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Strumpets and Whores

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we are going to look at public discourse throughout the seventeenth century principally through the lens of two words which, on the basis of the investigations so far, we might reasonably conclude are associated with paid and transgressive sex in the period – *STRUMPET* and *WHORE*. In this chapter, we will consider the semantics of *STRUMPET* and the core semantics of *WHORE* as formed by consistent collocates across the century. In the following chapter, we conclude our analysis of *WHORE* and explore three other related words in the period *HARLOT*, *PROSTITUTE* and *JILT*.

To begin with, however, we will look for any of these words changing abruptly in frequency between decades, seeking to explain any examples of this that we find. Following that, in this chapter and the next we will go further and try to take, for want of a better phrase, the ‘pulse’ of the seventeenth century. In public discourse, what were the issues relating to these five words that mattered, how did they vary through the century and how might this help to explain any findings we may have about prostitution in the century? This exploration will be undertaken in the light of the discussion of prostitution in Chapters 2 and 3. Most of our analysis, as will become apparent, will centre around the word *WHORE* as this is the most frequent and most complex of these words. As the analysis of *WHORE* progresses in this chapter and the next, we will explore its relationship to its near synonyms. In doing so, we will also explore the use of *WHORE* as an insult.

An analysis of this sort is a very substantial task, requiring an analysis of a billion words of data. Reading through the entirety of the data and analysing it in detail is out of the question. It is for that reason that we will once again in this chapter use corpus techniques to paint a broad picture and then relate that back to the details of the corpus in the period, by concordancing and interpretation

in the light of historical evidence. Let us begin with what we might call the easier task – looking at changes of frequency of the words through the period.

This is something we explored to an extent in Chapter 4. We mapped out the frequency of words across the decades and, by the use of techniques such as candlestick graphs, developed a narrative surrounding individual words in the corpus. The analysis in this chapter will differ in that instead of taking what we might call a simple, descriptive approach to the data, we will begin by using inferential statistics to see if any of the differences we see in word frequency between decades are worthy of note.¹ We will follow that by using collocation to explore the meaning of the words we are focusing upon.

Let us begin by exploring word frequency between decades. In order to explore this we will use the keyword procedure, a common technique in corpus linguistics introduced in Chapter 1 of this book. Our approach to using keywords is to look at each decade in the EEBO corpus, comparing the decades pairwise. For each pair of decades we can then look at the words we have previously studied in Chapter 4 to see whether, in fact, any changes of frequency are so marked that they begin to characterize what public discourse around these words at the time was about, at least in part. If a keyword is positive in a period, it is a strong evidence that discussion of that topic was markedly increasing. If the keyword is negative then, contrariwise, it is evidence that the topic was discussed less than previously – whether because of aversion to the topic or lack of topicality, for example. Note that we use the word evidence here, not proof. An example of why one needs to be cautious was shown in Chapter 4 – some words decline because the word is going out of use, but the concept may still be in use, it is just realized by different words. So while topicality and ‘aboutness’ are usually the frame within which keywords are analysed, we must always be sensitive to other plausible explanations for what we are seeing.

With that introduction concluded, how did we set about looking at keywords in the century? As noted, we divided the corpus into decade-long chunks and compared them pairwise with one another using the Log Ratio statistic. The results of these keyword comparisons were then gathered and individual decades were searched for focusing initially on each of the words looked at in Chapter 4, Table 4.6,² that is, COURTESAN, HARLOT, JADE, JILT, NIGHTWALKER, PROSTITUTE, PUNK, QUEAN, STRUMPET, TRULL and WHORE. The main finding arising from this may seem quite negative – few of the words become keywords in the seventeenth century. Only two words, STRUMPET and WHORE, vary in their frequency sufficiently to register as keywords. We will investigate the behaviour

of these words shortly before shifting to consider collocation which will allow us to explore variation in a different way.

First, however, let us return to the negative finding and consider it more carefully. The most important thing about keywords that must always be remembered is that keywords are words which show a change in frequency – they are not words of high frequency necessarily. Just because a word is not key, it does not always mean that the word is infrequent. Indeed, in this case we know we are looking at words which are frequent. So words which remain relatively stable and frequent across a time period, when approached by keywords in the way we are using them, will not appear to be key at all, because their frequency is not varying sufficiently. Importantly, however, just because the frequency of a word is relatively stable, it does not mean that the use of that word is static – the word may maintain a relatively stable frequency through time but its uses in discourse and meaning may vary. So we should not conclude that no variation in word frequency is the same as no variation at all, as the collocation-based analysis of words later in this and the next chapter will show very clearly.

5.2 Strumpet and whore – keywords

We can now look at STRUMPET and WHORE. The easier of the two cases is STRUMPET. This is key at one point in the century, when the word declines markedly in usage in the 1640s relative to the 1630s.³ Why does this happen? Does it represent a change in the use of the word or does it simply mean that the word STRUMPET was used less, but its meaning remained the same? Collocation helps to answer this question. Below are the collocates for STRUMPET in the 1630s and 1640s.⁴ Collocates which appear in the 1630s but not the 1640s are emboldened. There are no collocates that appear in the 1640s but not the 1630s. Following each collocate is an indication of the frequency of that collocate (per ten million words) in that decade.

Collocates of STRUMPET in the 1630s: *a* (30.55), *an* (3.94), *common* (4.41), *her* (6.93), *his* (11.81), *she* (5.51), *thou* (3.78), *whore* (2.36), *wife* (3.15)

Collocates of STRUMPET in the 1640s: *a* (16.23), *common* (2.51), *her* (4.23), *she* (1.94), *whore* (1.6)

The first thing we should note is the general decline in any mention of STRUMPET is marked – there are 74.96 mentions per ten million of the word in the 1630s versus 37.15 mentions per ten million words in the 1640s. This suggests that the topicality of the word, relative to others, seems to have declined

between the two decades. In the context of the 1640s, a decade in which a Civil War rages, this relative decline in topicality is perhaps understandable – one assumes that the politics and military affairs of the period were more topical than discussions of strumpets. As the mentions of the word decrease, the word loses some significant collocates, notably *his* and *wife*. These collocates are associated strongly with discussions of men's wives, either in terms of how they are called strumpets for some transgression, or how they are contrasted, as models of virtue, with strumpets. This seems to be a discourse that becomes less salient in the written language. Alone, it may account for this decrease between the decades. One assumes it is topicality rather than any prevailing social trend that explains this decrease – it is hard to believe that there is a great difference between the 1630s and 1640s in terms either of infidelity or of the idea that wives should be sexually faithful. Certainly, none of the background provided in Chapters 2 and 3 would support the hypothesis that this change links to a significant social change.⁵

In the list, however, there is one further collocate worth noting which may more correctly be called a colligate as it seems to index a grammatical rather than meaning-based relationship. Nevertheless, it may have an interesting tale to tell about change – *thou*.⁶ The pronoun *thou* seems to be very strongly associated with certain genres. Looking across the century, it collocates with STRUMPET in three decades – the 1630s, 1670s and 1680s. On close inspection, *thou* seems to be limited by genre, at least with reference to its collocation with WHORE. In the three decades in which *thou* is a collocate of WHORE, it occurs overwhelmingly in religious writings (eighteen examples) and literary works (thirty-four examples) and especially in plays (twenty-nine examples). Only three examples of WHORE collocating with *thou* are in other genres. It is possible that it is the disappearance of one of these genres that accounts for the departure of the word *thou* from the collocate list for WHORE in the 1640s and 1650s. If one were to hazard a guess, it would be that the suppression of playhouses during the years of the Interregnum (1642–60) most likely accounts for the disappearance of *thou* as a collocate. We have seen in Sections 2.3 and 2.7.3 how the period of Cromwell's leadership proved challenging for both actors and playwrights. Some playwrights continued to write shorter pieces or plays that were intended for a private audience but there was an overall marked decline in the output of plays in the 1640s and 1650s. Unfortunately, a manual inspection of the data was necessary to determine these results – at the time of writing EEBO cannot be reliably searched for genre automatically; otherwise, it would have been possible to check to what extent the genres in question vary across the decades.

