibeaut (2008) adds that live television is another area for which broadcasters must have concern regarding uttered profanity. Citing the Billboard Music Awards speeches by Cher and Nicole Richie, the author mentions that sometimes, broadcasters do not necessarily control the terms aired on their networks, and with fines topping $325,000 per offensive utterance, the repercussions to networks loosely policing live broadcasts could be devastating.

In addition to the terms being broadcast, the FCC examines the time of the broadcast in order to determine fines. According to the Commission’s (2012) profanity guide, programming

aired between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. is subject to indecency and profanity enforcement. The guide further states that the FCC may impose one of three punishments on offenders — station license revocation, monetary fines, or written warnings.

For smaller television stations, these FCC regulations may be especially restricting. Taking punishments for fleeting expletives into account, Schrimpf (2009) notes that steep FCC indecency fines may not cause major television networks to flinch; however, they may be devastating for smaller television stations. Local television stations broadcasting high school football games could incur severe punishments if fans' profanity is picked up on station microphones, and the threat of FCC backlash forces broadcasters to self-censor or pay for time-delay equipment for live broadcasts. Therefore, profanity — intentional or unintentional — broadcast in today's television market may force stations to choose between delaying or self-censoring their content and paying considerable fines.

Although not concerned primarily with profane language, a technological caveat of related FCC regulations deals with closed captioning and the services it provides to hearing disabled and non-English speaking audiences, among others. For viewers who rely on closed captioning, the language broadcast therein is of particular importance. In 1996, Congress mandated that cable operators and broadcasters provide closed captioning for their programs; however, issues with this sometimes inconsistent captioning arose alongside instances of television profanity. For example, on a May 2013 episode of *The Voice* on NBC, captions frequently mistook the name of talent judge "Adam" for "damned," and the profane term reached audience members more often than intended by broadcasters.

Considering legal and societal implications of faulty captioning — especially that which may unnecessarily add offensive language to a broadcast — the FCC began revamping its closed

captioning policies in February 2014. Although deadlines and implementation schedules are in progress as of this writing, the regulatory body's new policies seek to improve the accuracy, synchronicity, completeness, and proper placement of closed captioning while remaining cognizant of the nuances of pre-recorded, live, and near-live programming (Federal Communications Commission, 2014). These planned enhancements may alleviate many of the accuracy issues that plague contemporary closed captioning, preventing the unintentional airing of offensive language to viewers who employ, or rely on, captioning services.

Brief Legal Precedence of Media Indecency and Profanity

Today's media profanity and indecency regulations are vague despite the fact that they have subsisted for centuries. As early as 1873, Anthony Comstock lobbied Congress to allow the Post Office to ban the distribution of obscene or indecent materials; once passed, this ruling became known as the Comstock Law. From mail service to radio, the beginning of broadcast regulation was spurred by the establishment of the Federal Radio Commission in 1927 — a predecessor to the FCC, which was founded in 1934 — and the first radio profanity conviction in 1930, when political candidate Robert Duncan attacked his opponent using offensive terminology during purchased radio time (Hilliard and Keith, 2007). The next 40 years featured sexually suggestive controversies on the radio with Mae West's Garden of Eden skit and on television with Elvis's hip gyrations. By 1973, a clear definition of "obscenity" existed by which the FCC could pursue broadcast offenders. Five years later, *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation* became a landmark case in the legal history of broadcast indecency.

In 1975, the Pacifica Foundation aired Carlin's 12-minute *Filthy Words* monologue at 2 p.m. on a New York City radio station. The comedian's monologue included utterances of all seven dirty words and more than 100 unedited profanities. The FCC responded to the broadcast,

labeling Carlin's speech indecent. Pacifica then petitioned the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit on First Amendment grounds, and the Supreme Court resolved that the FCC could in fact restrict speech broadcast on the radio and on television, provided the speech involves more than an isolated or fleeting expletive. This decision prompted the establishment of the first safe harbor period, which banned indecency on the airwaves from 6 a.m. to midnight (*Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation*, 1978).

By the mid-1990s, the FCC and other governmental powers had settled on an eight-hour safe harbor period and a ratings system for broadcast television. The agency had also collected its largest reparation to that point of $1.7 million from Infinity Broadcasting Corporation — amends for indecency broadcast on shock jock Howard Stern's radio show (Hilliard and Keith, 2007). In 2001, the FCC clarified its definition of broadcast indecency, stating that, to be considered indecent, material must "describe or depict sexual or excretory organs or activities" or be patently offensive by society's standards. Three years later, following two awards show gaffes and a Super Bowl wardrobe malfunction, the FCC tightened its indecency policies and began sanctioning broadcasters for airing fleeting expletives, a reversal of a policy the Commission established during the *Pacifica* case (Day and Weatherby, 2012, p. 17).

The 2005 Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act increased maximum fines for indecency violations and made individual utterers — not just their broadcasting companies — responsible for airing offensive material. The following year, the FCC applied the higher penalties to complaints against 50 television programs (Hilliard and Keith, 2007).

Despite this increased enforcement power, the FCC struggled to collect on its high-profile cases in the early 2010s. In 2011, the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit tossed out the FCC's $550,000 fine of CBS for the Janet Jackson Super Bowl incident (*Federal*

Communications Commission v. CBS Corporation) — the most replayed moment ever using TiVo, an asynchronous programming service that allows viewers to pause and rewind live television (Reuters, 2004). The following year, the Supreme Court ruled against the FCC's crackdown on indecency as it related to fleeting expletives during the 2002 and 2003 Billboard Music Awards and nudity on a 2003 primetime episode of *NYPD Blue*. Citing vague standards and insufficient notice to broadcasters of the FCC's 2009 indecency policy change, the Court overturned the FCC's rulings and questioned the Commission's subjectivity regarding profanity-related cases:

> Surveying a number of Commission adjudications, the court found the Commission was inconsistent as to which words it deemed patently offensive…It also determined that the Commission's presumptive prohibition on the F-word and the S-word was plagued by vagueness because the Commission had on occasion found the fleeting use of those words not indecent provided they occurred during a bona fide news interview or were "demonstrably essential to the nature of an artistic or educational work." (*Federal Communications Commission v. Fox Television Stations*, 2012, p. 10)

1873 Comstock Law
1927 FCC established
1930 First profanity conviction in radio
1934 Communications Act
1937 Mae West blacklisted from radio
1948 U.S. Criminal Code
1950s – 60s Elvis "too suggestive" for TV
1957 *Roth v. United States*
1970 Jerry Garcia incident
1972 Radio Act
1973 *Miller v. California*; "obscenity" defined
1976 "Charlie's Angels"; sex boosts TV ratings
1978 *FCC v. Pacifica*
1987 FCC defines broadcast indecency
1988 FCC bans all indecent broadcasts
1989 FCC has backlog of 95 complaints
1990 Satellite distributors determined to be not immune from prosecution
1992 Safe harbor established
1992 Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act
1994 *FCC v. Turner Broadcasting*
1995 Infinity "donates" $1.7 mil to FCC for Stern
1996 Telecommunications Act; V-chip
1996 Communications Decency Act
1996 Child Pornography Prevention Act
1997 NBC airs "Schindler's List"; FCC takes no action
1999 Child Online Protection Act
2001 FCC clarifies "indecency"
2002 ESPN's "Season on the Brink"
2002-03 Cher, Nicole Richie, NYPD Blue incidents
2004 Jackson's Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction"; FCC tightens indecency laws
2005 Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act
2006 FCC fines 50 TV programs from 300k complaints
2009 Supreme Court approves FCC indecency policy
2011 US 3rd Circuit Court tosses out $550k CBS fine
2012 Supreme Court declares FCC's standards vague in *FCC v. FOX Television Stations* and *FCC v. ABC Inc.*
2012 FCC possesses backlog of 1.5 million complaints involving 9,700 TV broadcasts

(Hilliard and Keith, 2007) (Reuters, 2012) (Vicini, 2012)

Figure 3. A brief history of legal cases and incidents regarding media indecency.

A glance at Figure 3 allows readers to see that indecency complaints have piled up exponentially at the FCC since the 1980s. In 1989, the FCC possessed a backlog of 95 indecency complaints, but by 2006, that number had increased to more than 300,000 (Hilliard and Keith, 2007). Before its 2013 purging of "stale" complaints, the FCC's backlog of indecency complaints had grown to 1.5 million and involved more than 9,700 television broadcasts by 2012 (Vicini, 2012). Justifications for the building complaints may include the length of the legal processes involved in carrying out punishments for violators, the expanse of television channels, the thousands of programs broadcast each day, or the vague nature of FCC guidelines coupled with broadcasters' desire to push the boundaries of decency to appeal to viewers and advertisers. Regardless, mounting indecency complaints and FCC crackdowns shed light on the thin line broadcasters walk between free speech and "patently offensive" material.

Free Speech vs. Public Interest

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. (U.S. Const. amend. I)

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution arguably stands in opposition to stringent FCC regulation of profanity and indecency on broadcast television. The Amendment offers protection for those voicing their opinions, provided those opinions do not advocate illegal activity or involve lewdness, obscenity, defamation, or "fighting words" (Chidester, 2004, p. 140). During landmark case *Roth v. United States*, Justice William Brennan elaborated upon the dynamics between questionable speech supported by the First Amendment and that, such as obscenity, which has no constitutional protection:

> All ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance — unorthodox ideas, controversial ideas, even ideas hateful to the prevailing climate of opinion — have the full protection of the guarantees [of free speech and press]…But implicit in the history of the First Amendment is the rejection of obscenity as utterly without redeeming social value. (1957, p. 476)

Dissenting the *Pacifica* decision nearly two decades later, Justice Brennan again argued in support of broad First Amendment rights, lamenting the Supreme Court's narrow-minded approach to broadcast indecency. He maintained that, by allowing the FCC to punish aired utterances of Carlin's seven dirty words, Supreme Court members failed to recognize the opinions of those beyond their immediate peers. By isolating entire social groups who may find

no offense in these seven terms, Brennan argued that the Court in *Pacifica* set a dangerous precedent of infringing on the American freedom of expression:

> It is only an acute ethnocentric myopia that enables the Court to approve the censorship of communications solely because of the words they contain … Whether today's decision will similarly prove "harmless" remains to be seen. One can only hope that it will. (1978, pp. 776-777)

When FCC regulations restrict speech traditionally protected by the First Amendment, debates ensue regarding the importance of the Commission's rule over the airwaves and its responsibility to protect vulnerable audiences versus the ability of television stations to air creative, original programming. Advocates of the regulatory body's leadership argue that without restrictions, broadcasters may pursue grittier, more offensive programming to enhance their bottom-line profits. The competing viewpoint suggests that existing or additional federal regulations may work to uphold the stringent moral standards of a vocal minority, restricting content not necessarily considered inappropriate by the majority of viewers (Hilliard and Keith, 2007). During the 1994 *FCC v. Turner Broadcasting* case, the Supreme Court determined that a government body seeking to restrict speech "must do more than simply 'posit the existence of the disease sought to be cured'" by proving that actual harm may be done by the restricted speech and that the restriction will "alleviate these harms in a direct and material way" (p. 664).

