

The Big F



In the beginning there was **the act**. It was damn good fun but also somewhat scary. It struck fear and generated awe in those who experienced it. They surrounded it with mystery and circumscribed its use. When they later found a way to express themselves, they transferred the dread and awe to the word itself. The word closest to **the act** which reminds them most dramatically of their discomfort is the **Big F**, more commonly known as **fuck**.

My Word!

Whence came **fuck**? Nobody really knows. Some think it derives from the acronym for “For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge,” maintaining that it was a form of legal shorthand for recording cases of rape and sodomy. Some trace it to the Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony; others to medieval times. Further investigation, however, shows this hypothesis to be just so much **fucking** nonsense. There is no substantive evidence to support these claims, and it’s further unlikely the word was ever an acronym given the many variations in its spelling.

Others argue that the word comes from the sound of the act itself: in and out, in and out, in and out—“ph-ck,” “ph-ck,” “ph-ck”—sounds only a trained ear could distinguish.

There is no consensus among serious students of the language. They used to believe that the word originated with the French *foutre*, or the Latin *futuere*, a theory now pretty much discounted.

If etymologists appear somewhat aroused by the topic, it’s only because there are those who find **fuck**’s origins in the German *ficken*, to “strike, beat, knock, or bang,” a theory that converges nicely with the fact that men today **hit on** a woman (make sexual advances). Over the years, synonyms have included **thump**, **smack**, **batter**, **stuff**, **punch**, **ram**, **jolt**, **cramp**, **poke**, and **wallop**—leaving little doubt as to how men conceived **the act**. *Ficken*’s roots are the Indo-European *peik*, meaning “enmity, evil,

*I was walking along this fucking fine morning,
fucking sun fucking shining away, little country
fucking lane, and I meets up with this fucking girl,
fucking lovely she was, so we gets into fucking
conversation, and I takes her over a fucking gate
into a fucking field, and we has sexual intercourse.*

—An Australian “rigamarole” quoted by
Wayland Young in *Eros Denied*, 1968

