Gender differences in swearing in American sitcom: types and reasons

By Tanzima Mahmud

Stockholms universitet

Abstract

The essay is a study on gender differences in the use of swearing on television. Data collected for the thesis is from the American sitcom *Shameless*. The work of Lakoff (1975) on women's language and Stapleton's (2010) study done on gender differences on the use of expletive in both genders are drawn on as the theoretical considerations. The show was chosen due to its strong use of swear words by both genders, which makes it suitable for this research regarding gender differences in swearing. The study was carried out qualitatively and quantitively using two episodes from the latest season. The research questions were: if there is a difference in the use of swear words between men and women, in the types of swear words as well as the reasons for swearing between men and women. The result suggests that all the male and female characters use strong swear words frequently, however women tend to swear less than men. Furthermore, when it comes to the types of swearing, men tend to swear significantly more in the category of excretory (bodily functions) and sexual types of swearing are proportionally highly done by men than by women. On the other hand, women tend to use more swear words related to religious profanity and avoid swear words related to women's body. Lastly, the reasons for swearing for male and female characters include all expressing emotions, verbal emphasis, and humour; however, women tend to use swear words for solidarity as well, which was not visible in men's conversations.

Keywords

Contents

1. Introduction

In today's life, the influence of mass media is significant. The media, especially television has made an impact on shaping our culture and everyday life. However, it is also true that most of what we see on television is a reflection of cultural tendencies in society. Media can influence the way we perceive the concept of gender; the way men and women are portrayed on television can play a huge role in one's life into changing our minds and identity unintentionally.

It is through language we express or convey how we feel. Men and women are portrayed in television differently and the ways men and women speak differs as well. The study will focus on gender differences in terms of swearing. According to the "folk-linguists" women are expected to use language in a polite, decent way, whereas men tend to use strong and masculine words, and thus men use more swear words then women (Coates,1986). There have been many studies done within the field of swearing which mention the use of swearing is linked to men being the superior gender, hence swear more. However, as Fägersten (2016) argues all the female characters in the movie tend to have a different ratio on swear words and that gender is not an absolute variable but rather exists on a continuum, and language use is neither determined by gender nor a function of gender alone, but rather can be considered the representation or construction of one's position within a social group and one's role in a social context.

Shameless is an American series where the use of swearing is seen as substantial. The purpose of the study is to analyze if there are any gender differences in swearing on television. There is a lot of research done in the field of gender differences, however, the study focuses on the reasons for swearing as well. Therefore, it is an attempt to fill a small gap in the research by examining the reasons for swearing and the different types of swearing used by male and female characters.

Since the dialogues are scripted and not real-life dialogues, there are limitations. However, the script writers are also the ones who are trying to make the series or movies

relevant to everyday life, thus to some extent it reveals how we as humans tend to think and feel (Rey, 2001).

The study attempts to answer three research questions as follows:

1) Is there a difference in the proportion of swearing by female and male characters in the sitcom, *Shameless?*

2) What are the differences in the types of swearing by female and male characters in the sitcom?

3) What are the differences in the reasons for swearing by female and male characters in the sitcoms in the sitcom?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Dialogues/language in television sitcoms

Scripted language has been studied by numerous linguistics. In a society, there are often certain expectations of how men and women talk and behave, which is how the script writers come up with their content and as well how gender should be constructed. That is "folk-linguistic beliefs about language guide writers in constructing characters who are easily identifiable by viewers, and thus the construction of masculinity and femininity both draws from and perpetuates about language and gender" (Fägersten & Sven, 2016, p.87). The writers try to relate the dialogues or the language as relevant as possible to real life situation and to the audience. The way characters are built up shows how gender is constructed and, in addition, how men and women stereotypically behave or act in real life. The language in real life is not the same as scripted language, however, to some extent, while producing a transcript of characters, the writers imagine the real-life situation of how gender is portrayed or how men and women tend to speak or behave (Rey, 2001 in Fägersten, 2012).

2.2 Swearing in conversations

To understand swearing in conversations, we need to comprehend the meaning of swearing, functions of it, and reasons to swear. According to Fägersten (2012), swear words can be explained as words that tend to be offensive or inappropriate to others in any context. It is tough to explain a swear word since it often depends on how sensitive a

person is to that specific word or expression. It also depends considerably on the level of offensiveness of a word to rank the word as a swear word. It depends individually on the person if they find a swear word inappropriate or not (Marsden, 2015). According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990), the meaning of swearing follows in the three categories below.

(a) Refers to something that is taboo and/or stigmatized in the culture;

(b) Should not be interpreted literally;

(c) Can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes.

(Andersson & Trudgill, 1990, p.53).

2.2.1 Types of, and reasons for swearing:

There are different kinds of swear words which falls into different categories. I will use these three categories below to analyze the different types of swear words I discover in the study, according to Stapleton (2010).

-Excretory/scatological – those which relate to bodily functions and associated body parts (e.g., *shit, piss, arse*);

-Sexual – those which relate to sexual acts or to genitalia (*fuck, prick, cunt, wank*);

-Profanity – those which refer to religious issues (*damn, goddamn, bloody, Chrissake*)

(Stapleton, 2010, p.290).

There are many reasons why one tends to swear in different situations. It can be a reason to release tension or when someone is short of words or can be habitual as well. The reasons for swearing which will be used in the study is taken from Stapleton (2010) and explained below in categories.

-Expressing emotion;

-Humour and verbal emphasis;

-Social bonding and solidarity;

-Constructing and displaying identity

(Stapleton. 2010, p.290).

Expressing emotions:

Swearing is linked to express emotions, both positive and negative. There are swear words which people tend to express in different situations, for example when someone is mad, hurt, happy, and more, and it can be directed towards others or not. One of the examples is the word *fuck.* "It can be used to describe pain, pleasure, hate and, but not least, love. Besides its sexual connotation, this word can be utilized to describe many situations" (Andersson & Trudgill, 1999, p.60). There are studies done to figure out whether the reasons to swear more was due to positive or negative emotions. A study done to analyze the reason of Dutch female students to swear more was due to express negative emotions rather than positive emotions (Rassin & Muris 2005).

