

**The Perception of Profanity Amongst Dutch Adolescents in Different Environments,  
Sociodemographic Settings, and from Different Socioeconomic Statuses**

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## Abstract

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in understanding the linguistic behaviour of humans when profanity is used. However, much of the current literature focuses on adult participants, the factual usage of swear words or the distinction between English as an L1 and L2 when using profane expressions. Thus, the perceived profane behaviour amongst Dutch adolescents still has to be understood. Hence, this research aimed to analyse the perception of frequency and severity with regard to profane behaviour amongst Dutch adolescents. As a result, four research questions were posed in order to compare the perceptions of adolescents to profanity in relation to two demographic factors, namely, socioeconomic status and urbanity. The different social contexts and the perception of severity related to such contexts were also explored. The current study employed a crosslinguistic approach using both a questionnaire and follow-up interviews as tools. The results of this research show that the lower socioeconomic status group perceived their swearing behaviour as less frequent compared to average and higher socioeconomic statuses. The degree of urbanity for the places in which the schools were situated was divided into three categories: urban, semi-urban, and rural, based on the official ranking of the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* considering the address density (CBS, 2019). When regarding the perceptual parameter for frequency and severity, the findings yield similar results, concluding that the students in rural areas perceive to use the most frequent, and severe profane words. Lastly, the different social environments in which Dutch adolescents perceive to use profane words were analysed. The findings show a general tendency of profanity being expressed in informal environments, and in particular in the presence of friends. However, it seems unacceptable to utter swear words when in the presence of a family member or an authoritative figure. This study implies that Dutch adolescents perceive to use swear words frequently, distinguishing between mild swear words such as "kut" "fuck", and "shit" versus more severe expressions such as "kanker" "tyfus" and "homo". This is in line with the existing literature

(see, e.g. Jay, 1992; Jay & Janschewits, 2008). In order to gain more insight into the perspective of Dutch adolescents, further research could be required.

*Keywords:* acceptability, adolescents, Dutch school system, demographic differences, perception, profanity, offensiveness, severity, social environments, socioeconomic status, swearing.

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### Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'U' followed by several loops and a horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Date:

01/07/2020

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"Kut!" "Godverdomme!" "Shit!", and "Fuck!" are profane expressions I hear as a teacher of English at a secondary school. Primarily during breaks, adolescents use such expressions when in conversation with their peers. The question arose whether the adolescents were consciously using these swear words and how they would perceive their swear word usage while being an adolescent.

Dewaele (2017) argues that children start swearing at an early age. According to Van Hofwegen (2016), adolescents swear the most compared to older groups. Profane words are, therefore, sometimes used as a linguistic device. Such profanity can have various functions when this linguistic device is employed. For example, Jay (1999) states that one of the reasons why people use profane words is that one may find some relief from an emotional state.

Furthermore, Crystal (2003) states that profanity either is regarded as offensive or as taboo. However, profanity does not automatically entail that a profane utterance is perceived as negative or offensive. Hence, Nicolau and Sukanto (2014) argue that using profanity does not only relieve stress; it may also indicate a reaction of surprise, excitement or frustration. Additionally, according to Burrige (2010), profanity may leave or express a more memorable or shocking impression. Consequently, profanity exhibits different functions.

At the same time, Pinker (2007) makes a further distinction by dividing profanity into five functions, namely, dysphemistic, idiomatic, cathartic, emphatic, and abusive swearing. Such a division shows that profane words do not always carry a negative connotation. Whether a person is raised in a religious home, and whether someone is an introvert or extrovert, both contribute to one's factual usage and the perception of profanity (Jay, 1999). In addition, the situation that occurs and the audience that is present may influence the speaker's behaviour as well. Baruch and Jenkins (2007) underscore this by arguing that one can speak of social swearing and of using profanity due to annoyance. Meyerhoff (2011) explains that using certain words may cause inclusion or exclusion and thus can be seen as a marker of identity. Therefore, one's culture may influence the behaviour

displayed when using profanity. According to Lyneng (2015), one feature may be stigmatised in one country or culture, but this does not necessarily have to be the case in different cultures or countries. Hence, it can be concluded that swearing has different meanings embedded due to the context and social setting in which it occurs.

At the same time, it can be argued that not only cultural influences may affect one's linguistic behaviour, other variables may shape one's linguistic repertoire too. For instance, one's demographic background may shape one's pronunciation, vocabulary, dialect or accent (Meyerhoff, 2011). Due to this geographical variation, different patterns within the linguistic repertoire of people may be developed (Stenroos, 2017). The demographic background of a person can be further subdivided by classifications such as urbanity, socioeconomic status, and social mobility (Goldstone, 2011). A multitude of studies conducted measured the degree of urbanity and one's linguistic behaviour and how different geographical locations may bring about different linguistic patterns within societies. A well-known example that traces such a development synchronically is Labov's Martha's Vineyard study concerning the ay diphthong (Meyerhoff, 2011). Nevertheless, a perception study regarding the use of swear words amongst adolescents that considers geographical variation, in this case the urbanity background of the adolescents, has not yet been conducted.

Another demographic variable, namely socioeconomic class, has been researched with regard to one's swearing behaviour considering English-speaking societies. There seems to be a consensus that working-class, and upper-class people swear more than the middle-class citizens (Hagen, 2013). Jay (1999) accounts for this observation that people who associate themselves with the middle class are the most uneasy about using profane words since such citizens may be more concerned to come across as educated, and as a result, distance themselves from people associated with the working-class. Although this seems to be true for citizens of the United Kingdom, such a study has not been conducted amongst Dutch citizens in the Netherlands. In the same fashion, research has been conducted to measure the frequency of profane words, the attitude towards them

and what categories of profane words exist. However, research concerning the perception of profanity, the perceived frequency, and the perceived severity amongst Dutch adolescents has been sparse. Moreover, not much research has been done to indicate how adolescents use profanity in different social settings in the Netherlands.

Consequently, this master thesis explores how contemporary adolescents in Dutch high schools perceive to use profanity in different social environments. Additionally, this study investigates whether there is a relation between the perception of profane words, and the demographic factors socioeconomic status and the urbanity (e.g. rural, semi-urban and urban background) of the adolescents. Therefore, the following questions have been composed.

1. In what ways do socioeconomic status, and urbanity influence the perception of their frequency of profane behaviour?
2. In what ways do socioeconomic status and urbanity influence the perception of severity considering profane expressions?
3. In which different social contexts do adolescents use profanity?
4. Are different levels of severity in terms of profanity perceived to be used in different social contexts?

This study is structured as follows: firstly, the literature regarding profanity, its history, the functions, and its relation to different social contexts will be discussed. Next, the methodology is described in which an account will be given of which tools were employed in order to conduct the current research. Then the results will be outlined followed by the discussion and the concluding section.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this literature review, a brief history and use of swear words will be outlined, and the reasons for and functions of profanity will be discussed. Additionally, the behaviour of teenagers with regard to using profanity in the classroom environment will be considered. Furthermore, the context in which profanity is expressed will be described. Finally, in order to describe the research design and answer the research questions, demographic concepts such as social class, socioeconomic status, and urbanity will be explained.

### **2.1 A brief historical reasoning of profane words**

The current study focuses on swearing in contemporary times. In order to understand the concept of profanity, a brief historical overview is given. Humans have been participating in the activity of using profane words since the emergence of language (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). According to Montagu (1967), some researchers even propose the idea that modern languages have evolved from primitive linguistic utterances that could be argued to be comparable with profanity. According to Doherty et al. (2018) swearing refers to the lexical choices that can invoke the feelings of offensiveness, rudeness and generally, bad language on the whole despite their frequent use and persistence throughout history.

In the current society, the laws for regarding the use of using profane words are not as severe as, for instance, the punishments in the 15th century (i.e. imprisonment and the death penalty) (Hughes, 2006; Pinker 2007; Stone & Hazelton, 2008). However, in some societies, there are still laws prohibiting the use of profanity (Rassin & Muris, 2005). Additionally, some countries, such as the USA and the Netherlands, have federal bodies or unions that oppose swearing (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). Despite these efforts to contain the use of such words, more and more people from a western society seem to admit to their growing use of profane words (Rassin & Van der Heijden, 2005).

Some researchers (e.g. Baird, 2001; Liptak, 2012; Reid, 2009; Thelwall, 2008) suggest that there has been a rise in the prevalence of profanity. However, this claim is disputed by McEnery (2006) and Stone et al. (2015) who argue that this may be a representation of moral confusion or panic; there may not be a rise in prevalence of swearing, but it may be more noticeable through different platforms, which, in turn, may cause panic within the society. Although Stone et al. (2015) argue that it is difficult to establish the prevalence of profanity, Baruch and Jenkins (2007) advocate that profane words have found their way into daily conversations since the 1960s, and profanity has, therefore, become more prevalent in our language repertoire. By the same token, Bednarek (2015) argues that the expression of profanity is more widely used in TV series and on other media. Beers Fägersten (2012) advocates that swearing is considered to be 'bad' language whenever it is intended or when the result is to intentionally offend or harm someone, possibly enabling the spread of this linguistic feature through the media. At the same time, Howe (2012) argues that the intense meaning, and associated power, has been lost over time, possibly accounting for a marginal rise in frequency.

The role of the media may influence one's linguistic behaviour too. Generally, with different platforms freely available to us, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, there may be a greater chance to be exposed to bad language (i.e. the use of taboo language that is used with the intent of offending or hurting someone) (Beers Fägersten, 2012). Foul language, such as the expression of swear words, is becoming more popular in Chinese and western society (Lin & Shek, 2017). To exemplify, drill music (e.g. rap music in which profanity is expressed and weapons and violence is glorified) is currently very popular amongst adolescents in different countries causing them to be exposed to bad language and the glorification of violence (Ilan, 2020). Butler and Fitzgerald (2011) claim that profanity that is expressed in live broadcasts is often unintentional and can be considered a slip or a gaffe. Conversely, according to Beers Fägersten (2012), swearing has become more frequent and tolerated in interviews, TV shows and official speeches; mostly profanity is expressed

in these contexts when a person is emotionally charged or frustrated. Interestingly, swearing occurs mostly spontaneous and amongst the different age cohorts. This may indicate why profanity has become more tolerated over time in particular environments.

When considering the current research, the question arose whether adolescents perceive to use profane language frequently and how severe they would perceive such expressions to be. Therefore, the aspects perceived frequency, and severity will be considered in research questions one, three and four. The frequency and severity of swear words will be determined by a 5-point Likert scale in order to measure the perceived frequency and severity amongst adolescents. Labels to be used for frequency include: never, sometimes, regularly, often and always, whereas the labels for severity comprises of a 5-point scale ranging from unacceptable to acceptable.

## **2.2 Definitions of profanity**

In order to research the perceived frequency and severity of profane expressions amongst adolescents, it is important to clarify the definition of profanity and swear words. Profanity can be categorised using various labels with different emphasizing qualities, although a concrete one-sided system has not yet been documented. The following definitions appear to be common within studies regarding profane expressions.

First of all, profanity can be categorised based on the negativity that is associated with the expression. For instance, Wajnryb (2005) regards profane words as a type of dysphemistic language (i.e. language that is used to express derogatory or unpleasant matters). Using profanity can, in turn, affect one's social status negatively (Stapleton, 2010).

Second of all, swear words can be defined using taboo words and categories of different cultures. On the one hand, Andersson and Trudgill (1990; 2007) attempted to define criteria for profane expressions in which such expressions are stigmatised within cultures and express strong emotions and attitudes. On the other hand, Ljung distinguishes between two types of swearing when taboo is categorised: taboo words that refer to "sexual acts, sexual organs, and other bodily waste"



versus taboo words referring to "religion and the supernatural" (2011, p. 5). Here, religious profanity refers to the indifference in attitude towards the church, whereas blasphemy entails an actual attack on the church and what it stands for (Doherty et al., 2018). The types of words considered to be profane, can change diachronically and is established through social codes, therefore, resisting a concrete definition (Beers Fägersten, 2000; Stone et al., 2015; Morris, 1993). To exemplify, profanity is also associated with expressions such as 'cursing', 'swearing', 'obscene language', 'bad language', expletives, 'dirty' words and blasphemy (Stone et al., 2015), which shows that it appears to be difficult to label the act of using profane expressions.

Yet another division can be made based on the intent of the speaker when using profane expressions. On the one hand, researchers such as Kidman (1993) and Montagu (1967) consider the emotional expression, and aggressive intention to be more relevant when defining profanity. On the other hand, Fägersten (2000), amongst others, argues that the intention to offend someone is a determining factor when considering a word to express a profane connotation. Furthermore, people who participate in the act of swearing are often viewed negatively due to the possible intent of shocking or disturbing people (Bylsma et al., 2013). When considering profane expressions and their intent, it should be taken into account that such intent is highly dependent on contextual factors.

Third of all, since each individual has their linguistic repertoire and customs that they are used to, it may be interesting to see whether there are individual differences when it comes to the use of profanity, since it may explain why swear words are used in different manners by different people. Vingerhoets et al. (2013) argue that people acquire and develop their 'swearing etiquette' at different points in time. Additionally, Jay (2000) advocates that someone's personality traits are also a relevant factor in determining someone's use of profane words. In line with Jay's arguments, Fast and Funder (2008) found that the people that are most likely to utilise swear words, are the people who are extraverted, display lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness, and are quicker to

experience high degrees of hostility. On the other hand, Jay (2009a) found that people with a more religious background or have experienced sexual anxiety may utilise profane words less than others, and are more prone to regard swear words using "God" or "Jesus" as very offensive.

When considering the Dutch society exclusively, one particular feature stands out, namely the use of diseases as swear words. In the Netherlands, the use of diseases is considered taboo, and therefore, this taboo category is specifically tied to this country (Rassin & Muris, 2005). Related to the taboo categories, are the intense emotions associated with both positive (i.e. laughing) and negative (i.e. crying, swearing) expressions (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). Notably, not all cultures value and appreciate these strong expressions of emotions in the same manner (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Vingerhoets, 2013).

