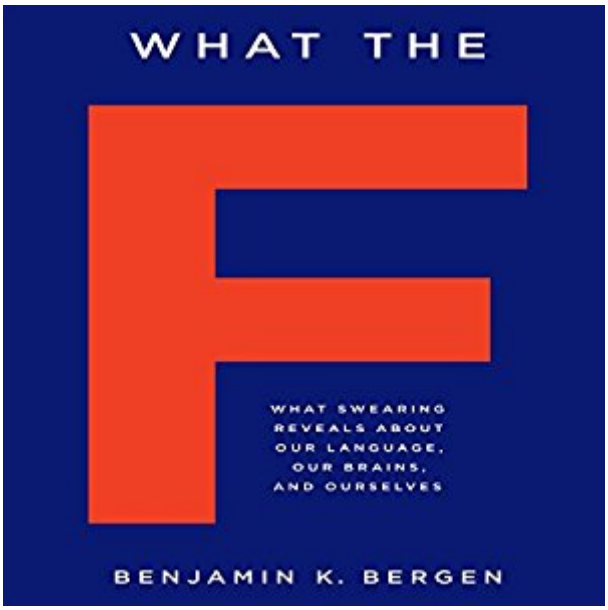
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What The F: What Swearing Reveals About Our Language, Our Brains, And Ourselves



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Synopsis

Nearly everyone swears - whether it’s over a few too many drinks, in reaction to a stubbed toe, or in flagrante delicto. And yet, we sit idly by as words are banned from television and censored in books. We insist that people excise profanity from their vocabularies, and we punish children for yelling the very same dirty words that we’ll mutter in relief seconds after they fall asleep. Swearing, it seems, is an intimate part of us that we have decided to selectively deny. That’s a damn shame. Swearing is useful. It can be funny, cathartic, or emotionally arousing. As linguist and cognitive scientist Benjamin K. Bergen shows us, it also opens a new window onto how our brains process language and why languages vary around the world and over time. In this groundbreaking yet ebullient romp through the linguistic muck, Bergen answers intriguing questions: How can patients left otherwise speechless after a stroke still shout "Goddamn!" when they get upset? When did a cock grow to be more than merely a rooster? Why is crap vulgar when poo is just childish? Do slurs make you treat people differently? Why is the first word that Samoan children say not mommy but eat shit? And why do we extend a middle finger to flip someone the bird? Smart as hell and funny as f--k, What the F is mandatory listening for anyone who wants to know how and why we swear.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

On the whole, I really appreciated the light Bergen shed on the role swearing plays on our basic emotions. The Tourette syndrome example shows how deeply ingrained swearing can be and beyond conscious control. Being a former French professor and very fluent in French, I found that swearing in French has features that are quite different from the standard model Bergen seems to

set up. I wonder how well he knows non-English languages. (The suggestion that the Japanese don't swear, on the face of it, strikes me as preposterous.) I do recommend this book to the non-specialist, although specialists might find it quite enlightening in spite of the pop style Bergen seems to use. Some of the brain experts might protest against his adherence to the distribution of functions to certain parts of the brain. But that's totally beyond my ken. Or interest, for that matter.

If you are looking for a crude look at crude language, this is not the book for you. However, if you are interested in a well-researched and well-written look at why words or concepts are considered taboo in our culture, then this is an excellent read. It is quite academic, which I appreciate; Bergen takes the time to thoroughly prove all of his points and even address the counter-arguments. There are perhaps moments when it verges on crude; it is a book about profanity, after all. But, overall, I was more than impressed.

What a pleasant surprise! Such a great store of odd knowledges! I have read it twice, and will read it once more, too. I was impressed enough to order five hard-back copies as Christmas presents for intelligent friends.

One of the best novels I have ever read. It informs the reader about the sociological taboo of using profanity and other obscure language, while also looking at the psychology of why we use profanity. There are interesting stories of using profanity and history of how profanity has changed in our culture. Very interesting read.

What a great read. Truly thought provoking - changed the way I think about profanity in general, slurs in particular. Plus I laughed out loud & learned a slew of new dirty words.

Popular style book but well researched. Quite hilarious read! Didn't know squat about squatifers!

Fascinating!

It is an interesting book about a dodgy topic.

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