The harms that the FCC hopes to limit are those to vulnerable audiences, namely children. Supporters of broadcast deregulation have argued that the responsibility to protect children from inappropriate television programming should belong to the parents, a claim countered by faith-based media watchdog group Morality in Media, who contend that parents hoping to protect their children from the harms of indecent programming must prevent children

from watching television altogether. Morality in Media also argue that technological “fixes” such as the V-chip are not sufficient to support deregulation, suggesting that television providers, not viewers, are responsible for ensuring that the public is not “assaulted” by obscene programming.

A tertiary pitch for deregulation is that television viewers may simply change the channel when they encounter material they deem inappropriate, a claim repeatedly rejected by the Supreme Court (Hilliard and Keith, 2007, p. 126). Undoubtedly, this “turn the dial” argument places too little responsibility on broadcasters, assuming that parents will be present 24 hours per day to protect their children when offensive material reaches the airwaves. The argument also incorrectly presumes that audience members always will be able to “turn the dial,” something people watching television in a public place, such as a sports bar or a physician’s office, may find difficult or impossible to accomplish.

Yates and Fargo (2002) note that, despite regular broadcaster pressures to lift content constraints, the Supreme Court continues to rule in favor of the ability to use regulation to protect children. Schwartz (2006) supports increased regulation on children’s behalf, arguing that if the government has resolved to protect vulnerable audiences, it should expand its control to cable and satellite television. Former FCC Chairman Michael Powell argued that regulation of broadcast-only television is akin to placing a small bandage on a gaping wound. Children cannot tell the difference between broadcast and cable channels; thus, Schwartz contends that regulation should be applied to all of television programming. Although the FCC does not have the power to govern cable or satellite, Congress does (Yates and Fargo, 2002). Furthermore, Chidester (2004) postulates that, if television regulation is to work effectively, fines must be significant, or broadcasters will consider the fees “the price of doing business” (p. 167).

In support of the FCC's ability to regulate broadcast television, one may also argue that the Commission's regulations fall within time, place, and manner exceptions of the First Amendment. In *Ward v. Rock Against Racism* (1989), the Supreme Court elaborated upon the three considerations first recognized in *Grayned v. City of Rockford* (1972), noting that First Amendment protection may be subject to time, place, and manner restrictions if those restrictions are content-neutral, if they are narrow and serve a significant government interest, and if they leave open alternative channels of communication. The Court further argued in *Frisby v. Schultz* (1988) that "[t]he First Amendment permits the government to prohibit offensive speech as intrusive when the 'captive' audience cannot avoid the objectionable speech" (p. 474). In the case of television, language constraints outside of the safe harbor period arguably serve as time, place, and manner restrictions; otherwise, "captive" audience members, including children, may be subjected to intrusive profanity aired on broadcast television between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

On top of FCC regulations, technological advances of the last 15 years have provided viewers with the ability to protect children by blocking or censoring specific programming. The V-chip, or violence chip, has been integrated in all televisions with screens 13 inches or larger since 2000. The programmable chip decodes broadcaster-submitted rating information carried by the programs and blocks those programs blacklisted by parents or rated more mature than parents' settings allow. Current DirecTV parental controls allow subscribers or parents to block television or movie programming according to its reported rating, to restrict their children's viewing during particular hours of the day, and to prevent particular channels from airing in their residences. Additionally, these controls permit subscribers to block programming that may be unrated, such as news or sports, so as to ensure that only approved programming is shown in their homes (2014). Less restrictive than the V-chip is TVGuardian, a plug-in box that scans the

closed captioning information of broadcast and cable programming and mutes profane or indecent speech (Chidester, 2004).

Exceptions exist for these technologies, however. According to Yates and Fargo (2002), not all television viewers use sets that feature a V-chip, and even parents who do have the technology have difficulty using it properly. Although the Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires that contemporary televisions include a V-chip, it does not require broadcasters to submit ratings for these programs; thus, not all programs may be accurately censored or judged by the V-chip. Vague ratings mean films like *Alien* and *Schindler's List* register similarly using the V-chip, and live programming is able to bypass the filters (Scott, 1996, p. 749). Live programming provides further complications for TVGuardian, because the box is unable to mute profanity uttered during sports, news, or live events (Chidester, 2004, p. 159-60).

According to Reinhart (2005), protecting children and providing stations free speech are competing ideas in the context of broadcasting. She argues that freedom of speech enhances public discourse, and banning certain offensive terms is a violation of the First Amendment. Reinhart also theorizes that a profanity crackdown would be unnecessary with available television parental controls, steeper fines, and broadcaster self-regulation; in an effort to reach the largest audience possible and to avoid being penalized, broadcasters may regulate themselves and limit the offensiveness of their own content.

Saltzman (2004) suggests that "for the kids" is a veil used to mask unnecessary regulation, stating that content objectionable to some is not so to others: "You cannot legislate taste or even decency in a society where half the population is offended by the F-word and naked bodies, and the other half spends billions of dollars on adult entertainment" (p. 75). Levi (2008) also argues against the regulation of broadcast content, suggesting that contemporary indecency

regulations create a chilling effect among broadcasters — on-air personalities in most cases are swiftly terminated following profanity- or indecency-related controversies, and broadcasters often wait to air their grittiest programming until after 10 p.m., regardless of whether or not the safe harbor is an ideal timeslot for the programming. Chidester (2004) speculates that, unless the FCC gains a better grasp on contemporary community standards, broadcasters' self-censorship "is too high a cost for our First Amendment to pay" (p.167). A *Miami Herald* editorial titled "Indecency on the Air" echoed these sentiments in favor of deregulation: "The courts — the institution responsible for striking a balance when rights are in conflict — must handle these cases with care. Free-speech rights are fragile, and, once shattered, not easily reconstructed" (1989, p. 22A).

From the perspective of deregulation, Yates and Fargo (2002) pose a marketplace approach to determine public interest — broadcasters should air what the public wants, whether that be profanity-laden programming or not. They argue that deregulation would not mean opening the "floodgates" of profanity; broadcasters could use public and advertiser input to determine what content is aired on television (p. 21). Moreover, to bolster the argument against regulation, Chidester (2004) employs the input of The California State University professor Craig Smith, who suggests that proving that profanity-laced programming causes damage to impressionable audiences is "a burden [the government] can't meet" (p. 162).

Considering the contemporary discord between freedom of speech and public interest as it relates to television, Yates and Fargo (2002) note that there exist only three possibilities for regulation or deregulation in the future: (1) The government may step in and regulate cable as well as broadcast television, giving more support to the public interest; (2) The FCC may cease presiding over broadcast television, supporting free speech pursuits and allowing the marketplace

to determine what constitutes appropriate programming, which may also serve in the public interest; and (3) Broadcast regulation may stay as it is, providing the same opportunities and restrictions for television stations and the same variety of programming for viewers. They argue that television broadcasting is best left alone, as the current system is the best balance between broadcasting "gritty realism" and protecting children (p. 23). This pro-marketplace sentiment was echoed during *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation* by Justice William J. Brennan, who wrote the following:

> I would place the responsibility and the right to weed worthless and offensive communications from the public airways where it belongs…in a public free to choose those communications worthy of its attention from a marketplace unsullied by censor hand. (1978, p. 772)

Beyond the regulation and marketplace approaches to free speech, some theorists view the First Amendment not as an implementation that allows American citizens broad speech freedoms but as a tool that limits the government's ability to set restrictions on such speech. From an absolutist perspective, the key to interpreting the Amendment involves a strict adherence to the phrase "Congress shall make *no law*..." and an overarching support of free speech. During *Bridges v. California* (1941), Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black offered an absolutist opinion of the Court regarding free speech, as follows:

> For the First Amendment does not speak equivocally. It prohibits any law "abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." It must be taken as a command of the broadest scope that explicit language, read in the context of a liberty-loving society, will allow. (p. 252)

Considering television content, an absolutist perspective supports the rights of television stations to air the programming of their choice in an environment free of governmental restrictions and repercussions.

Summary

Related literature addresses topics of profanity and indecency as they affect audience size and advertising revenue, the nuances of profanity and the role of offensive speech on television, legal implications, and the history of indecency and profanity on television. Additionally, associated literature addresses the dissonance between free speech and public interest as it relates to broadcasting profanity over television-specific airwaves. According to Hilliard and Keith (2007), these themes surrounding indecent speech only spur debate regarding offensive language on television: “Defining indecency is only half the problem. The other is fashioning enforcement mechanisms so that the cure doesn’t turn out to be worse than the disease” (p. 48).

Given available alternatives, the marketplace approach to indecency regulation (or deregulation as it may be) seems most adequate in addressing contemporary issues of profanity on television. Absolutist and regulation-heavy approaches may be too clear-cut for media as expansive as television. Furthermore, considering the breadth of television programming, the variety of television viewers, and the ever-changing landscape of social norms, government agencies may continue to struggle to regulate profanity in a manner suitable for all audience members and respectful of all First Amendment perspectives. The marketplace model allows viewers, not necessarily family groups or government, to determine what programming remains on air. Because viewership is a clear indicator of a program’s popularity, viewer numbers may help to determine what types of programming — “fuck-free” or “chock-full-o’-fuck” — large factions of society deem acceptable. Furthermore, the marketplace model supports the protection

of vulnerable audiences to an extent, because families may avoid or block channels broadcasting profanity throughout the day, contributing to a decreased demand for these programs and stations.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology and procedures employed to gather quantitative data for the study, detailing the variables present and considerations given during the content analysis.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Procedures

This study explores the frequency and linguistic categorizations of aired and implied (bleeped) profanity on broadcast and cable networks using a content analysis. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology used for this study, including the research questions and hypotheses, population and sample, data collection, data analysis, validity, and reliability respective to the chosen methodology.

Methodology

This quantitative study employed a content analysis that examined the frequency and linguistic categorizations of aired profanity on two cable networks and two broadcast networks in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot during a selected sweeps period. In *Media and Communication Research Methods*, Arthur Asa Berger described the inherent value of content analysis data as it relates to print: “These numbers provide detailed information that can be interpreted to gain insights into the mindset of those who created the texts. Possibly…they can be used to infer the way audiences of these texts might be affected by them” (p. 182). The same may be considered true for television; a content analysis of television programming may provide valuable insight into the mindsets of program and station executives and into the potential receptions by audience members.

During sweeps rating periods, Nielsen (2013) electronically determines which channels are being viewed and when; the company also distributes paper diaries to viewers asking them to describe the television consumers in their families and to track their television consumption

during this period. Sweeps periods occur four times per year; data collection took place during the May sweeps period, which ran from April 25 to May 22, 2013.

Population and Sample

Myriad television channels are available to American households. At last glance, Dish Network offered customers more than 320 channels, and DIRECTV offered more than 285 (Dish Network, 2012; DIRECTV, 2012). Some of these channels are controlled by broadcast networks, such as NBC, CBS, ABC, and Fox; others are run by cable networks, such as TBS, USA Network, ESPN, A&E, and MTV.