The question of whether the suppression in religious writing or literary works, principally plays, must thus rest upon the evidence presented in Chapter 2, not the corpus. However, Chapter 2 does provide relevant evidence – in Section 2.7.3 we outlined how plays were banned in 1642 and the playhouses closed in 1647. Given that this state of affairs persisted until the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the hypothesis that this change is caused by the decline of plays in this period seems both persuasive and plausible.

The keyword pattern for *WHORE* is much more varied. It is a negative keyword in the 1640s, 1650s and 1690s, but a positive keyword in the 1680s. Looking at what seems to be a relatively complex pattern of change, by comparison to *STRUMPET*, is more of a challenge. This challenge is amplified by the fact that *WHORE* not only varies in terms of keyness, it also appears to be linked to a major biblical figure, the Whore of Babylon, who is being used for allegorical effect in the writing of the time. Hence, before beginning to look at why the word shifts in keyness across the century, one needs to better understand how the word works across the century – what is its meaning and how, if at all, does its meaning or role in discourse shift. In this chapter, we will focus principally on establishing the stable elements of meaning attached to the wordform *WHORE* in the century. With this established we will return to look at how the word *WHORE* changes meaning in the century in the next chapter.

Yet if we are to look at meaning change at all we must answer a methodological question – how do you study meaning shift across a century?

5.3 Exploring long-term change

Our approach is as follows. Given that the keyness calculation is linked to decades in our analysis, we will use those decades as, admittedly arbitrary, units to organize the century. Taking a decade-long view of a word has the merit of yielding sufficient examples in each decade to allow an analysis of the word *WHORE*. As has been the practice in this book so far, we will use collocation to explore the word in each decade, organizing words into semantic fields. In doing so we use a span of ± 5 words and require the collocate to occur with the word *WHORE* at least ten times in the decade. Collocates are discarded from this analysis where i) the collocates are all drawn from one author; ii) the collocates are drawn from a number of authors, but one author predominates to the extent that if those examples are removed, the number of collocates remaining falls below the threshold used in the study; iii) the collocate is associated clearly

with two meanings and neither meaning, when disaggregated, achieves the threshold used in this study. The first condition which results in collocates being dropped is important – we wish to explore collocates which appear to have reasonable currency in the language in that decade. We are not interested in the idiosyncratic use of language by individual authors, no matter how important that author may be. One possible downside to such a decision is that we may miss the birth, so to speak, of an important collocate. One may imagine that an influential author, using a collocate frequently, may establish a collocate in the language as people follow their lead and adopt that collocate. So, for example, in the 1640s the word *fleshly* collocates with WHORE. It only does so, however, in one book written by Joseph Salmon, *Anti-Christ in Man*, published in 1647.⁷ It is the first time in the century that the word collocates with WHORE – yet there are only five other examples of *fleshly* and WHORE collocating in the remainder of the century. All of those come from the following decade in which the book *Mysterium Magnum* by Jakob Beohme, published in 1656, uses the collocate five times. Such a collocate then is of limited interest to our study – only one author (Salmon) uses it above the threshold we have set, while one other (Beohme) uses it below that threshold. If this was an attempt to innovate linguistically, it failed. An exploration of the collocates thus discarded in this study show that none of them led to innovation – they all had the limited impact of Salmon's *fleshly* + WHORE. Hence, we can safely set these collocates aside in this study of public discourse in general written English.

Another decision that requires some discussion before the analysis proper begins is the treatment of the Whore of Babylon. In Chapter 3, we have already noted the work of Freist (1995) who has explained how new life was breathed into the insult Whore of Babylon during the Civil War years – it was used by opponents of the Catholic Church to decry Charles I's apparent affinity with Catholicism (his wife, Henrietta Maria was a Catholic) and also by nonconformists to criticize the High Anglican Church. This may account for the peak in the semantic fields of WHORE in the Religion category in the 1640s and 1650s shown in Table 5.2.⁸ In our analysis the collocates associated with the WHORE are placed into one category, Religion, as they are clearly linked to one, admittedly complex, feature in the discourse. So, for example, collocates as diverse as *cup*, *dragon*, *drink*, *skirts*, *two-horned* and *waters* all fall into the Religion category as they are all part of the discourse surrounding the WHORE. There is no sense, in our view, of separating these words out into different semantic fields – as collocates of WHORE they all index the Whore of Babylon in the texts we are looking at. Hence the fact that cup is a drinking vessel here is irrelevant. The

key is that this is an object closely associated with the Whore. Also, the words are allegorical. The cup of the whore is not a physical object, imagined or real, except, perhaps, for people of faith. It is used in the discourse in an allegorical sense and all of the words in the Religion category work, in concert, to achieve allegorical goals, typically promoting anti-Catholicism, as the following example shows: 'The church of Rome should be the whore of Babylon ... out of whose cup the nations of the earth have drunken so many abominations, and that the Pope should be the lover and spouse of this adulterous and unchaste congregation.'⁹ The story of the Whore in this example is allegorical – her acts and degradation act as a parallel for the writer to those of the Catholic Church. The elements of the Whore's story are imbued with meaning in that context, helpfully spelt out in part in this example. Her sexual congress with many is likened to the Pope's relationship with many Catholics, a far from flattering parallel. Her cup is the vessel within which all of the perceived wrongs of the Catholic Church are stored and dispensed. Hence, the Religion semantic field is deliberately broad, as it relates almost exclusively to the Whore and the complexity of the allegory around the Whore warrants a broad field with many collocates within it. A literal interpretation of the words in this field would be entirely pointless as it would miss the true, allegorical meaning, being encoded by the collocates. Note, however, that we are not suggesting that religious concerns do not impact on other semantic fields. They almost certainly do, and as will be shown in Section 6.2, the indirect influence of the Bible on what was written at the time can at times be seen.¹⁰ However, as the Whore of Babylon is an allegorical character, deriving entirely from biblical sources, we set her aside in this analysis.

