

CHEEKY BEHAVIOR: THE MEANING AND FUNCTION OF 'FARTLORE' IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

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Whether it is due to social taboos about bodily functions or sheer ingenuity, *flatulence* has well over a dozen common terms associated with its occurrence: passing gas, breaking wind, letting one rip (or go), cutting the cheese, busting ass, pooting, tooting, foofing, fluffing, puffing; folk retorts that mask the anxieties caused by flatulence through euphemistic annotations also exist, such as “dropping a bomb,” “making a stinker,” “cooking some eggs,” “baking brownies,” “making an air biscuit,” “stepping on a duck,” “cracking a boom-boom,” or “rolling out some thunder.”¹ Regardless of the fact that flatulence is a universal bodily production, the public discussion of its occurrence is a forbidden social taboo; as Josepha Sherman and T.K.F. Weisskopf point out, the aforementioned genteel euphemisms “emphasize its unsuitability as a topic of polite adult conversation” (1995, 55). Still, *farting* (as the passing of flatulence is most commonly referred to in American culture) is a part of our daily lives as well as our folklore — so much so in fact that the term “fartlore” has emerged to refer to the folklore of flatulence.²

Fartlore research has appeared sporadically in children’s folklore scholarship, but in nearly every instance the collected materials are a mere footnote in comparison to the other topics reported upon. Likewise, most existing collections are descriptive rather than analytical, and they insufficiently explain the meaning and function that flatulence-themed folklore has in the lives of children, adolescents, and adults. This begs the question: beyond their face value, what do the flatulence-themed components of folklore *mean* when enacted in games, songs, humor, beliefs, or verbal art? More importantly, what *purpose* do they serve in society and why?³

Using an interdisciplinary framework drawn from psychoanalysis, folkloristics, and sociology, this essay seeks to elucidate the means by which children and adolescents attempt to circumvent, challenge, or cope with adult authority in their confrontation of social taboos while establishing their own identities. Through a survey of historical and contemporary texts, I interpret the projective functional purpose and meaning of fartlore in the social worlds of pre-adults. In doing so, I contend that the data I have accumulated represents a distinct genre within children’s and adolescent folk culture in which folklore about bodily functions — especially those with scatological themes — is ubiquitous. In addition, my study of fartlore intends to demonstrate that fartlore is a subversive and compensatory genre that is a reflexive manifestation of unspoken societal attitudes and anxieties (see Sidoli 1996). Ethnographers should consider the value of collecting folklore for the broader interpretation of gendered and life-course experiences (including in national contexts) and especially those areas that dwell outside of mainstream scholarship boundaries in their future research endeavors.

When I was a graduate student at Indiana University, I wanted to complete my Master’s thesis on latrinalia in the twenty-first century. I was quickly shut down

after receiving the explanation that my proposed topic was (and I quote), “too unsanitary.”⁴ Clearly, the topics of flatulence and scatology trigger highly emotional responses in the public sphere! In an example outside of my own personal experience, the children’s book *Walter, the Farting Dog* (Kotzwinkle and Murray 2001) — which tells a rather innocent story about a loveable, adopted dog that has a chronic flatulence problem — was banned from numerous public school libraries in Wisconsin in 2009. Some public schools have openly discussed banning children from farting (Mills 2008), and a twelve-year old boy was even arrested recently for deliberately “breaking wind” during class.⁵ Why all the fuss?

Everybody farts. On average, men fart fourteen to fifteen times a day and women do it an average of eight to nine times a day en route to creating over a quart of gas (Dawson 2006, 1). Stemming from swallowed air, food, and other natural body processes, the accumulation of internal gases eventually passes through the rectum, whereupon the anal sphincter vibrates and creates the distinctive sounds associated with flatulence (Alvarez 1942). A combination of gasses are present in *flatus* (the medical term for gas expelled from the digestive tract), which is composed of approximately 79% nitrogen, 17% oxygen, 4% carbon dioxide, and small traces of hydrogen and methane. Of that, less than 1% of the gas in the average fart contains the unpleasant smell associated with its passing; this includes small amounts of ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, indole, skatole, volatile amines, and short-chain fatty acids (Rabkin and Silverman 1991, 8, 14). Before I scare anyone off, I would like to contextualize my rationale for including this information.

It is understandable that one may be “grossed out” by the physiological processes behind flatulence. We strive to avoid discussions about flatulence *when* we fart; if we break wind, we might pray that it does not make a sound or smell that will draw attention to us; we may simply avoid acknowledging that a fart has taken place, or if we do, we might pass the blame onto the family pet⁶ or to a peer with diffusing remarks or posturing; undeniably, some people will endure great physical discomfort in order to withhold flatulence or acknowledge anal productions in public. As such, it is not surprising to note the lack of social awareness or interest about *how* we fart, much less (and more curiously) *why*, *when*, and *where* we do it. Despite its proclivity for creating anxiety, flatulence is a pervasive part of folklore — beginning with learned behaviors during childhood and reinforced by parents and society throughout the life course — and as such, the subversive and compensatory nature of fartlore serves as an excellent entry-point into a deeper understanding of the myriad ways that people — especially children and adolescents — navigate and respond to the pressures of not only their bowels, but their social worlds. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find someone over the age of ten who was unfamiliar with the enduring children’s song, “Beans, Beans,” which features stanzas such as:

Beans, beans, they’re good for your heart
 The more you eat, the more you fart
 The more you fart, the better it feels
 Beans should be served at every meal!

And:

Beans, beans, the musical [or magical] fruit
 The more you eat, the more you toot
 The more you toot, the better it feels
 So serve some beans at all your meals!

Even though a significant portion of fartlore plays on the social anxieties stemming from flatulence, it bears noting that “passing gas” was not always a socially taboo subject matter; cultural awareness and engagement with flatulence has been documented for centuries.⁷ Societal attitudes about the public embrace or acknowledgment of flatulence have been undergoing revision since the mid-19th century, when the social classification of highbrow and lowbrow culture became increasingly dichotomous and subjects such as flatulence began to be associated with immaturity or the lower class (see Levine 1988). Accordingly, the historical accounts about the deliberate engagement of flatulence in customs or narrative forms show a cultural revelry with the subject in past generations and cultures, whereas modern fartlore collections hint at secretive, malicious, or emotionally reactive causes behind the creation of fartlore, especially amongst pre-adults.

Perhaps the most (in)famous study of scatology was conducted by soldier-scientist John G. Bourke, who witnessed a ritual urine-drinking ceremony among the Zuñi in New Mexico in 1881 and subsequently became fascinated with the role of excrement in world cultures. Bourke spent over a decade researching and collecting scatological folklore from around the world en route to publishing the exhaustive *Scatologic Rites of All Nations* in 1891. Unsurprisingly, the folklore of flatulence was well-represented in Bourke’s treatise, including the proposition that the fart was seen as a divinity to ancient Egyptians who saw flatulence as the personification of a natural function (87-88) and the revelation that farts were once used as a means of toll payment in France dating back to 1398 (109-10).