Humour and verbal emphasis:

According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990), there are abusive and humorous swearings, when directed towards others. Abusive swearing is offensive, insulting, and inappropriate whereas humorous swearing has the opposite effect and is considered fun and done in a playful way in order to create a fun, joking environment (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990). When it comes to verbal emphasis, the swear words are used to put extra emphasis to the sentence to create more effect or to make it sound more important or serious. One of the examples to describe the type could be: "compare the effects of saying "*That meal was fantastic!* versus *That mean was fucking fantastic!* In the second case, the expletive *fucking* acts as an intensifier which strengthens both the force of the adjective *fantastic* and the speaker's personal commitment to his/her evaluation of the meal" (Stapleton, 2010, p.295).

Social bonding and solidarity:

Many people tend to use swear words on a daily basis. Certain groups tend to speak the same way or use swear words to connect to each other and express unity. Swearing can be a way to communicate with a certain group, either in a friend's circle or at a workplace environment. Other sociocultural and pragmatic factors play a role when it comes to swearing on a different setting. Swearing has become a habitual thing where the group of friends tend to swear daily and have developed a part of everyday culture (Stapleton, 2010). In this regard, Jay and Janschewitz (2008) note:

> Swearing is influenced by pragmatic (contextual) variables such as the
> conversational topic, the speaker-listener relationship, including

gender, occupation, and status, and the socio-physical setting of the communication with respect to whether the swearing takes place in a public or private location, one's jurisdiction over the location, and the level of formality of the occasion. (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008, p.272)

Thus, it depends largely on the location and as well as the company you have, to be able to use different types of expletives (i.e., offensive expressions). One tends to swear more with friends or colleagues in private or within a small group, instead in the classroom or with senior workers. It can be seen swearing is used more in lunchrooms, bars, and hangout places rather than in professional settings.

Constructing and displaying identity:

According to Stapleton (2010), the use of swearing by an individual depends on different factors such as people tend to swear more in the same age group and having the same ethnicity group makes it easier and more comfortable for individuals to swear, and it depends on the gender as well. Same sex use more swear words to each other, and women and men tend to swear for different reasons and on different levels.

2.3 Gender differences in swearing

Lakoff (1973) mentions in her seminal work, *Women and Language,* how gender plays a role in how men and women speak. Women are expected to speak calmly or quietly and be more ladylike due to how society views women, while men tend to use more harsh words or language. Furthermore, the author mentions how society expects women to behave in a polite way, "if she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human" (Lakoff, 1975, p.6). Society wants to teach girls from a younger age to use a decent language, and if she speaks in a way a boy does, she will be criticized, disliked, looked down upon and will be disciplined (Lakoff, 1975). Lakoff mentions how women need to use more "male language" to be heard and be more powerful and empowered.

Many have criticized Lakoff's work who claims her work was based on assumptions or impressions, rather than real evidence. One of those in disagreement with Lakoff is

Jennifer Coates, who mentioned "Implicitly, WL [women's language] is deficient by comparison with the norm of male language. This approach was challenged because of the implication that there was something intrinsically wrong with women's language, and that women should learn to speak like men if they wanted to be taken seriously" (Coates, 2014, p.6).

In contrast to Lakoff's (1975) work, which should of course be understood in its historical, cultural and social context, some current studies need to be brought up to create comparison between gender studies. For example, Fägersten (2016) speaks about gender differences on television while comparing the different characters in the movie *Sex and the City*. The researcher mentions if all the women speak in the same way, then all four female characters of the movie are expected to communicate in a similar way. However, it is rather seen one character speaks way differently than the other three and more likely in a masculine way. The author mentions language is not determined by gender, it largely depends on other factors, for example the person's role in a certain group and social background.

Stapleton (2003) writes about Gender differences in swearing and adopts a "communities of practice" framework to investigate a group of undergraduate drinking friends from a small Irish town. The study explores whether the group creates a specific linguistic category using swear words when speaking with each other. The data is collected by meeting the members of the group over a two-week period during the summer vacation since the participants are students and have enough free time to meet up. It was a group of 30 people, consisting of 15 females and 15 males. The participants were interviewed in a group, and audio recorded. The idea was to ask questions about the issue of swearing and as well as the participants' perception on it as well.

The result shows swearing signifies a common linguistic practice for male and female equally and the use of expletive is even in both gender and the differences is not huge. However, there is a dissimilarity when it comes to the use of different kinds of swear words, the women are sensitive with the bad words related to women's body. Stapleton (2010) puts it:

in particular, the female respondents judge "vaginal" references (i.e. "cunt" and "fanny") to be obscene, with two thirds of the women also categorizing "tits" in this way. In contrast, only half of the male respondents consider "vaginal" terms to be "obscene" and none consider the word "tits" to be obscene (Stapleton, 2010, p.27)

The study concluded that both genders use expletives as an everyday culture within the group to connect to each other and feel a sense of belonging. The author mentions how one tend to think language is contrasted to either being more "feminine" or "masculine" and that the women are trying to form an identity and not imitating men in the use of expletives or the way men tend to speak but instead using their own linguistic features and looks up to other women and the way they represent themselves rather than typical stereotype of how a woman should be (Stapleton, 2010).

3. Method

3.1 Material

The material for this paper was collected from two episodes of the American situational comedy, *Shameless*. *Shameless* is a series premiered from January 2011 till April 2021 consisting of 11 seasons and 134 episodes in total. The series revolves around a dysfunctional family of a single father who struggles with money and his six children. The show was chosen due to the frequent use of swear words by both gender, which makes it suitable for this research regarding gender differences in swearing.

The first and eleventh episodes of season 11 which aired in 2020 during the pandemic were chosen to analyze data, which were: *This is Chicago* (Episode 1), and *The Fickle Lady is Calling it Quits* (Episode 11). The two chosen episodes for the study are from the latest season. The choice for the latest season is to be current and contemporary. The random selection of the episodes is to be as free as possible from the bias by writers.