We also need to be clearer about semantic fields. They have been mentioned in the book a couple of times so far, but no detailed definition of them has been given. With semantic fields, we are placing words in the broad fields of meaning that they relate to – so, for example, we might place *cup*, *glass* and *mug* in the semantic field Drinking Vessels as the words all share this meaning. It is a process of hierarchically organizing meaning, bringing words together with similar meaning. When placing collocates in semantic fields, we explore the context in which that collocate occurs by looking at concordances of the collocate occurring with the word we are interested in. So, for example, if *stews* collocates with *whore*, we may wonder whether it relates to food or brothels. To determine this we explore through concordancing the contexts where *stews* and *whore* co-occur to discover the sense in which the word *stews* is being used with *whore*. On the basis of this exploration we can then determine the meaning that this collocation seems to select. The majority meaning selected in that context is

then used as the basis for assigning the word to a semantic field. Note, however, that if there is not one clear dominant meaning in that context, but two or more, this may lead to the collocate being assigned to more than one semantic field.

But where do the fields in our study come from? Our approach to deriving these was corpus driven – we looked at the collocates of the words we were interested in and, from those, we developed a set of semantic fields that seemed to account for the meanings these collocates express in combination with the words studied, in the corpus. However, before we made this decision – which was not taken lightly as such a process is labour-intensive – we explored the possibility of automating this process using an existing, predetermined, set of semantic fields. We explored whether we could reliably automate the classification of words into semantic fields by using a program such as USAS (Garside and Rayson: 1997) which claims to automate, or at least assist, this process. This could, in principle, be of help and there seems to be some evidence to show that the system works with some success on Early Modern English.¹¹ We were fortunate in that, when the corpus we are using in this book was constructed, it was run through the USAS system, hence each word had a semantic ‘tag’ – a code telling us which semantic field the word had been assigned to by the system – attached to it already. We began by looking through the data to assess how accurate the tagging of the data was. It was at this point that we encountered two problems which meant that the use of the USAS system, while tempting, was clearly inappropriate. The first problem relates to the worldview encoded in the USAS system. USAS provides a set of semantic fields which were crafted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This produces a terrible bias that it is difficult for the system to escape from – it imposes a worldview on the data from nearly four centuries later. For example, there is a semantic field of Electricity in USAS – yet this field, should it exist at all for the seventeenth century, is clearly far less important to it. Similarly, the semantic field relating to TV, Radio and Cinema is clearly irrelevant for the century. Contrariwise, there is only one semantic field for Religion in the USAS system, but religion is pervasive in the seventeenth-century worldview and deserves a much more detailed treatment than simply one label.¹²

The second problem is related. The worldview issue could be ignored to some extent if no words were assigned to the problematic categories. Yet the worldview bias in the set of fields used is also reflected in the words which those labels are applied to. The system seems to frequently make assumptions about the meaning of words which are inappropriate for the seventeenth century. For example, the word ‘articles’ in present-day English is usually given a semantic

label by USAS that identifies the word as being linked to newspaper articles. In the seventeenth century, this use of the word seems non-existent, with the word typically being used to refer to the core principles of systems – for example, articles of faith. Another example is the semantic field Cigarettes and Drugs – while the word SMOKE in the seventeenth century could be used to refer to smoking tobacco, the majority of the examples we looked at referred to things that emit smoke rather than the process of smoking tobacco. Other words assigned to this semantic field in the seventeenth century, such as PUFF, have no clear link to smoking tobacco or other substances in the language of the time. Similarly, *addicted* is assigned to this category, but the word seems to have nothing to do with substance dependence four hundred years ago. In brief, while an automated semantic analysis of our data would have proved of help, the system we had access to was clearly not suitable for use on seventeenth-century data. We are sure that, in time, a system will be developed which is sensitive both to the worldview and word meaning of the time. But for now we decided to rely on wholly manual semantic analyses.

5.4 In depth – WHORE

To study the word WHORE, we calculated the collocates of the word in each decade of the seventeenth century. As discussed, for each collocate we then looked at the concordances of the collocate and determined the principal meaning encoded by that collocate. This led to the collocate being placed into a semantic field. The semantic fields themselves can be further organized into one of three categories – semantic fields relating to grammatical relations that we may more properly call colligates (e.g. prepositions, wh-interrogatives), collocates in principle relating to the practice of prostitution (e.g. words for controllers of prostitutes) and those in the Religion category (words to do with the Whore of Babylon). We will focus only on the second category, setting aside collocates which were in the Religion category as the allegorical attack on the Catholic Church, while interesting, is not a central concern of this book. Similarly, we will only look at what might more readily be described as colligates, that is, words expressing a principally grammatical rather than meaning relationship, where it is revealing to do so. This brings us to the start of the analysis. To begin with, we looked at the semantic fields associated with WHORE in each decade. The question we wanted to explore was to what extent the meaning of the word was stable over time – if new semantic fields are being associated with or decoupled from the word

then this is taken as strong evidence that the meaning of the word is changing. Table 5.1 gives an overview of the word in the century. In each case the semantic fields associated with the word are listed with a number in parentheses following indicating how many collocates fall within the field in that decade.

Table 5.1 shows what we may call the overall 'shape' of the meaning of *WHORE* across the seventeenth century. In the table a core semantics for the word which

Table 5.1 The semantic fields of *WHORE* by decade

Decade	Semantic fields attached to <i>WHORE</i>
1600s	Criminality (1), Gender Identity (1), Insult (2), Location (1), Near Synonym (2), Purchase (3), Family Relation (1), Religion (23), Undesirable Characteristic (3)
1610s	Acting (3), Controllers (2), Criminality (2), Gender Identity (2), Honesty (1), Insult (1), Near Synonym (1), Purchase (1), Family Relation (1), Religion (20), Undesirable Characteristic (1)
1620s	Acting (4), Controllers (1), Criminality (3), Gender Identity (1), Honesty (1), Insult (2), Purchase (2), Family Relation (4), Religion (23), Undesirable Characteristic (2)
1630s	Age (1), Acting (1), Controllers (3), Criminality (4), Gender Identity (2), Honesty (1), Insult (2), Near Synonym (3), Purchase (2), Family Relation (2), Religion (7), Title (1), Undesirable Characteristic (3)
1640s	Acting (2), Controllers (4), Criminality (4), Gender Identity (1), Honesty (1), Insult (1), Near Synonym (3), Purchase (3), Family Relation (2), Religion (41), Undesirable Characteristic (3)
1650s	Acting (3), Controllers (1), Criminality (3), Disease (1), Gender Identity (1), Honesty (1), Illegitimacy (1), Insult (3), Intercourse (1), Location (1), Matrimony (2), Near Synonym (3), Purchase (2), Family Relation (2), Religion (55), Undesirable Characteristic (5)
1660s	Age (1), Acting (2), Controllers (2), Criminality (4), Disease (2), Falsehood (1), Gender Identity (1), Honesty (1), Insult (3), Matrimony (1), Metaphor (1), Near Synonym (2), Pity (1), Purchase (2), Family Relation (2), Religion (38), Simile (1), Undesirable Characteristic (2)
1670s	Age (1), Acting (1), Controllers (2), Criminality (2), Disease (1), Gender Identity (2), Honesty (1), Illegitimacy (1), Insult (2), Near Synonym (2), Pity (1), Purchase (1), Family Relation (3), Religion (31), Title (3), Undesirable Characteristic (2)
1680s	Age (2), Allow (1), Acting (4), Controllers (2), Criminality (4), Exclamation (1), Falsehood (1), Gender Identity (2), Honesty (1), Illegitimacy (1), Insult (4), Know (1), Location (1), Near Synonym (1), Pity (1), Profession (1), Purchase (3), Family Relation (2), Religion (30), Title (2), Undesirable Characteristic (1)
1690s	Age (1), Acting (6), Controllers (6), Criminality (6), Gender Identity (2), Honesty (1), Insult (8), Punishment (2), Purchase (4), Family Relation (2), Religion (27), Simile (1), Title (1)

