



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

**Study: Investigating the impact of online disinhibition
on the behavioural effects of swearing**

DEBRIEF SHEET

Supervisor:	Email	Phone:
Dr Anthony Haffey	anthony.haffey@reading.ac.uk	0118 378 8523 ext. 100
Experimenter:		
Christopher Dobson	c.g.dobson@student.reading.ac.uk	

Thank you for taking part in our study

As mentioned on the information sheet, swearing out loud has been found to increase pain tolerance and physical strength. However, it has also been found to increase the level of “risky” behaviour someone is prepared to take. The ‘balloon inflation’ task you completed measures the level of risk you were prepared to take. The more pumps you made, the more risk you will accept. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic research experiments have had to be conducted online. One consequence of this was that the effects of swearing outlined above have failed to replicate using unsupervised online testing; but have replicated using supervised online testing. It is thought that swearing generates its effects through inducing disinhibition and that, if unsupervised online testing generates online disinhibition, the two cancel each other out, stopping any effect of swearing. This study manipulated the presence of the researcher to change how much eye-contact you made and how seen you felt, as these are key components in generating online disinhibition. Specifically, it is believed that the lack of eye contact is important in stopping the expected effects of swearing and the video instruction conditions specifically tests this hypothesis.

Further, we asked you to complete the offensiveness rating to test whether online disinhibition made the swearword less offensive. If correct, a swearword, when repeated alone, should be less offensive than when repeated in front of another person. The questionnaire measuring cognitive dissonance was included as we believe that if swearing becomes more offensive in another’s presence, this will create mental conflict. Swearing is a taboo behaviour and so, dissonance should be created between the action of repeating the swearword out loud, and the belief that swearing is taboo. This is also why we included the humour rating. One was to reduce cognitive dissonance is to reframe the action or belief to be in line with the other. As you were told to repeat the word, you can only reframe the belief. Swearing is often reported as being funny, especially the word ‘F**k’, and we think this may reflect a reframing of one’s belief about the word to reduce the cognitive dissonance felt. If correct, results should show a positive correlation between levels of cognitive dissonance and how humorous repeating the word was.

However, the lexical decision task was a manipulation check to ensure each word was repeated out loud, as required. Priming effects mean your response time should be quicker for phonetically similar (i.e., rhyming) than phonetically dissimilar words if you correctly repeated the word for 20 seconds. Your data will be kept confidential and securely stored, with only an anonymous ID number identifying it. Finally, your consent forms will be kept for 5 years, and the following data preserved and made available in anonymised form: average balloon pumps, offensiveness and humour rating, and cognitive dissonance score.

Once again, thank you again for your participation.

Dr Anthony Haffey and Christopher Dobson