Not only are television channels numerous, they are pervasive. According to recent research, seven broadcast networks and 20 cable networks reach more than 100 million households, and each of these networks airs original programming (National Cable and Telecommunications Association, 2012). Given the prevalent nature of television, and the fact that approximately 85 percent of American households subscribe to cable, it is no wonder that aired profanity is cause for concern among members of society (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2009).

For this study, DVR capabilities allowed for a maximum of two broadcast channels and two cable channels to be recorded simultaneously; thus, the sample consisted of four total networks. Similar studies collected corpuses of data ranging from 133 hours of programming (Sapolsky and Kaye, 2005) to 283 hours of programming (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2009). Although the data for this study was solitarily collected and coded, all four weeks — 224 hours of sweeps-period programming (265 programs) — were coded to ensure the sample was impartial and comprehensive.

The two most popular channels overall on the cable and broadcast Nielsen Top 10 List ratings for the week of April 8, 2013, were chosen from each list to be part of the convenience

sample. For an example of how the two channels from each category were chosen, CBS aired six shows on the same broadcast network Top 10 List (#1 – *NCAA Basketball Championships*, #2 – *NCIS*, #3 – *NCIS: Los Angeles*, #8 – *60 Minutes*, #9 – *Prelude to a Championship* and #10 – *Criminal Minds*), with a total viewership of more than 90 million viewers. The popularity of CBS made it a clear choice to represent broadcast television in the study. NBC, ABC, and Fox each aired two shows that reached the list — ratings "ties" at #8 and #9 allowed for a 12-program Top 10 List. The total viewership that week for each network was tallied, and the network with the highest total was selected to fill the second spot in the study. Because NBC gained more than 27 million viewers to the 25 million of ABC and Fox, it secured the study's second broadcast network spot.

Research Questions

The main questions the inferential quantitative study addresses included the following:

- RQ_1: How frequently does offensive language (aired and implied) air on primetime, sweeps-period programming in May 2013?
- RQ_2: Do the instances of profanity aired or implied differ between cable and broadcast television networks during primetime?
- RQ_3: Do the most popular categories of on-air profanity differ between cable and broadcast networks in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot?
- RQ_4: Does the amount of profanity (aired and implied) vary according to half-hour timeslot during primetime?

Research Hypotheses

Given the existing literature, the purpose of the study, and the grand research questions, the null hypothesis tested included the following:

- H_0 1: Programming on cable networks will contain the same amount of offensive language as will programming on broadcast networks.
- H_0 2: Programming on cable networks will contain the same most popular linguistic categories of offensive language as will programming on broadcast networks.
- H_0 3: The frequency of profanity aired or implied by cable and broadcast networks will not vary according to half-hour timeslot during primetime sweeps-period programming.

Materials

Study materials included a five-channel DirecTV Genie DVR and a coding sheet (see Appendix B).

Instrumentation

The researcher used a coding sheet (see Appendix B) to collect and code data, noting the following details, which are accompanied by examples, for each program:

- Date and time of broadcast (e.g. May 4, 9-10 p.m.)
- Show and episode title (e.g. *NCIS*, "Bait")
- Date or year program first aired (e.g. 2006)
- Network name and type (e.g. USA, cable)
- Broadcast type (e.g. scripted)
- Programming type (e.g. crime drama)
- Profanity usage (e.g. "hell")
- Linguistic categorization (e.g. mild other words)
- Bleeped or aired (e.g. aired)
- Context (e.g. "What the hell?")
- Gender of speaker (e.g. male)

- Other notes (e.g. “Profane term was uttered in Spanish.”)

The research of Kaye and Sapolsky (2009), who studied offensive language on primetime broadcast and cable programming, inspired the study’s linguistic categorizations.

Data Collection

To acquire the quantitative data for the study, the researcher conducted a content analysis on aired profanity using four weeks’ worth of programming recorded on two broadcast channels and two cable channels. All of the shows broadcast on these channels in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot (the two-hour block in the middle of primetime in the Eastern Time Zone) were recorded using a DirecTV DVR (Shapiro, 2012). Corresponding to the researcher’s geographic location, broadcast programming included in the study consisted of that aired by Youngstown, Ohio, affiliates WKBN (CBS) and WFMJ (NBC).

To select which broadcast and cable networks’ programming would be recorded, and to avoid researcher bias, the researcher consulted Nielsen Top 10 ratings from two weeks prior to the beginning of data collection to gain the most accurate insight into the most-watched broadcast and cable programming that month. The two broadcast networks with the highest total viewership and the two cable networks with the highest total viewership were selected, and the programming on those channels was recorded. Moreover, considering the intense Nielsen ratings focus during sweeps periods, programs airing during the May 2013 sweeps month were recorded so as to employ the selected channels’ most heavily promoted offerings (see Appendix C).

Once the programs from all four networks were recorded, the researcher coded each episode according to nominal-level data, such as show and episode title, date and time of broadcast, date or year the program first aired, network name and type, programming type, broadcast type, profanity usage, gender of speaker, and whether the profanity was aired or

implied. Furthermore, the researcher coded each episode predominantly according to Kaye and Sapolsky's (2009) nominal-level category data (see Appendix A) and ratio-level data (e.g. broadcast length). The edited and unedited instances of profanity featured in each program were tallied, and the terms' context was noted so as to more accurately denote the terms' linguistic categorizations in analysis.

Only material broadcast from 8-10 p.m. was collected as part of this study. For example, USA aired comedy film *The Dilemma* from 6-8:30 p.m. during the studied sweeps period; only the portion of the film airing from 8-8:30 p.m. was included as part of the content analysis. Repeats of episodes aired during the four-week period were coded and tallied as unique, independent programs; although the same episode of a show may have been broadcast multiple times during the May 2013 sweeps period, its offensive language counted in subsequent airings as it did in the first run. Furthermore, each time offensive language was visible on-screen in text form, it was collected as a separate instance, as it would be if the term was verbalized. For example, an episode of *2 Broke Girls* on CBS featured a sign that read "Yard Sale, Bitches." This sign was visible on nine separate occasions during this episode; thus, the researcher tallied "bitches" nine times for the specified broadcast.

Numerous offensive terms aired during primetime that could not be classified according to the categories promoted by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009). For example, an episode of *Law & Order: SVU* broadcast on USA aired the phrase "freaking fag," and a character on CBS's *Mike & Molly* used "dago" to address another character. Racist slurs and sexual orientation pejoratives fall outside of Kaye and Sapolsky's linguistic categories, but arguably these offensive terms deserve consideration in this study (see Appendix D).

In the summer of 2013, celebrities' hate speech utterances and the resulting professional ramifications made headlines across the country. In June, Food Network chef and restaurateur Paula Deen lost her television contract and numerous endorsements when, while being questioned in a discrimination lawsuit, she admitting to having used a racial epithet off-air several times throughout her life (*TODAY*, 2013). The following month, Riley Cooper, a professional football player for the Philadelphia Eagles, was fined an undisclosed amount and excused for four days from training camp to seek counseling after a video surfaced showing Cooper using a racial slur to insult a security guard at a Kenny Chesney concert (Brinson, 2013). In August, ESPN dropped talk show panelist and former NFL player Hugh Douglas from the sports network following a nightclub argument between Douglas and fellow ESPN personality Michael Smith, in which Douglas allegedly used racially-charged terms to degrade Smith (Deitsch, 2013).

Each of these hate speech utterances occurred outside of the television environment in private or limited public settings, and nevertheless all three celebrities experienced significant blows to their bank accounts and reputations. Although no support exists regarding the specific instances collected in the content analysis, the repercussions for airing hate-filled pejoratives on nationwide cable or broadcast television ostensibly could be quite damaging to the careers and reputations of television executives, producers, actors, and others.

From a regulatory perspective, the FCC's (2013) freedom of speech guide states that the Commission refrains from punishing stereotypical or demeaning content in the interest of free speech unless that content may be considered profane, indecent, or obscene. However, in *Degradation: What the History of Obscenity Tells Us about Hate Speech*, Kevin Saunders (2011) argues that obscenity is not about sex but about degradation; as a result, terms used to degrade

ethnic, religious, or other groups may be considered obscene. Furthermore, in *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Jeremy Waldron (2012) posits that derogatory speech may be considered group defamation, going beyond the boundaries of the First Amendment and unreasonably and unlawfully threatening the wellbeing of particular groups of people. When hate-fostering speech hits the airwaves, Waldron explains that disparaged groups become physically and psychologically vulnerable, and hate groups gain steam in their pursuits. Because obscenity and defamation are not protected by the First Amendment, a category of terms consisting of racial slurs and other pejoratives could be considered inappropriate — or illegal — to air during primetime. Thus, in addition to the five categories established by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009), the researcher used a hate speech category to classify content analysis data.

Throughout the study, euphemisms like “dang” and “effing” and instances of unintelligible bleeped terms were tracked and categorized as such to monitor additional implied profanity broadcast during primetime on broadcast and cable networks (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the content analysis, the researcher tallied the quantitative data per episode, per half-hour and per hour, per network, per program type, and per broadcast type. Although the four networks studied make up a mere fraction of the more-than-300-channel population, the statistical tests used to analyze the data are inferential. Considering the intense viewerships of these top-ranked networks, one may argue that, despite their small representation, the programs included in this study may be used to generalize to the greater population. Furthermore, because the population for this study has not been measured fully, some uncertainty still exists regarding the applicability to the greater population of conclusions drawn from the sample, a characteristic common of inferential research (Reinard, 2006).

The researcher then analyzed the data using a chi-square test and an alpha level of $p<.05$ to determine the amount of profane terms aired according to each of the classifications discussed previously. Using the five categories of offensive terms offered by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) and the three content analysis-inspired categories (hate speech, euphemisms, and unintelligible bleeped terms), the researcher categorized profane terms aired in the 8-10 p.m. timeslot according to their linguistic gradations. Once the data was categorized, it was analyzed again using a chi-square test and an alpha level of $p<.05$ to determine the most popular linguistic categories of profanity aired per episode, per half-hour and per hour, per network, per program type, and per broadcast type. Furthermore, consideration was given to bleeped or pixelated terms and gestures (live or scripted); these instances of aired profanity were also analyzed for frequency and for linguistic categorizations.

Variables

For this inferential study, the independent variables for the research questions and null hypotheses were network type (cable or broadcast) and timeslot (8-8:30 p.m., 8:30-9 p.m., 9-9:30 p.m., or 9:30-10 p.m.), and the dependent variables were number of offensive terms (aired or bleeped) and popular linguistic categories.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

This study called for criterion and content approaches to ensure validity. Because the content analysis was structured similar to that of previous research done by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) and included researcher variations, a concurrent-face combination approach was employed to support valid research.

No trustworthiness issues were foreseeable for this research. To avoid potential researcher bias when selecting cable and broadcast networks, the top two networks in each category from

timely Nielsen ratings were used to dictate many of the quantitative study's independent variables. To gain the richest data and to avoid the greatest number of news broadcasts possible, only the 8-10 p.m. block of primetime was recorded. Furthermore, to avoid intercoder reliability issues and to ensure accuracy, the researcher solitarily coded and re-checked the data, consulting closed captioning for each episode when tallying terms aired and bleeped on all networks.