My point in sharing these incidents of cultural awareness about flatulence and their influence on the creation of fartlore is to underscore the longstanding tradition of social commentary and interest in the subject and its narrative byproducts. Fartlore is more than just a response to the constraints of modern social norms; it is a derivative of tradition that has managed to repeat and vary throughout history. Could it be that between the psychological need for the creation of fartlore (to bypass social restrictions in order to gain pleasure) and the contemporary social pressures to control one’s anal productions (through reinforcement, peer group dynamics, and the social construction of normalcy) that folklore helps to negotiate children’s understanding of their body and corporeal presence with the expectations and constraints of society in the early years of their development? And if so, why are males seemingly more likely than females to participate in fartlore?

Flatulence is a liminal category between excretion and relief and thus serves as a fertile testing ground for establishing cognitive categories of dirtiness and cleanliness in pre-adulthood (especially childhood). By extension, identification of what makes something profane and sacred, aggressive or submissive, is also a

component of flatulence's importance to child and adolescent development of understanding social boundaries. The agent is unclear in the social construction of the flatulence taboo, and as such the sense of liminality serves to test honesty and responsibility; in a sense it serves as a means of moral conditioning through training the child in a more influential way than during other periods of the life course.

William Bascom's (1954) classic identification of the "four functions of folklore" — escape, validation, education, and social control (with the goal of stabilizing society) — embodies the functionalist approach to understanding the reasons for folklore's creation and dissemination; that is, the assumption that folklore has a purpose or "function" in society and can thus be viewed through this lens of interpretation. Functionalism has long served as a theoretical framework for the study of children's folklore (Gaignebet 1974; Knapp and Knapp 1976; Opie and Opie 1953); however, Elliott Oring (1976) and others have criticized functionalism as merely *interpreting* folklore by providing a greater sense of understanding the consequence of social phenomena, instead of truly *explaining* its causation through empirical evidence and analysis. As an example, the Knapps (1976, 211-16) use functionalism as an entry point into explaining fartlore, and while their collection shows a body of folklore that is clearly mediated by the performative presence of flatulence, their reportage falls short of uncovering the motivational sources or contexts that influence their informants and does not make any notation of gendering issues with fartlore.⁸ The functionalist approach has merit as an analytical framework, but — as critics suggest — it requires deeper inquiry into the sources of the tradition that produced the functions, particularly with regard to its role as a cognitive source of categorization.

The reluctance to openly embrace flatulence may be due to the fact that malodorous scents attributed to bodily secretions or emissions (such as perspiration and flatulence) have long been associated with persons of wanton moral character or those of lower class status (Brill 1932, 40; Largey and Watson 1972). Even today, negative connotations are attributed to things that are perceived to be unclean or foul-smelling (see Drobnick 2006).⁹ A person who acts undesirably may be called a "stinker," while a clean or pious person might be described as emitting the "odor of sanctity." In the animal kingdom, skunks are symbols of avoidance not for their temperament, but for their smell; similar social contempt is held for people who do not smell pleasantly or appear unkempt. The hesitation to openly acknowledge our body's waste is due in part to the social perception that most of our secretions (from saliva to feces) are "dirty" and therefore symbolize what Mary Douglas (1966) calls "matter out of place" that can threaten contamination and consequently impinge on an individual's personal safety (see also Dundes 1968; Jones 1913, 431; Jones 2000; Praeger 2007, 51).

Although the elimination of waste and the passing of gas are two naturally occurring bodily functions, individuals often take proactive measures to mask from others their urge to defecate or flatulate. Sociologists have labeled this behavioral response as the "fecal habitus," or the delicate social organization of the ways that people go about ridding themselves of feces and their subsequent methods for creating a perception of distance from their excrement (Inglis 2000). Central to the concept of fecal habitus is the assumption that anxiety, embarrassment, or

shame follows a bowel movement or the passing of flatulence if they occur in situations where other people are present. Proximity to one's anal productions (such as feces or flatulence) suggests ownership and creates a sense of shame or embarrassment, especially if there are visual or olfactory remnants that can be linked to the individual.¹⁰ Weinberg and Williams assert that the "threat to character is especially severe with regard to defecation, as failure to control the disposition of fecal outputs [including flatulence] in an appropriate way can project a self that is incompatible with a person's identity as a competent, mature adult" (2005, 316). To this point, Erving Goffman (1967) notes that the embodied signs of embarrassment (blushing, fumbling, stuttering, sweating, etc.), usually occur when identity claims are unfulfilled or when someone does not appropriately present themselves to others in a social situation.

Still, there is a performative component to fartlore. Folklorist Michael Owen Jones points out that "Bravado and the allure of the forbidden are not the only reasons to participate in the disgusting. No sooner do children develop a concept of contagion and learn the disgust response than many of them flaunt it, challenging rules of decorum" (2000, 59). Thus, children may "break wind" intentionally or unintentionally, playfully or maliciously. If children cannot pass gas on command, they might imitate the sound by making noises under their armpits or with their mouths, or engage in a prank such as placing a whoopee cushion on a peer's seat. A certain license is given for children to engage in these activities, although they become aware that as they become older, it is less desirable behavior. Children and adolescents frequently experiment with social taboos through humor and play frames in an effort to better understand the limits of their own corporeal existence, and also in an effort to define their role within the limits of their social networks (see Bronner 1988; Sutton-Smith et. al. 1999). In any case, it is clear that fartlore allows children and adolescents to make their most tangible connections to reality — their own, physical bodies — symbolically disembodied and ethereal, which serves as a psychological release.¹¹ But how is this applied in children's folklore?

Flatulence in Child and Adolescent Folklore: Examples and Interpretations

In order to understand and explain the meaning and function of fartlore, I have identified several pervasive categories of the genre, but they are by no means representative of all the texts or types of fartlore in circulation. I purposely provide only a handful of examples for each heading in order to keep the focus on the *meaning* and contextual *function* of selected texts, while attempting to avoid overloading this essay with numerous descriptions that lack proper annotation and context.¹² As I have mentioned, a problem with the scant collections of fartlore available is the fact that the authors have often done little more than reprint fartlore texts verbatim without contextual information beyond the geographical location of its collection and perhaps the informants' age. Instead, I wish to reveal a few salient examples of fartlore within each category and utilize an interdisciplinary approach in order to interpret them effectively in this section and the proceeding ones.

Games

Games have been one of the most popular genres of children's folklore observed, yet many child and adolescent games that incorporate flatulence have gone unreported. This may be due to difficulty of collecting such corrosive material in the moment of their occurrence. One such game of fartlore in many groups of children and especially early adolescents today is the game of "doorknob," which is played immediately after someone farts and like most performative fartlore is almost exclusive to males.¹³ There is no official sanctioning of the game's beginning other than the passing of flatulence itself; the farter is supposed to quickly yell "safety" as an invocation of protection from physical retaliation for passing gas. However, if one of their peers cries "doorknob" before "safety" can be called, then the farter will be repeatedly punched in the arm until he is able to touch a door handle. As one boy proudly stated, "the game is best when you're out camping or somewhere where it's hard to find one to touch!"

