

[LANGUAGE]

Profane Brain

THE WORLD OF TABOO WORDS

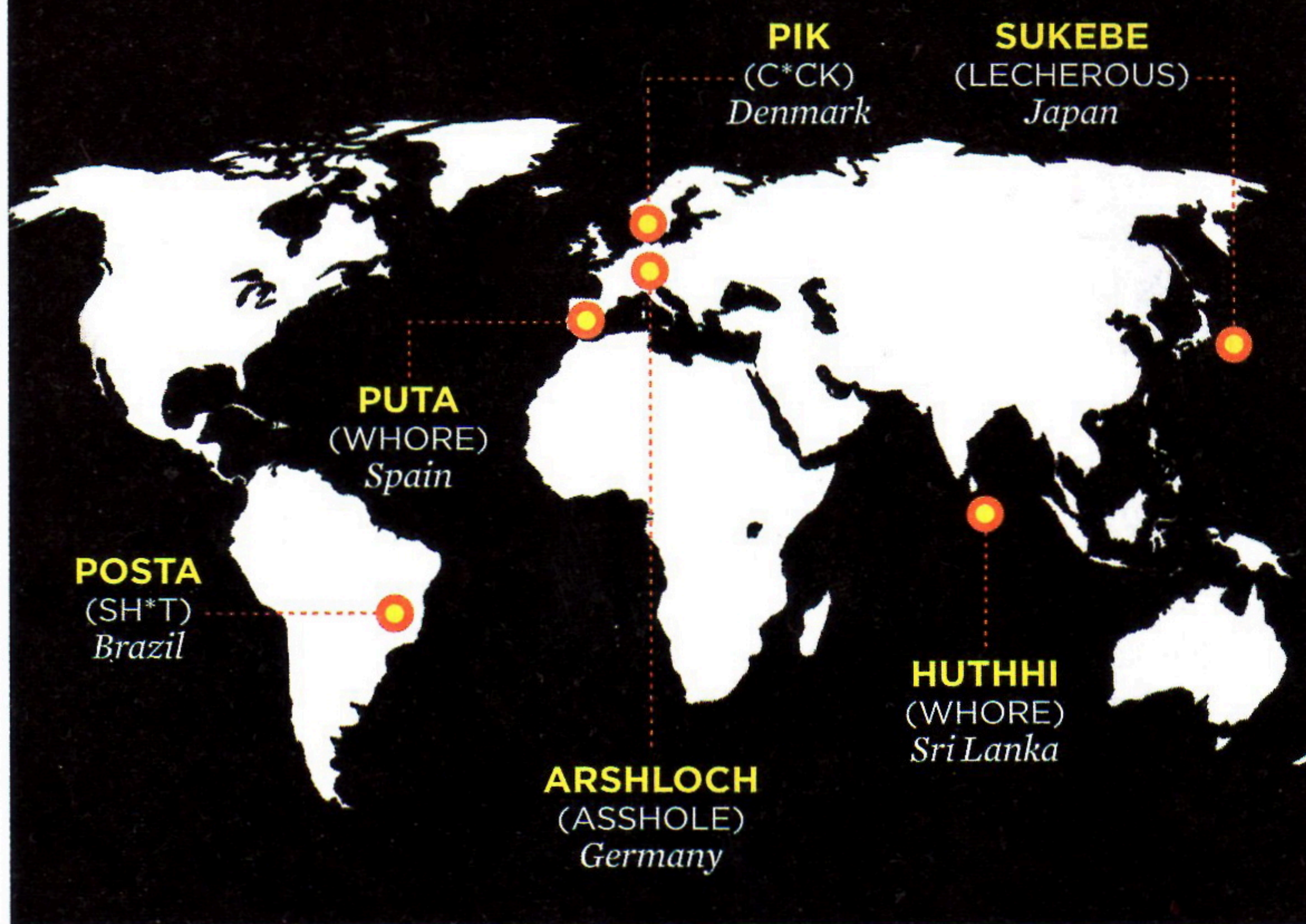
WHEN THE HEALTH CARE bill was signed into law, Vice President Joe Biden leaned over and whispered his true feelings into President Barack Obama's ear. Live microphones picked up his remark: "This is a big f*cking deal." The slip caused predictable buzz, ricocheting around the Internet. But profanity is an inescapable part of many cultures, and it even has some benefits. —Emily Anthes

"In certain trying circumstances, urgent circumstances, desperate circumstances, profanity furnishes a relief denied even to prayer."
—MARK TWAIN



SWEARING AROUND THE WORLD

Common curse words in different countries:



HOLY \$#!+ THAT HURTS!

A 2009 study revealed that **swearing may increase subjects' pain tolerance**. Subjects were asked to submerge their hands in a bath of ice water and keep them there as long as they could. When subjects were allowed to curse, they were able to keep their hands in the icy water longer.

