

Strewth! Are Aussies the world's most virulent swearers?

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Australians are a nation of creative expletive users who take pride in bad language as part of their cultural identity.

'Suckhole', 'get rooted', 'no wuckers' and 'we're not here to f*** spiders' are some of the more modern colourful phrases identified as uniquely

Australian obscenities by the Australian National Dictionary Centre's Chief Editor, Dr. Amanda Laugesen.

Her new book, *Rooted*, an Australian history of bad [language](#) charts the history of swearing and how it was used to defy authority as well as oppress and control groups in Australia's history.

She said in our earlier history the four Bs - 'bloody', 'bastard', 'bugger' and 'bullshit' - were some of the rudest expletives one could utter and could earn you a flogging or a fine depending on which century they were used in.

Bloody was noted as "the great Australian adjective" in 1847 by an English visitor to the Australian colonies.

According to Dr. Laugesen, by the 1900s Australians were talking about themselves as swearers.

"In the middle of the 19th century there's a desire on the part of Australians to be respectable and shake off their convict past. But, late 19th century literature celebrates Australian cultural figures like the bushman and the bullock driver, both renowned for their swearing," she said.

"During the First World War, there are a lot of references to Australian soldiers talking themselves up as being much more creative swearers and more willing to swear than the soldiers of other national armies.

"Australian society forgives the soldiers for their bad language because of the hardship of fighting in the trenches. So, the experience of the war helps to cement the 'acceptability' of at least mild swearing, but it does depend on who's doing the swearing."

Dr. Laugesen found women and Indigenous people throughout history falling foul of Australia's obscenity laws, which she says were often used to control and oppress.

"On the one hand there were acceptable swearers—generally working men—but on the other it's unacceptable for working class women and 'larrikin roughs' out of work and on the streets to swear, so they get arrested on offensive language charges," she said.

"Most of the evidence of oppression of Indigenous people comes from the 20th century and into the 21st, where research shows, Indigenous people are disproportionately targeted by offensive language laws ."

Dr. Laugesen said Australian swearing has shifted from the religious blasphemy - 'crikey' is a disguise for Christ and 'strewth' is a shortening of god's truth—to the sexual and excretory including the proverbial 'shit sandwich'.

"There are a lot of Australian compound words using the word shit, such as 'deadshit', 'shit kicker', and 'shit-can'," Dr. Laugesen said.

"Another key finding highlighted in my book is the increased use of the word c***.

"The older generation is horrified at any prospect of this word becoming more acceptable, but anecdotally, it's being used more often by younger people and they sometimes use it as a jokey term of abuse—a bit like bastard.

"The c-word was used on Australian reality TV last year where one contestant on The Bachelor used the word 'dog-c***' to refer to someone who was betraying someone else.

"There was a lot of discussion around the broadcast of this word, but the commentary on social media found it more amusing than shocking, with one online comment noting: 'That's such an Australian thing to say'.

"It shows that shifts in attitudes to bad language are generational; certainly my mother-in-law would be shocked at hearing that word."

Rooted, an Australian history of bad language is published by NewSouth Books.

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