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Shooting the Shit: Profanity, Self-Control, and Aggressive Behavior

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SHOOTING THE SHIT: PROFANITY, SELF-CONTROL, AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

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I dedicate this manuscript to my family, my fiancé, Tracy, and our dog Burt. Without them it is unlikely I would have survived graduate school.
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ABSTRACT

A recent Supreme Court case conferred the FCC with the ability to increase the fines for profane language on television as well as to expand their definition of what is deemed offensive. These actions appear to be based on the belief that profane language negatively impacts human behavior. Yet little research exists to indicate that profane language has any effect on human behavior, much less negative effects. The current studies sought to examine the effect of exposure to profane language on human behavior. Specifically, we tested whether profane language would impact factors related to self-control. Two studies provide evidence that profanity can either decrease or increase self-control based on factors of the situation in which the swearing occurred and personal factors of those who are being exposed. A third study provides evidence that exposure to profanity decreases the perception of the strictness of social norms by those who are exposed to it.
INTRODUCTION

Recently the Supreme Court ruled to allow the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to fine broadcasters up to $325,000 for incidents of so-called fleeting expletives aired on television. Although falling short of making such fines a constitutional right, this ruling extends the rights of the FCC to fine broadcasters for the airing of profanity. Previously, fines for taboo language were restricted to instances of taboo language with sexually explicit or excretory meanings. The new ruling expands that definition to include “fleeting expletives,” or what might be considered casual profanity. According to an FCC statement released in response to the ruling, Michael Copps, the acting chairman of the FCC, stated that their interest in this case was to “reassure parents that their children can still be protected from indecent material on the nation’s airwaves,” (Berg, 2009).

Such statements suggest that the FCC believes taboo language, including fleeting expletives, to have a negative influence on people’s, specifically children’s, behavior. Yet, the specific harms that one might experience due to the use of or exposure to swearing, if there are any, have not been established (Heins, 2007; Jay, 2009; McEnry, 2006). While garnering more attention in recent years, much of the research on taboo language focuses on the prevalence of swearing in the media and in real life (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2009), and the reasons people swear (e.g. Jay, 1992; Rassin & Muris, 2005). Little research exists that identifies the consequences of being exposed to profane language.

The absence of evidence does not prove the fact, however. There is a distinct possibility that profane language, even when fleeting, can influence people’s behavior in unsavory ways. This paper will attempt to assess the impact of swearing on behavior. Several recently conducted studies examining the effect of profanity on behavior will be reviewed briefly. Specifically, we focus on the effect of profanity on aggressive behavior. Two theoretical accounts will be put forward to explain the effect of profane language on aggressive behavior. The first will focus on the potential priming effects of profane language on hostile thoughts and emotions based on the General Aggression Model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The second will focus on how profane language changes the perception of current social norms and the need for self-control.
For the purpose of this article, the terms swear word, profanity, and taboo language will be used interchangeably.

**What is Profanity?**

Defining profanity is an elusive task. One might think that the FCC would provide a clear definition of profane language as they are responsible for monitoring and enforcing rules pertaining to its use. Yet, even the FCC’s definition of what is considered indecent, obscene, and/or profane language is loosely defined and open to interpretation. According to fcc.gov (2008), “context is key.” Standards about what words are deemed offensive are based on whether or not the word is used as a sexual or non-sexual referent (although the recent ruling concerning fleeting expletives might change this) and the time of day that the word is spoken. Probably most problematic for establishing a solid definition for profane language based on the FCC’s standards is that a word is judged to be profane on the basis of what an “average person” might deem inappropriate based on “community standards.” Yet community standards can change over time and vary across communities. As such, there is no set list of profane words. Rather, the FCC makes judgments on a case by case basis.

It is not surprising that the FCC has such difficulty pinning down a concrete definition. Although there appear to be clear categories of taboo language, each referring to a specific type of swear word (e.g. blasphemy, scatological referents, ethnic slurs, etc.; Jay, 2009), there seems to be no clear list of what is taboo. This is likely due to the fact, highlighted by the FCC’s statement that “context is key,” that what is taboo varies wildly across situation, time, and person. For example, the term bitch can be used formally to refer to a female dog. In other contexts, such as referring to a domineering female, it acquires taboo status.

It seems then, that the most pertinent variables to consider, when attempting to understand what profane language is and how it can influence behavior, are contextual variables – when and where it occurs, who is saying it, and who is listening. Just as with any other taboo, language taboos are defined by the individual and the circumstance in which they occur (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Mabry, 1974; Wells, 1989). Unsurprisingly, most discussions of swearing center on this idea of context. Jay (2000) points out that whether or not a word is good or bad depends on the context in which it occurs, which defines the word’s appropriateness. Wajnryb suggests that without context, acts of swearing are “only theoretical; they haven’t yet achieved a
meaning” (pg. 25, 2005). We will suggest that profane language is so inextricably linked with the standard context in which it occurs, that exposure to profane language will lead to the perception of similar normative standards to that which are present in environments where swearing is permitted.