In the current study, diseases, religious names such as Jesus and God, genitals, sexual acts and oppressed groups such as homos will be regarded as profane expressions. The terms profanity, swearing, swear words and expletives will be applied synonymously due to the similar meanings of the vocabulary chosen. As can be gathered from the discussion above, the definitions of both profanity and swear words are difficult to define due to the different perceptions of these terms. In order to see what adolescents define as profane, the question was asked how they would define the concept of profanity. This approach was chosen based on the framework used by Smakman (2012), in which he argues to use an open question first to gather a general sense of the perception without biasing the participants. In Dutch society, the use of diseases is regarded as swearing as well, and are, therefore, a taboo category tied explicitly to this country (Rassin & Muris, 2005). Related to the taboo categories, are the intense emotions associated with both positive (i.e. laughing) and negative (i.e. crying, swearing) expressions (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). Notably, not all cultures value and appreciate these strong expressions of emotions in the same manner (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Vingerhoets, 2013).

### **2.3 The neurological background when regarding the linguistic repertoire**

It is generally known that adolescents can express strong emotions when evoked. This research aims to investigate how adolescents use profane expressions in different social environments which can be linked to the fourth research question. Arguably, swearing can be used as an emotional outlet to reduce high-stress levels and communicate an utterance with an intensified meaning (Vingerhoets et al., 2013; Ginsburg et al., 2003; Goffman, 1978; Pinker, 2007). The prefrontal cortex has shown to play a role in managing when and where swearing is acceptable or not; this may be because the prefrontal cortex regulates the emotions of a person and evaluates the social situations (Beer & Quirk, 2006; Jay, 2000). Interestingly, children start to develop such an 'etiquette' for swearing, because utilising such a linguistic device can trigger negative emotions amongst others. When this repertoire is developed sufficiently, children are able to choose their words more selectively in order to accomplish inter-individual goals in particular contexts (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). However, as Luna et al. (2010) state, the cognitive ability to assess social situations and as a result, the possibility to adapt behaviour appropriately (i.e. inhibition) develops considerably in adolescence. Therefore, skills such as planning, regulating emotions and responding appropriately are not fully developed at the stage of adolescence (Mills et al., 2012), which in turn indicates that adolescents are not always able to use their linguistic repertoire accurately.

When profanity is concerned, one of the reasons why it is expressed may be caused by diseases relating to the brain such as Alzheimer, Tourette syndrome, Aphasia, and injury caused to a normally well-functioning brain (Finkelstein, 2018). According to Finkelstein (2018), and Jackson (1958), the expression of profanity can be linked to the emotion of aggression and may serve as a substitute for using physical violence. Higher levels of testosterone and hormones caused an increase in aggression; in particular, males show this behaviour (Finkelstein, 2018). It is generally known that adolescents have more hormones than a fully developed adult. This might be indicative of why adolescents appear to swear more than other age cohorts.

Interestingly, according to Stephens et al. (2009), adolescents perceive less pain when uttering expletives resulting in an increased thermal pain tolerance due to the cathartic effect of uttering swear words. Therefore, using swear words can be used as a coping mechanism. Automatic language (i.e language that shares many features with non-linguistic human utterances such as laughter and cries) such as the uttering of numbers and expletives commonly is regulated within the right hemisphere, and this language type can still be expressed even when the left hemisphere is damaged (Finkelstein, 2018; Panksepp, 2005).

However, most research done regarding the production of swear words and the functions activated in the brain is executed clinically. Additionally, most studies conducted either feature healthy adults or target people with neurological disorders. Hence, a future direction for this project may include researching the neurological processes of adolescents to get a better depiction of how the brain works with regard to younger participants of which some brain functions are not fully developed yet. The current study attempts to find out which reasons adolescents give to use swear words and how frequent the perceived usage of these expressions is amongst adolescents.

#### **2.4 The functions of profanity**

In order to investigate which social contexts adolescents use profanity, and how this concept is applied by teenagers, the functions of profanity will be described. Profanity can have different functions depending on the situation in which it occurs. First of all, profane expressions can be used in order to express one's strong emotions (Rassin & Muris, 2005). The expression of profanity can both indicate positive and negative emotions that express significant intensity. Such expressions can be used to signal anger, catharsis, relief or a state of euphoria (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). To illustrate, Duncan et al. (2006) found that the main reasons for swearing were expressing anger, frustrations, humour and pain. Additionally, a study by Jay (2000) yielded similar results, adding two more prominent reasons to the equation, namely, sarcasm and surprise. Therefore, swearing can evoke positive as well as negative emotions and associations.

Second of all, swear words can act as intensifiers in order to strengthen a particular message (Stapleton, 2010). This tactic is used in different situations depending on the audience and the intention of the speaker. According to Howell and Giuliano (2011), swearing may contribute to the intensity of speech, which in turn can enhance the overall effectiveness of the message. To exemplify, BurrIDGE and Mulder (1998) and Eggins and Slade (1997) argue that excessive profanity can serve as a medium to establish leadership. Additionally, it may let a speaker come across as persuasive and genuine when profanity is applied accurately (Jay, 1992). Furthermore, Baruch and Jenkins (2007) distinguish between social profanity (i.e. building on solidarity), and profanity expressed due to annoyance (i.e. associated with stress, the potential to damage a relationship) in order to heighten the intent of the message the speaker would like communicate. Moreover, profane words can function as intensifiers that evoke shock and are more memorable, thus possibly indicating its historical persistence (BurrIDGE, 2010; Doherty et al., 2018). Thus, profanity can act as an intensifier to emphasize a message or to evoke the audience.

Finally, profane expressions can function as a marker of hierarchy or solidarity amongst people. Importantly, swear words are not only context-dependent, but also have a cultural dependency too (Stone et al., 2015). As a result, profanity can help to establish social norms, group identities, boundaries and a hierarchy within groups (Meyerhoff, 2011). In other words, this behaviour can enhance the feeling of cohesion and social inclusion in such groups when profanity is expressed. On the whole, swear words serve different functions in different social contexts, such as expressing strong emotions, marking solidarity or the hierarchy between group members, and they may act as intensifiers to either emphasize or evoke the audience. Research questions three and four were formulated in order to analyse in which social contexts swear words are used and how severe they are considered to be amongst adolescents.

## **2.5 Consequences of the use of profanity**

This study aims to elicit in which social situations adolescents may perceive swearing to be regarded as either severe, or in contrast, acceptable. Additionally, the perceived frequency and severity of use of swear words will be analysed in order to see whether adolescents with differing demographic backgrounds may use different swear words for specific purposes. Thus, one may wonder why profanity is perceived as a negative phenomenon by others. Since such profane words are based on one's cultural taboos, these words can be judged as shocking, antisocial, or offensive (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). Therefore, the use of profanity can have both positive and negative consequences for the utiliser.

Firstly, a possible consequence when using profanity is that it may elicit a negative mental state and underlying problems of anger management. Eventually, this could lead to isolation and may eventually result in feelings of depression and rejection (Robbins et al., 2011). Consequently, one may be viewed negatively due to these expressions when uttered in inappropriate situations (Jay, 1992). As a result, one's social status may decline resulting in a further derogation of both one's mental state and one's social status (Rassin & Muris, 2005).

Secondly, although it is evident that one's swearing behaviour can impact the social status and the mental state negatively, swearing could also elicit reactions of positivity amongst others (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). For instance, using profanity may persuade the audience and will let the speaker come across as genuine when applied accurately (Jay, 1992). Additionally, it may enhance the meaning of a message by emphasizing or intensifying it, affecting the overall effectiveness positively (Howell & Guillianio, 2011). Furthermore, using swear words may cause inclusion or solidarity within groups (Meyerhoff, 2011; Stapleton, 2010).

## **2.6 The context in which profanity is expressed**

As stated before, this research aims to elicit in which social contexts adolescents express profanity. There are different categories of profane words which can serve a multitude of purposes when used

in context. Such categories were more prominent in the domain of religion in the past, whereas a more diverse group of categories can be distinguished today (Patrick, 1901; Pinker, 2007; Stapleton, 2010). According to Rassin and Muris (2005), diseases fit in the taboo category and will be utilised by Dutch speakers specifically. The quality and strength of a profane word perceived are dependent on the perception of the listener, and the degree of perceived taboo in a particular culture (Doherty et al., 2018; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Ljung, 2011; Taylor, 1975; Wajnryb, 2005). As a result, the variability in perception leads profanity to be potent and risky. However, a general dichotomy can be established in which profane expressions are utilised.

Firstly, it appears that swearing is more tolerated and accepted in informal settings, whereas formal settings do not allow for such a tendency to be tolerable (Mercury, 1995). According to Jay (2009b) and Seizer (2011), swearing can be used to create an informal atmosphere. In other words, the degree of formality of a situational context determines the acceptability of using profane words (Vingerhoets et al., 2013; Johnson & Lewis, 2010). According to Van Sterkenburg (2001) and Rainey and Granito (2010), the context in which profanity occurs most is sports-related (e.g. the sports canteen or the locker room). Furthermore, the relationship between the speaker and the receiver is an influential aspect too in determining the tolerance towards profanity (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). To exemplify, Jay (1992) found that students did not, or hardly displayed, any utterances containing profane words when in formal and public settings when there is a chance of lowering one's status or losing one's respect. According to Vingerhoets et al. (2013) and Mercury (1995), people also tend to swear less in the presence of someone from another gender or in the presence of people having a higher status. In sum, the degree of formality of a situation, the setting (i.e. private or public), and the relationship between the speaker and the listener are all contextual factors which can influence the functionality of swearing.

Secondly, different variables may determine how one's swearing etiquette may be employed. For instance, one's demography (i.e. geographical background) may play a role in the

establishment of the swearing lexicon. Subsequently, demography can be subdivided into several subcategories, namely, the population growth and its effects, the age stratification within a society, its urbanisation, social mobility and long- distance and local migration (Goldstone, 2011). It can be concluded that many demographic factors can be taken into account when analysing sociolinguistic data. For this study, the measure of urbanisation will be considered and what the effect of urbanisation is on the perceived frequency and severity of adolescents. Within for instance a country or province, differences may occur in the use of language, dialect or accent. The measure urbanity is taken into account in order to see whether one's demographic background influences one's swearing behaviour. It is, therefore, necessary to define the terms associated with the demographic aspect of urbanity.

In order to answer the first two research questions, it is vital to establish what urbanity means and how this stratification is determined. Stenroos (2017) argues that people will speak differently if they come from different geographical backgrounds (i.e. geographical variation); such differences become more noticeable, the greater the distance between these places. Additionally, Stenroos (2017) advocates that linguistic forms are more likely to diffuse from large cities rather than small isolated villages. Sometimes the labels cities and villages are defined by considering the degree of urbanity that such an area may contain. The term urbanity, in traditional social studies, refers to traits such as the high density in population, a spatial distribution of activities one can do, the heterogeneity of the ethnic groups that are residents of the city, and generally, cities consisting of a large size (Tittle and Grasmick, 2001).

Although previous research defined the rural versus the urban category as a dichotomy, more recently, this typology has been viewed as a continuum-based one instead, making it more complex to define the categories due to the overlap between the terms (Porter & Howell, 2009). According to Isserman (2001), Schnore (1957), Thomas and Howell (2003), this overlap refers to the increased ability to share ideas, the exchange of people, and the transfer of geographical space. According to



Hinze and Smith (2013), it has increasingly become more relevant to research phenomena shown in different cities in order to be able to draw comparisons and trace the different linguistic developments within villages and cities. However, only a small number of studies use the measure urbanity when conducting their research. This measure may prove fruitful to show possible trends or different linguistic patterns in the perceived use of swear words in this case (Hinze & Smith, 2013; Meyerhoff, 2011).

The stratification of urbanity for the Netherlands is defined, regulated and maintained by the CBS. Hence, their official data regarding the stratification of urbanisation was used in this study. The CBS divides urbanisation into five categories ranging from very rural to very urban. A tripartition, namely urban, semi-urban and rural, was applied in this study in order to see whether the adolescents from different urban backgrounds perceived to use profane expressions in different contexts, or whether differences in perceived frequency and severity were noted. An area was considered to be rural with a maximum amount of addresses of 1000, semi-urban when 1500 addresses were registered maximally in a particular area and considered urban when the number of addresses reached above 1500 (CBS, 1992; CBS, 2019). In conclusion, the framework for urbanisation from CBS (2019) will be used in the current study to determine whether an area in the Netherlands is urban, semi-urban, or rural. Hence, the degree of urbanity can be compared in order to answer research questions one and two.

Another sociolinguistic variable that is often linked to variance in one's linguistic repertoire, is socioeconomic status. As the first two research questions consider how socioeconomic status influences the perception of frequency and severity amongst adolescents, it is necessary to define social class, socioeconomic class and socioeconomic status, and justify why this terminology is applied in this research. According to Fiske and Tablante (2015), discussing one's social class may cause feelings of discomfort, and can be considered taboo in many social circles. Tait (2015) underscores that talking about and defining social class may be perceived as awkward and

uncomfortable due to one's possible lack of access to resources and wealth, on the one hand, and the feeling of 'gloating' about a high status on the other hand, which is perceived as negative and impolite. Social class is a notion that can and has been, defined in many different ways. The intellectual basis of this theory stems from the 19th century and is associated with figures such as Karl Marx and Max Weber.

Furthermore, social class is inherently linked to division (Meyerhoff, 2011). Marx' perspective solely focused on the difference of people who produce capital (i.e. working class), and the people controlling this process and the capital (i.e. capitalists); Weber added another dimension to this definition by linking social actions to socioeconomic status (Meyerhoff, 2011). Hence, Weber (2012) advocates that socioeconomic status can be considered the ranking of one's social position taking the measures wealth, power, and prestige as the determining factors. According to Meyerhoff (2011), it is important to realise that the influence of one's economic status inherently affects one's rank within the social class system. As a result, a further distinction can be made when taking occupation, aspirations, mobility, wealth and education into account; people can be grouped according to socioeconomic status. Note that within this research, the term socioeconomic status will be used as a measure instead of socioeconomic class or social class. The terms socioeconomic class and social class can evoke feelings of discomfort and awkwardness. Hence, socioeconomic status has acquired a less negative connotation, is used in a multitude of studies, and is considered to be relatively objective.

According to Berk-Seligson and Seligson (1978), socioeconomic status (SES) is closely linked to linguistic variation. Moreover, a higher SES is correlated with a higher frequency of using the 'prestige' form, whereas stigmatised linguistic variables have been found to dominate in frequency amongst people with a lower SES (Seligson & Berk-Seligson, 1978). Hence, the question arises whether this phenomenon would also hold for the use of profanity as a linguistic variable; would the (frequent) use of profane words, a taboo linguistic variable, be restricted to people

belonging to a lower SES, or would the use of profane words be uttered more frequently towards people with a lower SES? According to Allan and Burridge (2006), one towards people with a lower social status since no loss of status is a likely outcome. Conversely, utilising profane words in the presence of, or directed towards someone with a higher status, the consequences are on the negative side of the social spectrum.