endures across the century is observable. Throughout the century the Religion category is associated with the word. Yet a second use of the word is also present throughout the century – the social process that we call prostitution seems to be clearly attached to the word WHORE – crucially, whores are purchased, for example. Table 5.2 recasts the data in the first table in terms of consistency of collocation, as discussed in Chapter 1, showing the consistent, initiating,

Table 5.2 The semantic fields of WHORE by decade over the century

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90		Nature of collocates
Criminality	1	2	3	4	4	2	4	2	4	6	10	Consistent
Gender Identity	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	10	Consistent
Insult	2	1	2	2	1	3	3	5	4	8	10	Consistent
Purchase	3	1	2	2	3	2	2	1	3	4	10	Consistent
Family Relation	1	1	4	2	2	2	2	5	2	2	10	Consistent
Religion	23	20	23	7	41	55	38	31	30	27	10	Consistent
Acting	0	3	4	1	2	3	2	1	4	6	9	Consistent
Controllers	0	2	1	3	4	1	2	2	2	6	9	Consistent
Honesty	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	Consistent
Undesirable Characteristic	3	1	2	3	3	5	2	2	1	0	9	Consistent
Near Synonym	2	1	0	3	3	3	2	2	1	0	8	Consistent
Age	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	5	Transient/Initiation
Title	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	2	1	4	Transient/Initiation
Disease	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	3	Initiation and Transience
Illegitimacy	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3	Transient
Location	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	Transient
Pity	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3	Initiation and Transient
Simile	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	Transient/Initiation
Falsehood	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	Transient
Matrimony	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	Transient
Adultery	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Transient
Allow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Transient
Client	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Transient
Exclamation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Transient
Know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Transient
Intercourse	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Transient
Metaphor	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	Transient
Profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Transient
Punishment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	Transient

terminating and transitory collocates in the century. In this case, however, rather than looking at the persistence of individual collocates, we are looking at the persistence of collocates within a field across time.

This table is ordered by type of collocation because this is the structure that the discussion of the word will now follow. In this chapter we will explore the core semantics of *WHORE* which seems invariant across the century as evidenced by its consistent collocates. The discussion of the initiating and transient collocates of the word will take place in the next chapter.

In the consistent semantic fields, we argue there is, setting religion aside, a consistent representation of real, rather than allegorical, whores. The construction of these whores is that they are associated with Criminality, Gender Identity, Purchase, a process whereby people Act as whores and those who are Controllers of whores. They are also associated with a series of Undesirable Characteristics. Where there is an association with a positive attribute, Honesty, this is negated in context. We also see that there are Near Synonyms of *WHORE* that are often mentioned in close proximity to *WHORE* itself.¹³ In addition, whores are often mentioned with reference to a Family Relation such as *sisters*. Given the representation of whores as discussed so far, it is unsurprising to discover that to call somebody a whore is an Insult that is used across the century. Let us flesh out this construction of the whore in seventeenth-century texts in these semantic fields.

5.4.1 The price of a whore

First of all, let us consider the Price field as evidence that what we have is a meaning of *WHORE* that is consistently associated with some type of transaction for sex. The most consistent collocate in the Purchase field is *HIRE*, which occurs as a collocate in all decades bar the 1610s and 1630s. *PRICE* is also a consistent collocate in this field which initiates in the 1630s, appearing in each decade thereafter. Both of these collocates indicate quite clearly that what a whore is offering she is offering for pay – there is a price to be paid for the services given. A third collocate, which is transient, is *KEEP*. This occurs from the beginning of the century until the 1640s, is in abeyance from the 1650s to 1670s, and returns in the 1680s and 1690s. This roughly corresponds with what historians tell us about changes in public morality as a result of Puritan influence during the period of Cromwell's leadership. It is interesting that the collocate *KEEP* does not reappear earlier in the century, in the 1660s or 1670s, when an atmosphere of sexual liberation at court was thought to have spread to wider society (see Chapter 2).

Conversely, the circumstance of men keeping whores does not appear to have fully re-entered public discourse until a few decades into the Restoration of the monarchy. We would argue that the keeping of a whore is as transactional as hiring a whore – the price paid is the whore's keep, as was shown in Chapter 2, Section 2.5. If the price is not paid, the whore is not kept. Some may 'keep their whores, under a yearly rent'¹⁴ while others 'keep a Whore, paying only Ten Shillings and Six Pence'¹⁵ though men are warned that the whore is unlikely to be faithful, and that if you keep a whore you 'Must chain her, or she'll trade with forty more'.¹⁶ The last point, once again, accords well with what historians have described, that kept women may have had many keepers (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5). There is no doubt then, that throughout the century, the word WHORE refers to women who provide a certain form of entertainment in return for money or, perhaps, a payment in kind.

5.4.2 Whores and criminality

The association of whores with illegality in the century is marked in the Criminality field. While consistent, a close inspection of collocates reveals, however, a change across the century, as will be shown.

In the Criminality field there are criminals (KNAVE, THIEF, ROGUE) and criminal processes (STEAL). However, the focus is much more on criminals. KNAVE is a collocate in the 1600s, and then from 1620 through to the 1660s after which it terminates as a collocate of WHORE. Interestingly, as KNAVE terminates, ROGUE initiates in 1660 and remains a collocate through to the end of the century. THIEF is the most consistent collocate, starting in the 1610s and continuing as a collocate throughout the century. Let us first consider knaves and rogues. Given the pattern of distribution of each, it would be easy to conclude that *rogue* displaces *knave* but that changes little – we simply have a new word indexing the same meaning. That is not the case – a look at the top twenty collocates of KNAVE and ROGUE reveals that this shift indicates a real change in the type of criminality associated with WHORE. In the top twenty collocates for KNAVE, no less than eight of the collocates relate KNAVE to criminality. In each case knaves are associated with trickery or deceit through words such as, *bribing*, *cheating*, *cogging* and *cozened*. Yet ROGUE does not link to criminal acts. Rather it links strongly to criminals, with six of the top twenty collocates linking to words such as *cut-purse*, *footpad*, *Tory* and *villains*. There is a further notable change – the words most frequently associated with ROGUE in the top twenty collocates of the word are words associated with begging. Seven of those collocates fall in this category,

including *beggars*, *runnagate*, *vagabond* and *vagrant*. From being associated through *KNAVE* with those who undertake criminal deceit, *WHORE* shifts in the latter half of the seventeenth century to be associated with poverty and thieves through *ROGUE*. This is a sustained shift, as noted. So the association with thievery created by the consistent collocate *THIEF* is amplified from the middle of the century by a shift of collocate from *KNAVE* to *ROGUE*. In that process, a link between poverty and thievery is also introduced. The transient collocate *STEAL* from the 1640s is entirely in harmony with this strong link to thievery.

