

Notes on Peculiar Differences between American and English Use of a Pejorative

We Americans are united
in agreement that just about
the worst thing to call someone is
a cunt, but
the English embrace no such anathema.
The possibilities implied by this
contrast deserve more scrutiny.

First, why might we spurn this word
used as an epithet given,
by definition, such a word should
be disparaging in nature?
The male correlatives are used
without pause; no one thinks twice
before calling a man
a prick or a dick.
Is the repudiation of cunt
related to gender?
The argument could be made
that in a culture that objectifies
women calling a woman
by the most intimate of female body parts
would be greeted by the strongest
of censures; however, this position
is weakened by the reality
that no such disapprobation exists
for words related to breast.
In fact, to call someone a boob
is considered the mildest of rebukes
(and tit is close behind).
The ubiquitous ass (while not exclusively
female, ass carries different
feminine connotations) is even
uttered in church.
So if related to gender,
the relation to function
must also carry weight.

In England the epithet cunt
carries, at times, benign,
even humorous, overtones.
(Of course, almost any word
can be made more biting
by delivery.) Cunt conveys

a sense of goofiness
("a silly cunt") or of familiarity.
From whence this cultural divide?
The English are not historically
known for their feminism
(Henry VIII?), although their famous
stiff-upper-lip-stoicism
may obscure the depths
of their misogyny. (To be fair,
they have accepted women
in positions of power for
longer than we, but we
are as yet a young country.)

(Aside – London, 400+ years ago:
Lady shall I lie in your lap?
No, my lord.
I mean, my head upon your lap?
Ay, my lord.
Do you think I mean country matters? *(note the pun)*
I think nothing, my lord.
That's a fair thought to lie between a maid's legs.)

The likelihood that time alone
is the deciding factor seems low.
What additional difference might hold
relevance? For instance,
what role might religion play?
The English did eventually rid themselves
of those pesky Puritans,
transporting them to the colonies
now our home. While Puritans
championed some trappings of equality
under the guise that none but god
knew the elected, they also carried the club
of witch at the ready should some
poor midwife lose her place.
Besides, allowing women to learn to read
had no relation to the Puritans' greatest
fear: sex
and the connected punishment for the first
woman's transgression: menstruation.
(Remember: The first sin was that
of knowledge, of trying to be more like god,
a god in whose image *man* was created,
a god whose defining attribute is the power of creation,

the power of the female.)
The Puritans' puritanical rejection of their sexuality
coupled with their innate misogyny
lead to the American phenomenon
of banishing cunt while embracing prick.

So far this rumination has focused
on cunt as an epithet, but
what about using cunt to describe itself?
Being called a cunt is one thing,
using cunt as a colloquialism
for a body part is different.
Many women do not want their cunts
called cunts. The reason cannot
be the glottal Anglo-Saxon nature
of the word, not with
cock, dick, and prick around.
Yet for the same women
pussy is perfectly acceptable
even with pussy's negative associations
with fear and weakness.
What gives? Cunt is no uglier
than cock; why the difference?
Why do women use cunt
when they want to be really dirty?

If the English also avoid
cunt in the literal sense,
I do not know; I only know
cunt's use by D. H. Lawrence
was not the main objection;
rather, the objection was to writing about sex
so openly for public consumption.
(So much for being rid of those Puritans!)

Language is strange enough;
it is a wonder we can talk at all.

– Jeffery Greb