



School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences
Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 6AL

**Study: Re-examining the role of eye-contact within
online disinhibition on the behavioural effects of swearing**

DEBRIEF SHEET

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Thank you for taking part in our study.

As mentioned on the information sheet, vocalised swearing has been found to increase pain tolerance and physical strength. However, it has also been found to increase the level of “risky” behaviour someone will take. The ‘balloon inflation’ task you completed measures someone’s propensity to take risks. The more pumps you made, the more risk you will accept. The Covid-19 pandemic forced research experiments to be conducted online and, using unsupervised online methodologies, the behavioural effects of swearing, outlined above, failed to replicate. When supervised online methodologies (e.g., using video conferencing software) were used, results replicated online. It is thought swearing generates these effects by disinhibiting the speaker and, therefore, as unsupervised online environments can also be disinhibition in nature, the two cancel each other out, stopping any effect of swearing.

We have previously shown that disinhibition, caused by unsupervised online environments, can be counteracted by asking participants to make eye-contact whilst swearing with a researcher in a pre-recorded video. The pseudo-presence of the researcher being sufficient to break the environmental disinhibition effect and allow swearing to generate a behavioural increase in risk taking. The evidence to support the use of a pre-recorded video centred on the fact a lack of eye-contact is the main factor in the formation of environmental online disinhibition. However, as the pre-recorded video presented the entire researcher a question had remained as to whether the same effect would occur to either a video of just the researcher’s eyes, or a single, static image of the researcher’s eyes. This study was, therefore, looking to replicate the original finding that vocalised swearing made with eye-contact to a pre-recorded video would generate increased risk taking, before extending that finding to test the hypotheses that the same increase in risk taking after vocalised swearing would also be found when making eye-contact to both a video of, as well as, a static image of, just a pair of eyes, too.

Further, you completed a lexical decision task, offensiveness and humour ratings, and a questionnaire measuring cognitive dissonance. All these tasks were included as filler tasks to ensure that the study procedure you completed matched the original study procedure we are replicating. The data from these tasks will not be analysed. Additionally, the word search task was included to ensure that there was a standardised time delay between completing the first and second half of each session. This was to guard against any disinhibition effect of swearing (when completed first) from lingering and affecting the results of the second, non-swearword condition.



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SONA Credits

If you are a University of Reading Student completing this study for SONA credits, these will be awarded manually to you within the next 24 hours. If they have not been awarded after 24 hours, please email the Experimenter.

Reminder: What will happen to my data/how will it be protected?

Your data will be kept anonymous, confidential, and securely stored, with only your anonymous ID identifying it. The final dataset collected from this study will be preserved and made available in anonymised form, so that data can be re-used by others. Your individual consent form will be kept for 5 years after the completion of this study. Finally, if you agreed to be contacted about future studies whilst consenting to take part, you may remove this agreement at any point in the future by emailing Prof. Phil Beaman – c.p.beaman@reading.ac.uk.

Once again, thank you again for your participation.

Prof. Philip Beaman and Christopher Dobson