5.4.3 Whores and gender

The category of Gender Identity needs little discussion: *woman* is a collocate of *WHORE* in every decade of the seventeenth century – there is no other gender identity marker, for example, *man*, *girl* or *boy*. This very clearly defines the gender identity associated with *WHORE*. This is reinforced if we look at the colligates of *WHORE* and explore the pronouns colligating with the word. There are two consistent colligates – *her* (which occurs with *WHORE* in every decade but one) and *she* which is a colligate of *WHORE* throughout the century. This gender identity is formed in large part because of the numerous references to the Whore of Babylon, but it extends to non-biblical settings also. *WHORE* is generally the referent of the pronoun, as in the following example: ‘The whore speaks first, her argument doth tend To prove her calling lawful; and the end Will make it good: it is honest downright dealing To use my tail, to keep my hands from stealing.’¹⁷ One last point can be made regarding the word *she*. This often appears in the expression *she + BE + a + whore*. The pattern occurs 75 times in the seventeenth century and never seems to be anything other than an insult or accusation, as in the following examples ‘my wife cuckolds me, she is a whore, a whore, a whore’; ‘she is a Whore and her child a bastard’ and ‘Go tell thy mistress Whore, she is a Whore.’¹⁸ This pattern seems suggestive of an insult, a topic we shall return to shortly.

5.4.4 Playing the whore

The semantic field of Acting is linked to one consistent collocate – *PLAY*. If a woman plays the whore,¹⁹ she either acts in the fashion of a whore or is claimed to act in that fashion. The only other collocate in this category which occurs more than in a highly transient way, *MAKE*, is present in the 1610s–1620s and the 1640s–1650s. It is interesting to contrast the two words. The consistent collocate

seems to give some agency to the woman becoming or acting as a whore – it is her decision to play, yet that decision may be driven by external factors or some goal, as in the following examples: ‘for gain to play the whore’, ‘some forced are, By being poor and very bare, To play the Whore’ and ‘And what do many fair Ladies do, but play the Whores with themselves, and commit Uncleaness’.²⁰ In these examples it is also possible to see themes coming together – i) engaging in sex for gain; ii) poverty, crime and prostitution; iii) the strong association of being a whore with being a woman, as we may expect from the patterns of collocation discussed thus far. It may also be possible to link this pattern with the belief prevalent at the time that women were sexually incontinent, as discussed in Chapter 2 – they sought transgressive sex and took agency to engage in it.

The collocate *MAKE* on the other hand may initially suggest women are being coerced or tricked into transgressive sex, as did happen (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6). A close examination of the results reveals that many such examples can be found, as in ‘To make a whore of my daughter, is no hurt to me’ and ‘That Thief has sold her then into some Bawdihouse. Was this your project for her education, To steal my child to make a whore of her?’.²¹ However, it must be noted that *MAKE* is also used in a large number of examples in which the Whore of Babylon is made naked. While these are not numerous enough to force the categorization of *MAKE* into the Religion category, they are frequent enough to greatly increase the collocation of *MAKE* with *WHORE*. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that there are examples in the data where a female is coerced into prostitution, though by comparison to *PLAY*, this use of *MAKE* with *WHORE* is marginal. In short, there is more of a discussion of women playing the whore rather than being made whores in the century.

5.4.5 Facilitators of prostitution

One category of actors associated with prostitution that we have only touched upon lightly in the corpus analysis in this book so far are those who control or facilitate prostitution as evidenced in the Controllers semantic field. The analysis of *WHORE* forces us to consider this group, as they collocate consistently, perhaps unsurprisingly, with the word. The only consistent collocate in the field is *BAWD*. The transient collocates are *PANDER*, *WHOREMONGER* and *PIMP*. Of note is that *PIMP* becomes a collocate in the 1690s – while lack of data prevents us from exploring the hypothesis, it is tempting to conclude that what we see in 1690 is the initiation of *PIMP* as a consistent collocate. While we cannot explore that hypothesis, we can note that *PIMP* increases in usage through the century, as the

following figures of instances of PIMP per decade, normalized per ten million words, show: 1.7 (00s), 6.1 (10s), 1.4 (20s), 6.9 (30s), 16.3 (40s), 7.3 (50s), 15.8 (60s), 14.8 (70s), 22.3 (80s), 24.8 (90s). Setting this speculation aside, what does the consistent collocation with BAWD tell us? In order to answer this question we need to understand the word. To gain a better sense of it we analysed the top twenty-five collocates of BAWD (excluding spelling variations). This reveals that bawds were thought to be the near equivalent of panders and pimps, near synonyms with which they collocate. They also have a role to play in facilitating sex, as evidenced by the collocates *broker*, *brokers* and *procurers*. The sex they are facilitating is with *wenches* and these wenches are realized through the collocate WHORE and a series of near synonyms of the word: *courtesans*, *harlot*, *harlots*, *prostitute*, *punk*, *strumpet* and *strumpets*. It is implied that they live off the proceeds of the transactions that they set up as they are *parasites*. They are closely linked with criminals in the form of the word *ruffians* and undesirables such as *fornicators* and *usurers* – they are accused of *harbouring* criminals and young ladies who have had babies out of wedlock, and are *receivers* of such people into places out of the reach of the law. It probably follows that they are also collocated with places of detention (*bridewell*) and forms of punishment (*carted*). Finally, there is a suggestion that bawds are female in that it is suggested, through the collocate *midwife*, that bawds are female. On the basis of this exploration of BAWD, it is hard not to conclude that, in public discourse, a bawd served a purpose not dissimilar from a modern madame or pimp, facilitating the relationship between a client and a sex worker and profiting from that relationship. As is still the case with such people, their role takes them into a socially marginalized space in which they may be associated with criminality of various forms.

This analysis is striking in how it parallels what historians have said about bawds, as reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.7.1. All of the features of bawd found through collocation align well with the discussion of bawds in that section. Interestingly, the near synonymy of BAWD with PIMP is also best understood in the context set by that section – bawds and pimps fulfilled similar social functions, hence the basis for their near synonymy is rooted in the social reality of the lived experience of bawds and pimps, a reality well reflected in public discourse of the time.