The characters chosen for analysis were the main characters of the show as listed below. The chosen characters as the main ones of the show appeared in the screen time frequently and tended to use swear words regularly.

Male	Female
Frank	Veronica
Ian	Debbie

3.2 Analytic method

Overall, the script of each of the characters were transcribed and analyzed. The episodes have been watched several times to have proper correctness. The tokens include of 4049 words. Furthermore, a table has been conducted to collect data for each of the characters with their name on top and the type of swear words used by the characters on the left side of the table.

3.2.1 Analysis for Research question 1: Difference in the proportion of swearing

The proportion of swearing by female and male characters as percentages were calculated by dividing the number of the swear words by the number of the words each character speaks in the two selected episodes. Comparison of the total number of swear words spoken by male and female characters is made as well.

3.2.2 Analysis for Research question 2: Types of swearing

To analyze the different types of swear words used by female and male characters, Stapleton (2010) swears word types were used in the study. As mentioned above according to Stapleton (2010, p.290), most recognized swear-words can be categorized into three different areas which is:

- Excretory/scatological
- Sexual
- Profanity

Comparison of two different charts has been conducted in terms of percentage to clearly visualize the types of swear words uttered most by both male and female characters.

3.2.3 Analysis for research question 3: Reasons for swearing

As mentioned above, the interpersonal function of swearing falls into four categories which are expressing emotion, humour and verbal emphasis; social bonding and

7

solidarity; and constructing and displaying identity" (Stapleton, 2010, p.290). To collect data for the differences for the reasons of swearing by female and male in the series, the functions of swearing mentioned above has been used to investigate. The script was read and watched several times to have accuracy and figure out the reasons of each of the selected characters to swear.

4.   Findings and discussion

The results are organized into three sub-sections to answer the research questions and discuss the findings.

4.1 The differences in the proportion of swearing of male and female characters

As mentioned in the method section, to observe the difference in the proportion of swearing by female and male characters, all the swear words uttered by the chosen characters have been identified and counted from the two selected episodes. As shown on Table 1, the total number of words spoken by men and women are counted. The data shows, men spoke (2428 words) compared to women (1547 words). In the two episodes, the total number of swear words used by women (20 swear words) compared to men (37 swear words). Thus, when looking at the percentages of swearing by male and female characters, it is seen that male characters swear slightly more than female characters, but not considerably more.

Table 1. Swearing by male and female by male and female characters as percentages

	Male	Female
Words uttered	2428	1547
Swear words	37	20
Frequency of swearing	1.5%	1.3%

In order to have a closer look at the gender differences in the proportions of swear words, I counted the numbers of different swear words by each character as seen in Table 2. There are 9 different swear words spoken in the two episodes. Table 2 shows the total

8

number of swear words uttered by the characters are 57 times. Some words are used in different forms such as the word *fuck*, *shit* and these swear words tend to appear most of the time during the total two hours of episodes. The data shows men used in total of 37 swear word: *fuck* 14 times, *hell* 9 times, *ass* 3 times, *shit* 6 times, *pussy*, *goddamn*, *bitch*, *Jesus, damn* one time each. On the other hand, women used in total 20 swear words: *fuck* 5 times, *hell* 4 times, *ass* 1 time, *shit* 4 times, and *Jesus* 3 times. When looking at the result, it shows the amount of swear words uttered by the women was quarter less than men, as apparently the men talk much more than the women. According to Swann (1997), men tend to be the dominant parties when it comes to speaking more in discussions or mixed-sex conversations.

From the results, we notice that both men and women tend to swear in the two episodes, even though it is slightly more when it comes to men. The result does not match with the researcher Lakoff (1975) who mentions females tend to desist from speaking in a way which is not lady-like due to women not being respected in a society, however this is not the case in the study. The female characters are seen to use swear words overall in single to mixed conversations just like men. This shows gender does not play a role when it comes to swearing. As Lakoff (1975) mentions women tend to be consider weak and speaks in a quiet manner and unable to take part in serious discussions and restricted to being themselves. However, in the episodes we see the female character Debbie as a strong minded, independent woman with the capability to make her own decisions, therefore the theory of Lakoff does not match to the specific study.

We need to keep in mind the script is not real-life conversations, therefore we cannot believe the results to be reliable in real life situations. However, the writers are the people who tend to write the scripts consciously or unconsciously by looking at today's society and culture.

Table 2. The swear words used by the male and female characters from the series.

Swear words	Frank	Ian	Veronica	Debbie
hell	5	4	2	2
ass	2	1	1	

pussies	1			
fuck/er/ing/ed	4	10		5
Shit/shitty/bullshit/Holy Shit	3	3	1	4
bitch	1			
Jesus	1			3
damn	1			2
goddamn		1		
TOTAL	18	19	4	16

When it comes to swearing between the two women, there is a huge gap. Veronica used only 4 swear words in the two episodes. The use of Veronica's swears words include *hell* 2 times, *shit* 1 time, and *ass* 1 time compared to Debbie who swears 16 times in the episodes. The reason for one woman to swear more than the other can depend on multiple reasons. Debbie's reason to swear most falls into the category of verbal emphasis. This can be due to cultural reasons which is her growing up around people who constantly uses swear words since she was a child. In the 10 years of the series, it shows the growth of Debbie since she was a child and especially being around a father whose vocabulary fills up swear words all the time could be one of the reasons for the female character to swear more than the other one.

A qualitative analysis of different swear words are followed below, in the sections for answering research question 1: types of swearing and research questions 2: reasons for swearing by the female and male characters.

