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"Do You Kiss Your Mother With That Mouth?": Profanity in Popular PG-13 Movies

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The objective of this project was to study the pervasiveness of profane language in movies and how it is portrayed as a form of communication. For example, profanity is frequently presented as humorous and innocent. We hoped to examine how the use of language in popular movies has evolved over time by conducting a content analysis.

**Previous Studies**
- Overall profanity use in teen movies steadily declined from the 1980s to 1990s to 2000s (Cressman, Callister, Robinson, & Near, 2009).
- Social Cognitive Theory suggests that observing positive reinforcement of negative behavior is an added incentive to imitate the behavior (Bandura, 1994).

**Hypotheses**
- Profanity has increased from decade to decade.
- Uses of profanity will frequently elicit minimal or non-existent consequences.

**Methods**
- Researchers coded the 8 highest grossing PG-13 movies from the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s (24 movies in total).
- Only movies available on DVD/Blu-Ray as of December 31st, 2015 were included in the sample.
- 4 researchers coded 6 movies each (2 movies from each decade).
- Profanity used in each movie was coded for between the 1:00:00 and 1:20:00 timestamps (20 minutes per movie).
- In order to have a more varied sample only the highest grossing movie from a franchise was included (e.g. The Avengers (2012) for the “Marvel Cinematic Universe” franchise).
- Each instance of profanity was coded using the following variables: Gender, Type of profanity, Category, Intent, Consequence, Year.

**Results**

**Figure 1: Occurrences by Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010s</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\chi^2 (2) = 29.97, p < .001
\]

**Figure 2: Consequences for Using Profanity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Consequence</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reaction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Reaction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\chi^2 (3) = 386.96, p < .001
\]

**Additional Findings**
- Men use profane language more often than women.
- Explicit usage of profanity is more common than implicit instances.
- Mild profanity (i.e. words you might see in the Bible) is most common.
- Epithets are the most frequent reason for using profanity, with “no intent” a close second.

**Discussion**

- We hypothesized that the use of profanity would increase over time, but our results did not support this hypothesis. We expected the most recent decade (2010-2016) would have the most occurrences of profanity. However, the amount of profanity in the 1990s was significantly higher (see figure 1).
- We anticipated that there would rarely be consequences for a character who uses profanity in these movies. 96.5% of the time using profanity had no consequence (see Figure 2). Even though our hypothesis was correct, we were surprised to learn just how frequently profanity is overlooked.

**Limitations**
- Only 20 minutes were coded from each of the movies included in the sample. Therefore, we were only able to capture a fraction of the profanity that could be found by viewing all the movies in their entirety.