Weinberg and Williams note that "breaches of the fecal habitus can be downplayed through normalization and neutralization ... [and some] are celebrated in some instances" and tend to occur among young people in same-sex settings (2005, 318). This may also serve to ease the anxiety of repressed anal-erotic desires, which fartlore subconsciously invokes during its performance. On the one hand, the game of "doorknob" seems to thrive on the farter's ability to acknowledge and subsequently revel in the creation of flatulence, especially if there is a big reaction amongst "defenseless" peers. After someone farts and it is acknowledged through the invocation of a magic word (either "safety" or "doorknob," depending on the child's role), a play frame is instantly created and entered amongst members of the group of friends that have the game in their repertoire of tomfoolery. Once engaged, the play frame enables the farter to claim reprieve from their peers' admonishment if he yells the magic word first. Doing so allows him to not only diffuse his level of embarrassment after passing gas, but also talk, mock, or joke about his farts with his peers afterward; this exchange usually takes the form of celebration or humor from the farter and jeering or humorous, derisive commentaries from the "victims" about the farter's inconsiderateness or the potency or supernatural qualities of the fart (like its ability to linger endlessly, or make someone's nostrils burn). To this point, as Mary and Herbert Knapp explain, "the child who farts is almost always the butt of a jeer; thus he is reminded of a cultural prohibition. At the same time, the formulaic nature of these jeers testifies to the frequency and the ordinariness of the situation, and thereby reduces embarrassment to manageable proportions" (Knapp and Knapp 1976: 216).

Significantly, farters risk danger playing "doorknob"; they may fail to recognize that the play frame can be initiated by their peers' invocation of their magic word, "doorknob," could result in physical punishment through an aggressive release of energy that symbolizes the peers' retaliation for the "fart attack" they have endured. From an historical perspective, the modern game of "doorknob" shows evidence of repetition and variation taking place in the passing down of traditional fartlore. In the *Scatologic Rites of All Nations*, John G. Bourke describes the game

of “Touch Wood,” in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In Bourke’s description of the game, the non-farters would yell “touch wood” when a classmate farted and then proceed to flee for the nearest tree-box. “Those who were slow in doing this,” Bourke notes, “were pounded by the more rapid ones” (93).

Humorous Narratives and Verbal Art

Humor is also a large part of child and adolescent folklore, yet fartlore is often subsumed in collections of jokes rather than given separate attention. Anxiety, coupled with the desire to normalize an embarrassing bodily function, yields a considerable amount of the content from which fartlore is composed. Humor may be categorized as being predominantly sexual and aggressive in its intention,¹⁴ and according to Freud, jokes allow people to “evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible” (1905b, 103). In sum, humor allows people to have the freedom to express sentiments and thoughts that may be otherwise considered socially reprehensible. Children and teenagers are no different, and although the measurement of their social capital is more flexible and forgiving than their adult counterparts, they are nevertheless aware of social taboos and actively work to either circumvent them or subconsciously face them through symbolic interactions (see Opie and Opie 1953; Lytle 2003). Jokes are “a powerful way to test and reaffirm cultural values” (Ellis 2001, 8) and act as “an expressive genre through which one is encouraged to defuse, by means of laughter or groans, anxieties about and consequent hostility” toward socially deviant issues (Smyth 1986, 254). The performance and dissemination of humorous or playful fartlore not only massages children’s or adolescents’ repressed desire for anal play, but also helps to alleviate their unpronounced frustrations, anxieties, or resentment over the restrictions of social decorum or elements of society that are beyond their comprehension and acts as a challenge to the authority of adults or social expectations.

A relevant example of this phenomenon comes in the form of homophobic joking, which is especially prevalent amongst adolescents.¹⁵ Homophobic joking helps adolescents to reaffirm their masculine prerogatives and reassures both their peers and themselves that they are in fact “normal” and heterosexual. Considering the social stigma that accompanies deviance from heterosexual orientations, especially during adolescence, homophobic joking appears to engage tensions about sexual orientation, but also reinforces the learned disgust of the anus and promotes the continued repression of anal desires stemming from psychosexual development. Another telling example can be found in a narrative that I collected from a 14-year-old male:

These two gay guys just had sex. The first gay guy asks if he can take a shower. The other gay guy says “okay, as long as you promise not to jack off in my shower.” So the first gay guy says “okay.” About ten minutes later, the first gay guy comes out of the shower. The second gay guy then goes into the bathroom to go pee and looks in the shower and sees [semen] everywhere. He gets really mad and goes back into the other room and yells, “I thought I told you not to jack off

in my shower!" The first guy looks at him and then laughs. He goes, "I didn't! I farted!" (Collected April 9, 2010).

This story is highly sexual in its content and seeks to mock the perceived "grossness" of homosexual intercourse through an intentionally graphic humorous narrative. When performed by the adolescent, the story appears to serve three primary functions: first, to reaffirm the teller's heterosexuality and disgust for homosexual behavior (thus conforming to the masculine expectations of his peer group); second, to distance the teller from any association or empathy for homosexuals — note that the characters in the story do not even have names, they are simply "the first gay guy" and "the second gay guy" — ; and lastly, to demonstrate the teller's willful disregard of societal attitudes about how "extreme" a narrative should be and what language is appropriate for friendly storytelling.

Folk Beliefs and Proverbs

Fartlore does not always have to begin with observations or jokes about the act of flatulence itself in contemporary society; as a matter of fact, there appear to be a few folk beliefs and customs that are derived from historical attitudes and lore about flatulence.¹⁶ Considering that folklore is largely reliant on repetition and variation for continued survival, history provides insight into the influence of oral tradition in the formation of fartlore. For example, there was a medieval belief that a man's soul is passed through his anus at death in the form of flatulence; an accompanying narrative associated with this belief is a tale about a demon that appears and places a sack over the anus of a man who has just died, then flies away with his soul (Bourke 1891, 151). In numerous cultures, people similarly believe that sneezing signifies an attempt by one's soul to leave the body (Orientalia 2008). When someone sneezes in contemporary American society we tend to offer a customary "bless you" or "Gesundheit," either out of imitated kindness, or for some, in order to influence another person's soul to stay in place. As Gershon Legman points out, "under every layer of folklore another deeper layer will be found, going as far back and as deep down as anyone can trace" (1964, 442). Clearly, the logical similarities between modern sneezing beliefs and medieval ideas about the soul at death suggest a connected lineage.¹⁷

Among the other child and adolescent folk beliefs about flatulence that I collected was the incorporation of fire, usually including a variation about how one could "light a fart" or how farting near a fireplace would create green smoke. These beliefs reveal a desire to make an uncomfortable or embarrassing occurrence into one that not only seems intentional or controlled, but almost supernatural and therefore permissible. Additionally, Freud (1932) notes that fire can occasionally serve as a symbol of masculinity; in the context of fartlore, the presence of fire as a performative component or neologistic companion (as with labeling a smelly fart to be akin to "dropping a bomb" or "making an explosion").