4.2 Differences in the types of swearing by female and male characters

To analyze the differences in the types for swearing by female and male characters in the sitcom, the swear words are categorized into three different sections which is Excretory,

Sexual and Profanity (Stapleton, 2010). The swear words analyzed in the sitcom is *hell, ass, pussy, fuck/er/ing/ed, shit, Jesus, Goddamn/damn, bitch.* Excretory/scatological swear words are the ones related to bodily functions and connected to body parts. The swear words from the data in this category includes *ass, shit, pussy*. Another category falls into the sexual indication which is connected to sexual acts or to genitalia and the swear words collected from the episodes are *fuck/er/ing/ed.* The last type of swearing includes profanity which is related to religious issues and taken from the episodes are *Goddamn, damn, Jesus.*

The usage of certain swear words are uttered more by men than women. As shown in table 2, the swear word *fuck* has been used the most from all the swear words and in different forms *fuck/er/ing/ed.* The difference is huge with the number of times the word was uttered between male and female characters (Men 14 times & women 4 times). According to Stapleton (2010), *fuck* can be used in many situations and in expressing emotions including positive or negative, which will be mentioned in the section of reasons for swearing. The use of the swear word *fuck* is seen to be used by men mostly in men-to-men conversations which is mentioned by a study done by Coates (2003), that is men use the swear word *fuck* more when involved in the same sex conversation rather than mixed gender conversations which is the case in the series with both male characters.

The swear word *bitch* does not fall into any of the category and is judged separately and is not involved in the chart table 3. According to Siikavaara (2021), the word *bitch* has been associated to female gender and is used when indicating to a woman. The word has been uttered once by the male character whereas women do not use the swear word at all.

TYPES OF SWEARING WORDS USED BY MALE CHARACTERS

Religious Profanity 39%
Excretory(bodily functions) 36%
Sexual 25%

TYPES OF SWEARING WORDS USED BY FEMALE CHARACTERS

Religious Profanity 43%
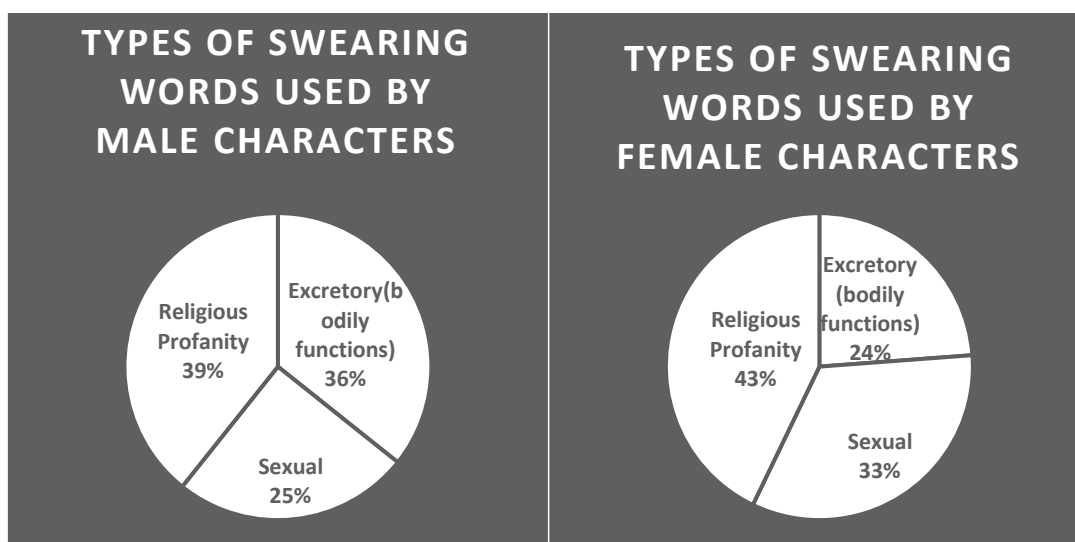Excretory (bodily functions) 24%
Sexual 33%

Figure 1. The comparison of the types of swear words used between men and women.

By analyzing the proportions of different types of swearing by female and male characters, as shown in Figure 1, we can see male and female characters use swearwords from all three categories. However, there are differences in the usage of different types of swear words between men and women. The use of Excretory (bodily functions) are seen more in men compared to women. The swear words related to bodily functions and associated with body parts such as *ass*, *pussy*, *shit* are used by men mostly, whereas the word *ass* was used once by one of the female character, Veronica. When it comes to the other character Debbie, she tends to ignore all the swear words associated with bodily functions. On the other hand, the use of *ass* is mentioned by both the male characters frequently but the word *pussy, bitch* been used only by the male characters. When it comes to the use of religious profanity such as *Jesus, God* are seen to be used more by women than men in the sitcom.

According to the previous research done by Stapleton (2010), swear words relating to women body parts are considered offensive by women and tend to generally not be used by women. The result of the study by Stapleton (2010) mentions the swearing signifies a common linguistic practice for male and female characters equally, however it differs in the types of swear words used by the men and women. The result matches with the current study of gender differences in the types of swearing which seems to be case in the series as well. The female characters tend to ignore the types of swearing of Excretory (bodily function) words whereas the men have used it frequently.

The differentiations in the use of different swear words are little between men and women, however, we still clearly notice the differences in the types of swear words men and women tend to utter. By analyzing the result, some of the swear words are ignored and not uttered by women at all. The strong swear words such as *fuck/er/ing/ed* is associated to the male characters than the female characters due to the difference in the number of times the word has been used in the episodes of the series by male characters.

4.3 Differences in the reasons for swearing by female and male characters

The differences in the reasons for swearing by female and male characters in the American sitcom *Shameless* will be categorized by four sections as mentioned above which is by 1) Expressing emotion, 2) Humour and verbal emphasis; 3) Social bonding and solidarity; and 4) Constructing and displaying identity (Stapleton, 2010) An analysis for different reasons for swearing has been done for each character as provided in Appendix. Both male and female characters reasons to swearing share some similarities or differences. The four reasons of swearing are shown below with extracts from both male and female characters, categorized reasons by reasons, and is followed by a discussion of similarities and differences between females and males in terms of reasons for swearing based on the results.

1). Expressing emotions and/or aggression:

Male and female characters are seen to sort of release or express emotions including both good and bad emotions in terms of anger, frustration, happiness, or excitement. One of the extracts presented below shows how a male character Frank, expresses emotions in the series in terms of swearing.