Summary

This chapter detailed the quantitative methodology used to complete this profanity-oriented research. The study employed a content analysis that examined the amounts of and the most popular linguistic categories of profanity aired on two broadcast networks, NBC and CBS, and two cable networks, USA and A&E, during primetime of all four weeks of the May 2013 sweeps period. Collected instances of offensive language were coded according to 14 categories (e.g. network type, timeslot, profanity usage) and double-checked by consulting the closed captioning for each episode, and the data was analyzed using the chi-square test and an alpha level of $p<.05$.

Chapter 4 will provide an analysis of the quantitative data collected during the content analysis, discussing the statistical significance of the data pairings and highlighting the nuances found therein.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The content analysis for this study gathered all instances, verbalized and implied, of profanity aired during four sweeps-period weeks of primetime programming broadcast on NBC, CBS, USA, and A&E. Data was solitarily coded across the 14 categories discussed in Chapter 3 (date and time of broadcast, show and episode title, date or year program first aired, network name and type, broadcast type, programming type, profanity usage, linguistic categorization, bleeped or aired, context, and gender of speaker) and analyzed so as to address the research questions and hypotheses listed in Chapters 1 and 3.

Results

During 224 hours of May 2013 sweeps primetime programming, a total of 2312 verbalized and implied offensive terms were coded across two broadcast and two cable networks. Addressing the first research question, at this rate, each network aired on average more than 10 offensive terms per hour — 86% of which were aired unedited, and 14% of which were bleeped. Of these implied terms, the majority (70%) consisted of bleeped instances of “fuck,” “shit,” and variations therein (e.g. “fucking,” “shitty”). One of Carlin’s seven dirty words, “fuck” did not once reach the primetime airwaves unedited, nor did fellow dirty words members “cunt,” “motherfucker,” or “cocksucker,” although the latter was not collected in any form during the content analysis. Of the remaining dirty words, “piss” and “tits” aired unedited regardless of network type and regardless of contextual presence. For example, on NBC, excretory and non-excretory uses of “piss” — “a pot to piss in” and “so pissed off,” respectively — aired unedited during primetime programming. Perhaps the most polarizing of the septet, however, was “shit,”

which broadcast networks consistently bleeped and cable networks aired freely. In the 9-10 p.m. timeslot of this data collection period, broadcast network NBC bleeped the phrase "Oh, shit" during an episode of *All-Star Celebrity Apprentice*, while cable network A&E aired the same two-word phrase during *Bates Motel*. Thus, at first glance of the airwaves' "most objectionable" linguistic category, regulatory pressures on broadcast networks appeared to manifest themselves in "shit."

Considering the continual policing of broadcast programming by the FCC and various watchdog groups, the number of profane terms aired and bleeped by broadcast and by cable networks — and the frequency with which these terms were aired or implied — was then examined as part of the content analysis.

Table 1

Instances of Aired and Bleeped Profanity by Network

Broadcast Networks				**Cable Networks**			
NBC		CBS		USA		A&E	
Aired	Bleeped	Aired	Bleeped	Aired	Bleeped	Aired	Bleeped
378	34	499	29	537	15	571	249

The second research question examines the difference in number of terms aired and implied by broadcast and cable networks, which was determined to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 72.24$, df = 1, $p<.001$). In their respective 112 hours of primetime programming, broadcast networks NBC and CBS offered viewers significantly fewer instances of offensive language (877 aired, 63 bleeped) than did cable networks USA and A&E (1108 aired, 264 bleeped), thus rejecting the first null hypothesis.

As noted previously, with the exception of "shit," all four networks studied employed similar bleeping and airing practices during primetime. The differences between the offensive

language presented by cable and broadcast networks became evident in the sheer volume of terms aired and bleeped by the respective network types. Cable networks aired 23% more and bleeped 326% more terms than did broadcast networks; of these bleeped terms, the majority consisted of “fuck” (40%) and “shit” (34%).

A quick glance at the per-network totals in Table 1 confirms that A&E aired a greater number of profane terms and bleeped significantly more words than did the three remaining networks studied. It may be interesting to note that the programming collected from A&E during the May 2013 sweeps period was composed of a far greater proportion of reality shows than were the samples from NBC, CBS, and USA; A&E’s lineup consisted of 86% reality shows (*Storage Wars*, *Duck Dynasty*, and *The First 48*) and 14% scripted programs (*Bates Motel*). This data collection suggests that a strong positive correlation ($r = +0.77$) exists between the amount of reality (largely unscripted) programming on the four studied networks and the frequency with which language is bleeped during this primetime programming.

Beyond program type, justification for the airing or bleeping of offensive terminology on television may hinge on the linguistic categories to which these terms belong. Research Question 3 addresses the popular linguistic categories of terms aired and bleeped on broadcast and cable networks (see Table 2). The eight categories of offensive terms used as part of this content analysis include the five established by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) — seven dirty words (SDW), sexual words (SW), excretory words (EW), strong other words (SOW), mild other words (MOW) — and three originating from this content analysis — hate speech (HS), euphemisms (EU), and unintelligible bleeped terms (UN).

Table 2

Instances of Aired and Bleeped Profanity by Network and by Linguistic Category

	Broadcast Networks				**Cable Networks**			
	NBC		CBS		USA		A&E	
Category	Aired	Bleeped	Aired	Bleeped	Aired	Bleeped	Aired	Bleeped
SDW	11	25	11	25	28	15	28	170
SW	70	0	132	0	118	0	100	20
EW	31	5	46	1	31	0	136	0
SOW	55	1	73	3	99	0	23	18
MOW	174	0	215	0	235	0	197	10
HS	1	0	5	0	5	0	0	5
EU	36	0	17	0	21	0	87	0
UN	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	26
Total	378	34	499	29	537	15	571	249
	92%	8%	95%	5%	97%	3%	70%	30%

The amounts of offensive language aired and implied among these linguistic categories was found to be statistically significant (χ^2 =1657.18, df = 7, p<.001). Of the 2312 collected terms, 831 (36%) belonged to the mild other words category, and 50% of the utterances collected as part of this category were “hell.” The next popular category of terms was sexual words, with 440 collected words (19%), followed by the seven dirty words, 313 (14%); strong other words, 272 (12%); excretory words, 250 (11%); euphemisms, 161 (7%); unintelligible words, 29 (1%); and hate speech, 16 (1%).

Table 3

Popularity of Linguistic Categories of Aired Terms Overall and Per Network Type

Category	Overall Rank	Broadcast Rank	Cable Rank
MOW	1	1	1
SW	2	2	3
SDW	3	5	2
SOW	4	3	5
EW	5	4	4
EU	6	6	6
UN	7	8	7
HS	8	7	8

Consistent with the most popular category overall, broadcast and cable networks aired mild other words more frequently than any other type of offensive language. Additionally, both network types were in agreement about the frequency with which, in relation to the remaining categories of profanity, excretory terms (fourth) and euphemisms (sixth) should reach the airwaves. The greatest disparities in popular linguistic categories of offensive language between broadcast and cable networks occurred in the seven dirty words (fifth for broadcast and second for cable) and strong other words (third for broadcast and fifth for cable) categories, discrepancies that help to reject the second null hypothesis.

Across these linguistic categories, the number of words aired as compared to the number of words bleeped by broadcast and cable television networks was determined also to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 86.55$, df = 7, $p<.001$). Of the four studied networks, only USA aired a greater number of seven dirty words than it bleeped; however, NBC, CBS, and USA all aired and bleeped fewer than 50 total instances per network of the words from Carlin's infamous list. A&E, on the other hand, aired a comparable number of these words, but bleeped 170 of them, a phenomenon discussed previously that positively correlates to the cable network's primetime lineup consisting predominantly of reality show programming.

Excepting the seven dirty words, few terms were bleeped on NBC (9), CBS (4), and USA (0). No sexual words were bleeped by these networks, and the most-bleeped excretory word by the trio was “asshole,” a term — like “shit” — that neither broadcast channel aired at any time. Strong other words such as “bastard,” “bitch,” and “son of a bitch” were aired on all networks. The word in this category bleeped by NBC was “bitch,” which it aired unedited two days later in the same timeslot. Furthermore, CBS bleeped three instances of strong other word “bullshit,” a logical action considering the resistance of broadcast networks to air “shit.” Of the four studied networks, only A&E bleeped instances of sexual words (some as benign as “balls”), mild other words, and hate speech.

The remaining notable difference between networks’ bleeping and airing practices exists in the airing of hate speech. On broadcast television, NBC aired “faggot” on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, and CBS aired “dago,” “homo,” “Wop,” “cracker,” and “fruit” on episodes of *Mike & Molly*. On cable television, USA aired “fag,” “dyke,” “cracker,” and “Gay-bler,” a portmanteau created using a character’s last name and a homosexual slur, during episodes of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. A&E, however, aired no instances of hate speech unedited, choosing to bleep five instances of “nigger” during an episode of *The First 48*.

Considering the collected samples of *Storage Wars* discussed previously, to a limited degree, nuances exist regarding the airing and bleeping of profanity as it relates to primetime timeslot. Thus, the fourth and final research question examines the number of profane terms aired during each half-hour timeslot of the two-hour block of primetime programming. This information may be considered significant, because, in addition to being broadcast outside of the safe harbor period, the earlier a program is aired during primetime, the greater the potential

exists for a captive audience, including children, to be part of the viewing audience (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2009).

Table 4

Instances of Profanity (Aired and Bleeped) per Primetime Timeslot by Network

	Timeslot	**8-8:30 p.m.**	**8:30-9 p.m.**	**9-9:30 p.m.**	**9:30-10 p.m.**
Broadcast Networks	NBC	107	80	119	106
	CBS	120	114	142	152
Cable Networks	USA	153	134	132	133
	A&E	212	223	220	165
	Total	592	551	613	556

Across half-hour timeslots, the number of profane terms aired by the four studied networks was determined not to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.56$, df = 3, p = .21); thus, no noteworthy change in aired profanity numbers was observed in the four half-hour timeslots between 8-10 p.m., and the third null hypothesis is accepted. Regardless of potential audience demographics, neither broadcast nor cable networks amped up the offensive language as primetime wore on or censored it in earlier programming.

Table 5

Instances of Profanity (Aired and Bleeped) per Timeslot by Linguistic Category

8-8:30 p.m.		**8:30-9 p.m.**	**9-9:30 p.m.**	**9:30-10 p.m.**
SDW	82	93	83	55
SW	121	96	121	102
EW	55	76	59	60
SOW	60	66	64	82
MOW	211	169	226	225
HS	0	2	8	6
EU	55	40	46	20
UN	8	9	6	6
Total	592	551	613	556

As part of this data collection, the only statistically significant differences in popular linguistic categories of terms aired per half-hour timeslot from 8-10 p.m. took place in the seven

dirty words ($\chi^2 = 10.16$, df = 3, $p < .05$), mild other words ($\chi^2 = 10.31$, df = 3, $p < .05$), hate speech ($\chi^2 = 10$, df = 3, $p < .05$), and euphemisms ($\chi^2 = 16.42$, df = 3, $p < 0.001$) categories. Seven dirty words and euphemisms were aired significantly fewer times during the latest half-hour timeslot, mild other words reached the air far less often between 8:30-9 p.m., and hate speech was aired only twice before 9 p.m.