Proverbs about flatulence suggest an awareness of the social pressure not only to control one's bodily functions in the way that they divert blame to a potential accuser, as with "whoever smelt it, dealt it," "he who observed it, served it," and "the smeller is the 'feller," but also to give defensive, proverbial retorts such as,

“he who said the rhyme, did the crime,” “the one who said the verse made the atmosphere worse,” or the non-rhyming (but double-entendre) proverb, “a fox smells his own hole first.” Children are also quick to offer proverbial scatological folk wisdom associated with flatulence and feces as well, such as: “First comes the poop; then comes the soup” which connotes that stomach gas and pain is a sign of impending diarrhea — it should also be noted that “turtle soup” has previously served as a euphemism for diarrhea in American slang: a fact that contributed to its decline as a popular dish in southern Indiana in recent decades (Bronner 2008, 20). Other proverbs support Jones’ (1913) belief that there are important unconscious associations between body functions with similar or interconnected sensory outputs, as observed in “Why fart and waste it when you can burp and taste it?” (Leary 1977, 60).

Latrinalia

It should be noted that fartlore is not limited to verbal or performative genres, as seen in the pervasiveness of latrinalia.¹⁸ Undeniably, there is an historical precedent of scatological humor that incorporates flatulence, such as the “Here I Sit” pattern, observed by Alan Dundes (1968): “Here I sit broken hearted/ Tried to shit and only farted” (99) or “Here I sit in silent bliss/ Listening to the trickling piss/ Now and then a fart is heard/ Calling to the coming turd” (100). In my own ethnographical collection of latrinalia, I have observed that the many of the old patterns are still present, as seen with: “Here I sit among the vapors/ Cleaned the weed but forgot the papers,”¹⁹ which is reminiscent of “Here I sit in stinking vapor/ Some sonuvabitch stole the toilet paper” (1968, 99). The obvious difference here is that my new example of latrinalia references the use of marijuana as opposed to a focused lamentation on the fecal situation. Dundes argues that “the psychological motivation for writing latrinalia is related to an infantile desire to play with feces and to artistically smear it around” (1968, 104). As I have previously noted, the same can be said of fartlore, which combines the infantile desire to play with feces with the desire for challenging social restraints through symbolic smearing in verbal or physical play frames.²⁰

Folk Speech and Slang

The folklore of flatulence has also encouraged the negative associations of the word “fart” to be adopted into compound neologistic terms for certain behaviors,²¹ including “old fart” to describe an unhip individual that is typically seen as over-the-hill, “fart-knocker” to describe someone who is rude, or a “fart-meister” to describe someone who has mastered the “art of farting.” Perhaps the most recognizable impact of fartlore on folk speech comes in the form of folk annotations about the different “types” of farts, like the “crop-duster,” which is a left-behind, lingering fart whose owner immediately leaves the area where he or she farted so as not to be blamed; the “firecracker,” which is a fart composed of several short, but loud expulsions of gas in quick succession that makes a distinctive *ratta-tat* sound; the “queef,” which is a somewhat mythologized

“vaginal fart”²² that is said to emit a sound similar to an anal fart and can only be “made by girls”²³; and the ever-popular “silent but deadly” or “SBD” for flatulence that does not make a sound during its passing, but still manages to stink.²⁴

Sifting through the Gas: Distinguishing Characteristics and Motivations

In dissecting these examples of fartlore, one might ask: what are the differences between adolescent and children’s responses to the genre? David Hufford notes that “Obscene material is of great interest to adolescents and forms a very significant part of their repertoires” (1970, 55). As evidenced by many of the examples I have discussed, such as in the game of “doorknob” or in homophobic joke narratives, a substantial portion of adolescent fartlore is either physically brutish or indirectly sexual in its nature. This suggests that adolescent fartlore aims to confirm the maturation process through a more adult-like repertoire of prose while compensating for the social anxieties and insecurities that often accompany the adolescent experience. One of the first surveys of adolescent folklore as a distinctive genre came from Martha Dirks, who in her 1963 essay, “Teen-Age Folklore from Kansas,” distinguishes four main genres of folklore commonly associated with the age group: humor, slang, customs/beliefs, and verse/song. Indeed, the period of adolescence overlaps with the cultural expression of the preceding and succeeding periods of life, and consequently adolescents “unconsciously retain (or consciously mock) elements of the folklore which played such an important role in their childhood years ... [but] many cycles of childhood games or customs disappear completely as youngsters move on to new interests” (Samuelson 1991, 18; see also Meley 1991).

Much of children’s fartlore is related to playing or navigating the social pressures for maintaining control over their bodily functions and urges. Hence, fartlore in childhood often incorporates an awareness of these social pressures by mocking the flatulence taboo through symbolic interaction, and thus reinforces cultural expectations of proper behavior. Since many children learn bodily control in the public school setting where toilet practices and their mastery are enforced and socialized as a necessity, they are more reflexively aware of these expectations through perpetual group feedback and encouragement. When this does not take place, as Weinberg and Williams observe: “Attention to a breach of body boundaries ... is sought to embarrass the offender and provide amusement to others” (2005, 318-19). In other words, fartlore in childhood helps to underscore the importance of bodily control and reinforce social norms and control expected of their age and gender groups.

The celebration or revulsion of flatulence in child and adolescent culture demarcates much more than folk perceptions about anal productions; it symbolizes and reinforces the expectations of gender roles and helps to frame societal definitions of masculinity and femininity. Males that emit perfumed scents may be chastised, and as Largey and Watson acknowledge, “many males of the labor class associate the odor of cologne on a male with effeminacy” (1972, 1023). Undoubtedly, the open enjoyment and playful manipulation of flatulence tends to be seen as a predominantly male behavior, and the great majority of

performative or interactive fartlore is collected from males (Ackerly 2007, 213),²⁵ but what about females? Elizabeth Tucker (2009) has shown that females are not opposed to partaking in risky or taboo behavior, and other scholars have collected numerous examples of subversive folklore performed and transmitted by females (Knapp and Knapp 1976; Legman 1968; Opie and Opie 1953; Sherman and Weisskopf 1995). We of course know that women flatulate too, despite that they are underrepresented in fartlore collections (admittedly including this one), which suggests either a genuine lack of female participation or an overtaking of the genre by males. Sociologists Weinberg and Williams (2005) posit that women are much more likely than men to have heightened concern over controlling evidence of their anal productions given their physical idealization. They offer that for males,

bodily grossness may be valued for its opposition to the manners that femininity is thought to imply. The delight taken in physical behaviors like burping can indicate men's disdain for what they perceive as feminine. Some men may adopt this form of embodiment as an expression of their power over women as they deliberately breach the [fecal] habitus. Such "strategic embarrassment" is also used to socially control other men who are seen to be straying from masculine ideals (Weinberg and Williams 2005, 317).