> Context: Frank enters the bar owned by Veronica during Corona lockdown.
>
> **Frank:**
>
> What's up? Oh my... come on Hail 'corona survivors. What-where is everyone? What? No, no. I heard somewhere bars are open again.
>
> **Veronica:**
>
> Three weeks ago, maybe. Mayor shut us all down again on Tuesday.
>
> **Frank:**

Well, who the **hell** keeps track? And excuse me but **fuck** the mayor. He has no authority to tread upon my rights as a free American male to drink my favorite brew in the tavern to do it. and has. (S11E1)

The use of swear words in the extract by the male character mainly expresses emotions such as the frustration of being unable to drink at a public place or a bar due to corona restrictions. The word *hell* is used to put extra importance on sentences. The male character expresses emotions with the use of swear words. They tend to use swear words in a general sense, especially when telling a story or as a form of emotional release.

Below is an example of an extract by the female character Debbie and her girlfriend, Sandy. Context: Debbie sees her prison records which has misinformation about the crime she committed.

Debbie:
"Seven! It says Julia was seven years old. Not 17.
Sandy:
laughs
Debbie:
It's not **fucking** funny. Everybody is gonna think I am a child molester.
Sandy:
well, you sort of are.
Debbie:
It's got my address, my social security number, my email. **God damn** it. I'm lucky if the neighborhood moms don't show up out front tonight with torches to hang me from the playground swing set.
Sandy:
Okay, it's probably not a big deal. Look at all these other guys.
Debbie:
What?
Sandy:
All these little dots on the map are sex offenders in the area.
Debbie:

What? **Jesus**. There must be 100 of them. What the **fuck** is wrong with people? Hey, that's Mr. Mosier down the block. I knew it. he was always way too into Halloween.

Both looks at the photo of Debbie

Sandy: you at least look hot.

Debbie: Yeah, I do look pretty hot. Oh **shit**. Who the **hell** is gonna hire me now?" (S11E1)

The reason Debbie swears in the situation shows frustration and aggression due to having wrong information of the crime she created. As mentioned above, people tend to use swear words when "they're "really" angry, "tense" or "stressed"" and in a way it can be seen "as a sin of aggression, or at least of tension/frustration" (Stapleton, 2003, p.28).

Debbie shows emotions by using the word *fucking* in the situation which she is irritated about. The misinformation is clearly bothering Debbie and to some extent, she has a fear that the the outside world will know about her crime; thus, the use of expletives is a way of expressing emotions in the specific context. As Stapleton (2010) mentions the use of swear words could be an expression of fear or vulnerability as well.

We notice the similarities in the use of swear words of both male and female characters in terms of expression emotions in the equal manner in the series. Both the male and female characters expressed emotions by using swear words such as *fuck, hell, Jesus,* not to only show anger or frustrations, but to use emphasis on a word to make the sentence louder and stronger. A previous study done by Rassin & Muris (2005) mentions the use of swear words are associated mostly with negative emotions, rather than positive emotions which is the case in the two selected episodes as well. All the characters used the word *fuck* mostly being mad at other person or at a specific situation.

2). Humour and verbal emphasis:

One of the extracts is shown below to display the male characters way of swearing for the reasons of humour and verbal emphasis. Context: Frank having a conversation with a costumer at the bar who came to purchase marijuana candy.

Frank: *stares at marijuana candy/chocolate*

15

Jesus, where the **fuck** are we? Willy Wonka's chocolate factory?

Frank sees a random woman asking about the candy and their properties

Frank:

Maybe I could be of some help. Why don't you order one of each, and I can sample them for you and then rate them on my world-renowned Gallagher Puff Scale? One puff being a glass of rose on a warm, summery day. five puffs being you wake up naked in an alley with something stuck in your ass, no idea where the **fuck** you are.

Veronica:

Frank leave the customer alone. (S11E1)

In the extract, the male character uses swear words being amazed at the marijuana showpiece with different candy/chocolates and expresses his words in a humorous way. Humorous swearing does not necessary mean to use direct insults at others or being offensive, rather it is used in a playful or joking way. (Stapleton, 2010) The use of *fuck* is used multiple times by the male character while having a normal conversation to put emphasis on the sentence such as *Jesus where the fuck are we?* rather than saying *where are we?* The swearing is not directed to others, but rather shows the characters opinions and gratitude about the marijuana being sold so openly in the city.

Below is an extract of a female character speaking to her girlfriend regarding the arrest.

Debbie:

Just not right. Julia's only ten months younger than me. why do I have to plead guilty and wear this **fucking** ankle bracelet and do all that community service when Carl did the exact same thing with Julia, but they didn't arrest him?

Debbi's girlfriend:

Well, not exactly the same thing. He wasn't banging Julia and her mom at the same time.

Debbie:

No, that judge just hates lesbians. Did you see the way he looked at me, at Julia? (S11E1)

Compared to the male character Frank, the female character Debbie does not use the swear words in a humorous way, but rather as a verbal emphasis only. Debbi uses swear word in different situations or more in general conversations and seems repetitive in the series with the use of *fucking* in most of the scenes. In the extract above, Debbie uses *fucking* to put emphasis to the word to make it sound louder or to make the message of having ankle bracelet seems bothersome come across harsher. As mentioned by Stapleton (2010), the word *fucking* acts as an intensifier which supports both the sentence and the adjective to make a sentence stronger which is the case in the episodes used by both the male and female characters.

4)Social bonding and solidarity

When it comes to social bonding and solidarity, only the female characters are seen to fall into this category for the reasons to use swear words. One of the examples is shown below. Context: Debbie and Veronica are having a conversation about men and relationships.

Debbie:

Hey you guys.

Veronica & Kevin:

we sold our house.

Debbie:

Wait what. No! why is everybody leaving me? why do you guys have such good relationship? I can't even find a partner. Kev, what is wrong with me? *Stares at each other in an awkward way*

Veronica: *Veronica pulls Debbie aside*

Never ask a guy that question. There is nothing wrong with you.

Debbie:

Not true. Everybody I have ever dated has treated me like **shit**.