Summary

The 224-programming-hour corpus of content analysis data yielded 2312 total instances of bleeped and aired profanity on two broadcast (NBC and CBS) and two cable (USA and A&E) networks. Offensive terms were broadcast on television at rate of 10 words per hour — 12 per hour on cable and 8 per hour on broadcast television — and 86% of these words were aired unedited. The numbers of these aired terms and those bleeped by broadcast and cable networks were determined to be statistically significant. Broadcast networks aired (877) and implied (63) far fewer terms than did the cable network pair (1108 aired, 264 bleeped), and nearly 75% of these implied terms were “fuck,” “shit,” and their variations. A large percentage of the bleeped terms on cable television aired on A&E, and A&E’s programming consisted primarily of reality television. Given this information, a strong positive correlation was determined to exist between the amount of reality programming a network airs and the frequency with which it bleeps offensive language.

The numbers of terms aired and implied across the eight linguistic categories of offensive language were determined to be statistically significant. The most popular category of language aired and implied overall during primetime of the May 2013 sweeps period was mild other words (e.g. “hell” and “damn”), which was followed by sexual words (e.g. “boobs” and “ass”) and the seven dirty words (e.g. “fuck” and “shit”). In all instances, and regardless of contextual presence,

broadcast and cable networks bleeped seven dirty words members “fuck,” “motherfucker,” “cocksucker,” and “cunt”; however, both broadcast and cable networks aired dirty words “piss” and “tits.” Of all collected terms, broadcast and cable networks were split, regardless of excretory or non-excretory connotation, on dirty word “shit” and excretory word “asshole”; broadcast networks NBC and CBS bleeped all instances of these terms, while cable networks USA and A&E aired them.

The fourth and final research question addressed the number of words broadcast across half-hour timeslots during primetime of the sweeps period. These were determined not to be statistically significant. Regardless of potential audience members, broadcast and cable networks aired and bleeped the same numbers of offensive terms from 8-8:30 p.m. as they did from 9:30-10 p.m.

Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the study and discuss the findings of the content analysis as well as conclusions that may be drawn from this analysis. Additionally, the final chapter of this dissertation will detail several limitations and implications of the study and propose a number of suggestions for related future research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Study

Television is a pervasive media outlet, reaching millions of households with a solitary broadcast; for example, more than 108 million people tuned in to watch the 2013 Super Bowl on CBS (ESPN, 2013). Given the sheer reach of television, the offensive language broadcast therein is often cause for governmental regulation and societal concern. Although such regulation — relevant outside of the safe harbor and dedicated to language supported by the First Amendment — applies primarily to the programming of broadcast networks, advertiser and viewer feedback may work similarly to pressure cable networks to air or to restrict specific content.

Consequently, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the language aired and implied on broadcast and cable television networks during traditional family viewing times. A 14-category content analysis was conducted on 224 hours of primetime programming on two broadcast networks and two cable networks during the May 2013 sweeps period, and the quantitative, inferential data gathered was analyzed using a chi-square test and an alpha level of $p<.05$.

Findings

Statistical analysis of the 224 hours of primetime, sweeps-period content collected as part of this study determined that offensive language aired on two cable networks and two broadcast networks at a rate of 10.32 terms per hour, equating to one aired or implied term every six minutes. Of these offensive terms, 86% reached the airwaves unedited, while the remaining 14% were bleeped; these implied terms consisted primarily of “fuck” and “shit.”

The difference between the number of terms aired and bleeped by cable and broadcast networks is statistically significant; cable networks USA and A&E aired and bleeped far more terms than did broadcast networks NBC and CBS. Of the four studied networks, A&E aired offensive terms with the greatest frequency, at a rate of 14.64 words per hour (or one aired or implied term every four minutes). Considering the fact that most half-hour timeslots feature 21-22 minutes of programming and 8-9 minutes of advertising, this rate may be argued as nearly 20 words per hour of strict programming content. Furthermore, given the heavy concentration of reality programming on A&E, it was determined that a strong positive correlation exists between the amount of reality programming aired by a particular network and the frequency with which the network bleeps offensive language.

Words collected as part of the content analysis were coded according to the five categories used by Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) — seven dirty words, sexual words, excretory words, strong other words, and mild other words — and the three categories stemming from the analysis — hate speech, euphemisms, and unintelligible bleeped terms. Regardless of context, terms were assigned to single categories so as to create clear category boundaries while preventing the overlap of versatile terms. For example, although “pussy” and “dick” have explicitly sexual and non-sexual connotations, all instances of these terms were coded as sexual words.

The difference in number of terms aired that belonged to the eight linguistic categories was determined to be statistically significant. Of these categories, mild other words (e.g. “hell” and “damn”) were the most popular to air and comprised one-third of the 2312-word corpus. The linguistic categories of terms most often aired on broadcast and cable networks varied slightly, with broadcast networks airing four categories of terms more often than the seven dirty words,

and with cable networks favoring the dirty words category next only to mild other words. Further examination of Carlin's infamous seven dirty words, often considered the "most offensive" linguistic category, revealed that constituents "piss" and "tits" reached the airwaves unedited on both broadcast and cable networks, while zero instances of "fuck," "motherfucker," "cunt," or "cocksucker" were aired unedited on either network type. The distinct difference between the treatments by broadcast and cable networks of this linguistic category could be found in "shit"; broadcast networks consistently bleeped the term, while cable networks aired it frequently.

Furthermore, no statistically significant difference existed in the number of offensive terms aired and implied across half-hour timeslots during primetime of the May 2013 sweeps period. Networks aired just as many offensive terms from 8-8:30 p.m. as they did from 9:30-10 p.m.

A final discovery not covered directly by the research questions or hypotheses concerns the nuances and discrepancies observed in captioning during the content analysis. To improve intercoder reliability and to ensure accuracy, the researcher consulted closed captioning during the data collection for all 224 hours of primetime programming. During this time, the language present in closed captioning varied occasionally from that of the primetime programming it accompanied, sometimes airing terms simultaneously implied by the program's audio track, or translating to English profanity aired in a different language. For example, an episode of *Storage Wars* bleeped mild other word "douche," but its accompanying captions displayed the term clearly rather than using common captioning substitute "[bleep]." As well, during an episode of *NCIS*, an instance of "What the hell?" spoken in Spanish — and not translated in subtitles — was translated to English in the show's captions. In similar situations for which translation is unintended or unavailable, "[Speaking in Spanish]" is often visible in captions. On these

occasions, unedited profane language reached a greater audience than perhaps the broadcasters intended, with closed captioning airing its accompanying programming's implied terms and translating its untranslated phrases. Further discrepancy took place on an episode of *The Amazing Race*, where captioning lagged behind the show's audio track and skipped over aired profanity, and on episodes of *The Voice*, where captioning frequently confused the name of talent judge "Adam" for "damned," broadcasting more profanity than intended.

Conclusions

Given these research findings, one can make a number of conclusions regarding offensive language aired on broadcast and cable television networks. The first of these conclusions is that it is not the words themselves, it is the number of words that distinguishes today's broadcast television programming from that of cable programming. Broadcast networks aired a nearly identical list of offensive terms as did cable networks during this content analysis, and those studied broadcast networks implied words as objectionable as "cunt" and "motherfucker." However, during the May 2013 sweeps period, NBC and CBS aired an average of four fewer offensive words per hour than did USA and A&E.

The fewer aired terms on broadcast television may suggest that these networks remain conscientious of the public interest and of the potential for FCC backlash. Although FCC pressures do not seem great enough to restrict broadcast networks from implying any particular offensive term, they appear to discourage today's broadcast networks from freely airing seven offensive terms during traditional family viewing times. Thus, it may be argued that the FCC maintains clout in broadcast television programming, and that the regulatory body's influence keeps broadcast networks from airing offensive language with the same frequency as cable networks.

A second conclusion of this study is that indecency in innuendo appears to be a line with which broadcast networks are willing to flirt. As discussed in Chapter 2, contextual presence may relieve broadcast networks of FCC punishments when indecent language, such as fleeting expletives, reaches the airwaves unedited. However, the opposite may be true for extended innuendo that does not use traditionally offensive terms but that conveys an inescapably explicit sexual or excretory message (Hilliard and Keith, 2007). FCC-pursued language has included dirty jokes or puns, such as "Liberace was great on the piano but sucked on the organ," which use few offensive terms, but which imply explicit sexual material (Haley, Bader & Potts, 1995, n.p.).

During the May 2013 sweeps period, primetime programming on CBS featured the most risqué innuendo, frequently toeing the FCC's indecency borderline. For example, an episode of *Two and a Half Men* featured the following sports-related double-entendre: "Hello, Lyndsey, you don't mind if I watch this baseball game in the nude do you? / Sure, you can kiss me between the strikes and I'll kiss you between the balls." Given their context, these lines feature a nearly undeniable explicit sexual connotation. As a result, CBS could suffer significant repercussions if the FCC concluded that the sexual import present in this double-entendre was inescapable (Hilliard and Keith, 2007).

The third conclusion that may be drawn from this research is that, from the perspective of broadcast and cable networks, content aired in the early parts of primetime need not be different from that broadcast during late primetime. Per First Amendment time, place, and manner restrictions, the Supreme Court may act to protect "captive audiences" from objectionable speech; these restrictions work to shield captive audience members, including children, from intrusive profanity aired on broadcast television during traditional family viewing times.

Although all of the studied programming aired outside of the safe harbor, no statistically significant difference was found between the number of offensive terms aired on television at 8 p.m. and those aired close to 10 p.m. Mildly profane words such as “hell” and “damn” were fair game for use by broadcasters at any moment during primetime; even dirty words “piss” and “tits” reached the airwaves and the ears of arguable “captive” audience members unedited on broadcast and cable networks in this timeframe.

When Carlin’s *Filthy Words* monologue aired on the radio nearly 40 years ago, a man driving with his young son heard the profanity-filled speech and complained that captive audience members like his son “should not be subject to obscene material on the air during times of day that young people are likely to be listening to or watching a broadcast station” (Hilliard and Keith, 2007, p. 22). Although broadcast regulations resulting from the airing of this monologue rendered the seven dirty words off limits to broadcasters outside of the safe harbor, it is evident that several of these filthy words have begun to seep back in to family-time programming airing as early as 8 p.m.

A fourth conclusion of this study is that several words once considered too offensive for the airwaves are no longer stigmatized as such. Consider Curzan’s (2013) *Slang Hunters* discussion from Chapter 2 regarding the social evolution of “breast.” In Victorian times, speakers hoped to avoid using the “vulgar” word “breast” at the dinner table, so they referred to chicken pieces as “white meat” and “dark meat” instead. Today, the word “breast” is considered socially acceptable — even mild — when used to refer to poultry cuts or human body parts.