In other words, fartlore is mostly *performed* by males because it helps to reinforce social and cultural expectations of "manly behavior" (see Bronner 2005).²⁶ Conversely, the expectations of females are elevated and hyper-sexualized, which discourages deviance from behaviors that would indicate otherwise. Gershon Legman posits that jokes about farting "must also be an evasive form of scatological abuse of women, since a large proportion of these are particularly concerned with the embarrassment of women" (1968, 858). However, fartlore that is not performed — that is, fartlore unrelated to the actual passing of flatulence — *does* include female participation, as the biting, gender-charged bit of female fartlore "girls pass notes; boys pass gas" suggests.²⁷ Still, fartlore tends to be a male-dominated genre, and with bodily humor, "the longer the relationship, the more ... [routinized] the experience of other's bodily functions" becomes in peer groups (Weinberg and Williams 2005, 329). One's level of comfort with flatulence or other anal productions is considerably smaller before such routinization takes place amongst his network of friends or playmates. By embracing "gross" bodily functions as a weapon or tool of play, males are able to hold additional power over their peers — especially females — and reaffirm their social status and experiment with genders' social hierarchies.

Perhaps, then, a "lingering" question might be: why is fartlore particularly important in childhood and adolescence? After all, adults are more than capable of participating in flatulence humor or games. The folklore of flatulence in childhood and adolescence is special because all adults pass through childhood and adolescence, where they acquire knowledge and experience with the genre. The social world of pre-adulthood encourages peer interaction and the

experimentation with group dynamics; however, as people tend to get older, their relationships become more dyadic, familial, or introverted, and consequently the performance of fartlore is not only unexpected in social settings, but truly uncommon. Nevertheless, the impact of folklore and knowledge of the taboos impressed upon pre-adults carries into the consciousness of their adult selves, which serves to cyclically reinforce expectations of bodily control in future generations, and continues to control the existing definitions of behavioral ideals and social constructions of maturity. Accordingly, studies of fartlore and subversive topics should begin before adulthood in order to fully understand its context.

Psychoanalytic and Folkloristic Considerations

Flatulence is not exclusively regulated by social pressures; there are biological and psychological factors that influence the creation and dissemination of fartlore as well. The psychoanalytical approach to fartlore might suggest that the anxiety over flatulence is due to the deep-rooted psychological shame felt for deriving pleasure from our anal productions during our development.²⁸ By making a socially-unacceptable desire (such as the wish to play with one's anus through flatulence) into a symbolically pleasurable act through fartlore, children and adolescents subconsciously satisfy their infantile attraction to their anal productions and help to stabilize their transition into adulthood through play.

According to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1905a), children pass through several psychosexual stages of development: the oral stage (0-1 years), during which a child's primary source of pleasure is derived from sensations in and around the mouth; the anal stage (age 1-3), which revolves around the process of toilet training and marks the period where the child begins to negotiate control over their own urges and behaviors, especially those related to the expulsion of waste; and the phallic stage (age 4-6) which marks a period of infatuation with the genitals (see Freud 1924). The initial stages of psychosexual development are then followed by a latency period (where sexual urges remain dormant from age 7 until puberty) and the genital stage (from puberty into adulthood), in which the child regains an interest in pleasure derived from the genitals and seeks to facilitate normal relationships with others. Freud suggests that the inability for a child to successfully pass through these stages of psychosexual developmental will result in social and psychological turmoil later in life as represented by their anal-repulsive (disorderly and unpredictable) or anal-retentive (regimented and obsessive) personalities (see also Brown 1959; Freud 1913; Jones 1913, 413-37).

The residual impact of the anal stage (or anal-erotic stage) is psychologically central to the production and dissemination of fartlore later in life; as Norman O. Brown remarks, "some of the most important categories of social behavior (play, gift, property, weapon) originate in the anal stage of infantile sexuality" (1959, 191). During the anal stage, especially during toilet training, children learn that their ability to produce and subsequently maintain control over their bodily waste has symbolic power; withholding their feces can draw the ire of their parents while expulsion of their excrement can result in praise. As a result, children attach

symbolic importance to their anal productions and interpret defecation and contact with their feces as being physically or sexually pleasurable; additionally, they see their feces as their own creations and interpret them as gifts (Jones 1913, 424; Ferenczi 1913, 325).²⁹ It stands to reason that farting may subconsciously connote failure, as stool is solid and considered an accomplishment when “successfully” passed into a designated receptacle, especially during toilet training.³⁰

The psychological process of sublimation occurs toward the end of the anal stage when the child’s pleasurable response and attachment to anal production is transferred to interactions with new symbols that resemble the physical composition of feces, such as mud, clay, or sand; this develops into a desire to play with small, hard objects like marbles, buttons, and stones, and eventually, small coins (Jones 1913, 425-27). Thus, the transference that occurs during sublimation may appear in the form of an adult’s desire to acquire material possessions such as property or money since they can be symbolically analogous to excrement and help to satisfy the person’s repressed anal-erotic desires (Carroll 1987, 491; Jones 1913, 427).³¹ Therefore, an adult’s infatuation with money and material objects is a result of the fact that they chose “the love of their parents over the pleasures of [feces, and in] the absence of affection, [an individual will] turn to their sublimated anal desires in hopes of recovering the gratification they traded for parental approval” (Praeger 2007, 114; see also Ferenczi 1914). Freud notes that in “the whole mental domain of the psychology of the neurosis, the sexual still includes the excrementitious, and it is understood in the old, infantile sense,” meaning that the adult’s repressed attraction to anal pleasure still remains even if they are not cognitively aware (1905a, 140). Thus, the homophobic narratives that I reported herein project the adolescent’s own subconscious anxieties about the anus as a receptacle of pleasure. By othering homosexuals, the male informant not only is able to save face in his social network (and actually obtain higher status by symbolically acting “more manly” through the performative dismissal of perceived-effeminate behavior), but also able through rhetorical commentary to tacitly dismiss his own shame for his infantile attraction to anal-eroticism.

Some psychoanalysts believe that a child’s transition from the oral stage into the anal stage imprints a symbolic correlation between the mouth and anus. This may be observed in the neologism for farting, “to clear one’s throat,” which suggests a peripheral awareness of the functional similarities between the mouth (used for things “going in”) and the anus (used for things “going out”). Freudian disciple Ernest Jones posits that flatulence has important unconscious associations with other occurrences that have similar sensory attributes, such as breath and speech, which (like flatulence) also expel air and have olfactory or auditory markers that must be controlled by the individual; from a sociological standpoint, this is supported by the contention that “moral symbolism relevant to interaction is expressed in terms of olfactory imagery” (Largey and Watson 1972, 1021). For Jones, these “important unconscious associations” explain society’s reverence for good dental hygiene and the desire for pleasantly scented breath: because bad breath attracts ridicule by peers if deemed malodorous in the same way that flatulence might. Additionally, these unconscious associations account for the strong emphasis placed on the learning of proper grammar and syntax throughout

a child's tenure at public school, where uncontrolled speech impediments could garner teasing from peers in the same way that gratuitous flatulence would (Jones 1913, 435).