Veronica:

That's because you treat yourself like **shit**. You have to love yourself before anyone else is gonna love you.

Debbie:

Cute and total **bullshit**.

Veronica:

17

No, it isn't.

Debbie is frustrated and scared to end up being alone rest of the life and goes to Veronica to look for answers. We notice the two girls having a conversation about relationships and men which girls tend to speak to each other since they relate about such issues. The conversations between female vs female conversations for example with Debbie and Veronica, creates a story they want to share with each other "creating/conveying intimacy and trust" (Stapleton, 2003, p.29). Swear words used by Debbie has been mostly in one-to-one conversations with individuals, mostly expressing emotions with the use of swear words. In the extract above, Debbie first goes to Veronica, and then to another woman to look for answers, which shows her trust on women and being comfortable in swearing with other females. Stapleton (2003) mentions women's reason for swearing indicates a sense of trust and solidarity with each other.

The last reason to swear in Stapleton's (2003) work mentioned constructing and displaying identity. However, the reason to swear for the specific cause was not found in the two episodes of the series, neither in women nor men.

Both male and female characters reason to swearing were similar in some context. According to the previous study done by Stapleton (2003), the two most common reason to use swear words are humour/storytelling and verbal emphasis which is the same case as the current study. By analyzing the data, the most common reason for male and female swearing includes verbal emphasis. Both the male and female characters used swear words while explaining a story to another or while having a normal everyday conversation to put emphasis on a word. However, the women's reason to swear includes social bonding & solidarity as well. This was not the reason of swearing for men. The reasons to swear for both the men mostly includes expressing emotions or aggression. Frank is seen to use swear words in general conversations or in a humorous way, on the other hand, Ian uses swear words out of aggression or frustration towards his partner.

5. Conclusion

The study was conducted to examine gender differences in the proportions of swearing in men and women, different types of swearing, and reasons for swearing in the American tv sitcom *Shameless*.

The first research question aimed to find the proportions of swearing in male and female characters in the two chosen episodes. The result shows the use of swear words by female characters is equivalent to male characters throughout the episodes, however, women tend to swear slightly less than men. Lakoff's (1975) theory of women being taught to be quiet and disciplined from a younger age, or being confused in conversations does not associate with the current study. Consequently, female characters in the series are outspoken, strong minded and swear equally in conversations.

The second research question ought to find the types of swearing in male and female characters. The study found that men and women tend to use different types of swearing, even though similarities are found. Men tend to swear significantly more in the category of excretory (bodily functions) and sexual taboo areas such as the word *fuck*. Conversely, women tend to use more swear words related to religious profanity than the other two categories and avoid swear words related to women's bodies such as *pussy* which aligns with the study of Stapleton (2010) about the choices of female swear words.

The last research question focuses on the reasons for swearing of the male and female characters in the series. The result found out that men and women's reason for swearing most was due to expressing emotions and verbal emphasis. However, women's reason differs from men's to some degree. The female characters often swear in same sex gender conversations as interpersonal solidarity and women relating to other women as an indication of trust and thus connecting to the study done by Stapleton (2003). In contrast, the reason men swear most focuses on expressing negative emotions out of anger and frustration.

Given the limited time and length of the current study, the use of more episodes would be beneficial to see more accurate and broad results. Further research into the field of gender differences in same sex and mixed gender conversation is required in order to

differentiate and have precise reason for the differences. Additionally, the usage of the swear word *fuck* is constant in the study, therefore, it would be beneficial to look deeper into the term and the growth of the use of it.

To conclude, the examined data is scripted and not real-life situations, so there are limitations. We cannot claim gender differences based only on television sitcoms; however, we can notice how the media has portrayed the language of men and women on television. Conclusively, the study gives us a brief result showing us how characters are constructed through language in a television sitcom from recent years.

References

<u>Primary sources</u>

Tv show transcript (Shameless)
https://tvshowtranscripts.ourboard.org/

S11E11 & S11E1
https://tvshowtranscripts.ourboard.org/viewtopic.php?f=182&t=43334&view=print
https://tvshowtranscripts.ourboard.org/viewtopic.php?f=182&t=40187&view=print

<u>Secondary sources</u>

Andersson, L. & Trudgill, P. (1990). *Bad Language.* Oxford: Blackwell

Fägersten, K. & Sveen, H. (2016). SaMANtha: Language and gender in Sex and the
    City. In k. Beers Fägersten (ed.) Watching TV with a Linguist, pp 67-85.
    Syracuse University Press.

Coates, J. (2003). *Men Talk-Stories in the Making of Masculinities.* Oxford: Blackwell
    Publishing Ltd.

Coates, J. (2014). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender
    differences in language*. (3. ed) Harlow: Longman.

Fägersten, K. (2012). *Who's Swearing Now? The Social Aspects of Conversational
    Swearing.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Gauthier, M., & Guille, A. (2017). Gender and age differences in swearing. Advances in
    swearing. *Advances in swearing research: New languages and new contexts*,
    137-156.

Hughes, G. (2006). *An Encyclopedia of Swearing: The Social History of Oaths,
    Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English-Speaking World.*
    London: ME Sharpe.

Jay, T & Janschewitz, K. (2008). The Pragmatics of Swearing. Journal of Politeness Research-language Behaviour Culture- J POLITENESS RES-LAN-LANG BEH CUL. 4, 267-288.

Lakoff, RT. (1975). *Language and woman's place.* New York: Harper & Row.

Marsden, E. (2015). What the Fuck? An analysis of Swearing in Casual Conversation. Huddersfield. BA Thesis. University of Huddersfield.

Murray, T. (2012). "Swearing as a Function of Gender in the Language of Midwestern American College Students" In *A Cultural Approach to Interpersonal Communication: Essential Readings,* ed. by Leila Monaghan, Jane E. Goodman, and Jennifer Meta Robinson, 233-241. Hoboken: Blackwell.

Rassin, E. Muric, P. (2005). Why do women swear? An exploration of reasons for and perceived efficacy of swearing in Dutch female students. *Personality and Individual differences,* 38(7), 1669-1674.

