

People who swear more may be more honest. We're not sh***ing you



IMAGE: VICKY LETA/ MASHABLE

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4 HOURS AGO

If you're one of those people who can't stop swearing, I have some great f*cking news and some bad f*cking news.

The good news first: [A study](#) published online in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* suggests that people who swear more may be more honest, or may be perceived as being more honest. Also, it may help explain why voters saw Donald Trump as

more authentic and trustworthy compared to his opponent, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

SEE ALSO: [The Complete F*cking History of Swear Words](#)

And now the bad news: that study is not conclusive and is nowhere near the final word on this topic.

Alright. Let's break this sh*t down.

In the study, titled “Frankly, We Do Give A Damn: The Relationship Between Profanity and Honesty,” researchers Gilad Feldman, Huiwen Lian, Michal Kosinski and David Stillwell explored the relationship between the volume of profanity usage and honesty, on both an individual and societal level.

The study was split up into three parts, one of which was conducted in a lab with users self-reporting profanity usage and honesty, another analyzing the profanity usage and honesty level in the posts of 73,789 Facebook users and a third part examining profanity usage on a societal level. More specifically, the third level looked at whether the state-level use of profanity is predictive of state-level integrity as reported by the State Integrity Index 2012.

And according to the study, profanity usage and honesty are linked.

“We found a consistent positive relationship between profanity and honesty,” the researchers outline. “Profanity was associated

with less lying and deception at the individual level, and with higher integrity at the society level.”

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Buuuuutttt... that doesn't actually tell us very much.

“Honesty in our article is mainly about the authentic genuine expression of the self in interactions with others,” Feldman told *Mashable*. “We did not measure blunt unethical or immoral behavior, and therefore cautioned in the article that the findings should not be interpreted to mean that the more a person uses profanity the less likely he or she will engage in more serious unethical or immoral behaviors.”

In other words, this doesn't mean that people who swear more are somehow better people than those who don't. This study simply suggests that people who swear more demonstrate more honest language patterns and are less likely to pad their speech with lies or misleading information.

Furthermore, the new research only examines the amount of profanity used. It does not take into account the varying levels of stigma associated with different types of profanity, with a variety of swear words carrying differing levels of taboo-ness.

“Different words having different impact or different degrees of being an obscenity,” says Gregory Guy, professor of linguistics at New York University. “The various kinds of usages, for what purpose are you using it, whether you’re using it as a noun or a verb or an adjective, all of those kinds of things might be fairly nuanced and that gets lost when saying, ‘How much does a person swear?’”

According to Guy, profanity can be broken down into varying levels of taboo-ness.

Religion-based swears like "hell" and "damn" are more commonly used and considered to be less taboo while profanity based on obscene body parts tend to carry the most stigma. Simply counting the *volume* of profanity used — which can vary based on religion, location, etc — doesn't tell us as much in comparison to the *type* of profanity used.

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"I think that the crucial thing is that treating it all as one thing — swearing or not swearing — is really a mistake," advises Guy, who was not involved in the new study.

The Donald Trump implications

There is one important thing about profanity usage that Guy does think we need to pay close attention to though — the *perception* that people who swear more are more honest. And we have a prominent example of that hypothesis with the election of Donald Trump.

"The idea that people construe swearing as a marker of authenticity — that's one thing out of that article I found fairly convincing," says Guy.

"You've seen an example of it with Donald Trump. He says outrageous things, he talks about grabbing women by the p*ssy, but he doesn't get nailed for it by a significant part of the electorate because he's got this persona of being plain spoken, not talking like a politician, saying what he thinks, not politically correct, etc. They think that's a sign of his authenticity. And the fact that he tells lies all the time doesn't seem to garner much attention. They think that the fact that he talks like that means he's speaking his mind."

Ultimately, though, this new research is just a start in the study of profanity. It's too early to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between honesty and profanity.

"The three studies are only a first step in the study of the relationship between profanity and honesty, as one article alone does not provide sufficient evidence for a definite conclusion on any topic," says Feldman.

"Both profanity and honesty are hard to study, because these are behaviors that people either try to hide or behaviors that are hard to observe in a well-controlled lab setting."

TL;DR: studying profanity is complicated sh*t.