The merger of unconscious awareness and social pressures about the body leads to the complex hybridization of folk knowledge in its disseminated state, folklore. The awareness of similarities between oral and anal functions as posited by Jones — subconscious or not — appears to be responsible for the evolution of the word “cheek” in contemporary slang as a neologism for the buttocks; as the double meaning of this essay's title suggests, a widespread acceptance of this symbolic correlation exists.³² When used as a noun in conventional English, “cheek” usually refers to a part of the face near the mouth; as a verb, “cheek” can describe the behavior of someone who exhibits impudence. This is not the only case in folklore where the functions of the anus become blurred with the perception of other objects; some folk narratives seem to corroborate Jones' observations about the symbolic associations between functionally- or visually-similar objects and the anal region.³³

A representative example from folklore can be found in Simon J. Bronner's reportage of a humorous narrative in which a fat woman consumes large quantities of grapes, goes to sleep with an upset stomach facing the wrong direction in bed, and subsequently has her flatulence mistaken as bad breath by her husband (1981, 107-08). As the story continues, the husband becomes enraged that his sleeping wife — who he does not know is actually lying upside-down in bed (with her buttocks near his face) and cannot hear him — refuses to oblige his demand for her to face the other direction; the husband threatens to “slap [her] goddamn eyeballs out,” and after several unheeded warnings, he hits her so hard that one of the grapes she ate flies out of her anus and lands on him. He thinks that he has actually knocked out one of his wife's eyeballs; in a fit of worry he leans forward in the dark and unknowingly kisses her buttocks, shortly thereafter quipping, “Whooo, baby, you be in bad shape because your jaws — you must be got the mumps” (108). The tale of grapes that are mistaken for eyeballs and buttocks that are mistaken for lumpy jaws suggests that folklore can assist a storyteller in encoding his awareness or anxieties about parts or functions of the body through symbolic objects or anecdotes, a claim that has also been supported in photocopy-lore traditions (Dundes and Pagter 1978, 1987). This suggests that there is compatibility between the psychoanalytic and folkloristic approaches to the study of scatological themes (see Bronner 2007b; Dundes 1987, 3-46).

Flatulence has made cameos in numerous urban legends, and not just ones about artists who place paint in their rectums and create “fart art” (Dawson 1998, 155). Elizabeth Tucker references the popular college legend about a student's encounter with laxative-laced campus grub and the gaseous consequences thereafter, and notes that such a tale represents fartlore “at its most extreme: both humbling and hilarious,” and adds that those who hear the legend “can only hope they will continue to be the ones who laugh, not victims of such embarrassing discomfort” (Tucker 2005, 104-05). Another popular urban legend from photocopy-lore as well as oral tradition is “The Surpriser Surprised,” in which a man is blindfolded by his wife on his birthday and must sit alone, waiting alone in

anticipation of his birthday surprise, while she answers a phone call in the other room. Feeling the beans he had for lunch rumble in his stomach, he decides to let out a few juicy farts in her absence. When she returns, she removes his blindfold to reveal that he is seated at a table of his friends, family, and colleagues. As it turns out, his birthday surprise is in fact a surprise party thrown by his wife ... and he has just gassed his guests (Dundes and Pagter 1978, 98-99; see also Jansen 1979).³⁴

Folklore serves as a means to project one's anxieties, attitudes, or beliefs, and one of the most reflexive means of such expression comes from the sharing of narratives. Without a doubt, the appearance of flatulence in urban legends suggests at least some level of awareness about the fear of its occurrence in social settings and the potential consequences it would render for one's reputation. Folklorists have often shied away from subjects of controversial scope, but as fartlore shows, there is merit in analyzing the unsavory components of society.

Fartlore, Folkloristics, and the Study of the Subversive

Under every rock of subversive folklore lies a meaning that waits to be discovered and a causation that requires explanation. In his classic study of latrinalia, Alan Dundes remarks that despite the widespread abundance of "shithouse poetry" and its demonstrably traditional structure, "one looks in vain for extended collections of published texts and for any rational discussion of them or the practice of writing them" (1968, 91). Such a statement could easily be adapted to discuss the dearth of modern research collections encompassing the intersection of folklore, flatulence, and scatology. Michael Owen Jones points out that the research of folklorists "usually centers on celebration, festive events, and the positive associations ... [with] ethnic or regional identity" (2000, 53).³⁵ This narrow-sighted approach has been a longstanding problem within the discipline.³⁶

In truth, folkloristics has a history of taking a reserved approach to the study of contentious subject matters. A key example may be found in the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1932-36 and 1955-58),³⁷ in which Stith Thompson makes a point to state that the categorization of motifs regarding erotic or scatological humor was unnecessary for the purposes of his index. Regarding X700-799, "Humor Concerning Sex," Thompson explains that

Thousands of obscene motifs in which there is no point except the obscenity itself might logically come at this point, but they are entirely beyond the scope of the present work. They work a literature to themselves, with its own periodicals and collections. In view of the possibility that it might become desirable to classify these motifs and place them within the present index, space has been left ... for such motifs (1960, vol. 5, 514).

Thompson left X700-799 blank purportedly for the sake of good taste and for the preservation of his volume's academic integrity. In reality, however, Thompson knew better than to exclude such a fertile source of folklore, especially given

its ubiquity. Instead, risqué tales with themes of eroticism or scatology were inconspicuously wedged between broader themes so as not to raise alarm, including such entries as “Illicit Sexual Relations” (T400), “Humor of Discomfiture” (X0-99), and “Clever Verbal Retorts” (J1250) among them (Legman 1964, 455).³⁸ According to Gershon Legman, Thompson’s rejection of “obscene jokes with moral horror at X700, while bringing them back in disguise at dozens of other numbers, makes clear one of the deepest deficiencies of any classification scheme: the inevitable subjectiveness of approach by the indexer” (1964, 455). Measuring the appropriateness of a subject is fine, but as Dundes notes, just because a topic is judged to be insulting or crude does not suffice as “an intellectually valid reason not to publish a well-researched paper or monograph” (2005, 404).