Aside from individual differences, it could be argued that there are also discrepancies between groups with regard to their actual and perceived distribution of profane words. For example, Patrick (1901) found that profanity may be expressed mostly by people who have received a lesser degree of education compared to people who have finished a university degree, soldiers, people with a more practical job and criminals. In addition, McEnery (2006) advocates that people from a lower socioeconomic status may express a higher degree of profanity. Jay (2000) argues that people from a lower socioeconomic status or environment are less prone to the adverse reactions of others.

In order to measure one's status, various measures have been developed in the field of sociolinguistics. According to Meyerhoff (2011), socioeconomic status is measured most frequently by a person's occupation. Importantly, the status of occupation is perceived differently by different countries or cultures. Therefore, the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), an official Dutch governing body that processes statistical data concerning the Dutch demographics, was consulted in order to examine the status of the general branches of occupation within the Netherlands. Additionally, Labov (2001) argues that one's socioeconomic status is best determined by a combination of three measures, namely occupation, level of education, and house value. Hence, the level of education is also taken into account when determining socioeconomic status; since it is complicated to determine the house value independently for this thesis project, this measure was not included. Finally, these measures can show a systematic stratification when considering the perceived frequency of linguistic variables (Meyerhoff, 2011). As a result, in this study, quantitative

measures are used in order to measure relative frequency in different social contexts and its effect on linguistic behaviour (Meyerhoff, 2011; Tait, 2015).

Thirdly, it appears that a difference is observed between not only one's socioeconomic status, but also one's age and gender. In previous studies, it is argued that men appear to swear more than women; young people seem to curse more than older people; and poorly educated people seem to employ more profanity in contrast to highly educated people (Doherty et al. 2018; McEnery & Xiao, 2004). Therefore, it can be implied that the use of profanity is something you grow into and out of at certain stages in life. Hence, it can be suggested that adolescents in secondary education are likely to use profanity. Additionally, the perceived degree of taboo may change over time due to the cultural changes and developing attitudes over time. Therefore, Doherty et al. (2018) concluded that language that can be considered daring and risky, is accepted in more settings in modern-day societies and that social standards are becoming less rigid. This appears to be in contrast to the values schools generally apply (i.e. protective standards, conservatism, exemplary status). Conversely, gender effects have been researched thoroughly with regard to the distribution of profanity. However, since this paper is mainly focused on demographic, and socioeconomic status differences, this aspect will not be elaborated on extensively. Vingerhoets et al. (2013) suggest that the swearing behaviour of men and women are dependent on contextual factors. Moreover, researchers (e.g. Baruch & Jenkins, 2007; Jay, 2000; Jay et al., 2006; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Johnson & Lewis, 2010, Hazelton & Stone, 2008) disagree about which gender expresses the most profane words and what the social consequences may be, indicating the inconclusiveness on the topic.

## **2.7 Classroom use and profanity**

In the preceding case study, Gordijn et al. (2019) examined the factual use of swear words within the school environment. Since this study was restricted to only one social environment, multiple social contexts were considered in the current research to explore the possible differences between

the various social contexts. When a classroom situation is considered, Doherty et al. (2018) state that students continually use profanity, which can be viewed as more than a purely linguistic phenomenon; Doherty et al. (2018) therefore, advocate that schools try to maintain a 'purified' demarcated environment while some societies grow more tolerant towards swearing. Crystal (2003) argues that profanity is often associated with taboo language due to the shared characteristics between the two. From another perspective, Stone and McMillan (2012) advocate a different, humorous account of a swear word to cause such displays to be a marker of group identity; adolescents may be particularly prone to experiment with linguistic features such as expressing profanity, due to the lack of an established identity (Meyerhoff, 2011).

When profane words are uttered by students in earshot of the teacher, it is considered an aspect of classroom trouble (Doherty et al., 2018). According to Maybin (2013), students aged 10 to 11 used curse words directed at themselves during lunch breaks but would restrict such usage when in the classroom, or the presence of adults. Remarkably, this does not apply to secondary education, in which students are reported to display a higher frequency of the use of profane words (Doherty et al., 2018). Additionally, Fägersten (2012) states that teachers may reciprocate such behaviour in order to establish a sense of solidarity and informality. Generous & Houser (2019) advocate that instructors may express profanity in order to engage students with the course contents. Finally, Doherty et al. (2018) conclude that profanity in class may indicate a sense of indifference and defiance displayed by students in order to reject the social boundaries that are attempted to be regulated by authoritative figures. Hence, the use of profane words is generally considered to be unacceptable within the school environment with the exception of very rare occasions when swearing might be used as a tool for teachers to connect with the students, but profanity is less accepted when uttered by students.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a discrepancy between the attitudes towards swearing in the school environment. According to Jay and Janschewitz (2008), profanity is generally accepted in the

presence or directed towards peers, whereas, in more formal settings, such use is seen as offensive and unacceptable. Sobre-Denton and Simonis (2012) render the use of profanity effective when one wants to spark the interest of adolescents. However, due to the status of profane words being taboo, it is not wished to be used in classrooms. Additionally, one may argue that teachers have exemplary functions that should show that such expressions of language are undesired. In sum, swearing amongst peers is considered acceptable and seen as a marker of group identity, yet when this occurs in more formal settings such as the classroom or is directed to the teacher, it is regarded as offensive and unacceptable. The question arises whether this is the case in Dutch classrooms and if students perceive that they use less profanity within the school environment.

## **2.8 The Dutch school system**

Since the current study investigates the perceived swearing behaviour of Dutch adolescents without distinguishing between the different levels of education, it is fruitful to describe the Dutch school system to clarify the possible differences. The Dutch school system is quite extensive and can be considered complex to foreigners. The Dutch educational system has various tracks that students can follow based on their academic performance making the concept quite complicated at times (De Graaf & Kraaykamp (2000). Dutch children go to primary school from the age of four until the age of 12, sometimes 11 based on whether they are born before or after the summer. Next, the primary schools give out advice based on the overall progress made throughout the years and with the help of the results from the CITO/NIO scores (Terwel, 2006; Van Huizen, 2019). This moment is quite important in their career since this determines to which secondary school they are allowed to go.

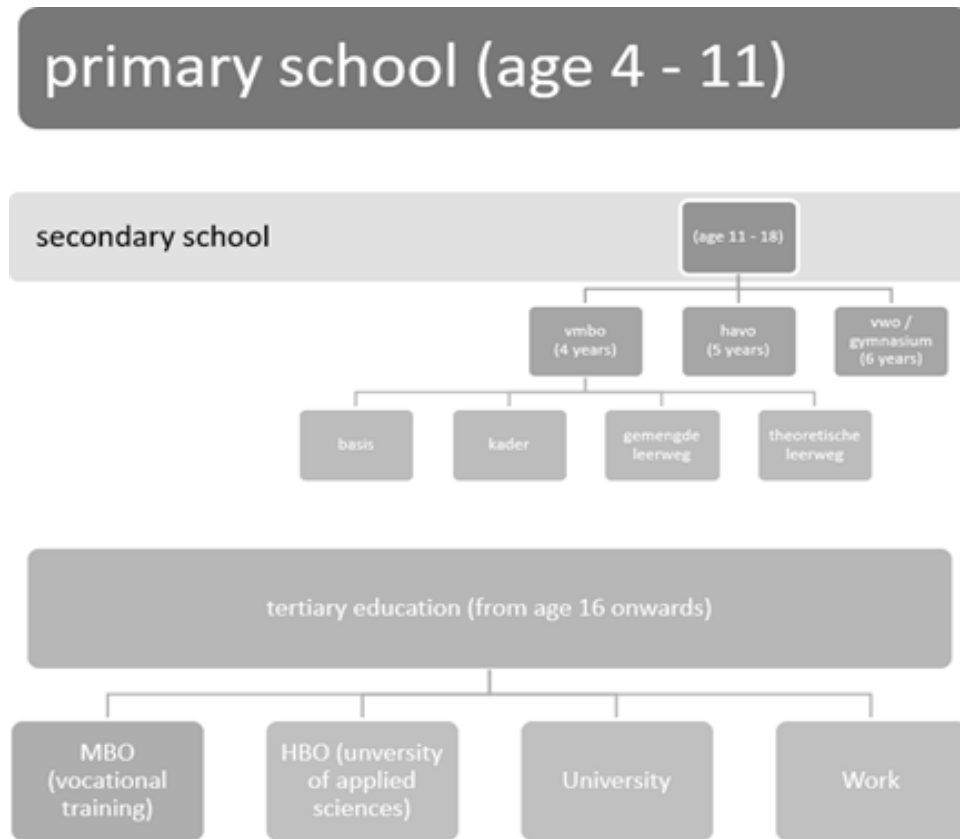
There are different paths a child can take starting with special education when the child has an IQ score below 70, sometimes in combination with the behavioural issues or a bad home environment. Another possibility would be a regular school with different degrees of VMBO; this can be divided from people with lower academic performance (vmbo basis, vmbo kader, vmbo gemengde leerweg, i.e. vmbo-gl) to relatively average in terms of academic performance (vmbo

theoretische leerweg, i.e. vmbo-tl). All vmbo tracks last for four years and most students finish at the age of 16. However, most students have to be schooled until the age of 17, according to the Dutch educational laws (Pelgrum & Plomp, 1992). Since only secondary education is considered, there will be no detailed outline of the academic tracks students can follow in order to further develop and school themselves with regard to tertiary education.

Three more divisions based on a higher academic performance can be made concerning secondary school placement. First of all, when a student performs slightly higher than average, the child is awarded havo advice. This track takes about five years, and most students finish at the age of 17. One of the highest possible ranks to attain is vwo, which is closely tied to gymnasium. Both of these tracks are reserved only for the children with the highest academic performances, and they are perceived as the most capable (Pelgrum & Plomp, 1992). Such children are required to complete 6 years of education at a secondary school. Figure 1 illustrates the Dutch school system with the different academic tracks that can be followed.

**Figure 1**

*The Dutch school system and its various tracks explained.*





## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, the research design will be explained; secondly, the instruments and the participants will be described. In the participant section, the justification with regard to the ethics will also be discussed. Furthermore, the procedure and timeline will indicate the planning of the study. Finally, the analysis will be outlined in which the categorisation and codification of the data will be discussed.

### **3.1 Methodology and Research Design**

This study implemented a multidisciplinary approach in order to achieve triangulation; different instruments such as a questionnaire and interviews were conducted amongst adolescents in different regions of the Netherlands. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were performed to give a more detailed picture of the data. Consequently, this study can be divided into three stages. First of all, the observations were conducted in the school environment in order to ascertain the actual frequency of swear words. These observations were part of a case study conducted prior to this thesis and were controlled for the geographical location (e.g. rural, semi-urban or urban). The next stage entailed the quantitative data collection in which the questionnaire was first distributed. In this survey, the perception of profane words, the perceived use of them and to which degree of urbanity (i.e. rural, semi-urban or urban), and to which socioeconomic status this could be accredited to were researched. The final tool, namely the interviews, were conducted as the qualitative data collection in order to give a more detailed reasoning for why adolescents perceive to use swear words in particular social environments, and what the adolescents considered to be mild versus severe profane expressions.

As stated above, a pilot study for the master course Sociolinguistics taught at Leiden University by Dr Smakman was conducted first between the 1st of October and the 4th of November 2019, in which observations were made at three different secondary schools in the Netherlands divided by urbanity (e.g. urban, semi-urban and rural). The observations were

conducted by me, Maxime Hoogstad, and two fellow university students (Aukje Swillens-Marinus, and Cynthia Gordijn) who worked as teachers at one of the schools observed. During these observations, the use and frequency of profane words used by 88 adolescents in three different classes in the school environment of year three were marked. In these observations, observation sheets were used that marked the gender of the adolescent, which profane words were used, whether the expression was addressed to someone or not, and in which part of the lesson it would be expressed. These observations were done by three teachers at the selected schools with the help of interns at these schools. The three schools were situated in the northern region (urban), south-west (semi-urban) and western area (rural) in the Netherlands. The adolescents were observed in a classroom environment as well as during their lunch breaks.

Additionally, they filled in a list stating which profane words they used most frequently. Moreover, the survey aimed to elicit in which social contexts the adolescents would use profanity. This list of 20 profane words serves as a foundation for creating the list accompanied by Likert scales in the questionnaire (explained in 3.2). The groups of adolescents that volunteered to participate in the observations enjoyed the same level of education, namely HAVO year 3, but followed their education in different parts of the country, making it heterogeneous groups (see table 1).

**Table 1**

*The participant sample of the observation.*

	Observation	%
Age		
Mean	14.57	
Median	14.50	
Range	13-16	
Standard Deviation	0.65	
Gender		
Male	43	49

Female	45	51
Urbanity of the school environment		
Urban	27	31
Semi-urban	30	34
Rural	31	35
Level of education		
Havo	88	100
Year of education		
3	88	100
Language distribution		
L1 (Dutch)	88	100
L2 (Other)	0	0
<hr/>		
Total	88	
<hr/>		

The main research question that was considered was to what extent adolescents use swear words in secondary education and which sociolinguistic variables were involved. In particular, the quality and quantity of profane expressions were investigated. The quality of the swear words were categorised by four overarching types based on the categories of Thelwall (2008), namely, physical, blasphemy, undesirable behaviour and denigrated groups. Each overarching category contained subcategories (as shown in table 2).

