

# People Who Swear Are More Likely to Be Honest: Study



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## Ain't that the fucking truth.

Let's face it: we all swear. Some of us do so more than others. But while it's generally frowned upon to be a foul-mouthed mess in public, new science is telling us that people who curse a lot actually might be more honest and trustworthy than those who stick to a conservative vocabulary.

According to **a joint study** (aptly titled "Frankly, We Do Give a Damn")—published by the University of Cambridge, Stanford University, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Maastricht University this month—cursing, both online and in real life, is heavily associated with honesty because honest people get emotional, and emotional people swear.

"There are two conflicting perspectives regarding the relationship between profanity and dishonesty. These two forms of norm-violating behavior share common causes, and are often considered to be positively related," the study reads.

"On the other hand, however, profanity is often used to express one's genuine feelings, and could therefore be negatively related to dishonesty. "

Scientists broke down their research in three different ways. First, they tested dishonest behaviour against swearing in a lab environment by asking the 276 participants to describe their swearing habits. Participants were asked to write down the curse words they like to use, the curse words they feel like they *cannot* use but still like to say privately, and how they use different curse words in different settings.

The researchers then compared those results against another questionnaire, in which the participants were asked about different ethical scenarios and how to handle them. For example, "If you say you will do something, do you always keep your promise no matter how inconvenient it might be?"

Contrary to popular belief, the researchers found that those who were more liberal with what swear words they said and how often they said them were far more consistent in keeping honest with other people and rarely lied to get out of difficult situations.

The second test analyzed people's use of swear words on Facebook compared to their actual behaviour in private. This was achieved (quite cleverly, if you ask me) by the use of a Facebook app—**myPersonality**—in which users voluntarily submitted to a personality test, and in turn gave researchers access to their profiles/answers to dissect. A total of 153,716 participants were recruited via the app, but only 73,789 users submitted usable results.

In this test, the researchers found that participants who swore less had a higher percentage of statuses deemed as "dishonest." The algorithm used for this—the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) system—is a little complex, but was essentially used to analyze online linguistics for unnaturally constructed statements.

"The explanation was that dishonest people subconsciously try to (1) dissociate themselves from the lie and therefore refrain from referring to themselves; (2) prefer concrete over abstract language when referring to others (using someone's name instead of "he" or "she"); (3) are likely to feel discomfort by lying and therefore express more negative feelings; and (4) require more mental resources to obscure the lie and therefore end up using less cognitively demanding language, which is characterized by a lower frequency of exclusive words and a higher frequency of motion verbs," the report reads.

What does that mean? Well, research suggests that dishonest people refrain from the use of "I", "Me," "He," or "She," and more frequently used people's full names when talking about issues or events. This is, according to 15 years of science, an effort to depersonalize the liar's emotions from the statement itself. An honest person, on the other hand, might just let the words fly as they make a statement—oftentimes swearing in the process.

The final test looked at data from US states that compared integrity to profanity usage. Across the board, states with a higher level of profanity usage ranked higher on the integrity scale—with Florida (pretty sure they got this one wrong), California (ugh, Hollywood), and Iowa (do Iowans even have anything good to lie about?) topping the list of most trustworthy states.

Ultimately, the researchers were able to assess that swearing more frequently was indicative of being more honest. Still, they also note that honest meant being nice. For example, the study notes that, oftentimes, people swear out of anger. The context of the swearing is up in the air, all it means is that the person doing it is probably telling you the truth about how they feel.

Good fucking day to you.

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