Since Carlin’s dirty words first hit the airwaves, a related, although slight, evolution of language appropriateness is evident. The seven dirty words are still predominantly foul, but as discussed previously, not every member of Carlin’s infamous seven dirty words list remains “too

hot" for contemporary television programming. Arguably, "piss" and "tits" may no longer be considered a part of this list, given that both terms were aired frequently — even in explicitly sexual and excretory contexts — on broadcast and cable television programming outside of the safe harbor period. Incessantly bleeped terms "fuck," "motherfucker," "cunt," and "cocksucker" persist as four of society's most objectionable words, and "shit" appears to be on its way out of the dirty words club and into acceptable television — at least cable — verbiage. Beyond the seven dirty words, broadcast network bleeping practices examined as part of this study suggest that excretory word "asshole" and strong other word "bullshit" also may be considered inappropriate for primetime, FCC-monitored programming. Thus, a three-tiered system may be used to display the status of Carlin's seven dirty words in contemporary television programming (see Figure 4).

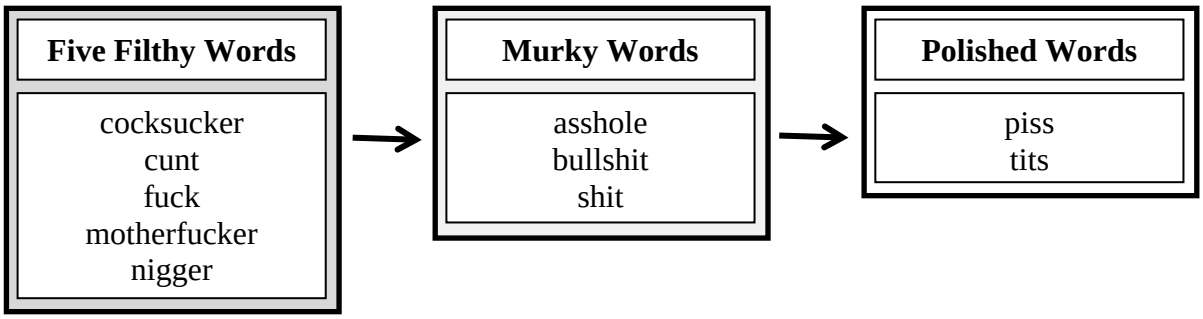

Figure 4. Carlin's seven dirty words revisited: The five filthy words.

Five filthy words — four of Carlin's original seven, plus "nigger" — remain too offensive for primetime television programming of any variety. Per the content analysis, "asshole," "bullshit," and "shit" are the three murky words bleeped consistently by broadcast networks and aired unedited only on cable television during primetime, and "piss" and "tits" are the two formerly dirty words now polished enough to be considered appropriate by cable and broadcast networks for all audience members.

The fifth conclusion that may be drawn from the content analysis is that hate speech should be present in discussions regarding content appropriate for primetime television audiences. Hate speech aired during the collection period included that of a sexual orientation perspective, such as “faggot squad” from *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* on NBC and “bull dyke” from the same show on USA, and that from a racist perspective, such as “dumbass cracker” and “baldheaded little Wop” from *Mike & Molly* on CBS.

The same data collection supports the consideration of context as it relates to hate speech, as this type of language may be used to show camaraderie as well as to degrade. With the exception of “nigger,” racial and sexual orientation slurs aired unedited on broadcast and cable networks regardless of context. For example, the aforementioned “faggot squad” remark from *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* aired freely on primetime television despite its demeaning connotation. Conversely, all instances of “nigger” — even those uttered between friends to show solidarity — recorded during the May collection period were bleeped on primetime television, a clear indication of the term’s contemporarily unacceptable status.

From an offensiveness standpoint, Sapolsky et al. (2011) posit that racial pejoratives have weight and over time have become more taboo than sexual words. Although hate speech is not considered punishable from a regulatory perspective, its small representation on primetime programming may be a result of industry best practices and broadcasters’ attention to advertiser interests.

In 2013, several television personalities lost their jobs and endorsement deals due to hate speech-related incidents, and the heavily publicized firings of notable figures such as Paula Deen and Hugh Douglas speak to contemporary society’s — and thus advertisers’ — intolerance for these types of terms, even in the face of the FCC’s (2013) hands-off, free speech policy. As

discussed in Chapter 3, if hate speech is argued to be unconstitutional as group defamation (Waldron, 2012) or by way of obscenity and degradation (Saunders, 2011), the contextual presence of such language is undoubtedly valuable in determining its level of offense. Thus, in the same manner that extended sexual innuendo may prove actionable by Congress given its context, so too may hate speech. Consequently, this study included hate speech as a category of offensive English terms.

The sixth and final conclusion that may be pulled from this research is that real life — at least as it exists in unscripted reality television — is more profane than life depicted on scripted television programming. The significant number of aired and bleeped terms on A&E, coupled with the cable network's primetime saturation of reality programming, influenced the examination of the correlation between offensive language and unscripted programming. As noted in Chapter 4, A&E aired 30 profane terms more than second-place network USA during primetime of the May 2013 sweeps period, and the cable network bleeped more (249) than three times the number of terms bleeped by USA, NBC, and CBS combined (78). Further, of its 56 hours of collection-period programming, A&E aired 48 hours of reality television, a total greater than that of NBC (38), CBS (16), and USA (8).

Given these factors, the study determined that a strong positive correlation exists between the amount of reality television programming a network airs and the frequency with which it bleeps offensive language. During the May 2013 sweeps period, A&E broadcast more reality programming than did any other studied network and bleeped far more terms than did NBC, CBS, and USA combined. Consequently, it seems as though the argument for the airing or bleeping of profanity on television for realism's sake is a valid one. Reality programming may be more appropriately considered an arranged reflection of real life than a documentary. However,

the heightened presence of profanity on reality shows may suggest that this type of language appears frequently in everyday conversation, more frequently than it does on the fabricated dialogue of scripted television shows. From this point forward, in trying to balance program realism and potential audience size, television networks may continue to rely heavily on the ability to bleep those terms not considered unanimously appropriate for all audience members.

Even without qualitative input for this study, it is possible to examine how Searle's (1962) speech act theory is present in contemporary television. Searle's theory gives linguistic and motivational value to indecency and profanity; thus, the offensive language noted in this study may not be written off as meaningless noise. With regards to scripted television, it may be difficult to determine how characters use language to accomplish action. However, one may discuss how broadcast teams strike a balance between marketability and realism, using language on programming to convey notions of profanity. For television industry professionals, speech acts are calculated and employed deliberately for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is establishing cultural meaning between stations and audience members. One may argue that, for scripted programming, scriptwriters, producers, and broadcast executives intentionally use offensive language during primetime programming to entertain, to convey realism, to shock, or to appeal to particular audiences. Concerning unscripted television programming, one may not argue the deliberateness of profane language used by cast members, because dialogue aired on these shows is unscripted and often instantaneous. It is unlikely that reality show casts first consider the effects of their speech acts on audience members before speaking; thus, for these cast members, offensive language is used simply on a basic level — to communicate.

Because profanity numbers are greater on reality television than on scripted programming, profanity may be more vital in adding emphasis to basic communication than in

entertaining, shocking, appealing to, or conveying realism to audiences. Regardless of the programming types they air and the intent behind their aired offensive speech, television stations use profanity to build a rapport with audiences and to establish cultural meaning between themselves and their viewers. Considering profanity's role in everyday speech, audience members may not appreciate networks' programming without the interjection of offensive language. "Fuck-free" programming may not always be taken seriously or valued given its inability to represent all genuine human interactions.

The challenge in finding the aforementioned balance between program realism and audience size may provide an explanation for the studied networks' seemingly haphazard bleeping practices. As noted previously, A&E bleeped three times more terms than did the remaining networks combined. Arguably, the network's bleeping practices seem to be more arbitrary than methodical. Perhaps the best example of A&E's bleeping discrepancies exists in the network's treatment of sexual word "ass," which it aired 23 times and bleeped 13 times during the observed sweeps period. Program type appeared not to be a factor in bleeping inconsistencies, because three — *Storage Wars*, *The First 48*, and *Bates Motel* — of the four series the network aired during the collection period both bleeped and aired "ass" on various occasions.

Beyond programming type, one could examine the half-hour primetime timeslots for justification regarding A&E's peculiar bleeping practices. For example, the cable network aired "ass" and strong other word "bitch" unedited during 8 p.m. episodes of *Storage Wars*, but bleeped the terms during 8:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. episodes of the same show, respectively. New episodes of the same show that aired during the collection period were broadcast at 9 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Besides "hell," which was aired and bleeped in the same new episode of *Storage Wars*,

the new episodes of this program drew a distinct line between the offensive terms the show would air (e.g. “damn” and “piss”), and those it would rather imply (e.g. “bitch” and “shit”). The *Storage Wars* episodes that were rerun during the May 2013 sweeps period may have re-aired during a different time than they ran initially; however, the fact that these reruns hit the airwaves during primetime of a heavily-scrutinized sweeps period may speak to A&E’s haphazard policies regarding the airing and bleeping of offensive terms.

Furthermore, on *Storage Wars*, “ass” aired unedited five times and was implied eight times by A&E during the May 2013 sweeps period. All five bleeped instances of this term existed on episodes run originally in 2012, and six of the aired instances occurred during episodes first broadcast in 2013. Thus, another argument may be made that the seemingly inconsistent bleeping of this term on A&E is due to the year or timeslot in which the show initially aired. However, if more recent episodes of this show that chose instead to bleep “ass” are broadcast alongside older episodes of the same show that aired this term, the implication of “ass” in contemporary episodes becomes relatively meaningless. Little data exists to suggest that A&E bleeps a significantly varied body of terms than do the three other studied networks. Consequently, the network’s internal bleeping disparities may not be due to A&E’s unique perspective on profane language; they may be a result of its heavy concentration of reality programming and of the cultural or legal standards tied to the years and timeslots — although safe harbor considerations appear not to be a factor — in which its rerun programming originally aired.

Akin to these haphazard bleeping practices are the faulty closed captioning services observed during the content analysis. On several occasions, the closed captions accompanying the primetime programming aired or translated to English profane terms not necessarily intended

to be aired by broadcast and cable networks. In a few instances, captions mistook benign terms for profanity, adding unnecessary offensive language to the primetime broadcasts. Given these discrepancies, one may argue that shoddy captioning complicates the ease with which audiences may anticipate offensive language in a program and that with which technological devices, such as TVGuardian, may monitor and block offensive language effectively (Chidester, 2004). Fortunately, new FCC policies in progress as of this writing aim to improve among other things the accuracy and completeness of closed captioning services offered by broadcasters. These enhanced expectations may alleviate some of the captioning incongruities and offensive language issues that exist in contemporary programming (Federal Communications Commission, 2014).