**Table 2**

*The categorisation of profane expressions with examples.*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency n = 84	Examples
Physical	Genitals	22	Kut, kutzooi, me pang pang,
	Excretion	2	Tfoe, shit

	Disease	5	Tyfus, kanker tief op
	Sex acts	12	What the fuck, verneukt Fuck, naaistreek, kont steken
		17	bek houden
Blasphemy	Religious	17	Oh (my) god, godsamme, godverdomme, jezus,
Undesirable behaviour	Stupidity	3	Dombo, kaulodom, mongool
Denigrated groups	Homosexuality	2	Gay, homo,
	Racism	1	Nigger
	Women	3	Bitch, teef, slet

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The results from these observations served as a foundation for the list of the top 20 most frequently observed swear words that were used in the questionnaire. In the observations, the quality of swear words (i.e. the categorisation of the profane expression) with regard to the degree of urbanity was also observed. With regard to the urban school, the profane expressions used related to sex acts, undesirable behaviour, and excretion (see figure 2). When considering the semi-urban school, genitals, sexual attributes and diseases were most often used as a quality of profanity, whereas religion, sexual attributes and genitals were the most frequently observed at the rural school (see figure 3 and 4). Notably, in the observations, the students at the rural school appeared to swear the most, expressing profanity twice as much as the urban school (see table 3). Finally, the attitudes towards using profanity in different environments were researched in which the researchers engaged in a short conversation during class with the students to elicit these answers. Pupils at the urban

schools stated that using profanity when expressing anger should be accepted, whereas it is unacceptable to swear in the presence of family or teachers. The students from the semi-urban school stated that it is unacceptable to express profanity without a particular reason, addressed to teachers or when hurting someone else. In the same fashion, the participants from the rural school argued that it is fair to use profanity for situations in which injustice occurs, whereas unacceptable reasons include specific purposes and regarding people's feelings. The three most frequently observed swear words were *kut* (27 times), *bek houden* (17 times) (translated: shut up), and *fuck* (7 times) with a total quantity of 84 occurrences (see table 3). In terms of the quality of swear words used, females tended to use more swear words related to genitals and blasphemy, whereas males were observed to use more profane expressions relating to diseases. On the whole, this case study served as the foundation for pursuing this thesis project, in which the scope of the study was expanded. More participants were included in this study, and more instruments were implemented in order to get a more detailed picture of the profane expressions adolescents use and perceive to use.

**Table 3**

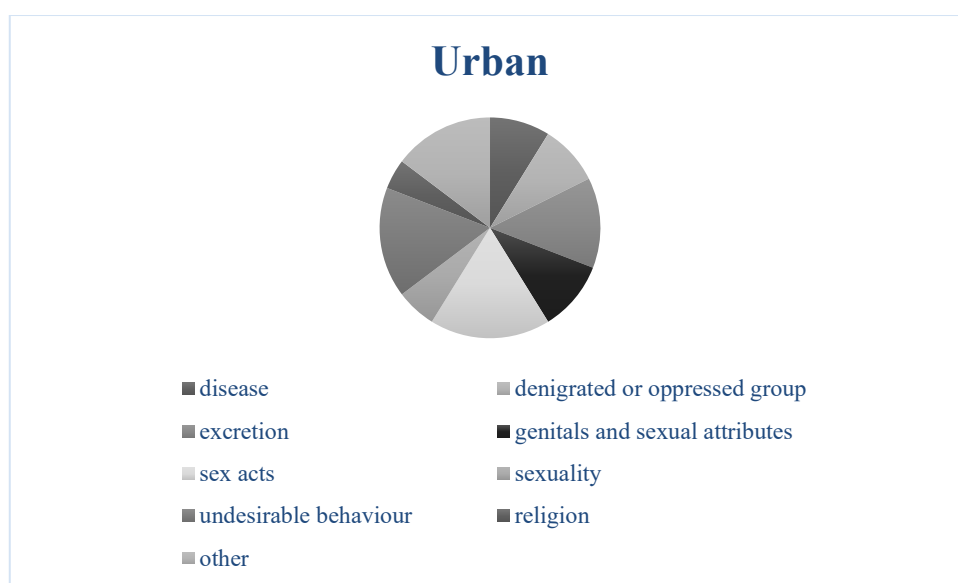
*The distribution of profane expressions and the degree of urbanity.*

Profane expression	Language	Addressed	Urbanity			Full sample
			Rural	Semi-urban	Urban	
			N	N	N	
Bek houden/hou je bek	Dutch	11	7	5	5	17
Dombo	Dutch	0	1	0	0	1
Fuck	English	2	3	2	2	7
Gay	English	1	0	0	1	1
Godsamme	Dutch	0	2	1	0	3

Godverdomme	Dutch	2	2	1	0	3
Kanker	Dutch	0	0	0	1	1
Kaulodom	Dutch	1				1
Kut	Dutch	2	11	9	7	27
Kutzooi	Dutch	0	2	0	0	2
Me pang pang	Sranan	1	0	0	1	1
	Tongo					
Mongool	Dutch	1	0	1	0	1
Naaistreek	Dutch	1	1	0	0	1
Nigger	English	1	0	0	0	0
Oh god	Dutch	3	2	2	1	5
Oh my god	English	2	2	1	1	4
Shit	English	0	1	0	0	1
Slet	Dutch	1	0	0	1	1
Tief op	Dutch	2	1	1	1	3
Tyfus	Dutch	0	1	0	0	1
Verneukt	Dutch	1	0	1	0	1
What the fuck	English	0	0	1	0	1
Total		33	37	26	21	84

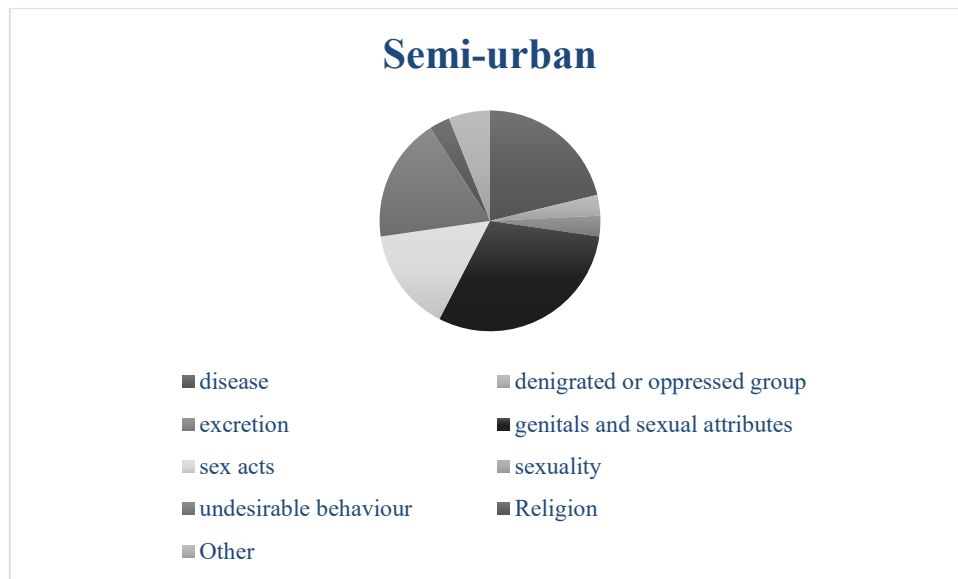
**Figure 2**

*The division of the quality of swear words for the urban group.*



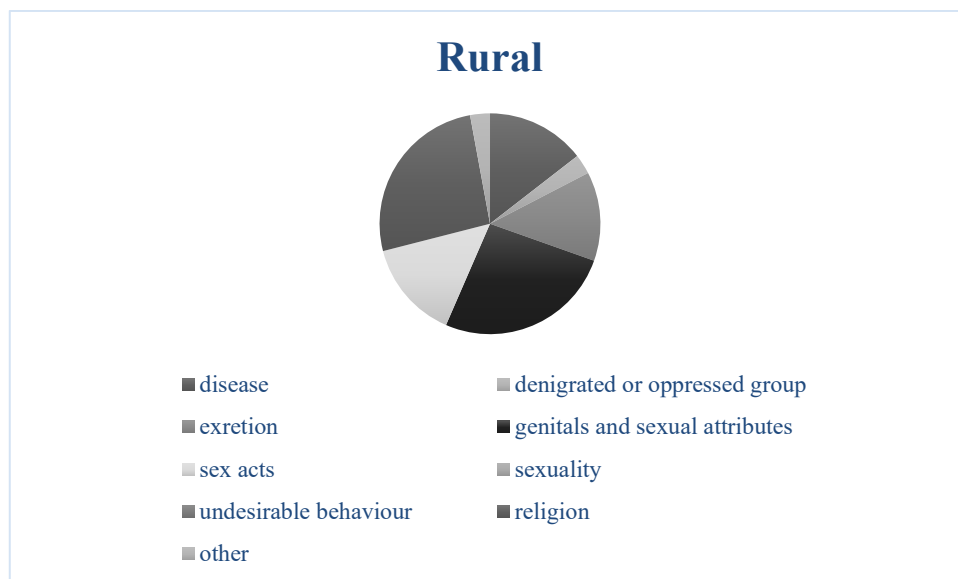
**Figure 3**

*The division of the quality of swear words for the semi-urban group.*



**Figure 4**

*The division of the quality of swear words for the rural group.*



### **3.2 Research Instruments**

#### **3.2.1 The questionnaire**

The next instrument that was used for this study was a questionnaire involving both open-ended questions as well as scale questions, multiple-choice and multiple selection questions (see appendix A). This questionnaire was both composed and used by Mrs Swillens-Marinus (forthcoming) and

me since both studies investigate the perception of profanity from different sociolinguistic angles. Firstly, this section will describe which questions from the survey were used to answer the research questions. Next, the choice for each question type will be justified accordingly. Finally, the manner of distributing the questionnaire will be explained.

Central to the composition of the questionnaire were the research questions, and which aspects should be elicited. In order to answer the first research question, questions such as in which city do you live, how old are you and where is your school situated were used to trace the demographic background of the participants and to measure the perception of the frequency of profane expressions in particular social contexts. In order to elicit the socioeconomic status of the participants, questions regarding the level of education, the field in which the caretakers worked, and the languages spoken at home were composed. To elicit the perception of frequency and severity, Likert scale questions were asked in which a swear word would be presented and the participant had to rank how frequently they perceived to use the profane expressions and how severe they would consider it to be; this aligns with the second research question. The third research question aimed to answer in which different social contexts profanity was used by teenagers, and the questions detailing different social environments (e.g. sports club, school and home) were used in order to uncover such results. Finally, question 15 was used to measure the perception of severity when using profane words in different social contexts (e.g. when I am alone, when in the company of family etc.), which answered the last research question (see appendix B).

In the questionnaire, different types of questions were used in order to gather a more detailed overview of the perception of adolescents. The questionnaire was made anonymous in order to reduce the tendency of participants to fill in 'desirable' answers (i.e. social desirability) (Dewaele, 2016). The survey consisted of 9 sections in which the participants were asked about their demographic background, level of education, the occupation of the parents, gender, and the area that they were going to school to. In order to elicit the participant's demographic background, mostly



multiple-choice and multiple selection questions were used. This decision was largely based on practical reasons because the analysis of the results was made more accessible. One open question was added in order to extract the definition of a profane word according to the participants. According to Jay (2000), amongst others, the process of defining what swearing is is rather complex and remains mostly vague due to the taboo that is associated with all things profane. Therefore, it may prove beneficial to get a better understanding of the participants' association with swear word usage. Additionally, acknowledging the different perceptions of the definition of a swear word may show why certain profane words are considered to be offensive in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the questionnaire aimed to elicit in which environments they would say that a profane word is acceptable, and why they would express profanity themselves. The questionnaire concluded with a couple of questions in which students had to rate the profane word in terms of severity on a 5-point Likert scale (1= *completely disagree/unacceptable*, 5= *completely agree/acceptable*). These scales have been implemented in previous studies to measure the offensiveness of a word (Dewaele, 2017; McEnery, 2004). Since this research investigates the perception of severity, such scale questions proved to be fruitful in order to measure such an aspect. According to Wakita et al. (2012), the sole purpose of Likert scales is to elicit self-reported views upon a topic with several categories to structure the set of choices. A five-point scale has suggested being reliable (see, e.g. Boote, 1981; Lissitz & Green, 1975; Preston & Coleman, 2000). In order to create equal psychological distance and an option for a neutral answer was added to the questionnaire (Wakita et al., 2012). Although there is some debate whether the option of a five-point scale proves to be more reliable (see, e.g. Bendig, 1953, 1954; Brown et al., 1991; Komorita, 1963; Matell & Jacoby, 1971, Wakita et al., 2014), since the target group involves adolescents, it was decided that a five-point scale was the maximum amount of options to be added. This was done to ensure that the target group did not lose focus and stayed engaged during their participation (Tinson, 2009).

### ***3.2.2 The interviews***

A final instrument that was developed collaboratively with Mrs Swillens-Marinus in order to delve deeper into the perceived attitudes of adolescents towards profane words were semi-structured interviews. This instrument was developed to ensure proper triangulation (Denscombe, 2011). In this interview, adolescents were asked the following six questions enabling the researcher to gather a better understanding of their opinion towards perceived profanity. The interviews were semi-structured in order to ensure flexibility on the part of the participant and enabled the researcher to apply a degree of predetermined order (Dunn, 2008; Longhurst, 2003). The interview questions used in this research aimed to elicit the different perceptions of swear words and how one's behaviour may influence one's swearing behaviour. These interview questions can be linked to research question three and four (see appendix E).

The interviews were held via Skype meetings in which the researcher was present to ask the questions. Possible prompts such as 'explain' and 'how come' were included in case the adolescent did not answer the question entirely. The meetings were recorded in order to transcribe the interview. In total, 12 students from different areas in the Netherlands were interviewed. Unfortunately, it was not possible to execute the interviews in real life at schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic also accounts for the lower number of students participating in the interviews. To summarise, in order to ensure triangulation, a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods were designed, considering the special needs adolescents may have (Denscombe, 2011; Tinson, 2009).

## **3.3 Participants**

### ***3.3.1 Participants of the questionnaire***

A total of 352 participants (N = 352) were recruited to fill in the questionnaire. Initially, the questionnaire was supposed to be carried out physically at 9 schools situated in different geographical locations in the Netherlands. However, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, schools were

closed from the 16th of March until the 2nd of June. Hence, a new strategy had to be employed in order to recruit the participants needed. The questionnaire was formatted digitally into a Google Forms survey which was anonymised. In order to distribute this questionnaire geographically throughout the Netherlands, the snowball sampling method was implemented. The snowballing sampling method entails that a data collection tool can be distributed further by asking people from your network to share the tool to be filled in with other participants enhancing the quantity of the sample (Dewaele, 2016). An anonymous questionnaire via Google Forms was put online, and the link was shared with 15 teachers from different geographical areas in the Netherlands, the 352 students of these teachers, and two informal contacts such as interns studying to become an English teacher. The teachers that helped distribute the questionnaire were carefully selected based on the school and area they worked at. Being an English teacher in the Netherlands myself, I asked people from my network within education to forward the link to any colleagues or students they were teaching. Moreover, our network of adolescents (e.g. cousins) was consulted in order to forward the questionnaire to their classmates too. Thus, this selection was possible due to my, and fellow teachers' networks in the field of secondary education. Since the survey was anonymous, the participants could not be approached to ask for consent. However, the participation was voluntary, and the participants were informed that they could finish the survey, could decide not to participate at all, or stop their participation at any point they would feel uncomfortable. The questionnaire remained online for two weeks and attracted 352 responses from various parts of the country and adolescents of various ages and levels.