80%

of swears uttered by Americans consist of one of these 10 words:

- 1 **F*CK**
- 2 **SH*T**
- 3 **HELL**
- 4 **DAMN**
- 5 **GODDAMN**
- 6 **JESUS CHRIST**
- 7 **ASS**
- 8 **OH MY GOD**
- 9 **B*TCH**
- 10 **SUCKS**

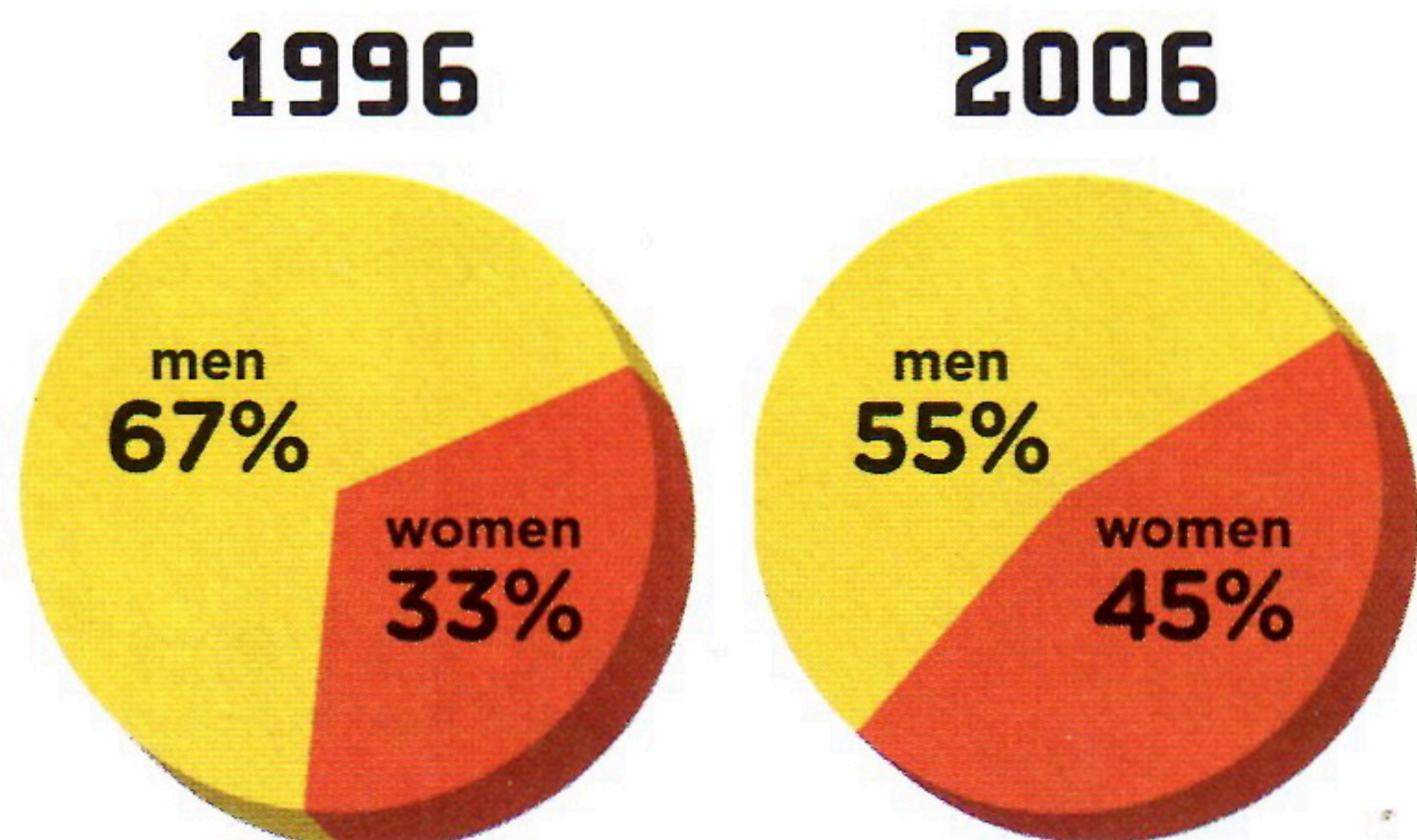
Together, f*ck and sh*t account for anywhere from a third to a half of all uttered profanity.

Cop-ro-la-li-a [kop-ruh-ley-lee-uh]:

Some 10 to 30 percent of those with Tourette's syndrome display the uncontrollable urge to erupt into profanity. In 2000, British researchers documented the case of a deaf man with Tourette's whose verbal tics were actually expressed in sign language.

BAWDY BROADS

The percentage of public swearing episodes by men and women:



Bleep!

Federal Communications Commission v. Fox Television Stations

In 2009, the Supreme Court found (5-4) that networks can be fined by the FCC for so-called "fleeting expletives" that may accidentally slip out during live broadcasts.

85

Number of taboo or swear words spoken, per day, by the average English speaker.

(Includes mild expletives such as "Jesus Christ")

HOT-BUTTON ISSUES

Every society and language ever studied has had taboo words. The words that become taboo in a given culture reflect that society's preoccupations. Extremely religious societies tend to have potent swear words derived from profaning God. Among groups that place higher value on women's honor, cursing is more likely to involve insulting someone's mother or sister. Meanwhile, some of today's most taboo words in the U.S., where race and sexual orientation continue to be hot-button issues, involve those concerns.