Of course, the *Motif-Index* is not the first (or last) case of an academic discipline catering to political correctness, but in the case of folkloristics — a supposed champion of interdisciplinarity and a highly reflexive subject area — why is this so? Why is it considered professionally risky to talk about feces, flatulence, or anal-eroticism, even if presented in a thoughtful and deliberate manner? To be sure, the study of fartlore may strike some as an intellectually devoid or outrageously tasteless endeavor, despite the fact that there is a small, but extant crop of folklore scholarship that demonstrates the value of examining “unpretty” folklore, including the conceptualization of scatological themes (Bronner 1981, 1985, 2007a, 2009, 56-63; Dundes 1968, 1984; Legman 1964, 1968, 1975; Sherman and Weisskoff 1995). We must strive to remember that while folklore can be dark or grotesque, our role as ethnographers is not to judge whether or not a subject matter is too risky to observe or report. Instead, we must hold ourselves accountable to our profession and to our subjects by collecting and interpreting data from *all* aspects of folk culture, including the subversive. Only then will we be able to draw adequate conclusions on the nuances of human behavior within their proper contexts.

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This work is dedicated to the late Alan Dundes, whose brave scholarship on everything from latrinalia and psychoanalysis to the scholastic boundaries of the folklore discipline has inspired me to continue his legacy of studying underexplored, yet ubiquitous cultural practices that merit scrutiny despite their unconventional nature. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Simon J. Bronner for his helpful suggestions, thoughtful critiques, and unwavering enthusiasm for the growth and completion of this essay. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Tucker for her correspondence, advice, and support as well. For a topic that on the surface tends to raises eyebrows (and nostrils), both Bronner and Tucker were pillars of support and generously donated their time to me in order to improve the overall quality and scope of this research. Thanks are also due to my friends and colleagues at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg American Studies program, who provided helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay: Jennifer Dutch, Spencer Lincoln Green, Nancy Jones, Matthew Lavelle, Erica Leonard, Paul Miller, and Amy Milligan. Lastly, I must acknowledge and thank

the love of my life (and a real gas!), my fiancée, Angelina Sanfilippo, who was quick to remind me of the numerous reasons why fartlore is a topic that is long overdue for a serious sniff.

NOTES

1. See the *New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (Dalzell and Victor 2006) or <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/thesaurus>.

2. See Knapp and Knapp (1976, 211).

3. Fartlore relatively functions alongside or in contrast to other taboo subjects as well. For example, another bodily emission that receives little attention in folkloristic scholarship is boogers and their folkloric byproducts — certainly boogers garner a similar response (regarding the fear of contagion) as flatulence.

4. On a personal note, I left Indiana University after my Master's degree for the Ph.D. program in American Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg. There, I was met with enthusiasm by my advisors and instructors, who not only enjoyed the sometimes-controversial or unorthodox subjects that interested me, but challenged me to fully explore all of their nooks and crannies. Indiana University and other folklore programs should take note that encouragement and support is the only way to promote true progress in our humble discipline. It may sound like sour grapes on the surface, but I assure you that the narrow-mindedness I argue combatively against throughout this essay has merit, and folklore programs such as IU should heed the call to welcome the expansion of our discipline's scope rather than suppress a potentially insightful research project in neglected areas of inquiry for the purposes of maintaining the status quo.

5. See "12-Year Old Boy Arrested After Deliberately 'Breaking Wind' in Class." *This Blog Rules*. 12 Jan. 2010. <http://www.thisblogrules.com/2010/01/12-year-old-boy-arrested-after.html> (accessed 18 April 2010).

6. To draw an historical correlation to fartlore, Gershon Legman (1968) notes that the "blaming of the fart on domestic animals is standard, and evidently ancient," citing examples as far back as 1654 (859).

7. For example, Greek physician Hippocrates believed that all diseases could be attributed to built-up gases in the internal organs, stating that "It is best for flatulence to pass without noise and breaking than to be intercepted and accumulated internally" (Nibbelink 2008, 83) and Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras forbade the consumption of beans among his disciples (5). Roman emperor Claudius (10 B.C.–A.D. 54) considered passing a law that legalized farting at banquets "out of concern for people's health" (83). Flatulence was a familiar motif in medieval Christianity and storytelling (Allen 1997), and reformer Martin Luther preached that the Devil could not stand the smell of rotten odors and suggested that any mortal man could beat him by baring their rear and farting directly into Satan's nostrils should he appear (Dawson 1998, 90) — as Jim Dawson writes, "the word *pumpernickel* comes from 'devil's fart' in German. *Pumpern* means 'to fart' and *nickel* is a 'devil' or 'goblin,'" and "The idea ... was that dark, heavy pumpernickel bread could 'produce outbursts of flatulence as powerful as those of the Devil himself'" (1998, 91). In many early

tales of fartlore, it was believed that the Devil produced flammable flatulence. Flatulence sporadically appeared in social customs and literature by the Middle Ages. In 16th century France, farting was used as a “ritualized signal for the advent of spring” through the utterance of the “Great Fart of Dehibernation” (Bailey 1996, 51). For an in-depth overview of the history and role of flatulence in the Middle Ages, see Allen (2007). Literature often incorporated flatulence or scatological themes. German literature and customs have long incorporated scatological themes (Dundes 1984; Rollfinke and Rollfinke 1986; Pilipp 1997), but by no means represent the only nationality that robustly engaged in the dissemination of fartlore. English author and poet Geoffrey Chaucer made flatulence a lingering part of several of his famed stories, including the *Canterbury Tales* (see Hasenfratz 1996); Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, was criticized by some of his contemporaries for overusing flatulence as a humorous ploy in his works; American author and literary icon Mark Twain published “1601” in 1880 (anonymously until 1906, mind you), which features a fictional dialogue about flatulence between several historical figures. In 1781, Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to the Royal Academy of Brussels in which he challenged their scientists to create a drug that would “render the natural discharges of wind from our bodies not only inoffensive, but agreeable as perfumes” and gushed about the pleasure that would befall society if everyone could freely express their “scentiments” without embarrassment (Rabkin and Silver 1991, 128-29). The French entertainer Joseph Pujol, better known as *Le Pétomane*, made a career as a professional “flatulist” and toured the world for over twenty years, headlining at the Moulin Rouge numerous times (Allen 2007; Bart 1995; Nibbelink 2008; Rabkin and Silverman 1991).

8. Nevertheless, it bears noting that the Knapps most certainly broke ground in proposing fartlore as a worthwhile category of children’s folklore.

9. For example, one might say that something “stinks like shit” to express a malodorous scent.

10. To this point, a telling statistic is that on a nine item “Disgust Scale” administered by sociological researchers, the highest ranking item was “You see a bowel movement left unflushed in a public toilet” (Rozin et al. 1993, 585).

11. See Sklar (1994) and Young (1994) for an overview of bodylore and its relationship to the interpretation of the self in society.

12. I realize that this decision may disappoint some readers. For those that this is the case, I recommend Legman (1968: 858-65) whose collection contains ample annotation and interpretation. For less-analytical, but more descriptive collections of fartlore, see Knapp and Knapp (1976, 211-16) or Sherman and Weisskopf (1995, 55-58).

13. Throughout my fieldwork (including the cross-referencing of other scholars’ work), I did not see any reportage on females playing this game, which is why I occasionally use masculine modifiers in my description of this game. No sexism is intended.