Siikavaara, J. (2021). Gender differences in usage of bitch and cunt across time: An analysis of findings in the BNC1994 and the BNC2014 (Dissertation). Retrieved from http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hig:diva-35105

Stapleton, K. (2010). 12 Swearing. *Interpersonal Pragmatics,* 6.289

Stapleton, K. (2003). Gender and swearing: A community practice. *Women and Language* 26, no. 2 (2003):22.

Swann, J. (1997). Talk Control: An illustration from the Classroom of Problems in Analysing Male Dominance of. *Counterbalance: Gendered Perspectives on Writing and Language*, 16

Appendix

Data analysis tables for RQ 3

Reasons for swearing –

Female

Character 1 (Debbie)

Reasons	Extracts
Reason 1 **Expressing emotion**	DEBBIE Seven! It says Julia was seven years old. Not 17. I DEBBIE'S GIRLFRIEND: It's not **fucking** funny. Everybody is gonna think I am a child molester. It's got my address, my social security number, my email. God damn it. I'm lucky if the neighborhood moms don't show up out front tonight with torches to hang me from the playground swing set. What? **Jesus**. There must be 100 of them. What the **fuck** is wrong with people? Hey, that's Mr. Mosier down the block. I knew it. he was always way too into Halloween. DEBBIE'S GIRLFRIEND: at least you look hot. Yeah, I do look pretty hot. Oh **shit**. Who the hell is gonna hire me now? - DEBBIE Can you at least take the mugshot with my cleavage off the site and get Julia's age, right? Yeah. She was 17. Not seven. Well, then check the **damn** court records. I'm on probation... would I be on probation if she'd been seven? Really? You can get probation if you diddled a seven-year-old? That's really **fucked** up. E9 - DEBBIE

	Hey Tami. Oh God, don't remind me. whenever I would shave my thighs, it would grow back the next day. it was like I was living in hair shorts. I need a life. I am trying to figure out how to find a relationship that lasts. Yeah. No, I hate it. I mean, I don't want to be alone. How can you guys say that? No. I want someone to share a life with. I wanna take care of someone. What the hell is that supposed to mean? Yeah, they were pretty **shitty**. I didn't even know those were things I was supposed to do. Yeah. Its frank's fault. He ruined love for me.
Reason 2 **Humour and verbal** **emphasis**	E9 DEBBIE I feel the same way about you. God, don't even get me started. Me too. For starters, teen mom, raped a guy once. stole a baby. Almost drowned a girl. I beat the **shit** out of so many people. Once I drugged my half-sister and locked her in a shipping crate. E1 DEBBIE Just not right. Julia's only ten months younger than me. why do I have to plead guilty and wear this **fucking** ankle bracelet and do all that community service when Carl did the exact same thing with Julia, but they didn't arrest him? -
Reason 3 **Social bonding and** **solidarity**	DEBBIE Hey you guys.

	Wait what. No! why is everybody leaving me? why do you guys have such good relationship? I can't even find a partner. Kev, what is wrong with me?
	VERONICA
	Never ask a guy that question. There is nothing wrong with you.
	DEBBIE
	Not true. Everybody I have ever dated has treated me like **shit**.
	VERONICA
	That's because you treat yourself like **shit**. You have to love yourself before anyone else is gonna love you.
	DEBBIE
	Cute and total **bullshit**.
	VERONICA
	No, it isn't.
	-
Reason 4 Constructing and displaying identity	

Female
Character 2 (Veronica)

Reasons	**Extracts**
Reason 1 Expressing emotions	FRANK
	Afternoon, my fellow Americans. The finest beer for me and my son…there's something wrong with the beer. My body is rejecting alcohol.
	Frank vomits
	VERONICA: What the **hell** frank?
	FRANK: I am scared. I said that? It's no use son. Who am I without alcohol?
	(**Another scene**)
	DEBBIE

	Hey you guys. Wait what. No! why is everybody leaving me? why do you guys have such good relationship? I can't even find a partner. Kev, what is wrong with me? VERONICA Never ask a guy that question. There is nothing wrong with you. DEBBIE Not true. Everybody I have ever dated has treated me like **shit**. VERONICA That's because you treat yourself like **shit**. You have to love yourself before anyone else is gonna love you. DEBBIE Cute and total **bullshit**. VERONICA No, it isn't.
Reason 2 **Humour and verbal emphasis**	VERONICA Your problem, Tommy, is you think knocking back boilermakers white your **ass** is stuck on that stool is something that all red-blooded white American males are supposed to do, while smoking weed is a Black folk thing. The only reason why marijuana's been illegal for the last hundred years is because poor black people in the ghetto were smoking it. marijuana prosecution was criminalized racism. Now that white people decided they like smoking it, it has to be made legal. Can't make lily white kids go to prison for having a couple of blunts.
Reason 3	

Social bonding and solidarity	
Reason 4 Constructing and displaying identity	

Male
Character 1 (Ian)

Reasons	Extracts
Reason 1 Expressing emotions	- IAN IOUs? What the **fuck** is this? I go to get our money for the utilities out of our wedding cash, and all I find is IOUs. You spent all our money from the wedding? that's not the point. It's not your money. It's our money. On what? It's not your money to spend. We decided we were saving it to get our own place. Yeah, one of us has certainly been having some **fuckin** fun. We're supposed to be making these decisions together.
Reason 2 Humour and verbal emphasis	IAN Morning Mr. Milkovich. I could go another five right now. MILKOVICH Did you make breakfast for me? IAN No didn't know you were gonna get up. You didn't get up yesterday.

Sorry, I only make toast for husbands who have jobs.

MILKOVICH

I have a job.

IAN

No, you have a laundromat owner who's terrified you're gonna smash his face into a dryer again. That's not the point. We need more money coming in.

Hey, no. I don't wanna be some sad-**ass** prison widow catching a bus to Statesville every weekend.