5.4.6 Whores and the undesirable

This association with social marginalization continues when we look at the Undesirable Characteristics semantic field. Many of the collocates in this field

appear as collocates fleetingly. Some recur briefly (*arrant, impudent, painted, swear*) while others are entirely transient, collocating for one decade only before disappearing (*base, crafty, filthy, lust, notorious, shameless*). It is interesting to note that the decade which has most transient collocates evidenced within it is the 1650s, which shows WHORE collocating with *arrant, filthy, impudent* and *swear*, that is, four out of the ten transient collocates. Before leaving the discussion of transient collocates in this category, however, it seems wise to pause over *swear* and to highlight another set of collocates, those which appear in the last two decades of the century associated with WHORE. The collocate *swear* occurs in the 1640s and 1650s, then vanishes only to return in the 1680s and 1690s. In the 1680s and 1690s it joins other collocates which are key only in those decades – *drink* and *lewd* as well as one collocate, *drunk*, which is not evidenced elsewhere in the century. In short, while we do not have data to project into the eighteenth century, there is some evidence that the word WHORE is becoming associated at the end of the century with a different set of undesirable features than earlier in the century. Transient collocates such as *arrant, base, crafty, filthy, painted* and *shameless* all occur pre-1680. After 1680 the new collocates are *drink, drunk, lewd, lust, notorious* and *swear*. A strong link to sex, drink and bad language seems evident in the last two decades of the century, while it is absent in the first eight. It is doubtful that this reflects a change in the social practices associated with whores – it seems absurd to suggest that prior to 1680 whores had nothing to do with sex, drink and bad language. What seems more likely as an explanation is that what is viewed as problematic shifted in public discourse at this point leading to features that had always been associated with whoredom, but not salient in discourse, to be forced into prominence. On the basis of the historical background provided in Chapter 3, the most likely explanation for this is the rise of moral reform movements in response to the perceived libertinage of the Restoration, in particular the Society for the Reformation of Manners. The work of Shoemaker (1999) in particular, as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.4, explains why and how such a pattern should be observable in the data. Note also that this concatenation of issues is also supported by the study of the language of the Society for the Reformation of Manners in McEnery (2005). While causation is always difficult to prove, we would argue that there is a strong case, based on previous studies, to suggest that what we are seeing here is a shift in public discourse brought about by, or at least in harmony with, moral campaigning groups such as the Society for the Reformation of Manners. The linking of bad language, sex and alcohol was precisely the type of associations they, and other moral reformers, were campaigning to bring about. While McEnery (2005)

shows the process at work in the writings of the reformers, this study shows, we would argue, its powerful effect on public discourse and the representation of whores in public discourse.

The one consistent collocate in this category is the word *common*. This raises the question of what is being foregrounded – are whores ‘usual’ or of low social standing? An exploration of the collocate *common* with WHORE reveals a striking result – it is powerfully linked to the L1 position. The fixed expression *common* WHORE accounting for 71 per cent of the collocates of *common* with WHORE, with the fixed expression occurring 296 times in 231 texts throughout the century. This leads us to refine the question to ask, what does the fixed expression *common* WHORE denote? Again collocation is helpful here – we can explore collocates of fixed expressions as easily as we can those of individual words.²² The collocates of *common* WHORE reveal it to be one linked, predictably perhaps, with those on the social margins in much the same way that WHORE is – *common* WHORE collocates with criminals (*pick-pockets*), beggars (*wanderers*), those controlling or facilitating the sex trade (*bawds*) and others engaged in the same activities (*harlot*, *prostitute*). The talk is not of the whore as ‘usual’, but, rather, seems to be about how they are typically of low social standing. The following quote, in which whores are likened to a toilet (*Jakes*), shows the low social standing of whores in public discourse:

A Prostitute or Common Whore, is a Creature in the form and shape of our mother Eve, but of far more impudence, for as Eve desired to hide her nakedness, this covets to discover it, making a Trade of lust, and a pastime of incontinence. A painted Iesabell peeping out at her polluted window, with a nod or beckon to allure the simple; and shamelessly saluting those she neer saw; and may be compared to a Jakes, which every rogue uses for necessity, and then abhors it.²³

The only ordinariness here about the *common* WHORE is that she is routinely associated with the marginalized and despised by the mainstream.

It is interesting, and perhaps telling, to note that this analysis of *common* once again parallels well with the analysis of the word in the writing of the Society for the Reformation of Manners by McEnery (2005: 160–4), though in this case the collocate predates the writings of the society, so there can be no suggestion that the society brought this collocation into being. The analysis also links in well with the discussion of the origin of whores in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, in which a powerful link between low social standing, economic deprivation and prostitution was established. The discussion of common whores in Section 2.1 does not sit as easily with this analysis – though the ambiguity regarding the

payment or otherwise to a common whore certainly permits that this analysis is not inconsistent, potentially, with that outlined in Section 2.1. This analysis of *common* WHORE also links to the discussion of the Apprentice Riots in Chapter 3, Section 3.3. The impoverishment that those riots brought to whores, though satirized at the time, must have made the position of the socially and economically marginalized worse.

5.4.7 Whores and honesty

The Honesty semantic field is generated by a word which frequently collocates with WHORE throughout the century – *honest*. While this appears positive, in the text it is subject to a variety of plays on words – an honest whore is ‘a poor whore’, as if to suggest the essence of being a successful whore is dishonesty; an honest whore is prone to change as she may be ‘persuaded by strong Arguments to turn Courtesan again’; only disfigurement might stop a whore, for of honest whores there ‘live none but honest whores with a pox’; in short, it was thought ‘to be impossible, an honest whore.’²⁴ The words *honest* and *whore*, when collocating, are brought together for effect – the honest whore is a contradiction in terms for many writers and as such is used as a literary device.

5.4.8 Whores and the family

What of the consistent relationship in the data between family relatives and whores in the Family Relation category? There is one consistent collocate in this category and it brings with it, potentially, a metaphor. The consistent collocate is *wife*. When collocating with WHORE, the predominant sense that is attached to WHORE is not literal – it is most often that a wife who has been unfaithful is being accused of being a whore. The use of the word as an insult was noted in Chapter 2 where we were told that a woman’s sexual reputation was crucial to her standing in society. The collocate not only draws a parallel with the actions of a prostitute, the intention also verges upon insult, meaning that this collocate could, arguably, be cross posted into that category too, as the following examples show: ‘his Wife had plaid the Whore with another Man before his Marriage to her’,²⁵ ‘My wife is a whore, I’ll kiss her no more’ and ‘My Lord, you are a Rogue, your Wife’s a Whore, and your Children are all Bastards.’²⁶ Consequently, the presence of this category is indicative more of issues of fidelity in the home rather than prostitution as such, that is, another variety of transgressive sex.

5.4.9 Insults: When is a whore not a whore?

When it is a metaphor

The potentially insulting use of *wife* with WHORE brings us to the last consistent semantic field of WHORE, Insult.²⁷ It is a matter of some planning and fortune that this comes last for, as a category, it needs some careful justification. That the word WHORE could be used as an insult, as has been shown already, is not in doubt. What is more contentious is the question of which words should be placed within the category. As noted already, *she* is closely linked to the formation of insults involving WHORE (and other words for that matter). It is entirely plausible that other pronouns, in particular *you*, are also used. However, our lexical approach to this analysis allows us to note this while also accepting that a pronoun such as *you* is not inherently insulting. It is simply a pronoun that may be used to insult yet is also more commonly used for a host of other purposes. This is in contrast to a word that is the sole consistent member of this category – CALL.