Limitations

The first and most evident limitation to this study lies in the broad spectrum of television networks and the inability of a single researcher to study the whole population. Recording and analyzing all programs broadcast on more than 250 networks during primetime would be impractical and nearly impossible. A second limitation to this study is the lack of qualitative input from stations concerning their policies and procedures regarding the airing of profanity during primetime broadcasts. Although the corporate headquarters for NBC, CBS, USA, and A&E were contacted for input, all chose to decline participation. Furthermore, four Youngstown-local broadcast affiliates chose not to participate after first consulting with their corporate offices. The qualitative responses from these studied organizations could add justification to the quantitative content analysis data and depth to the study as a whole.

A tertiary limitation to this study lies in the contextual restrictions inherent in a black-and-white coding system such as the one used for this study. When determining whether an on-

air utterance is punishable or not, the FCC recognizes that the context of this term is indeed important, but "context is not an easily defined concept, nor a sure-fire defense" (Hilliard and Keith, 2007, p. 204). For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, courts frequently recognize the difference between sexual (e.g. "Go fuck yourself") and non-sexual (e.g. "I don't give a fuck") uses of the word "fuck" (Fairman, 2009) when determining and distributing punishments; during *Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation* (1978), the FCC agreed to pursue only the seven dirty words as part of its enforcement policy, pardoning those used in fleeting and isolated situations. For this study, "fuck" was coded simply as a member of the seven dirty words category. However, given context and varying levels of offensiveness, "fuck" may have been coded more precisely as a member of seven dirty words (sexual) or seven dirty words (non-sexual) categories. The same is true for words such as "shit," which may have been coded further as a seven dirty words (excretory) or a seven dirty words (non-excretory) member, and "pussy," which may have been further divided into sexual words (explicit) or sexual words (non-explicit) categories.

Given the numerous linguistic gradations of the words collected in the study, more than 20 categories — rather than eight — may have been used to classify the data. However, at this advanced level of categorization, drawing clear, meaningful conclusions may have been challenging. Thus, a black-and-white process was used to split data into eight strict categories, and the "graydations" were overlooked in the interest of conducting a large analysis.

Further, although coding for this study was streamlined, it is not to suggest that the contextual qualities of the collected terms may be ignored, as they have significant implications and affect the regulation of broadcast speech. Butler and Fitzgerald (2011) concluded that "expletives themselves are not problematic — it is the context in which they are used (including

who the recipient and listeners are) that shapes how they are treated" (p. 547), and because explicitly sexual or excretory connotations of words are often considered more patently offensive by societal standards than their non-sexual and non-excretory counterparts (Fairman, 2009), context plays a tremendous role in audience backlash, in the evaluation of public complaints, and thus in the distribution of FCC punishments. Consequently, with this study's streamlined coding system, a limitation is that contextual nuances and implications may be discussed only post-analysis, not during.

Implications

Implications of this study may be predominantly political or social in nature. Regulatory bodies such as the FCC may decide that, given the rate of offensive language aired on broadcast television or the linguistic categories to which these terms belong, their policies and punishments are failing to work as effectively as they might hope. They may find that the regulatory pressure they are placing on broadcasters is not great enough to discourage the airing of words such as "piss" and "tits" during traditional family viewing times. Regulatory bodies may choose to pursue harsher punishments, including steeper fines, in an effort to regain influence over the broadcast television airwaves.

Broadcasters may gain a comprehensive understanding of the offensive terms they air and the frequency with which they broadcast these terms during primetime. It is possible that these industry professionals concentrate more frequently on the profane language aired per program or per episode than that aired on their networks as a whole. Conversely, it is equally possible that these networks in fact recognize the frequency with which they air and imply offensive language to primetime audiences. They may internalize their excellent Nielsen ratings and intense

advertiser support and conclude — correctly or not — that they are operating with the public's full support.

Furthermore, social watchdog groups may find that the content broadcast on television aligns or does not align to the public interest. The extent to which the interests of these groups accurately represent those of the public is debatable, and Hilliard and Keith (2007) argue that First Amendment absolutists may consider members of such watchdog groups to be "moralists who would impose their judgments and beliefs on the entire nation" (p. 117). Regardless, one may argue that the perspectives of community-focused groups are valuable, not only because they represent the views of a more conservative faction of viewers, but also because these groups organize protests and file complaints with the FCC; it is these complaints that prompt FCC investigations and pursuits of financial reparation.

Reportedly, community groups including the Parents Television Council are satisfied with the bleeping of profanity during live sporting event broadcasts (Poniewozik, 2010), but it is unclear whether or not this acceptance transfers to scripted or pre-recorded television shows. These watchdog groups may determine that the public is content with profanity of all linguistic categorizations on television programming so long as the harshest of terms are implied rather than aired. They may also find that the public is uncomfortable with even the implication of terms such as "cunt" during family viewing times; in these instances, the public interest is not being served, but rather the public is being pacified.

Future Research

Future research may include qualitative broadcaster perspectives, policies, and procedures regarding the airing of offensive language on family-time programming, or the perspectives of scriptwriters regarding the inclusion or exclusion of profanity in television

programs. This information could provide considerable insight into the decision-making processes governing the airing and bleeping of particular terms, and the frequency with which these terms are presented to television audiences. It may also shed light on the dynamics between advertising revenue and programming, marketability and content, and cable and broadcast television as they relate to indecency.

Future researchers may conduct a content analysis of advertisements broadcast during profanity-laden programming, examining the interplay between advertising and television programming. Often, offensive language is aired during network promotions for upcoming shows or during the advertisements themselves. In 73 instances during the content analysis, networks aired or implied offensive language in reviews of previous episodes, in teasers for current episodes, or in previews for upcoming episodes. For example, during the April 29, 2013, episode of *The Voice* on NBC, a preview clip featured Blake Shelton addressing Adam Levine with “Kiss my ass, Adam”; this retort did not air during the course of regular programming until the following night’s episode. Given the attention-grabbing role of devices such as previews and teasers, the fact that broadcasters (excepting USA) regularly incorporated profanity into these brief clips speaks to the implicit draw of this language. Arguably, networks need not recap or promote programming using language that has the potential to offend viewers or to invite regulatory backlash, which suggests that these broadcasters recognize the comedic or general attention-demanding nature of profane language. A study that incorporates this type of data plus any profanity aired during the advertisements themselves may lead to more comprehensive offensive language analyses for full viewing periods.

Another direction for related research may examine the effects of aired profanity on audience members or the perceptions of these audience members regarding particular terms, the

effectiveness of bleeping practices, or the value of profane language in conveying a situation realistically. Perhaps more valuable than the perspectives of broadcasters are the opinions of audience members concerning offensive language on television; this information could provide researchers with a more accurate idea of what constitutes the public interest than what is represented individually by conservative family groups, regulatory bodies, or First Amendment absolutists.

Summary

Contemporary research of offensive language aired on primetime television is indicative of changing cultural standards as they relate to the English language. In the 1970s, Carlin's seven dirty words were considered the most offensive to place on public airwaves; 40 years later, only four of these remain too taboo for family-time television. Aired frequently on broadcast and cable programming outside of the safe harbor period, "piss" and "tits" could be designated as appropriate living room language in 2013, and fellow dirty word "shit" appeared welcome on cable programming.

This is not to suggest that the argument against the regulation of Carlin's dirty words is a novel one, however. Following the *Pacifica* decision, Justice William Brennan voiced his displeasure with the narrow focus of the Supreme Court and the FCC, suggesting that the whole of society may not subscribe to these seven terms as unacceptable:

> The Court's decision may be seen for what, in the broader perspective, it really is: another of the dominant culture's inevitable efforts to force those groups who do not share its mores to conform to its way of thinking, acting, and speaking. (1978, p. 777)

Thus, the apparent "loosening" of broadcast standards in relation to these terms may be indicative of a grassroots movement 40 years in the making, with a majority public opinion simply beginning to overwhelm the opinion of a select but powerful few.

Even so, contemporary primetime television programming is far from an indecency free-for-all. Consistently bleeped racist slur "nigger" joined the ranks of terminology too offensive for family-time programming on cable and broadcast television in May 2013, rounding out the new list of words "too hot" for the airwaves — the five filthy words: "cunt," "fuck," "motherfucker," "cocksucker," and "nigger." Even cable networks have determined that these words are not appropriate to be aired unedited during primetime; thus, for these five terms, the pressure from members of society, including advertisers, to censor these terms may be considered as great — if not greater — than that of the FCC on broadcast networks. Furthermore, because mild other words and euphemisms comprised more than 40% of the collected data, and because bleeped terms accounted for 14% of the sample, one may argue that broadcasters continue to exercise best practices when airing family-time programming.

Provided the FCC's inability in recent years to elicit significant fines from its high-profile broadcast television indecency cases, the regulatory body's influence over television titans such as CBS, to whom its $550,000 "wardrobe malfunction" fine was absolved in 2011, seems to include little more than empty threats. Accordingly, one may argue that, with the FCC's questionable authority and decidedly vague guidelines (*FCC v. Fox*, 2010), broadcasters must consider more than the threat of financial reparations and prolonged court appearances when drawing an appropriate line between free speech and public interest.

Without a doubt, the federal regulations that govern broadcast television will continue to evolve, as will the public consensus regarding what constitutes appropriate family-time

television language. Given its flexibility in dealing with the breadth of television programming, the variety of television viewers, and the ever-changing landscape of social norms, the marketplace approach to indecency regulation remains most capable of determining public interest and of protecting vulnerable audiences in contemporary society. Even if present FCC regulations are little more than an annoyance to broadcasters, these television professionals must continue to operate in a manner that does not upset large sectors of the public, or their ratings and — perhaps more importantly — their advertising revenue undoubtedly will suffer.

This study's most significant implications, perhaps, lie in the ability of profanity to reflect and to influence culture. The fact that hate speech and formerly "dirty" terms now air unedited on primetime television is indicative of shifting cultural values regarding indecent language — or at the very least indicative of the overwhelming of regulatory thought by public opinion.

Such an apparent evolution of cultural standards may be a result of several factors, not the least of which is the proliferation of technology. With so many media outlets available to consumers, broadcasters must compete for viewers. This competition often results in broadcasters pushing the boundaries of indecency to attract audience members, flooding the market with risqué content and language. Arguably, the saturation of indecent terminology on family-time programming influences cultural attitudes about the appropriateness of such language.

Another justification for shifting cultural standards is that the expansion of media technology facilitates increased cultural connectivity. Through social media alone, members of more conservative communities may be exposed to cultures beyond their own that hold divergent

stances on indecent language. Interaction with more tolerant perspectives eventually may sway the attitudes of conservative-leaning speakers.

Furthermore, the apparent relaxation of cultural standards as they relate to indecent language may be a result of the fading novelty of particular offensive terms. Since the 1970s, the seven dirty words have been documented as being among the most offensive of English terms; undoubtedly, these terms caused controversy for decades, if not centuries, prior to *Pacifica*. At some point, it seems the edge of offensive terms must dull, however. Extended exposure to offensive language may influence a dwindling of the terms' provocativeness, and members of society may slowly stop subscribing to these terms as indecent.

