

Do We Find People Who Swear More Honest? Yes, Says New Study

January 15, 2017 by PAUL RATNER

Swearing is not an acceptable form of social discourse in most public situations. But impolite people who use profane language have been found to be more honest and trustworthy in a new study.

A three-part study was concluded with the appropriately titled paper “**Frankly, we do give a damn: The relationship between profanity and honesty**”, set to be published in the Journal of Psychological and Personality Science.

*“Profanity was associated with less lying and deception at the individual level, and with higher integrity at the society level,” write the researchers, led by **Gilad Feldman** of the Department of Work and Psychology in Maastricht University in the Netherlands.*

What the scientists found was that people are more likely to swear to express themselves rather than to use the swearing as an attack on others. Interestingly, while liars were more likely to use third-person pronouns or negative words, honest people were more likely to resort to profanity.

The study consisted of analyzing responses of **276** participants on their use of swearing and their degree of honesty in various situations. In particular, the subjects were asked to relate how often they cursed, their favorite swear words, and their emotions during such moments.

Additionally, the study looked at status updates of **73,000** Facebook users around the world, investigating the frequency of profanity as well as pronouns that have been linked by **previous studies** to lying. They found that people who use profanity were generally more honest in Facebook status updates.

"There are two ways of looking at it. You might think if someone is swearing a lot, this is a negative social behaviour seen as a bad thing to do, so if someone swears they are probably a bad person as well. On the other hand, they are not filtering their language so they are probably also not putting their stories about what is going on through similar filters which might turn them into untruths. That is what we seemed to land on in this study, that people who use the language that comes to mind first are less likely to be playing games with the truth," [said the study's co-author David Stillwell](#), from the University of Cambridge.

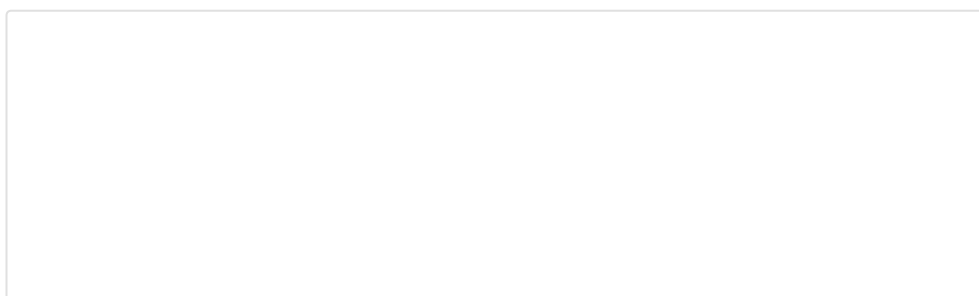
The researchers also conducted a study to compare integrity levels of American states with swearing frequency. To accomplish this, they relied on the [2012 Integrity Analyses of 48 U.S. states](#), carried out by the Center for Public Integrity. That report measured transparency and accountability in state governments. The researchers correlated the state data to swearing scores of individuals from their Facebook study and found a relationship between using more profanity and the integrity score of the state where that person lived.

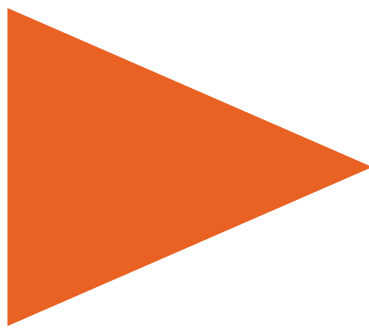
Swearing has also been linked to higher verbal intelligence by [previous research](#).

The researchers do warn that honesty in expression and honesty as an individual are not necessarily one and the same. You could certainly have someone who curses and commits crimes.

You can [read the paper online here](#).

Check out this great Big Think talk with renowned expert on lying Paul Ekman for a perspective on how to spot a liar:





Cover photo:

Italian actress Asia Argento poses on May 26, 2013 as she arrives for the screening of the film 'Zulu' presented Out of Competition at the 66th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes. (Photo credit: LOIC VENANCE/AFP/Getty Images)