CALL, in the sense of ‘to label’, appears to have a negative discourse prosody, indicating insulting usage, hence when linked to WHORE it may better be defined as ‘to label with the purpose of insulting’. Relying on the examples around WHORE may allow us to make that claim – but such uses of CALL are highly likely to be linked to insulting. A wider question to consider is whether CALL generally had a negative discourse prosody in the seventeenth century. It need not necessarily be the case that all uses of CALL are insulting – one might call somebody a saint, for example. However, to establish whether it is the pattern CALL+WHORE that has a negative discourse prosody or whether CALL carries this burden of meaning typically anyway is clearly linguistically important.

To explore this we began by looking at the word CALL in the seventeenth century. The word occurs 268,664 times in the corpus, so examining all examples of the word is quite impractical. Hence we explored a random sample of four hundred uses of the word looking not for where somebody is attributed a proper name through *call* (e.g. ‘His mother said that she would call him John’), but for examples with an attribute or with a noun that links them to an activity – this is the sense of call we are exploring (e.g. ‘I will call you dishonest’ or ‘I will call you a whore’).

What did we find? In the sample, there were sixteen uses of *call* with the definition we were interested in. All were linked to negative concepts, with people being called such things as *absurd*, *fool*, *jealous*, *liar*, *monstrous*, *traitor*, *unclean* and *ungrateful*. So, while it is almost certainly the case that in a larger sample we may have seen some positive examples, it appears that there is good

evidence that to call somebody something is an inherently insulting act because of the discourse prosody of *call* – it seems it will typically introduce something that is insulting to be called.

We decided to explore this a little more deeply by looking at the pattern *call+him* and *call+her* in the data. This allowed us to narrow our search a little and get out examples which more clearly met the sense of *call* we were exploring. The results provided further evidence in support of the hypothesis we had developed. We looked at two hundred examples of each pattern and found that *call+her* yielded twenty-six relevant examples, while *call+him* yielded forty-five examples. In each case, while we did find some examples of positive labelling, the labels being applied were overwhelmingly negative – *call+her* introduced twenty-three negative labels (e.g. *Babylon, dog, harlot, rogue, whore, wine bibber*) while *call+him* introduced thirty-seven negative labels (e.g. *devil, liar, monster, son of a whore, worm*). So it seems that this sense of CALL is imbued with a negative discourse prosody through collocation in the century as it is used to insult. It is a consistent collocate of WHORE throughout the seventeenth century as it is used to insult women by calling them *whore*, relying on two wordforms in particular, *call* and *called*, to achieve this goal. Further evidence of the insulting nature of being called a whore comes from another collocate in the Insult field, *like*. This is a collocate which, like many others, attaches to WHORE in the 1660s, being a collocate through the 1670s and 1680s, hence matching our criteria for being an initiating collocate. It could be that the word is being used to express approval – ‘I like whores’. It is not. It is used quite consistently to introduce a simile, a likening of somebody to a whore with the intent of insulting. It is a pattern repeated with STRUMPET (with which *like* collocates in the 1600s, 1610s, 1620s, 1650s, 1660s and 1670s) and HARLOT (with which *like* collocates in the 1600s, 1610s, 1630s, 1640s, 1650s, 1680s and 1690s). So all of these near synonyms can be used with *like* in a simile to insult.

Demonstrating the use of *like* as a simile reveals two things in the data – first that a simile can be used to insult. One might just imagine examples saying somebody suffered stoically like a whore, for example, which might, conceivably, be viewed as a compliment. Yet the data does not bear this out. The purpose of using *like* with WHORE or one of its near synonyms to form a simile was to insult, as is clear in the following examples: ‘Like an harlot drunk in a common Inn, or a frantic whore in an open market, she prostrates her self to every passenger’; ‘old errors are like old whores, that is, the more to be abhorred’ and ‘Why is thy beatiful Maiden-body, polluted like a strumpets, and prostituted’.²⁸ Yet notice the second function of the simile – while saying something is like something,

there is a tacit assumption that the things are not, in fact, the same. Hence, an unfaithful wife who is said to act like a whore, strumpet or harlot is not any of those things. She is identified as having some properties in common with them, in this case what is perceived as sexual incontinence.

Some modern examples can help illuminate the argument. Consider the following utterances from the British National Corpus: 'That old woman looks like a witch', 'Your life is an illness, you old witch' and 'You used to have a story book when I was a kid, there was a witch called Jenny Green Thing'.²⁹ In the first example, a simile is used to liken a person to a witch. In the second, it is asserted that the person is a witch, but this is merely an insult, the person is metaphorically being associated with the properties of a witch. In the final example, there is a reference to a literary witch. In neither of the first two examples is it actually believed that the person being likened to or referred to as a witch is, in fact, a witch. Rather, the association with a witch is drawing attention to some features that the person shares in common with a witch – this is an unflattering process, hence it is an insult. We see the same process in the seventeenth century around HARLOT, STRUMPET and WHORE. Women who are not, for example, those who have sex for money are likened to such people or asserted to be such a person by way of an insult. Yet we should not conclude, especially in the case where the extension is metaphorical, that the writer actually intended to claim that the target of their ire was a person who was an actual whore, that is, somebody who matched fully the core definition of WHORE outlined in this chapter – a woman who took money in exchange for sex. Consider this example: 'Come you are a whore, and have abused my honest bed; I'll have you before the Justices to be punished for thy offence'.³⁰ In this example, taken from a play, a man has been accidentally cuckolded by his wife who thought him dead. The wife has not been engaged in transgressive sex in return for pay, she has simply taken another lover, assuming her husband dead after he has been absent for seven years. His use of *whore* is insulting, but he is not suggesting she has been having sex with many men for money. He is, however, insulting her by calling her *whore*, drawing on the transgressive nature of the sex that whores engage in to draw a metaphorical link to his own wife's behaviour. The Insult category for WHORE and its near synonyms generally works in this way.

Another category issue is worthy of mention – the example above, *son of a whore*, shows evidence of a multiword unit being used as an insult. This phrase (and *sons of whores*) emerges in the 1660s, at which point the word *son* collocates with *whore* in this phrase. It is then a consistent collocate until the end of the century and hence is a strong candidate for being labelled as an initiating

collocate in the Insult category, which is where we have placed it in this analysis. One interesting feature of *son of a whore* is that, while *whore* seems to be an exclusively female insult when used in a structure such as *you whore*, *son of a whore* extends the negative associations of WHORE to a male target, bringing a wealth of meaning with it including, presumably, illegitimacy. Unwanted pregnancies outside marriage, as noted in Section 3.2, were closely associated with prostitution.