14. For an example of sexual and aggressive folklore that occasionally incorporates flatulence within the narrative structure, see Bronner (1981, 91-109,

114-15n5). For commentary on the historical assumption of humor as being sexual and aggressive, see Oring (1987, 277).

15. One joke that I collected followed the common question-answer/ riddle formula to pose a homophobic joke, Q: How do you seat four gay guys on one barstool? A: Turn it upside down. Another example, though less homophobic, is nevertheless “anal-oriented” and includes wordplay, Q: What does *Star Trek* and toilet paper have in common? A: They both circle around Uranus looking for Klingons!

16. The Opies report the use of “pull my finger” — which is usually the impetus for a prank in which pulling the peer’s finger “releases” a fart — as a component of a joke stanza collected from schoolchildren (1959, 61). This may suggest a correlation.

17. While the sneeze correlation to flatulence is relevant, so too are the connections between the flatulence taboo and more acceptable but nonetheless restricted actions such as belching/ burping, hiccupping, or nose-dripping/ blowing one’s nose in an inappropriate setting. All of these emissions and bodily functions have been folklorized due to their audible and visual components, but are clearly seen as more acceptable — perhaps because they are derived from the mouth instead of the anus.

18. “Latrinalia” is more-commonly known as bathroom graffiti today to non-folklorists.

19. Collected March 22, 2010 in New London, PA. Also seen on the wall was a limerick: When I get up to wipe my ass, I like to pass a little gas/ It clears my hole and dries the bowl/ And shows I got a lotta class. How cheeky!

20. Taking a psychoanalytic approach, Simon J. Bronner (2009, 56-63) hypothesizes that the Internet may serve as a virtual play frame for adolescents to symbolically “smear” one another from a sitting position.

21. Urbandictionary.com hosts many of these annotations and operates with a folk-moderated wiki interface. Unlike the average dictionary, urbandictionary.com celebrates and even encourages subversive and shocking definitions of folk neologisms. The posted definitions are then allotted a “thumbs up-thumbs down” rating system to allow site visitors to symbolically voice their approval or disapproval of a submitted description for all to see.

22. According to the infantile cloaca theory of psychoanalysis, “the female genitals and anus are conceived as a single opening ... and only later is it discovered that this region of the body contains two separate cavities and openings” (Legman 1968, 329). This may account for the emergence of the “queef” designation as a “vaginal fart.” Girls also refer to “period farts” as an excuse for flatulence during menstruation, again connoting the greater perception of inappropriateness for females to engage or acknowledge flatulence.

23. When I asked a small group of boys in their early adolescence if girls farted, one responded jokingly: “No, but they queef instead,” which demonstrates the gendered othering of the opposite sex by a male informant as a means to distance themselves from their own urges or desires.

24. I also collected a rhyming variation of the “silent but deadly” annotation as “silent but violent.”

25. If you want proof that flatulence is promoted as a “manly behavior,” look no further than Bobby Mercer’s *How Do You Light a Fart?: And 150 Other Essential Things Every Guy Should Know About Science* (2009), which submits a feminized presentation of science through the examination of supposedly masculine subjects such as belching, farting, and defecation. These “manly” acts are framed as topics that not only should be of interest to men, but information that they “should know about.”

26. Indeed, fartlore is perceived as being manly because it is aggressive, attention-getting, and dirty.

27. For additional reference to women’s interaction with scatological humor relating to flatulence, see Legman (1968, 860).

28. Certainly, this interpretation of human behavior has its share of detractors; in fact, one might even argue that psychoanalysis has more critics today than it does supporters due to its controversial suppositions. That said, a Freudian might argue in response that the vehement resistance to interpretations found in psychoanalysis underscore the individual’s strong desire to ignore their repressed infantile desires out of shame ... but I digress! As with any scholarship or theoretical approach, the success of an essay should rest on the ability of the researcher to effectively collect, annotate, and present evidence on their subject, whereupon the strength of their findings should be determined by readers on a case-by-case basis — and only after reading and reflecting upon the interpretations therein. The incorporation of psychoanalysis into the interpretations of folklore and allied fields should be held to the same standard of suspended judgment. After all, when we stop to consider the fact that fartlore comes from “talking out our asses” so to speak, even the skeptics must acknowledge that a psychoanalytic approach offers plausible explanations to the origins of scatological folklore in society. See Dundes (1987, 3-46) for an overview of the psychoanalytic approach and correlation to folklore. One of Alan Dundes’ greatest contributions to folkloristics is, in fact, is his development of the psychoanalytic method for interpreting folklore. For an excellent historical and contextual overview of Dundes’ contributions to folkloristics, as well as his psychoanalytic perspectives and argumentation, see Bronner (2007b). Those interested in scatological folklore will find particular value in the section dubbed by Bronner as “Theses on Feces” (352-81).

29. For more contemporary applications of this concept, see Dundes (1968, 101-04); Bronner (2009, 56-63).

30. Parents will often encourage their child to try and “make a poopie” if they hear them farting. This reinforces the idea that defecating is the positive outcome of properly dealing with bowel pressures. Recall the example of latrinalia that ends with “tried to shit, but only farted” — again, even in folklore, an awareness of the perception of failure due to the absence of fecal production is present.

31. As Simon Bronner pointed out to me during an emailed correspondence, Freud is often misunderstood as always equating the symbol of money to excrement; however, this is not accurate. Freud did tend to universalize the symbolic response, but anthropological psychoanalysts such as Alan Dundes (1968, 1984; 1987) and Michael Carroll (1987) considered cultural factors such

as the intensity of toilet training in a certain country as contextual factors in distinguishing the correlation.

32. If readers need further convincing, the *New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* confirms that “cheek” has been popularly adapted to be used in reference to buttocks (Dalzell and Victor 2006, 378). See also Legman (1968, 814-21) for a discussion of how the buttocks have been incorporated into other neologisms or scatological humor out of concerns for social taboos.

33. See Leary (1977) on “bullshitting” as a form of narrative gesturing.

34. Similar tales have also surfaced in the collections of Brunvand (1981, 2002) and Legman (1968, 861).

35. For additional insight on the tendency for folkloristics to avoid conflict, see Bronner (1998).

36. Again, see my own personal story in note 4 for additional support to this claim.

37. See also Frank Hoffman’s motif index of Anglo-American erotica, which does some include some flatulence-related material, but is predominantly phallogocentric.

38. In other motif collections, flatulence and scatological themes are more-openly identifiable. For example, Hoffman (1973) identifies and indexes “Humor concerning defecation and breaking wind,” as tale-type X716. Simon J. Bronner also notes that Terrence Leslie Hansen’s *The Types of the Folktale in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Spanish South America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957) includes tale type 1459, “Girlfriend is very beautiful but cannot control flatulence. Friend asks her to dance. As soon as she begins to dance, the whistle blows. Everybody looks for the fire.” (Bronner 1981, 114-15n5).

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