All participants are residents in the Netherlands. The people participating had different geographical backgrounds (i.e. geographical locations in the Netherlands, and degree of urbanity) and ages included. Furthermore, by asking the participants in which field the parents were working, a distinction between socioeconomic status could be made based on income generated within such fields (CBS, 2019). The group consisted of 140 males and 212 females. Additionally, all

participants engaged voluntarily without receiving a reward for their contribution. Table 4 represents the participant sample for the data collection of the questionnaire.

**Table 4**

*The participant sample of the questionnaire.*

	Online Questionnaire	%
<b>Age</b>		
Mean	15.58	
Median	15	
Range	11 – 19	
Standard Deviation	1.41	
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	140	39
Female	212	60
<b>Urbanity of the home environment</b>		
Urban	183	52
Semi-urban	81	23
Rural	88	25
<b>Urbanity of the school environment</b>		
Urban	140	40
Semi-urban	64	18
Rural	148	42
<b>Income (in thousands)</b>		
<30.000	83	23
30.000 – 35.000	155	44
>35.000	221	63
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Vmbo	54	15
Havo	191	54

Vwo	107	31
Year of Education		
1	50	14
2	52	15
3	58	17
4	99	28
5	43	12
6	50	14
Language Distribution		
L1 (Dutch)	335	95
L2 (Other)	17	5
<hr/>		
Total	352	
<hr/>		

As already hinted at above, there were some challenges with regard to collecting the data. First of all, the COVID 19 pandemic caused the Dutch government to close the secondary schools from the end of March up until the first month of June. As a result, the data collection had to be done via online tools and media instead of personal contact at schools. This may arguably bring about different results or answers from adolescents not taking the questionnaire seriously or being more tense or nervous during the interviews. However, it also enabled a more extensive collection of data in various parts of the Netherlands, since more teachers forwarded the link of the questionnaire (see appendix A) to their students.

Although the present study asked adolescents to be part of the participant sample, no explicit informed consent signed by guardians or caretakers had to be obtained for the anonymous questionnaire. However, in order to make sure that the participants were familiar with the purpose of this study, at the beginning of the questionnaire, it was stated that the questionnaire was anonymous, and by completing the questionnaire, informed consent was

given. In addition, the purpose of the study was outlined, as well as how the data would be analysed.

### 3.3.2 *Participants of the interviews*

A total of 12 participants (N = 12) agreed to answer a total of six interview questions. These participants were recruited through the consultation of my network again. The students in my classes were asked whether they would want to consider answering six questions in an interview. In addition, fellow teachers that had been asked to forward the questionnaire to their students were asked to inquire if their students were willing to participate in the interviews. All in all, eight teachers from six schools located in different geographical locations in the Netherlands were selected to approach the students. Besides the consideration of the geographical locations of the schools, the selection was also controlled when regarding gender in order to give an equal representation of both genders (see table 5). Due to the unforeseen circumstances of the pandemic, it was not possible to control for age, level of education or native speakers; this may have skewed the results.

**Table 5**

*The participant sample of the interviews.*

	Interview	%
Age		
Mean	16.20	
Median	16.50	
Range	14 – 18	
Standard Deviation	1.23	
Gender		
Male	6	50
Female	6	50
Urbanity of the school environment		

Urban	4	33
Semi-urban	4	33
Rural	4	33
Level of Education		
Vmbo	2	16
Havo	5	42
Vwo	5	42
Year of Education		
1	0	0
2	1	8
3	3	25
4	2	17
5	4	33
6	2	17
Language Distribution		
L1 (Dutch)	12	100
L2 (Other)	0	0
<hr/>		
Total	12	
<hr/>		

The present study used informed consent forms for the participants who agreed to be interviewed, as well as an email to caretakers in order to comply to the ethical regulations stated for linguistic research (see appendix C and D). In particular, it is important to discuss why these regulations and protocols were followed because minors and adolescents up to 19 were asked to participate.

According to Christensen (1998), society sees children as vulnerable and in need of protection when research is being conducted. That is why there are particular templates and rules for obtaining the consent of the participants. Therefore, a few ethical issues will be discussed and how consent was obtained for this study will be outlined in more detail below.

First of all, there are a few policies to consider when conducting research with children or adolescents as participants. According to Tinson (2009), one should gather the consent of the child as well as that of the parent(s) or guardian(s). This is referred to as informed consent in which it is clearly stated that the participation is anonymous, voluntarily, and a participant can decide to stop volunteering at any point during the research. Lind et al. (2003) argue that the individual should comprehend the rights that have been outlined before. In order to enable this, the consent form was written in Dutch (the native language of the speakers), and the adolescents were asked to fill in the form.

Since this study involves adolescents younger than the age of 21, informed consent was obtained for the interviews from both the participants and their caretakers. The interviews were conducted with 12 students situated at different schools in different geographical locations via the online medium Skype. An email was sent out to the parents/guardians describing the procedure and aims of the current study as well as who would be analysing the data and for what purpose. The parents/guardians were asked to reply before the 1st of May 2020, whenever they wanted the data from the interviews removed or did not agree with the participation altogether. Before these interviews were ended, the question was asked whether the students had any difficulty understanding the rules and regulations of the interviews and the research. Moreover, the participants were told that they could withdraw at any moment and that answering questions during the interview meant that the adolescent consented to participate. In sum, informed consent was obtained from both the participants and the caretakers, the participants had to fill in the consent form (see appendix D) and the parents received an email in which the question was asked to reply whenever the results that the participant had given were to be excluded (see appendix C).

### **3.4 Procedure and Timeline**

This study was conducted in two stages, starting with the questionnaire and followed by the interviews. The first stage of the data collection involved conducting the questionnaire, which



was made available online via Google Forms from the 4th until the 20th of April. This tool was used due to the privacy protection that is given by Google when schools use it as their means of teaching. Additionally, the questionnaire served as a tool for two master theses, this one and one about gender differences written by Swillens-Marinus (forthcoming). We closely worked together when collecting data because the questionnaire was designed to be multidisciplinary, enabling us to gather more data on the whole via a more diverse school network. In the two weeks that followed, the data from the questionnaire were analysed. In order to collect the data, the snowball sampling method was implemented in order to spread the questionnaire geographically (Dewaele, 2016); an anonymous questionnaire via Google Forms was put online, and the link was shared with 7 teachers, 352 students, and two informal contacts. The questionnaire remained online for two weeks and attracted 352 responses of adolescents with different demographic backgrounds. Hence, such an instrument allows for a collection of quite a large sample of data considering multiple demographic variables such as age, level of education, gender etc. to be more precise (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). In order to supplement the data and see whether a more fully fledged picture could emerge, the next stage involved conducting interviews with 12 adolescents from different parts of the country. The interviews were conducted from the 4th until the 9th of May online via Skype. In addition, the interviews were recorded on the phone using the dictaphone function and transcribed afterwards. As such, these interviews were analysed and coded the following week.

### **3.5 Analysis**

In this section, the process of analysing and coding the data collected through the questionnaire and interviews will be described. The first two research questions, the demographic features socioeconomic status and urbanisation are concerned when considering the perception of adolescents regarding the frequency and severity of profane behaviour. In order to answer these questions, the questionnaire served as a tool to measure such aspects (see appendix B for the justification between the questions and the link to the research questions). Where urbanity is

concerned, the address density was calculated for the purpose of classifying the places given by the participants into either urban, semi-urban or rural. The degree of urbanity was calculated according to the address density that is officially registered (CBS, 2019). As a result, the place names were coded by the categories of urbanity. This classification served as the point of departure for coding the perceived frequency and severity of the questionnaire. Therefore, a distinction could be made between urban, semi-urban and rural participants and how they perceived their profane behaviour. To exemplify, the participants had to choose whether they would use a swear word frequently or not, using a 5-point Likert-scale approach. Furthermore, the same type of questions was asked when considering the severity of profane expressions.

The next important variable is socioeconomic status, and this was determined using the occupations of the parents of the participants. The questions in the questionnaire were multiple selection questions in order to determine in which field a parent or caretaker was working and what the first language spoken at home was. The purpose of eliciting the field in which a parent is working is to be able to determine the average salary one earns in such a field. According to CBS (2019), the average income is between 30.000 and 35.000 euros a year. Whenever the field was recognised to earn more than the average income, it would be marked as a high income. Similarly, when the income was determined to be lower than the average yearly income, it would be marked as a low income. For instance, fields such as ICT and banking generally contain jobs that earn above the yearly average threshold, whereas agricultural jobs and the catering industry rank below the average threshold in the Netherlands (CBS, 2019). Additionally, the level of education was coded in order to establish the socioeconomic status. For instance, vwo was considered to belong to a higher socioeconomic status than, for example, the vmbo participants. Hence, the questionnaire was analysed and coded based on the level of education of the participants, and the occupation of the parents and how much money they would approximately earn in a year. The same questions in

which urbanity was used as a variable, were analysed again with regard to socioeconomic status in order to see what effect socioeconomic status may have on the perceived profane behaviour.

The final two research questions concerned the different social contexts in which adolescents use profanity and how severe it is perceived to use such expressions in different social contexts. Therefore, the question type used for these questions were Likert scales (see appendix A). The scales were indicative of the perceived frequency and severity with the value 1 for a social context in which it was not acceptable to swear and not frequently used either, using the final value 5 for a context in which it was acceptable to swear and was done frequently.

Lastly, the interviews were conducted in order to support the answers extracted from the questionnaire for all four research questions. Therefore, the perception of frequency and severity were measured again through open questions, as well as in which environments it would be acceptable to use profanity. The interviews were recorded using the dictaphone function of a mobile phone and were transcribed. Since each research question tries to elicit a possible relation between the variables socioeconomic status and urbanity and one's perceived swearing behaviour, descriptive statistics will be employed (McEney, 2004). A summative content analysis was implemented in order to code the data collected via the interviews. This approach is used to explore usage without interfering with the meaning and is applied through identifying and quantifying certain words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This quantifying process was done by hand and coded by two separate researchers in order to objectively present results. To exemplify, words that occurred multiple times were seen as keywords and coded as such. For instance, the examples were seen as keywords (e.g. homo) and the reasoning that was given by the participants were categorised either to belong to a formal situation, an informal situation, negative, neutral and positive associations with profane expressions.

## Chapter 4: Results

For each of the four research questions, the descriptive statistics will be presented. First of all, the results of the questionnaire will be outlined. Next, the results of the interviews will be presented. Only descriptive statistics will be presented due to the nature of the study. First of all, descriptive statistics were employed to show the (perceived) frequency measure for the population. Note that not all sample groups were equal in terms of the number of participants, making it more difficult to apply inferential statistics and predict behaviour on a larger scale. Finally, Likert type scales were used which can be best analysed using descriptive statistics, since it does not meet the requirements to apply inferential statistics.

### **4.1 The perception of frequency and perceived swearing behaviour in relation to socioeconomic status**

In this section, the perception of frequency in relation to socioeconomic status will be described. The participants that contributed were all high school students ranging in age from 11 to 19 years old. The majority of the group was a native speaker of Dutch and spoke Dutch as their primary language at home. Additionally, more than half of the students (52%) did have as their level of education, whereas two minority groups followed either vwo education (30%) or vmbo education (18%). The questionnaire can be further analysed based on the demographic factors and the perceived socioeconomic status of each participant.

The two main reasons that are given for the use of profanity are “being angry” (78%) and “when hurting oneself” (67%). Other possibilities that account for the expression of profane words are: “when offending someone” (30%), “when being sad” (29%), and “to belong to a certain group” (2%). Another aspect of the questionnaire focussed on showing the perceived frequency of the profane words utilised by the participants, in this case, adolescents. In general, the most frequent profane expressions are: "fuck", "(god)verdomme", and "what the fuck". However, a difference occurs when considering both socioeconomic status as well as the degree of urbanity of the

participants. In order to draw comparisons between socioeconomic status and the degree of urbanity, the results will firstly be described regarding socioeconomic status.

In order to see whether socioeconomic status affected the reasons why the adolescents swear, the results of the questionnaire will be outlined below. First of all, there seems to be a difference in the order of the most frequent reasons given with regard to socioeconomic status (see figure 6). Although the main reason for using profane expressions appears to be the same, namely, “when I’m angry” with a division of 80% for the participants engaging in vmbo education, 75% of the havo participants choosing this option, and 84% of the vwo students using this reason most frequently. There is a difference between the stratification of the other dominant reasons for using profane expressions; “when hurting oneself” (59% and (74%), and “they do not consciously register it, it occurs automatically” (57%) and (60%) are the other two most prominent reasons accounting for using profanity amongst vmbo and vwo participants. In contrast, the havo group reversed the order according to their perceived dominant reasons for swearing: “they do not consciously register it, it occurs automatically” (66%) and “when hurting oneself” (63%).

One of the ways to elicit socioeconomic status is to consider the occupation of the participants. However, since most participants are underage, the questionnaire was used to find out in which field (e.g. health care, education, justice and police, etc.) the parents or caretakers were partaking. These fields were then further divided by the income the parents generated (e.g. low, average or high); this division is based on the yearly income average per field per household, with an average income of 29 500 euros (CBS, 2019). As a result, it became apparent that 45% of the participants had parents working in fields earning a high income, 32% of the caretakers earned a salary based on the Dutch national average income, and 16% either earned a low income or were unemployed during the time of the investigation. Another indicative factor used in this research to elicit socioeconomic status is the level of education the participants are currently following. As stated above, 52% of the participants were following the havo education as opposed to 30% of the

participants engaging in vwo education and 18% participating in the vmbo level. Finally, the majority of the participants (95%) spoke Dutch as their first and foremost language at home. Therefore, a distinction between socioeconomic status, in this respect, will be disregarded, since the results cannot be seen as conclusive for other languages spoken.

When regarding the frequency of the profane expressions, there appears to be a similar trend in terms of which expressions are perceived to be the most frequent when considering socioeconomic status. For example, “fuck”, “kut”, and “what the fuck” appears to be the most frequent altogether. Markedly, in terms of socioeconomic status, different profane expressions rank higher than others, as illustrated in table 6. A difference is that profane words are especially notable when considering the lower socioeconomic status. Overall, the lower socioeconomic status shows the least frequent use of swear words with the highest frequency of 59% compared to the higher socioeconomic statuses. The middle and higher socioeconomic statuses show the highest frequency range, namely 73% and 71%. With regard to the type of profane expressions used in these statuses, the list is relatively comparable with only some minor changes in the order of the swear words.

**Table 6**

*The socioeconomic status stratification with regard to the top five most common, and most severe profane words according to the perception of the participants.*

Socioeconomic status	Frequency	Severity
Lower (vmbo)	kut (59%) (god)verdomme (57%) what the fuck (48%) tyfus (45%) shit (43%)	kanker (66%) gay (43%) homo (41%) slet (31%) kut (28%)
Average (havo)	kut (73%) what the fuck (66%) fuck (63%) (god)verdomme(62%) fucking (59%)	kanker (78%) homo (52%) gay (46%) slet (34%) teef (32%)

Higher (vwo)

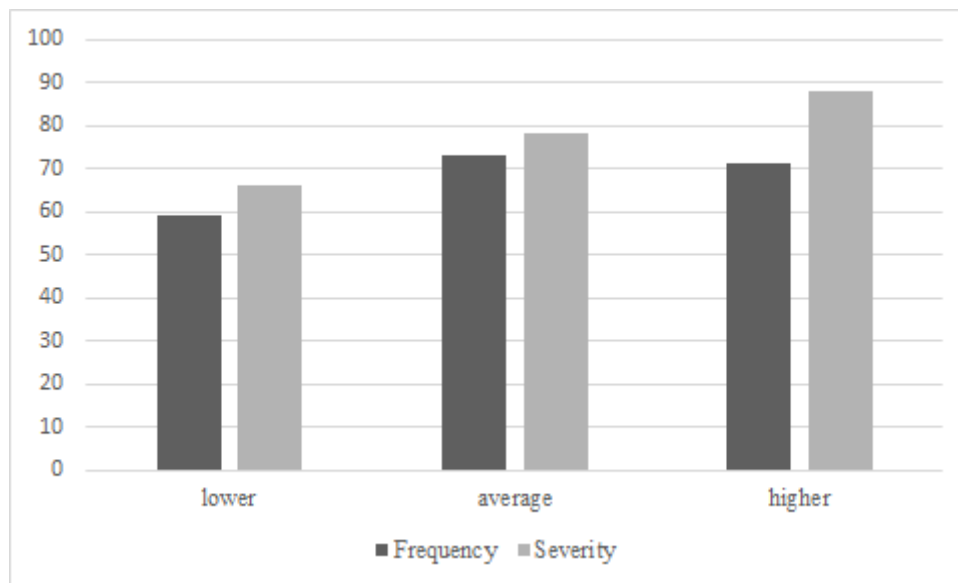
fuck (71%)  
kut (71%)  
what the fuck (65%)  
fucking (62%)  
(god)verdomme (57%)

kanker (88%)  
homo (74%)  
gay (62%)  
slet (55%)  
teef (53%)

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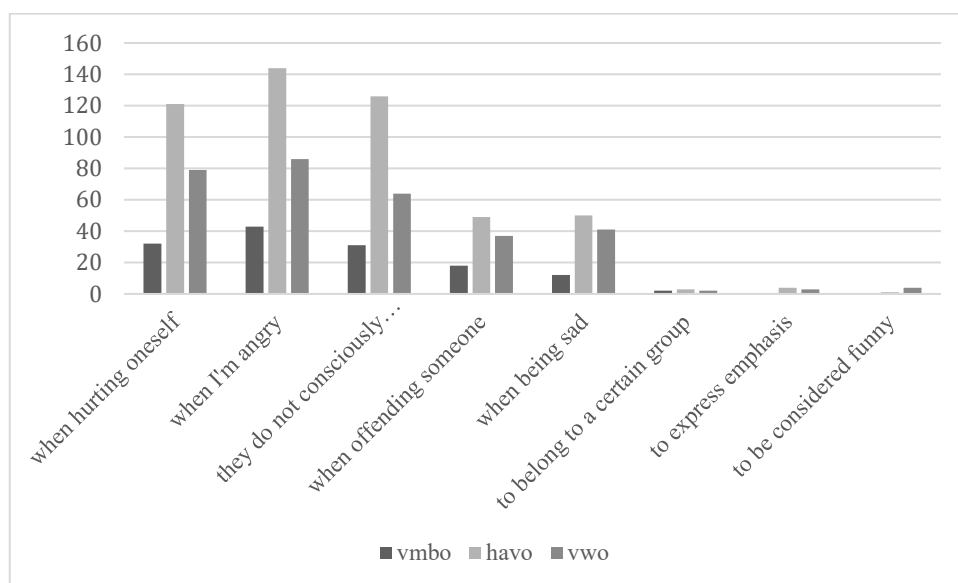
**Figure 5**

*The effects of socioeconomic status on perception of frequency and severity.*



**Figure 6**

*The division between the reasons for swearing and one's socioeconomic status.*



## **4.2 The perception of frequency and perceived swearing behaviour in relation to urbanity**

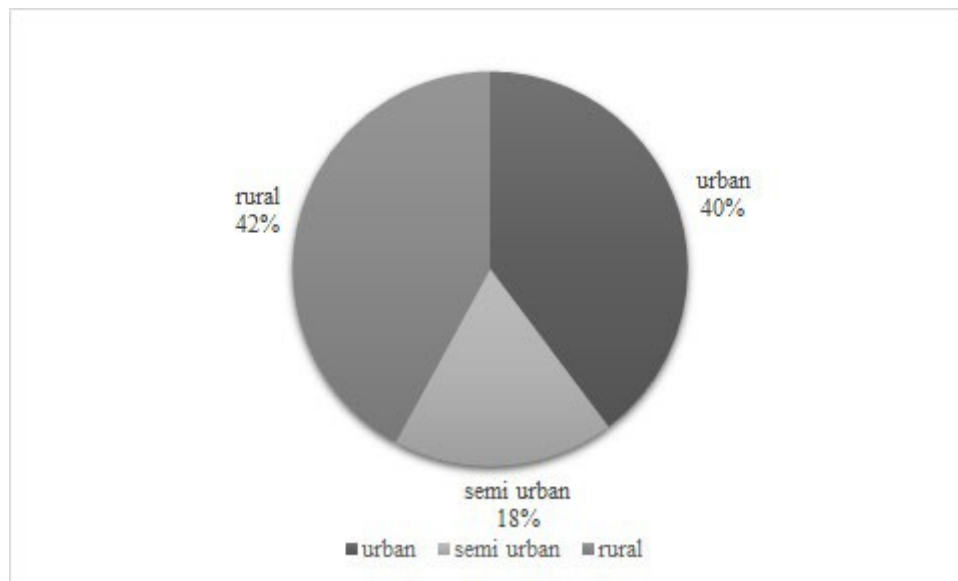
The participants had to state in which city their school was situated. Based on the place names given, the cities were categorised either as urban, semi-urban or rural. According to CBS (2019), a city is recognised either as urban, semi-urban or rural based on the environmental address density. The categorisation made in this investigation resulted in a tripartition as follows: urban (40%), semi-urban (18%), and rural (42%), see figure 7.

When looking at the distribution of the degree of urbanity, the questionnaire shows that 52% of the participants live in an urban area, 23% in a semi-urban area, whereas 25% is counted for the rural area. Interestingly, this same division is not observed when it comes to the area in which the participants attend school. To illustrate, about 40% of the participants attend a school in an urban area, whereas the rural area represents 42% of the participants and the semi-urban area accounts for 18% of the participants. As the point of departure, for all measures concerning the degree of urbanity, the division between urban, semi-urban and rural areas was based on which area the school of the participant was situated. This is due to the fact that most pupils in this research attend high school five days a week, and the observations were also executed at schools, creating uniformity in describing the results.



**Figure 7**

*The degree of urbanity based on the localisation of the schools that participants go to.*



First of all, the most prominent reasons for swearing in the urban area appears to be “when being angry” (84%) and “when hurting oneself” (67%). The same indication seems to appear when regarding the semi-urban area (75%) and (63%) respectively. However, a difference can be observed for the rural results when accounting for why profanity is used, namely, “being angry” (76%), and “they do not consciously register it, it occurs automatically” (73%). Additionally, the top two reasons that were chosen the least in all three categories were: “when trying to come across as funny” (1%), (3%), and (1%) respectively; “to put emphasis on the message I am trying to convey” (3%), (2%) and (1%) (see figure 9).

Another division based on urbanity can be made when considering the frequency of profane expressions (see figure 8). Generally, as table 7 shows, the following profane expressions are perceived to be the most frequent amongst teenagers: “fuck” (64%), “fucking” (58%), “(god)verdomme” (60%), “kut” (71%), “shit” (56%), and “what the fuck” (63%). When looking at the division between the degrees of urbanity per swear word, it can be observed that “fuck” has a high frequency amongst the urban group (71%), a somewhat lower frequency in the semi-urban category (56%), and (61%) of the rural area say they use this expression frequently. Consequently,

the division is somewhat similar for the expression “fucking” with a division of (61%), (63%), and (61%); The third expression, “(god)verdomme”, 58% of the urban group argue that they use this word frequently, whereas 49% of the semi-urban group and 64% of the rural group agree to use this expression frequently. Considering the most frequently used swear word in this research, namely "kut", has been divided as follows: urban (77%), semi-urban (67%), and rural (66%). Next, 59% of the urban group perceives to use the profane expression “shit” regularly, whereas 56% of the semi-urban group and 51% of the rural group perceive that they use this swear word often. Finally, when considering "what the fuck", 64% of the urban group, 67% of the semi-urban group, and 61% of the rural group appear to use it frequently (see table 7).

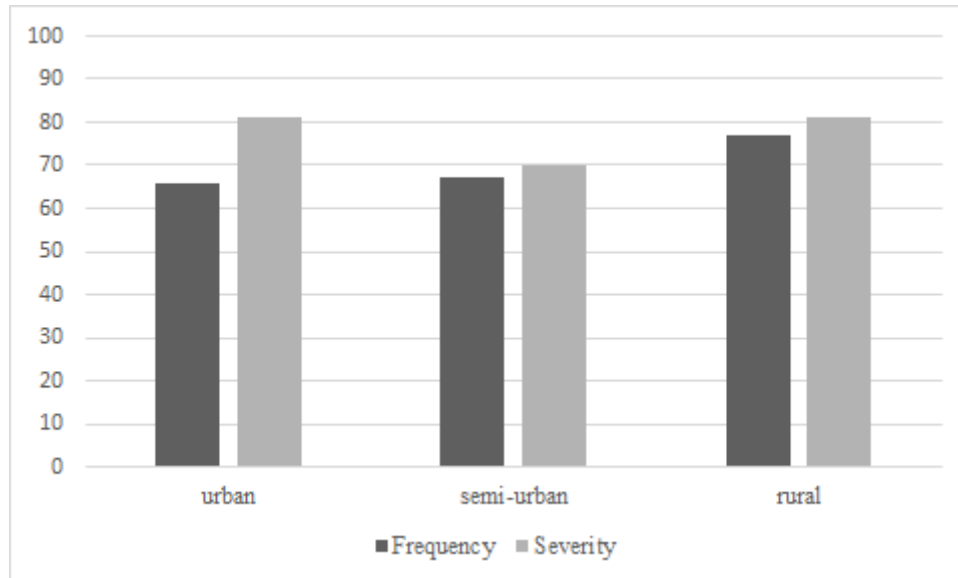
**Table 7**

*The degree of urbanity stratification with regard to the top five most common, and most severe profane words according to the perception of the participants.*

Degree of urbanity	Frequency	Severity
Urban	kut (66%)	kanker (81%)
	(god)verdomme (64%)	homo (60%)
	fucking (63%)	gay (51%)
	fuck (61%)	slet (39%)
	what the fuck (61%)	teef (33%)
semi-urban	kut (67%)	kanker (70%)
	what the fuck (67%)	homo (39%)
	fucking (63%)	gay (38%)
	(god)verdomme (56%)	slet (34%)
	Jezus (56%)	teef (28%)
Rural	kut (77%)	kanker (81%)
	fuck (71%)	homo (60%)
	fucking (61%)	gay (51%)
	what the fuck (64%)	slet (39%)
	shit (59%)	teef (33%)

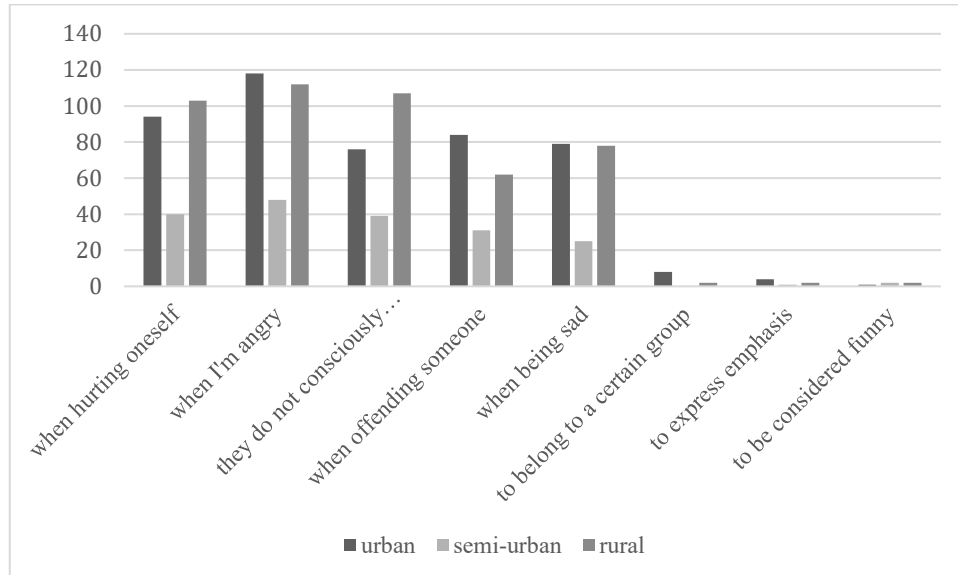
**Figure 8**

*The effects of degree of urbanity on perceived frequency and severity.*



**Figure 9**

*The division between the reasons for swearing and one's urbanity background.*



### 4.3 The perception of severity in relation to socioeconomic status

Another aspect of the questionnaire aimed to elicit the perceived severity of the profane expressions presented. When considering socioeconomic status and the perception of severity, the following can be observed. In general, all socioeconomic statuses appoint “kanker” as being the most severe profane expressions according to their perception. Additionally, both homosexual swear words

“gay” and “homo” are perceived as the most severe after that. Interestingly, another difference can be observed when looking at table 6; even though the term “slet” (translated: slut) is listed as number four in terms of most severe expressions, the final expression differs per socioeconomic status. The lower socioeconomic status regards “kut” as severe, whereas “teef” is considered severe by both the average and higher socioeconomic statuses. Moreover, a smaller majority, in general, perceive the profane expressions as severe, whereas at least half of the average and higher social groups perceive the profanity as severe (see figure 5).

#### **4.4 The perception of severity in relation to urbanity**

Different severity levels can be assigned to profane expressions. Therefore, the degree of urbanity will be compared to the severity level of the swear words in order to see whether a difference can be observed. In general, the profane expressions “gay”, “homo”, and “kanker” are perceived to be the most severe with a general rating of 50%, 56% and 79%. A similar pattern is observed when considering the different degrees of urbanity with “kanker” perceived as being the most severe by all three groups (81%), (70%), and (81%) followed by “homo” (62%), (39%), and (60%). Finally, “gay” is considered quite severe as well with a high degree of severity assigned by the rural group (65%) followed by the urban group (56%), and the semi- urban group (38%). Notably, the most frequent profane expressions are considered the least severe, with less than 10% of the groups assigning a high severity to such swear words. Additionally, other profane expressions may be less frequent, but show a similar pattern in terms of being perceived as not severe; To exemplify, expressions such as "bitch", “damn”, and "Jesus/Jezus" were all coded as not severe by the majority, more than 65%, of the groups.

#### **4.5 The perceived usage in different social contexts**

The latter part of the questionnaire focused on eliciting the social environments in which the participants perceived to use profane expressions, as well as stating the perceived severity in such environments. The three most frequent social environments in which the participants perceive to swear the most are “when being with friends” (61%), “when they are playing games” (41%), and at

school, and more specifically, “before or after class” (36%). Using profane expressions, perceivably occurs the least “when in company of family” (5%).

Next, the survey aimed to show whether there is a difference in frequency or choice of swear word when considering the different social environments. There were only two environments in which the same profane words were expressed to some extent: the same swear words are used on social media and real-life (50%), and the same swear words are used at school and home (42%). On the other hand, most of the statements answered show that the opposite is true. To exemplify, 67% of the participants state that they use different swear words when in the company of friends in contrast within the company of family. Additionally, 48% of the participants show that they use different profane expressions at school compared to at home. These results can be further subdivided in terms of urbanity and socioeconomic status. Both urban, semi-urban and rural groups show that different expressions of profanity are used in different environments such as the home compared to school, and when in company of friends compared to in company of family. In line with the results presented above, the urban, semi-urban and rural groups use the same swear words on social media compared to a real-life situation. The socioeconomic status division yields similar results in terms of frequency and similarity in the use of profane expressions.

#### **4.6 The perceived levels of severity in relation to different social contexts**

In order to see how the perception of severity was marked in relation to the social contexts given, the participants also had to rank in which social environments the expression of profanity was perceived as the most severe. Strikingly, a majority of the participants (83%) perceived the profanity the most severe “when being alone”. Furthermore, “when in the company of friends”, the participants perceived the use of profanity as severe by 71%. Moreover, “playing a game” appears to bring about the third-highest number, namely 60%, in terms of severity.

In line with the findings of the questionnaire, severe swear words that were mentioned in the interviews were diseases such as kanker and tyfus as well as gendered expressions (e.g. homo)

whereas mild expressions of profanity included words such as shit, kut, oh mijn god, lul and what the fuck. In general, all participants agreed that your swearing behaviour is context- dependent, indicating that expressing profanity at home, alone or with friends is generally the most accepted. Another factor influencing the swearing behaviour of adolescents appears to be the feelings of stress and frustration. Most of the time, 'mild' profane words such as kut, shit and what the fuck are not considered as profane anymore. The participants account for this fact by stating that these words are used frequently, and these expressions are normalised within society. Finally, the majority of the participants believe that the meaning of the Dutch profane expressions is similar to the English counterparts. Therefore, the Dutch variant is used most often with some exceptions; trying to be funny and the English versions being more distant are reasons given for initially using the English variants. Finally, the interviewed adolescents perceive a swear word to be hurtful, negative, and a means to express that you are displeased about something.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter aims to summarise the main findings of this study and see whether the results relate to the findings of previous studies. Additionally, the limitations, as well as suggestions for future research, will be discussed.

### 5.1 Revisiting the research questions

The current study investigated the perception of frequency and severity of adolescents with regard to swearing behaviour. Additionally, this research examined in which social contexts adolescents perceive to swear the most frequently, and in which situations it is considered to be most severe to use profane expressions. In the field of sociolinguistics, studies have been conducted to quantitatively measure the differences in linguistic repertoires between different age cohorts synchronically and diachronically (Meyerhoff, 2011). This study took a few of these demographic measures into account, namely, socioeconomic status and urbanity, in order to measure the perception of frequency and severity of profane words amongst adolescents in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the different social settings in which profanity occurs was examined. First of all, the results of the observation will be considered before referring to the results of the primary tool, namely the questionnaire. Finally, the answers from the interview will be discussed in light of the previous literature to see whether there is a connection between their results and this study.

The results generated from the observation showed that there is a tripartition in the distribution of the quality of swear words concerning the degree of urbanity. The pupils from the urban area appeared to use profane words regarding sex acts, undesirable behaviour and excretion more frequently. In contrast, the semi-urban results showed a preference for genitals and diseases, and the rural group used swear words relating to religion and sexual attributed the most. On the whole, the quality of the profane words observed is in line with the categories defined by Pinker (2007), Rassin and Muris (2005), Wajnryb (2005), and Andersson and Trudgill (2007). A notable finding regards the actual frequency observed during these observations. Strikingly, the pupils at the

rural school appear to swear twice as much as the urban area, thus indicating that the rural adolescents use profanity the most.

Furthermore, the attitudes towards different profane expressions were measured, and the findings show a general tendency of acceptability in informal settings. In contrast, it is perceived as unacceptable when swearing is employed in the presence of family members or authoritative figures such as teachers. This marks the same distinction described by Mercury (1995), Johnson and Lewis (2010), Vingerhoets et al. (2013), Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Jay (1992). Finally, all groups shared the opinion that it is regarded as unacceptable to use profanity when the intention is to hurt someone's feelings or without an actual reason at all (Doherty et al., 2018).

Another tool used to elicit results was the questionnaire, in which socioeconomic status was determined as well as demographic factors such as age and the degree of urbanity. Additionally, the attitudes towards the perceived frequency and severity were examined when profanity would be expressed in particular social environments. Moreover, the reasons why profanity would occur and the degree of acceptability was assessed as well. Firstly, the results show that the main reasons for using profanity regard emotions such as being angry and the process of relieving oneself in situations such as when hurting oneself. These reasons appear to be a common theme in other studies (Jay, 1999; Nicolau & Sukanto, 2014; Vingerhoets et al., 2013). When considering the demographic factor of urbanisation, the findings yield similar results with one exception. The second-most common reason for the expression of profanity appears to be that the adolescents do not consciously distinguish between swear words and other expressions. Although this outcome is not found in the majority of the studies consulted, Beers Fägersten (2012) accounts for this by arguing that such expressions are unintentional.

Furthermore, Butler and Fitzgerald (2011) advocate that these occurrences can be accredited to slips or gaffes. In contrast to the suggestion that the profane words used most frequently are regarded as the most severe (Cameron, 1969; Jay, 1977), the results show a general pattern of most



frequently used profanities being regarded as the least severe. There is no significant difference observed in terms of the swear words chosen and the degree of urbanity.

From another perspective, the socioeconomic status was also deemed an important factor for the analysis of the distribution of profane words. In particular, the level of education and the occupation of the parents of the participants were considered when determining the socioeconomic status of a participant (Labov, 2001; Meyerhoff, 2011; Weber, 2012). A difference is observed in terms of the most frequent reasons given when socioeconomic status is concerned. On the one hand, all socioeconomic status groups chose the reason of anger as their dominant reason. On the other hand, the stratification of the other reasons results in a different order in different socioeconomic statuses, in particular the average socioeconomic status group. In the first place, the lower and higher socioeconomic status groups both register the feeling of hurting oneself and unconscious usage as their most frequently occurring reasons, whereas the average socioeconomic status group reverses this order. The frequency of the profane expressions yields similar results to the urban groups. However, a distinction is particularly significant between the lower socioeconomic status, who have chosen different frequently occurring swear words compared to the average and higher socioeconomic statuses. Finally, when considering the severity compared to the socioeconomic statuses, the lower socioeconomic status group perceives the profane expressions as the least severe, whereas the higher socioeconomic status group perceives profanity to be very severe. These findings are also underscored by Berk-Seligson and Seligson (1978), Jay (2000), and McEnery (2006).

Next, the questionnaire aimed to elicit the social environments in which the perception of acceptability was measured. Only two environments shared the same profane expressions used, namely social media and real life, and school and at home. In all other cases, the participants perceived to use different profane expressions in different environments. Most notably, is the division of profane words used in the company of friends versus the presence of a family member.

When the results are subdivided by the degree of urbanity and socioeconomic status, the same results are yielded with no significant differences observed. These findings support the theory that the expression of profanity is highly context-dependent in which a difference can be observed in behaviour in informal and formal settings (Fast & Funder, 2008; Jay, 1992; Jay, 2009b, Seizer, 2011; Stapleton, 2010).

## **5.2 Limitations and future research**

A few limitations should be noted when this study and its findings are considered. First of all, when considering the questionnaire, the distribution of the levels of education was not controlled, which resulted in an uneven distribution with the majority of the participants engaging in havo education. As a result, the relative frequency was measured, but especially the vmbo group had the least participants possibly indicating a less significant representation of the frequency and severity of the lower socioeconomic status. Additionally, more demographic and social factors could have been considered since the questionnaire generated many more results that could have been analysed, such as the division between different age cohorts and the gender of the participants. However, some social factors, such as house value, were impossible to determine in this anonymous questionnaire. Second of all, the number of observations, groups and the number of schools that were part of the pilot project could be expanded to analyse further the quality and actual observed frequency of the profane expressions. Such a project could elicit the differences between perception and actual usage of profane words amongst adolescents in the Netherlands. Moreover, the observations were not controlled in terms of the level of education. This could be added as a measure for future research in order to draw parallels between socioeconomic status and the degree of urbanity.

As may be well-known, due to the corona crisis, all schools closed as of the 16th of March 2020. Therefore, the interviews and the questionnaire were distributed and conducted online enhancing the total number of participants. However, due to these online methods, the participants that were interviewed might have felt awkward or more obliged to give socially acceptable answers,

because as a teacher I have experienced that students may not feel as free to give their opinion when in a private environment (e.g. the home environment). Furthermore, non-verbal communication is more difficult to follow and less visible for the participant. Unfortunately, due to these unforeseen circumstances, the trends observed in the interviews could have skewed results. Finally, much can still be explored in terms of swearing behaviour and Dutch adolescents. Possible future directions may include researching the neurological conditions of adolescents and the use of profanity, the role of profanity in (Dutch) media, and the differences between Dutch as a first and second language and the distribution of profane words.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study aimed to shed light on the perceived swearing behaviour of Dutch adolescents in secondary education in the Netherlands. In particular, the demographic factor urbanisation, and the sociolinguistic variable socioeconomic status were considered. Both the perceived frequency and severity were analysed with regard to the degree of urbanity, and one's assigned socioeconomic status. On the whole, the average and higher socioeconomic status groups perceived profane words to be more severe than the lower socioeconomic status group. Remarkably, the lower socioeconomic status group perceived to use profanity the least compared to the other two groups. There seems to be a discrepancy between the perception of adolescents and the definite frequency of profanity. The findings of this study concerning urbanisation suggest that one's situational context influences one's swearing behaviour. To exemplify, the pupils from the rural area were observed to use profanity the most frequently; the perception parameter also illustrates that the rural group perceives to use swear words the most frequently compared to the urban and semi-urban group.

Additionally, this study aimed to elicit the different social environments in which adolescents perceive to use profanity. Subsequently, the degree of acceptability was measured for the different social environments when considering profanity by means of measuring the severity adolescents perceive in such contexts. Adolescents tend to express different profane words in different social settings. This can be accredited to the formality of the situation and the relationship between the speaker and the receiver. Urbanisation and socioeconomic status are not noteworthy when the different environments are considered. The participants are most likely to swear in the presence of friends which may be related to the development of identity and the use of this linguistic marker to show a feeling of solidarity.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: The questionnaire

#### Sectie 1 van 9 introductie (introduction)

Iedereen scheldt wel eens, bijvoorbeeld als je boos bent of als je per ongeluk met je vingers tussen de deur komt. Soms gebeurt het zonder dat je er bij nadenkt. Hoe zit dat bij jou?

Voor ons afstudeeronderzoek van de universiteit Leiden, zouden we graag willen weten hoe jij hierover denkt. Je hoeft je naam niet op te schrijven, dus het is een anonieme vragenlijst. Zou je de vragenlijst zo eerlijk mogelijk willen invullen? Het duurt ongeveer 10 minuten om het in te vullen.

Het inleveren en versturen van je ingevulde enquête betekent dat je toezegt dat je mee wilt doen aan dit onderzoek en hiertoe toestemt.

Super bedankt!

*(Everyone uses swear words sometimes, for example when you are angry or when you accidentally get stuck with your finger between the door. Sometimes, it can happen subconsciously without you registering its use. How does this happen to you? For our thesis from the university Leiden, we would like to ask you how you think about this. You do not need to write down your name, so, it is an anonymous questionnaire. Could you fill in the questionnaire as honest as possible? It will take approximately ten minutes to fill in it in. Thank you so much!)*

*The return of your completed questionnaire constitutes your informed consent to act as a participant in this research.*

M. Hoogstad en A. Swillens

#### Sectie 2 van 9 Algemeen (General)

1. Ik ben een (*I am a*)

- man (*man*)
- vrouw (*woman*)
- Anders... (*other*)

2. In welke plaats woon je? (*In what city/place do you live?*)

3. Welke taal spreek je thuis? Je kan hier meerdere antwoorden kiezen. (*Which language do you speak at home? You can choose multiple answers.*)

- Nederlands (*Dutch*)
- Anders, nl (*other, namely*) .....

4. Hoe oud ben je? (*How old are you?*)

- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19

5. In welk leerjaar zit je? (*In what form/year are you in?*)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

6. Welk type school volg je? Je kan hier meerdere antwoorden kiezen als je bijvoorbeeld in een TL/HV brugklas klas zit. (*What kind of education do you follow? You can choose multiple answers when you are in a mixed first form such as TL/HV.*)

- Brugklas
- Praktijkonderwijs
- VMBO- B
- VMBO - K
- VMBO -G/TL
- HAVO
- VWO
- Anders, nl (*other, namely,*) .....

7. In welke plaats staat je school? (*In which city/place is your school situated?*)

8. In welke sector werken je ouder(s) / verzorger(s)(e.g. zorg, onderwijs etc)?

Je kan hier meerdere antwoorden kiezen. *(In which field do your parents/caretakers work (e.g. healthcare, education etc. You can choose multiple answers.)*

- Administratie *(administrative work)*
- Bouw *(construction)*
- Horeca *(catering)*
- ICT
- Justitie & Politie *(justice and police)*
- Landbouw *(agriculture)*
- Onderwijs *(education)*
- Toerisme en recreatie *(tourism and leisure)*
- Techniek *(technique)*
- Transport en logistiek *(transportation and logistics)*
- Zorg *(healthcare)*
- Mijn ouder(s)/verzorger(s) werken niet. *(unemployed)*
- Anders, nl *(other, namely,)* .....

**Sectie 3 van 9 Scheldwoorden (Swear words)**

9. Wat is volgens jou een scheldwoord? Omschrijf in je eigen woorden. *(What is a swear word according to you? Describe it in your own words.)*

.....  
.....  
.....

**Sectie 4 van 9 Waarom? (Why?)**

10. Geef aan waarom je scheldwoorden gebruikt.

Je kan hier meerdere antwoorden kiezen. *(State why you use swear words. You can choose multiple answers.)*

- Omdat ik me bezeer. *(because I hurt myself.)*
- Omdat ik boos ben. *(because I am angry.)*
- Omdat ik verdrietig ben. *(because I am sad.)*
- Omdat ik iemand wil beledigen. *(because I want to offend someone.)*
- Om erbij te horen. *(to belong to my group.)*
- Het gaat vanzelf, ik denk er niet overna. *(I do it automatically, I don't think about it.)*
- Anders, nl *(other, namely,)* .....

**Sectie 5 van 9 Welke scheldwoorden gebruik je? (Which swear words do you use)**

11. Geef van de volgende woorden hoe vaak je ze gebruikt. *(State for the following words how often you use them on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).)*

A. Bitch	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
B. Damn	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
C. Fuck	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
D. Fucking	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
E. Gay	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
F. Godverdomme/Verdomme	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
G. Homo	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
H. Jesus (EN)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
I. Jezus (NL)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
J. Kanker	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
K. Kut	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
L. O mijn God (NL)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
M. O my God/ OMG (EN)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
N. Lul	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
O. Shit	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
P. Slet	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
Q. Teef	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
R. Tering	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
S. Tyfus	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
T. What the fuck/ WTF	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak

12. Gebruik je nog andere scheldwoorden?

Als je ja invult, wil je dan bij anders invullen welke? (*Do you use other swear words? If you fill in yes, could you fill in which ones at "other".*)

- Nee (*No*)
- Ja, namelijk( vul in bij anders) (*Yes, namely, fill in your choice at other*)
- Anders, (*other,*) .....

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Sectie 6 van 9                      Jouw mening (*Your opinion*)**

13. Geef van de volgende scheldwoorden aan hoe erg je ze vindt. (*State for the following swear words how severe you think they are on a scale from 1 (not severe at all) to 5 (very severe).*)

A. Bitch	helemaal niet erg	0	0	0	0	heel erg
B. Damn	helemaal niet erg	0	0	0	0	heel erg
C. Fuck	helemaal niet erg	0	0	0	0	heel erg
D. Fucking	helemaal niet erg	0	0	0	0	heel erg
E. Gay	helemaal niet erg	0	0	0	0	heel erg

F. Godverdomme/Verdomme	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
G. Homo	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
H. Jesus (EN)	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
I. Jezus (NL)	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
J. Kankerhelemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg	
K. Kut	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
L. O mijn God (NL)	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
M. O my God/ OMG (EN)	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
N. Lul	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
O. Shit	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
P. Slet	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
Q. Teef	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
R. Tering	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	heel erg	
S. Tyfus	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg
T. What the fuck/ WTF	helemaal niet erg	0 0	0	0	0	0	heel erg

### Sectie 7 van 9                      Situaties (*Situations*)

14. Geef aan hoe vaak je scheldwoorden gebruikt in de volgende situaties. (*State how often you use a swear word in the following situations on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).*)

A. Als ik alleen ben (when I am alone)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
B. Bij mijn broer(s) en/ of zus(sen) (at my brother(s) and/or sister(s))	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
C. Bij familie (at family)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
D. Bij mijn ouder(s)/verzorger(s) (at my parent(s)/caretaker(s))	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
E. Met vrienden (with friends)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
F. Op school, in de les (at school, in class)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
G. Op school, voor of na les (at school, before or after class)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
H. Op social media (on social media)	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak
I. Sportclub	nooit	0	0	0	0	0	heel vaak

*(at the sportsclub)*

J. Thuis nooit 0 0 0 0 0 heel vaak

*(at home)*

K. Tijdens het gamen nooit 0 0 0 0 0 heel vaak

*(when I play a game)*

L. Tijdens het werk nooit 0 0 0 0 0 heel vaak

*(when at work)*

M. WhatsApp nooit 0 0 0 0 0 heel vaak

*(on WhatsApp)*

## Sectie 8 van 9

## Situaties (2) (Situations 2)

15. Geef van de onderstaande situaties aan of je het oké vindt om scheldwoorden te gebruiken. (*State whether you think it is okay to use swear words in the following situations on a scale from 1 (not okay at all) to 5 (totally okay).*)

A. Als ik alleen ben

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(when I am alone)*

B. Bij mijn broer(s) en/ of zus(sen)

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(at my brother(s) and/or sister(s))*

C. Bij familie

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(at family)*

D. Bij mijn ouder(s)/verzorger(s)

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(at my parent(s)/caretaker(s))*

E. Met vrienden

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(with friends)*

F. Op school, in de les

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(at school, in class)*

G. Op school, voor of na les

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(at school, before or after class)*

H. Op social media

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(on social media)*

I. Sportclub Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

*(at the sportsclub)*

J. Thuis Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

(at home)

K. Tijdens het gamen

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

(when I play a game)

L. Tijdens het werk

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

(when at work)

M. WhatsApp

Helemaal niet oké 0 0 0 0 Helemaal oké

(on WhatsApp)

## Sectie 9 van 9 Stellingen (Statements)

16. Geef bij de volgende vragen aan in welke mate je het eens bent met de stelling. (State for the following questions how much you agree with the statement on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).)

A. Ik gebruik dezelfde scheldwoorden bij jongens als bij meisjes.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use the same swear words when with boys and with girls.)

B. Ik gebruik net zoveel scheldwoorden bij jongens als bij meisjes.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use as many swear words when with boys and with girls.)

C. Ik gebruik dezelfde scheldwoorden bij mijn familie als bij mijn vrienden

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use the same swear words with my family and with my friends.)

D. Ik gebruik net zoveel scheldwoorden bij mijn familie als bij mijn vrienden.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use as many swear words when with my family and with my family.)

E. Ik gebruik dezelfde scheldwoorden op social media als in real life.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use the same swear words on social media and in real life.)

F. Ik gebruik net zoveel scheldwoorden op social media als in real life.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use as many swear words on social media and in real life.)

G. Ik gebruik dezelfde scheldwoorden bij mensen van hetzelfde geslacht, als bij mensen van het andere geslacht.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use the same swear words with people from the same gender, and people from the other gender.)

H. Ik gebruik net zoveel scheldwoorden bij mensen van hetzelfde geslacht, als bij mensen van het andere geslacht.

Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens

(I use as many swear words with people from the same gender, as people from the other gender.)

I. Ik gebruik dezelfde scheldwoorden op school als thuis.  
Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens  
(*I use the same swear words at school and at home.*)

J. Ik gebruik net zoveel scheldwoorden op school als thuis.  
Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal mee eens  
(*I use as many swear words at school and at home.*)



## Appendix B: The justification of the questionnaire

	Research Questions	Variables measured	Questionnaire questions
1	In what ways do urbanity and socioeconomic status influence the perception of frequency of profanity?	Perception of frequency	2, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16A, B, C, D, 13
2	In what ways do urbanity and socioeconomic status influence the perception of severity of profanity?	Perception of severity	3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J
3	In which different social contexts do adolescents perceive that they use profanity?	Perception of use	14, 16A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J
4	Are different levels of severity in terms of profanity perceived in different social contexts?	Perception of severity	15

## Appendix C: Consent e-mail parents

Geachte ouder(s)/verzorger(s),

In de afgelopen week heeft uw zoon en/of dochter mee gedaan aan een onderzoek voor een afstudeerscriptie van de docent. De leerling heeft meegewerkt aan een (online) interview over het gebruik van scheldwoorden onder jongeren. Dit interview is van belang voor het onderzoek om de redenen en situaties te kunnen beschrijven waarin Nederlandse jongeren schelden en wat voor hen het begrip schelden precies inhoudt. De resultaten zullen anoniem worden geanalyseerd en verwerkt. De interviews dragen dus bij als meetmiddel om conclusies te kunnen trekken over het scheldwoordgebruik onder Nederlandse jongeren. Deze afstudeerscriptie heeft als doel om te bekijken wat de invloed van de mate van stedelijkheid en sociale klasse zijn op het gebruik van scheldwoorden. Slechts een interview vraag bevat scheldwoorden om zo te kijken of jongeren Nederlandse en Engelse scheldwoorden als even erg ervaren of niet. Indien u niet wilt dat de resultaten van het interview van uw zoon en/of dochter worden gebruikt, vraag ik u om dit aan te geven voor 30 mei 2020 door een mailtje terug te sturen naar de afzender. Wij danken u alvast voor uw aandacht en benadrukken nogmaals dat er ethisch is omgegaan met de gegevens van uw kind. Het interview is dus anoniem en uit de scriptie is niet te herleiden wie mee heeft gedaan aan de interviews en waar zij vandaan komen. De afstudeerscriptie wordt geschreven voor de master *English Language and Linguistics* aan de universiteit Leiden en voldoet aan de ethische richtlijnen en eisen van de school en van de universiteit Leiden.

Hopende u zo voldoende te hebben

geïnformeerd. Met vriendelijke groet,

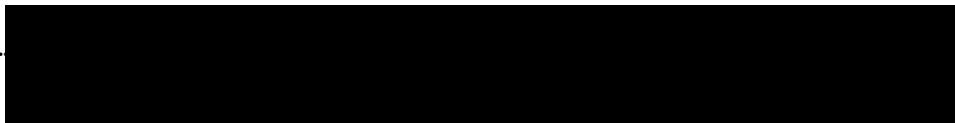
Maxime Hoogstad en Aukje Swillens-Marinus

## Appendix D: Consent form adolescents

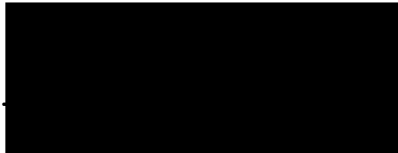
If you consent to being interviewed and to any data gathered being processed as outlined below, please print and sign your name, and date the form, in the spaces provided.

- This project - ‘The perception of profanity amongst Dutch adolescents in different environments, sociodemographic settings and from different socioeconomic statuses’ - is being conducted by the researcher from Leiden University.
- All data will be treated as personal under the 1998 Data Protection Act, and will be stored securely. Moreover, the data will be anonymised.
- Interviews will be recorded by the research teams and transcribed by an independent transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement with me.
- Data collected may be processed manually and with the aid of computer software.

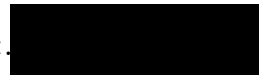
Your name:



Signature: ....



.....Date:



*\*Note: Your parents or caretakers have received an e-mail whenever you or your parents/caretakers feel uncomfortable with your participation. You can withdraw at any moment and your results will be deleted. Also, note that the answers you gave in the interview will be anonymous.*

*The researcher's contact  
details: Name: Maxime  
Valerie Hoogstad Email:  
[maximehoogstad@gmail.com](mailto:maximehoogstad@gmail.com)  
Leiden University*

## Appendix E: The interview questions

1. Which words would you mark as severe swear words and which ones do you consider to be 'mild'? (Can you explain?) (Can you give examples?)
2. Do you behave differently at home then, for example, at your sports club with regard to swearing? (How come?) (Can you give examples?)
3. What influences how often you swear? When do you swear the most and when the least? (How come?) (Can you explain?) (Can you give examples?)
4. Which of the following swear words would you say are not considered swear words any more and how come?  
Damn, fuck, gay, Jezus, o my God, what the fuck. (Can you explain?)
5. What is your definition of a swear word? (Can you give examples?)
6. Do you use the same swear words with boys and girls? (Can you explain why/why not?) (Can you give examples?)
7. Do you think there is a difference in severity between Dutch swear words and English swearwords? (e.g., Damn/Godverdomme, bitch-teef, slet/slut, Gay/Homo, Jesus (EN)/Jezus (NL), O my God/ OMG (EN), O mijn God (NL) (Can you explain why/why not?)
8. Do you think boys and girls can use the same swear words? Is it accepted?  
Is it accepted by you? (Can you explain?) (Can you give examples?)