Finally, as the century progresses, beginning in the 1660s, the Insult category attracts another initiating collocate – DAMN. The use of this word to amplify an insult needs no extensive justification. One hypothesis we should dismiss, however, is that DAMN initiates as an insult in general at this point in the history of the language, that is, it initiates as an insult at this point, linking itself first to WHORE. If we look at the distribution of the word *damned* through the century, we see no evidence that the word sprang into being in the 1660s – in the corpus its frequency varies between 41.35 and 26.57 words per million across the century. Yet the word need not be an insult – we need to explore whether the word's association with insult started in the 1660s, previous to which it was used in a religious sense only. A quick test of this was carried out whereby we looked at *damned* in the first decade of the 1600s. This yielded 2,368 examples. If the hypothesis is right, we should have seen no examples of *damned* as part of an insult in this data. While it is true that the majority of examples in the data show *damned* being used in a religious sense, there are clear examples of *damned* being used to amplify an insult in cases such as the following one from 1607: 'Into a house among a bawdy crew, Of damned whores; I there's your whole delight: Let purse and time go which way twill for you, Bus me sweet rog till moneys all gone quite.'³¹ There is no overt religious framing of this use of the word, and it seems it is being used here in an insulting rather than religious fashion. This is a good example because, as well as showing the use of *damned* in an insult, it also attests that whores could be the target of the word many years before it became a collocate of the word. What happens in the 1660s is that it becomes a frequent part of insults aimed at whores.

The discussion of insults begs a question – how often is a word like WHORE used to refer to a woman, imagined or otherwise, engaged in transactional sex as opposed to being used in some non-literal way, for example, to besmirch a woman or to refer to a woman engaged in transgressive but non-transactional sex? We have already seen, in Chapter 2, Section 2.1, that historians such as Gowing (1993: 3) have argued that the term *whore* did not necessarily carry implication of payment in early modern England. It would clearly be very

difficult to analyse every use of the word in the seventeenth century to ascertain the truth of this, though the collocation analysis alone would cast doubt on the claim. So to approach this question we proceeded by taking a random 5 per cent sample of uses of the word *WHORE* from each decade. We looked at each example and categorized it either as i) relating to a biblical allegory (typically the Whore of Babylon); ii) either a woman, imaginary or otherwise, engaged in transactional sex or the process of purchasing or seeking such sex; iii) the use of the word in some non-literal sense, typically as an insult or as a reference to a woman engaged in transgressive sex that is not transactional; iv) as being ambiguous – it is on occasion difficult, in context, to disambiguate ii and iii; v) other meaning, where the word does not fit categories i-iv, that is, examples where *whore* is a person's surname. What did these samples show? Table 5.3 gives the numbers of examples falling in each of the five categories – the percentage of all examples in that decade that this represents is shown in parentheses after each number for ease of comparison across the columns. In each decade, the most frequent category is emboldened.

While admittedly based on a sample, the figures here seem revealing. If we focus upon the top ranked category in each decade, we see that the use of the word *WHORE* as a religious allegory is dominant in most of the century, as the collocation analysis suggested. It is interesting to note that there seems to be shifts in the selection of the meanings through the century – the non-literal and literal uses rise, while ambiguous references also rise. The rise of the non-literal can, in part, be explained once again by collocation – insults fall within this category and, as the use of the word to insult rises, so too do the number of instances of the word falling in this category. The surge of ambiguity

Table 5.3 Different uses of *WHORE* sampled across the century

Decade	Religion	Literal	Non-literal	Ambiguous	Other
1600s	26 (42%)	18 (29%)	12 (19%)	6 (10%)	0 (0%)
1610s	29 (39%)	14 (19%)	13 (17%)	15 (20%)	4 (5%)
1620s	34 (49%)	17 (24%)	8 (11%)	10 (14%)	1 (1%)
1630s	14 (18%)	33 (42%)	12 (15%)	19 (24%)	1 (1%)
1640s	14 (18%)	29 (37%)	16 (21%)	18 (23%)	1 (1%)
1650s	90 (51%)	12 (7%)	22 (12%)	50 (28%)	3 (2%)
1660s	68 (51%)	14 (11%)	28 (21%)	19 (14%)	4 (3%)
1670s	46 (36%)	12 (9%)	22 (17%)	46 (36%)	2 (2%)
1680s	51 (30%)	26 (15%)	33 (19%)	57 (34%)	3 (2%)
1690s	26 (23%)	29 (26%)	31 (28%)	21 (19%)	5 (4%)

is also of interest – though the explanation for this is more difficult to posit. Textually, there is no clear evidence in each of these cases to ascribe the use of the word to the literal or non-literal categories, though this is always where the ambiguity lies. In each case it could well be that a broader social context at the time may have disambiguated these uses. Or it could be that the ambiguity was productive – people were actively choosing not to disambiguate for effect, suggesting transgressive sex may have a transactional element thereby, for example. This would certainly have led to a more potent insult. Speculation aside, what the table shows us is that the analysis of the word here is quite in line with the analysis of insults presented in this section – there is a literal meaning for the word from which ambiguous and non-literal meanings proceed and gain their effect, especially in the context of insulting. Historians who dispute the word *whore* having any financial implication are probably correct with respect to the data they examined, but wrong when it comes to the language in the century in general. Gowing (1993), for instance, has primarily made use of data taken from the consistory court, London's main church court. These cases were dealing with sexual insults – hence we might expect to find exactly what Gowing found, the use of the word *whore* as an insult, not as a literal reference to prostitution. Yet outside of this genre this is not the case.

This example shows the advantage of looking at large language corpora, composed of a range of genres, when assessing word meaning. It also illustrates why, in Section 1.4, we said that we wanted to avoid an over-reliance on language in a legal context and to explore language in general. Polysemous words can have strong preferences for appearing with specific meanings in certain genres or in certain modes of communication (e.g. speech or writing). If we only look at that one genre, or mode of communication, then we run the risk of only viewing a subset of the word's range of usages. With reference to insult, consider the word *pig* in present-day English. If one looks at the spoken section of the British National Corpus, the word *pig* appears most frequently as an insult (as suggested by the collocate *ignorant*). If you look at the same word in the written section of the corpus, then the word often refers to the animal (as suggested by strong collocates such as *warty*, *bellied*, *sty* and *suckling*). In this case, the mode of production is key to separating out two contexts in which two distinct, but related meanings, are preferred. The same appears to be true of *whore* in the seventeenth century – in certain contexts it has a strong preference to appear as an insult. As noted in Section 5.2, in our data we found a genre that seems to develop a strong preference for using *WHORE* as an insult: plays. If we had only studied plays, it may be that we would have come to a similar conclusion to Gowing. However,

as Table 5.3 shows, when a wider range of texts are considered, a wider range of meanings of *WHORE* emerges, including what we term the literal meaning of the word, a person paid for sex.

This study certainly establishes that we should expect literal and non-literal meanings of *WHORE* to be well attested throughout the century in the corpus. So it is not the case when we look at the data in the corpus that what we are seeing is the word *WHORE* used simply to denote non-transactional transgressive sex. We have good cause to believe, on the basis of this analysis of samples of data, that we are seeing collocates relating to what we might call transactional sex as well as collocates which refer to non-transactional transgressive sex as well as non-literal uses of the term used with the intent of insulting.

In the following chapter, we will consider the initiating and transient collocates of *WHORE*. We will then return to a semantic field which is consistent with *whore* but which has not been discussed in this chapter – Near Synonyms.