No. there aren't many other jobs left around here mick. Its either Amazon or digging graves. Until you decide to do one or the other, my **shitty** minimum-wage job is the only money we got coming in. and the bills are piling up. Okay fine, I will start digging into the wedding present money instead of saving it to get our own place.

-

IAN

We need to be honest with each other, all right? No more secrets. No nothing but truth. We should have talked about what we expected from each other, but we didn't so now we have to. Yes, but it's also about what we want this marriage to be. We need some rules. A mutual understanding of how **shit** is gonna work. like how we spend money together, joint purchases, monogamy. Not **fucking** other people. I think blow jobs should count yeah. I mean, if I am being honest, I am not really sure either. It's kind of hard to imagine that I am never ever gonna wanna **fuck** anyone else, you know? But I also know I definitely don't want you to **fuck** anybody else. Okay, so we're both monogamous or we both get to **fuck** other people. What do you wanna do? I asked you first. Okay I'll tell you what. We both write down what we want and then we'll turn our answers over at the same time. so, we both turn them over on three. One two three. Turn your

	fucking paper over. Graduated? You don't have a car **dumbass**.
Reason 3 **Social bonding and solidarity**	
Reason 4 **Constructing and displaying identity**	

Male
Character 4 (Frank)

Reasons	**Extracts**
Reason 1 **Expressing emotions**	FRANK What's up? Oh my.. come on Hail 'rona survivors. What-where is everyone? What? No, no. I heard somewhere bars are open again. FRANK Well, who the hell keeps track? And excuse me but **fuck** the mayor. He has no authority to tread upon my rights as a free American male to drink my favorite brew in the tavern to do it. and has. FRANK This is Brad. He's making a major film about me. (Looks at marijuana candy) Holy **shit**. What the hell is that? Have I arrived at Mecca after a long pilgrimage? VERONICA Hands off, Frank. We are not offering credit on cannabis products. Payment up front only.

You have come to the right place. Lots of economic displacement and transition going on around here.

FRANK

Gentrification, my friends. The ten percenters gobbling up what's left of the workings man's dreams when he's down and out. Felled by a tiny, lifeless microbe. Were the last of the Mohicans. Chicago aboriginals struggling to preserve a vanishing culture.

Also, Gallaghers. Kev, could we?

Oh **shit**, pay the man.

FRANK

On the floor. Joe College didn't finish it.

Jesus, where the **fuck** are we? Willy Wonka's chocolate factory?

Maybe I could be of some help. Why don't you order one of each, and I can sample them for you and then rate them on my world-renowned Gallagher Puff Scale? One puff being a glass of rose on a warm, summery day. five puffs being you wake up naked in an alley with something stuck in your ass, no idea where the **fuck** you are.

VERONICA

Frank leave the customer alone.

FRANK

Weed? We're 20 years into the next century. Nancy Reagan. It's really a question of personal freedom. Why is it any of your **damn** business if I choose to smoke a fat one after dinner? Or shoot up in the privacy of my local Denny's bathroom? It's my life. my body, my choice.

(At the end of E1)

FRANK This is my Chicago, the Chicago I love.

Lip's got a baby now. Debbie's got a kid and a rap sheet.

Carl's gonna be a cop. Didn't see that coming.

	Ian's married to a Milkovich. Really didn't see that coming. Family looking after family. That's the south side way. The Gallagher way.
	Yeah, this is our Chicago, its disappearing fast. But before it's gone, we're gonna enjoy every **fucking** minute of it.
	E9 (at the beginning of the episode)
	IAN
	How the **hell** did you get in here?
	Hey, I'm not gonna tell you what happened last week on Shameless, all right? Go look it up on **goddamn** Wikipedia.
	-
	IAN
	Hey. What are you doing over here. You coming back to the apartment? You haven't really given the west side a shot. Neither do it. but you know, I would like to try. We paid first, last, and security. We. Could buy our own. So, you're gonna stay here, and I am gonna live over there. its nicer there. don't you want a better life? why? Okay I understand. Fine. Ahh. Fine, we'll stay here then. Well, because you are my husband. If you're not happy there, then we don't have to be there. don't do what? I'm not. I swear...i am not. what cinnamon challenge things are you watching? What? Nobody wants you to change. All right, maybe you could change an eensy, teensy, little bit and not steal anything in the apartment complex. That's all I'm asking for. You can do anything else you want. Yeah.really? all right, fine, but I want you to come to a yoga class. all right. Whole foods so we can share at the organic fruit. I'm letting you **piss** in the pool. You are such a **fucking** barbarian.
Reason 2	

Humour and verbal emphasis	Episode 1 (at the beginning of the episode)
	Well, well, well, look who's back. Where the *hell* you been? At home, sitting on your *asses*, practicing social distancing? Washing your hands 20 times a day while us essential workers risked our lives making sure you have enough toilet paper and wheat flour for your sourdough?
	What a bunch of *pussies*. And now you can't remember what happened last season on *Shameless*? Get out of here. Go on, get. Get! I will piss on your leg.
	Every important moment in Chicago history, a Gallagher was there. the Chicago Fire, O'Leary's cow, that was Great great grandma Gallagher's Holstein.
	This union stockyard workers. The poor **bastards** butchering 6,00 steers a day covered in blood and **shit**, all Gallaghers.
	The black Sox score-fixing scandal, a Gallagher. No, he wasn't a player, he was a gambler. Set the whole thing up. Made a bundle. Prohibition, Capone, you think it was all Italians? **Hell** no. it was the Gallaghers that provided the homicidal muscle.
	FRANK'S SON: At least it's going good on the romance section. FRANK
	Thank you. I don't know about romance, but I am still really good at **fucking**.
	(Another scene)
	FRANK
	Afternoon, my fellow Americans. The finest beer for me and my son.
	DEBBIE
	Hey frank, been waiting for you. Back up, Liam. You ruined love for me. I will be alone the rest of my life.
	FRANK

	That's true. The only way you will ever have love is to find someone who is even a bigger loser than you are. Then they won't leave you. **Jesus**.
Reason 3 **Social bonding and solidarity**	
Reasons 4 **Constructing and displaying identity**	