

Foul-mouthed people are also the most honest, study finds



Gordon Ramsay, known for his swearing, gets his point
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18 JANUARY 2017 • 7:44PM

Temperate language has traditionally been considered a social virtue, but new research suggests people who refrain from swearing are often the most devious and dishonest.

Those fond of effing and blinding, by contrast, are likely to be the most honest in any given group, according to academics at the University of Cambridge.

Published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, the study describes how a cohort of 276 participants were asked to list their favourite swear

words in order to gauge how fond they were of turning the air blue.

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Dr David Stillwell

They were then given a survey asking them to agree or disagree with statements such as “I never lie” and “all my habits are good” to assess their propensity for dishonesty.

The researchers found that the most honest in the group were also the biggest swearers.

Dr David Stillwell, one of the study's authors, said the correlation may stem from the constraints imposed by social convention.

“If you’re trying to follow the social norms rather than saying what you think, you are saying what people want to hear,” he said.

“In that respect you are not being very honest.

“We did not look at extreme dishonesty such as fraud, so from that experiment it’s an open question as to whether there would be a link.”

However, he said the findings corroborate research in the US which links states with a high level of swearing to low

levels of honest-related crime.

States such as New Jersey, where a lot of people use bad language, were found to rank highly on the State Integrity Index, whereas Utah and other places where bad language is a relative rarity saw higher levels of fraud similar offences.

“At least people who swear are telling you what they really think,” said Dr Stillwell.

“Although if people said what they think all the time, would that really be a good thing?”

The researchers also examined the Facebook postings of 75,000 people, where a similar correlation was observed.

People who regularly posted short, simple messages were the least likely to swear.

Dr Sillwell said simple statements are already known to be associated with dishonesty, because liars find it hard to make up complicated sentences.

However, more nuanced language, evidenced by words such as “but” and “however”, as well as use of pronouns which associate the speaker with his or her statement, are commonly agreed to indicate honesty.

In the Facebook analysis, people who spoke in this style were also more likely to swear.