The conclusion that audience size is determined by the degree of a television station's inclusion of aired profanity in television programming — however logical in theory it may be — is not so in practice. Because the networks chosen to represent broadcast and cable entities in this study topped Nielsen ratings during the data collection period, one may argue that the profanity aired during these networks' primetime programming does little to discourage audience members or advertisers. Whether viewers and advertisers enjoy or simply tolerate offensive language broadcast outside of the safe harbor is immaterial; the dominant ratings of programs containing such language suggest that contemporary viewers and advertisers support, regardless of network type or timeslot, a moderate level of offensive language on television.

Lileks (2010) argued that, in addition to reflecting culture, profanity has the potential to influence it. At last glance, seven broadcast and 20 cable networks consistently reach more than 100 million households (National Cable and Telecommunications Association, 2012); thus, the profanity broadcast by these networks alone extends to a considerable audience. Certainly, large numbers of these viewers are unfazed by, if not proponents for, offensive language on television.

For these viewers, the influence of televised profanity is limited. Supporting profanity on television is by no means a unanimous public sentiment, however. Those viewers who abhor indecent language may choose to view programming strictly on family-oriented, “fuck-free” networks, but it is arguably possible that those in the middle, who simply tolerate profane language on popular primetime television, may experience a sort of desensitization to this type of language over time. If such a numbing effect takes place, profanity on television may indeed influence a shift in cultural ideals regarding what is and what is not appropriate on family-time television programming.

From a conservative standpoint, profanity on primetime television reflects contemporary society’s lax moral stance regarding indecency. From a more liberal perspective, however, such profanity simply reveals a more accurate view of what society does and does not consider indecent, serving as a snapshot of contemporary societal ideals as they relate to offensive language and primetime television programming.

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APPENDIX A: KAYE AND SAPOLSKY (2009) – FIVE OFFENSIVE TERMS CATEGORIES

Seven Dirty Words
cunt
fuck
motherfucker
cocksucker
shit
piss
tits

Sexual Words
testicles
boobs
pussy
dick
cock
jackoff
hummer
ass

Excretory Words
fart
asshole

Strong Other Words
bastard
bitch
bullshit
son of a bitch
shithead

Mild Other Words
hell
damn
slut
whore
Christ/Jesus/God
Goddamn
douchebag

APPENDIX B: TELEVISION PROFANITY CODING SHEET

D	S	E	N	B/C	T	S/C	G	T/P/G	LC	C	B/A	M/F/X	A	O

Key

D = Date
S = Show Title
E = Episode Title
N = Network Name
B/C = Broadcast or Cable
T = Time Slot
S/C = Scripted or Unscripted
G = Program Genre

T/P/G = Term/Phrase/Gesture
LC = Linguistic Categorization
C = Context
B/A = Bleeped or Aired
M/F/X = Gender of Speaker
A = Date of First Airing
O = Other Notes

APPENDIX C: COLLECTION PROGRAMMING SCHEDULE (2013)

Week 1: 4/25 – 5/1

Thursday, 4/25	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Community	The Office	The Office	Parks and Rec
CBS	Big Bang Theory	2 ½ Men	Person of Interest	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	The First 48	x	The First 48	x

Friday, 4/26	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Fashion Star	x	Grimm	x
CBS	Undercover Boss	x	Vegas	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Saturday, 4/27	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Smash	x	The Voice	x
CBS	Mayweather	x	Criminal Minds	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Sunday, 4/28	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	<- (1) The Voice	x	All-Star Celeb. App	(1) ->
CBS	The Amazing Race	x	The Good Wife	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	x

Monday, 4/29	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	x	x
CBS	How I Met	Rules of Engage.	2 Broke Girls	Mike & Molly
USA	WWE Monday	Night RAW	x	(1:05) ->
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Bates Motel	x

Tuesday, 4/30	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	x	x
CBS	NCIS	x	NCIS: LA	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Wednesday, 5/1	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
CBS	Survivor	x	Criminal Minds	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	x	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty

Week 2: 5/2 – 5/8

Thursday, 5/2	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Community	The Office	x	Parks and Rec
CBS	Big Bang Theory	2 ½ Men	Person of Interest	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	The First 48	x	The First 48	x

Friday, 5/3	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Fashion Star	x	Dateline NBC	x
CBS	Undercover Boss	x	Vegas	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Saturday, 5/4	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Smash	x	The Voice	x
CBS	Person of Interest	x	48 Hours	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Bates Motel	x	Bates Motel	x

Sunday, 5/5	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	<- (1) The Voice	x	All Star Celebrity	Apprentice (1)->
CBS	The Amazing Race	x	x	x
USA	<- (2)The Dilemma	Couples Retreat	x	x (1) ->
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty

Monday, 5/6	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	x	x
CBS	How I Met	Rules of Engage.	2 Broke Girls	Mike and Molly
USA	WWE Monday	Night Raw	x	x (1)->
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Bates Motel	x

Tuesday, 5/7	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	x	x
CBS	NCIS	x	NCIS: LA	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Wednesday, 5/8	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
CBS	Survivor	x	Criminal Minds	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty

Week 3: 5/9 – 5/15

Thursday, 5/9	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Community	The Office	The Office	x
CBS	Big Bang Theory	2 ½ Men	Person of Interest	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	The First 48	x	The First 48	x

Friday, 5/10	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Fashion Star	x	Dateline NBC	x
CBS	Undercover Boss	x	Vegas	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Saturday, 5/11	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Smash	x	The Voice	x
CBS	NCIS	x	CSI	x
USA	<-(2) Ugly Truth	The Back-up Plan	x	(1) ->
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Sunday, 5/12	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	<-(1)The Voice	x	All-Star Celebrity	Apprentice (1) ->
CBS	Survivor	x	x	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	x

Monday, 5/13	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	x	x
CBS	How I Met	Big Bang Theory	2 Broke Girls	Mike & Molly
USA	WWE Monday	Night Raw	x	(1) ->
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Bates Motel	x

Tuesday, 5/14	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	The Voice	x
CBS	NCIS	x	NCIS: LA	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Wednesday, 5/15	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Dateline NBC	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
CBS	2 Broke Girls	2 Broke Girls	Criminal Minds	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty

Week 4: 5/16 – 5/22

Thursday, 5/16	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Office	x	The Office	x (:15) ->
CBS	Big Bang Theory	Big Bang Theory	Elementary	x (1)->
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	The First 48	x	The First 48	x

Friday, 5/17	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Dateline NBC	x	x	x
CBS	Undercover Boss	x	Undercover Boss	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Saturday, 5/18	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Grimm	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
CBS	Elementary	x	Criminal Minds	x
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Bates Motel	x	Bates Motel	x

Sunday, 5/19	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	<- (1) The Voice	x	All-Star Celebrity	Apprentice (1) ->
CBS	60 Minutes	x	ACM Presents: Tim	McGraw's… (1) ->
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty

Monday, 5/20	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	The Voice	x	x	x
CBS	2 Broke Girls	Rules of Engage.	Big Bang Theory	Mike & Molly
USA	WWE Monday	Night Raw	x	(1:05) ->
A&E	Duck Dynasty	x	Bates Motel	x

Tuesday, 5/21	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	NBC News Special	x	The Voice	x
CBS	NCIS: LA	x	NCIS	x
USA	Law & Order: SVU	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
A&E	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars	Storage Wars

Wednesday, 5/22	8-8:30	8:30-9	9-9:30	9:30-10
NBC	Dateline NBC	x	Law & Order: SVU	x
CBS	2 ½ Men	Mike & Molly	Criminal Minds	(1) ->
USA	NCIS	x	NCIS	x
A&E	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty	Duck Dynasty

Key

x = Prior program continues into slot
<-(#) = Program extends # of hours beyond slot

APPENDIX D: DATA COLLECTION WORD LIST

CATEGORIES OF KAYE AND SAPOLSKY (2009)

Seven Dirty Words
cunt
fuck
motherfucker
cocksucker
shit
piss
tits
+dumbfucks, fuck you (gesture), fucked, fucker, fucking, motherfuckers, pissed, pissing, pissy, shitting, shitty, titty

Sexual Words
testicles
boobs
pussy
dick
cock
jackoff
hummer
ass
+anal, asses, balls, bang, banged, banging, bangtastic, blew, boob, boobed, boobies, cods, crotch, cum, dicked, doing, dong, gets off, getting off, hard, hard-on, head, humping, jerkoff, Johnson, junk, laid, nail, nailed, nuts, penis, plow, prick, screw, screwed, screwing, scrotums, shtupping, suck, sucked, sucker, suckers, suck-fest, suck-hole, sucks, tapping, testes, testicular, tug-and-chug, vagina, vaginal, wiener, wieners, wood

Excretory Words
fart
asshole
+bullcrap, crap, crapped, crappier, crapping, crappy, craps, crapville, defecating, defecation, deuce, dump, "Fan-dunghole," farts, farting, poop, pooped, sharted, turd, turds

Strong Other Words
bastard
bitch
bullshit
son of a bitch
shithead
+asshead, asstastic, badass, badasses, bastards, big-ass, bitch slap, bitching, bitchy, dickhead, dipshit, dumbass, fat-ass, full-ass, half-assed, half-assing, hard-ass, hard-assed, jackass, jackasses, kick-ass, kiss-ass, smart-ass, sons of bitches

Mild Other Words
hell
damn
slut
whore
Christ/Jesus/God
Goddamn
douchebag
+damned, damning, douche, douchey, God-awful, hellacious, hell-bent, hellcat, hellholes, hells, ho, ho-bag, hos, Jesus Christ, Lord, skank, slutty, whorehouse, whores

NEW CATEGORIES (2013)

Hate Speech
+*Chink*
+cracker
+dago
+dyke
+fag/faggot/fruit
+"Gay-bler"
+homo
+*Jap*
+*kike*
+nigger
+*spic*
+Wop

Euphemisms
+arse
+BS
+butt
+ dadgumit/daggone/doggone
+dang/darn/darned/durn
+eff/effing
+freaking/fricking/frigging
+golly
+gosh dang/gosh darn
+heck
+*m-eff-er*/m-er-eff-er
+shoot/shiz
+SOB

Unintelligible
+undistinguishable bleeped terms

Key
italics = category words absent in content analysis
+ = collected words assigned to categories

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
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Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1048

P 724-357-7730
F 724-357-2715
irb-research@iup.edu
www.iup.edu/irb

February 27, 2013

Britta McCreary
Dept of Communications Media
121 Stouffer Hall

Dear Ms. McCreary:

Your proposed research project, "Profanity vs. Marketability: Sitcoms and Dramas Aired by Broadcast/Cable Networks," (Log No. 13-017) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of February 27, 2013 to February 27, 2014.

It is also important for you to note that IUP adheres strictly to Federal Policy that requires you to notify the IRB promptly regarding:

1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented),
2. any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects, and
3. any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

Should you need to continue your research beyond February 27, 2014 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683 .

This letter indicates the IRB's approval of your protocol. IRB approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University policies, including, but not limited to, policies regarding program enrollment, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:jeb

xc: Dr. Zachary Stiegler, Dissertation Advisor
Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary