

Uncovering Female Swearing Motivation and Its Role in Hardwicke's *Thirteen* (2003) Film

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Abstract. Swearing is traditionally associated with male characters [2], but *Thirteen* (2003) film challenges gender norms by depicting female characters, Tracy, Evie, Melanie, Brooke, and Astrid, frequently using swear words. This study aims to identify the types and purposes of swearing uttered by female characters based on Hughes' [9] and Rothwell's framework [10]. Using an observation [11] and a distributional method [12] in descriptive-qualitative research, the writer discovered 80 data on swearing uttered by female characters in the film. The writer found 31 data on swearing related to religion and taboo terms, 24 data on swearing related to personal background, 18 data on swearing related to excrement, 5 data on swearing related to excrement, and 2 data on swearing related to animal terms. Notably, the writer found no occurrences of swearing related to racism and sex used by the female characters. It is also found that female characters conduct swearing for varied purposes, including to provide catharsis, to raise attention, discredit, and to create interpersonal identification. In highlighting the female characters' swearing behaviors, the writer also offered insight into the swearing culture in the society, particularly used by American teenagers.

Keywords: Swearing, Types, Purposes, Female Characters, *Thirteen* (2003) Film

1 Introduction

Swearing is a part of profanity that has long been the subject of interest in linguistics. It is interesting to study because there must be certain reasons or motivations for someone swearing in their utterances [1]. In addition to daily usage, swearing can also be found in literary works, such as Hardwicke's *Thirteen* (2003) film. This film disrupts societal norms which observe that female characters in movies typically refrain from swearing [2] by presenting five American female characters, Tracy, Evie, Melanie, Brooke, and Astrid, frequently swearing due to social pressure they encounter.

The phenomenon of swearing is indeed interesting to study because of some previous studies, such as from Prayuda et al. [3], Sarnika [4], Garaga et al. [5], Hasanah et al. [6], Zelira & Fitrawati [7], and Wulandari, et al. [8] have analyzed swearing analysis using different literary works. However, there has been no prior swearing-analysis study that analyzed female characters in *Thirteen* (2003) film. Thus, this study intends to give an in-depth analysis of the types and the purposes of swearing uttered by

female characters in the film using the main theories, from Hughes [9] and Rothwell [10], while relating the findings to the American swearing culture.

2 Methods

In this research, the writer used a descriptive-qualitative method, with a non-participant observation method to collect the data [11] and a distributional method to analyze the data [12]. In using the observation method to collect the data, the writer applied three main steps, including 1) watching the film intensely and repeatedly, 2) paying attention to the females' utterances, and 3) taking notes on the use of swearing uttered by the female characters [11]. Furthermore, in applying the distributional method to analyze the data, the writer used several steps, including 1) classifying the data based on types and purposes of swearing, 2) analyzing the data by including the scene (dialogue and context), timestamp, and the interpretation of the data, and 3) making a conclusion [12].

3 Result and Discussion

In this subchapter, the writer wrote down the results and the discussion regarding the types and principal purposes of swearing uttered by female characters in Hardwicke's *Thirteen* (2003). The data are presented in the following table, and each of them will be analyzed using theories from Hughes [9] and Rothwell [10] as beneath.

Table 1. Types and Purposes of Swearing by Females in *Thirteen* (2003) Film

Types	Purposes					Total
	Raise Attention	Discredit	Provoke	Interpersonal Identification	Catharsis	
Racism	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religion Terms	15	-	-	-	16	31
Sex	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mental Illness	-	4	-	1	-	5
Personal Background	10	7	-	1	6	24

Animal Terms	-	1	-	1	-	2
Excrement	-	4	-	-	14	18
Total	25	16	-	3	36	80

Based on the table, there are 80 data on swearing, with religious swearing and the function of providing catharsis being the most dominant type and purposes of swearing uttered by female characters in the film [9] [10]. In detail, there are five swearing types, including 1) swearing related to religion and taboo terms, 2) related to personal background, 3) related to excrement, 4) related to mental illness, and 5) related to animal terms [9], that are used by female characters to achieve four major purposes, which are 1) to provide catharsis, 2) to raise attention, 3) to discredit, and 4) to create interpersonal identification [10]. These findings represent swearing motivation and swearing role in female characters' lives. There are several contexts in the film where each type and purpose of swearing is used, as can be seen in the following examples.

- (1) **Context:** In this scene from *Thirteen* (2003), the girls, Tracy, Melanie, and Evie, use religious and taboo language to express their shock and disbelief at the sight of something unexpected. It shows the three teenage girls having discovered a strange, mystical-looking chicken in a cardboard box, which one of the male characters, Brady, has brought to show them.

(55:32 – 55:43)

Brady : Hey, guys.
Tracy : **What the hell?**
Melanie and Evie : Oh, my God!
Brady : Yeah, Zen chicken.

Expressions that invoke religious figures or concepts, such as “**hell**,” are common for people, especially young people, to convey strong emotions and draw significant attention to a surprising or revelatory event [9]. The phrase “**what the hell**” is considered swearing related to religion and taboo terms as it refers to the belief in after-life existence. “**What the hell?**” uttered by Tracy Evie successfully attracts Evie and Melanie, preoccupied with their makeup, to move their attention to Tracy. They are also surprised by the chicken. In other words, Tracy’s use of swearing using the phrase “**what the hell**” can grab Evie and Melanie’s attention. By swearing, she intends to be noticed since her existence is initially ignored by those busy doing makeup [10].

The girls' use of swearing in the dialogue can be the depiction of American culture. Religious swear words reflect their prevalence in American popular culture and everyday speech, particularly among youth subcultures. The use of swearing involving religion or the divine often carries a sense of transgression, making it an effective tool for screenwriters to signal heightened emotional states and urgent situations [13].

