

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

May 3, 2018

**Zena Zedekiah**  
**via the FOI website**

Dear Zena Zedekiah,

regarding your Freedom of Information request titled "cunt" we collected the following information:

Cunt is a vulgar word for the vulva or vagina and is also used as a term of disparagement. Reflecting different national usages, cunt is described as "an unpleasant or stupid person" in the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, whereas Merriam-Webster states that it is a "usually disparaging and obscene" term for a woman or an "offensive way to refer to a woman" in the United States. The Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English gives "a contemptible person". In Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, it can also be used as a neutral or, when used with a positive qualifier (good, funny, clever, etc.), positive way of referring to a person. The earliest known use of the word, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, was as part of a placename of a London street, Gropecunt Lane, c. 1230. Use of the word as a term of abuse is relatively recent, dating from the late nineteenth century. The word appears not to have been taboo in the Middle Ages, but became taboo towards the end of the eighteenth century, and was then not generally admissible in print until the latter part of the twentieth century. The term has various derivative senses, including adjective and verb uses. Feminist writer and English professor Germaine Greer argues that cunt "is one of the few remaining words in the English language with a genuine power to shock."

Sincerely,

John Smith  
**FOI Manager**