- (2) **Context:** This scene explores the tumultuous relationship and experiences of two female characters, Tracy and Brooke. The argument becomes heated as Evie manipulates Brooke into thinking that Tracy is the one who gets her doing dangerous things like selling drugs. Evie provides all the evidence in Tracy's room while she still defends herself. Brooke is so upset. She defends Evie, and she starts to confront Tracy.

(1:31:02 – 1:31:08)

Tracy : It is none of your business, you fucking Frankenstein!
Brooke : This child is my business, **you** little **cunt**.

The term "**cunt**," which refers to a girl or woman who is annoying and stubborn, is used by Brooke to insult Tracy's character. The confrontational exchange between Tracy and Brooke, where they employ profanity and personal insults to discredit one another, is a prime example of how swearing is often used in American culture to express strong emotions, assert dominance, and escalate interpersonal conflicts [14]. The purpose of this swearing is to discredit and insult Tracy further into a mental breakdown. In this dialogue, Brooke is distraught with Tracy, and Brooke successfully delivers the swear word as Tracy starts feeling guilty and gives up aggressively defending herself.

- (3) **Context:** This scene depicts the situation when Tracy and Evie use drugs. They inhale something that causes them to feel drunk and unhinged. Evie begins to ask Tracy to hit her hard, and Tracy does in line with the given order. In the film, Tracy and Evie express that they cannot feel anything. This doubled their excitement under the influence of intoxicating drugs they were using.

(02:16 – 02:27)

Evie : Hit me really hard. Really.
Tracy : Ok, I am going to punch you.
Evie : Okay, go!
Tracy : **Oh, shit!**

Relating to the use of swearing, the term "**shit**" is an excrement term used by Tracy to express Tracy's amazement and excitement. It can be inferred that the word "**shit**" in this conversation is used to provide catharsis, not function to discredit others.

Catharsis refers to the function of releasing one's emotional burst [9]. In this case, Tracy expresses her excitement because she and Evie are already getting high due to the influence of using drugs. The use of swearing in this dialogue can also indicate how close Evie and Tracy are at that time. They have fun together to release all their problems for a while. This relates to a prior study which stated that the use of swearing by young people often includes emotional expressions and social bonds [15].

- (4) **Context:** This scene occurs when Evie answers Tracy's concern over Evie's closeness with the older man they met at the tattoo and piercing parlor. Evie answers Tracy's question almost immediately, and this surprises Tracy more. However, after briefly confirming that she has something going on with the old man, Evie returns her answer and addresses Tracy as an "**idiot.**"

(29:15 – 29:26)

Tracy : You never did anything with that crusty tattoo guy, right?
Evie : Yeah, he ate my pussy. I am kidding, **idiot!**

The term "**idiot**" is considered a swearing act related to mental illness as it refers to one's lack of intelligence. Evie uses this strategy to emphasize that it is Tracy's fault for not taking the joke from the beginning. However, in this situation, Evie does not mean to insult. Tracy is not an idiot, but this is how they show their annoyance toward each other because they are already close as best friends. Swearing related to mental illness can enable individuals to make jokes and present social bonds to their peers or particular social groups [10] [14] [15].

- (5) **Context:** This scene occurs between the main character, Tracy, and another female character, likely a peer or classmate. The conversation revolves around rumors and accusations related to Tracy's personal life and sexual experiences, with the other woman making claims about Tracy's alleged sexual encounters. Tracy, who does not accept the slander, is angry, and she swears at the woman, calling her a bitch.

(1:24:40 – 1:24:54)

Woman : You nasty. I hear that you got used.
Tracy : What? By who?
Woman : By Conrad on the stairs at Nona's party.
Tracy : That never happened.
Woman : That is not what Evie said. Are you fucking lying?
(while hitting Tracy's body).
Tracy : **Bitch**, you better not touch me.

In America, the use of the word "**bitch**," which means a female dog, is used to strongly insult people by comparing them to the animal or to attack someone's

background [9]. In the context of the dialogue, it is shown when Tracy is furious that the woman defames her. It clearly defines Tracy as wanting to insult that woman, implying that she is unpleasant. She wants to tell the woman that she also has power and that nobody can defame her as she pleases. In American culture, the use of swearing is often seen as a means of asserting one's identity, challenging power and authority, and expressing authentic feelings, even in social situations that may be inappropriate [16].

4 Conclusion

Hardwicke's *Thirteen* (2003) film can be evidence that females can also conduct swearing in their utterances. It is found that there are 80 utterances of swearing, with swearing related to religion and taboo terms and the function of providing catharsis being the most dominant female swearing behavior. It is also found that there are four major motivations for the female character swearing throughout the film, including providing catharsis, raising attention, discrediting others, and creating interpersonal identification.

In addition, the writer also discovered some particular findings that show implied jokes in the use of swear words by the female characters in the film. Terms such as “bitch,” “wussy,” and “idiot” are used by some female characters to refer to someone with whom they have a very close relationship. For example, in the film, it is found that Tracy and Evie swear to each other to show their intimacy as best friends. In this case, swearing is not used to discredit others directly, but they are used to present the solidarity of a friendship among individuals. The female use of swearing in this film can be the representation of American swearing culture. How swearing itself plays a role in the females' life as a tool to assert power, to cope with their struggles, to express severe frustration, and to present social bonds, is indeed common in American society, particularly in the younger ones of the same age. It is also common for screenwriters in American media and popular culture, including in this film, to highlight the dramatic impact of a scene by swearing.

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