Profanity and Context

What is considered taboo is susceptible to multiple factors. We are more accustomed to hearing, and as a result less attentive, to swear words spoken at a bar than at a place of business (Pezdek & Prull, 1993). Jay (1992) found that native and non-native speakers of English judged individuals in a dean’s office to be less likely to swear than those in a parking lot or dormitory. Jay also found that who is saying the swear word will alter the offensiveness of the word, oftentimes depending on the context in which it is spoken. For example, it was judged more offensive for a dean to swear than for a student to swear. This was likely influenced by the likelihood ratings of swearing - as participants judged a college dean to be much less likely to swear than students.

The offensiveness of words also changes with age. Although children consider words like poo-poo and pee-pee to be highly offensive, and use them frequently, adolescents would be unlikely to use the same terms – opting, instead, for more offensive terms like crap, shit, and piss (Jay, 1992). Time in general seems to be an important variable for judging the offensiveness of swear words. In one of the first articles attempting to explain profane language, Patrick (1901) includes such phrases as “mercy”, “goodness, gracious”, and “confound it” as profane language. Few, if any, would consider such phrases offensive today. Time does not always degrade the offensiveness of words. Some words become more offensive as time passes. For example, certain racially offensive slurs are likely considered more offensive today than before the civil rights movement.

Profanity and context seem inextricably linked. As such, it is possible that being exposed to profanity might alter an individual’s perception of the current social norms to match those that are present in profanity-likely situations. Therefore, exposing individuals to profanity should lead to behaviors that are consistent with situations in which profanity is often uttered. In a series of studies examining the frequency of swearing, Jay (1992, 2000) found that over two thirds of profane words were uttered in aggressive contexts. Along the lines of Anderson and Bushman’s
(2002) General Aggression Model (GAM) we initially proposed and tested the hypothesis that exposure to profanity would lead to increases in aggressive behavior (Gitter, Tice, & Baumeister, unpublished data).

Profanity and Aggressive Thoughts and Behaviors

The GAM suggests that exposure to violent stimuli will lead to the activation of hostile mental representations that remain highly accessible even after the violent stimuli have been removed. These active thoughts then lead to increases in the probability of aggressive behavior. Support for this theory has been provided through several studies using a variety of stimuli including violent games (Anderson, et al., 2004), hot temperatures (Anderson, Deuser, & Deneve, 1995) and pictures of guns (Bartholow, Anderson, Carnagey, & Benjamin, 2005). Because profanity is so often used when angered, mental representations of each should be linked in memory. Exposure to profanity should activate hostile knowledge concepts which should then lead to increases in aggressive behavior.

To test this idea, 47 participants (17 female) were recruited to participate in a study on attention. Participants first completed a lexical decision task (LDT). During this task participants were asked to identify whether a string of letters was a word (e.g. APPLE) or non-word (e.g. BARMS) by pressing a corresponding key (‘z’ – for non-words, ‘/’ for words). Participants completed a 20-trial practice block and two 60-trial measurement blocks. Although participants were told the LDT measured attention, its actual purpose was two-fold. First, during the practice trials, half of the participants were subliminally exposed to a set of profane words (e.g. SHIT, FUCK, BITCH). The other half of participants were subliminally primed with neutral words (e.g. PANT, KNOB, ARENA). Second, the two 40 trial blocks were used to measure the participant’s accessibility of hostile words. In each trial 10 of the words were aggressive in content (e.g. MURDER, SHOOT, INJURE) and 10 of the words were neutral (e.g. CANAL, TROUT, RETAIL). The remaining 20 trials in each set were non-word letter strings (e.g. PHUNGE). The rationale is that those who have hostile concepts activated in memory should respond quicker (shorter latencies) to the aggressive words than participants who do not have hostile concepts activated in memory. If profanity primes hostile knowledge concepts, then exposing participants to profanity should lead to shorter latencies on the LDT.
After completing the LDT, participants competed in a reaction time game against an ostensive partner they met earlier in the experiment. Participants did not actually compete against this person. Rather, the “partner’s” responses were predetermined and delivered by a computer program. In the game, participants are asked to click their mouse button as quickly as possible in response to an auditory and visual cue. Whoever, loses on each trial is blasted by an aversive white noise, the intensity and duration of which is set by his or her partner. The participant’s noise settings for his or her partner serve as the measure of aggression.

Results showed that although participants who were primed with profanity were more aggressive toward their partner, there were no differences in the latency of their responses to the aggressive words on the LDT. Although we have replicated the effect on aggressive behavior in subsequent studies, three follow-ups, using varying methods, have failed to show an increase in participants’ levels of hostile cognition. Rather, the evidence suggests that participants show decreases in hostile cognition. In one study participants, who had been exposed to profanity using a similar LDT procedure as the one described above, were asked to read a story about a fictional character named Donald, who acted in an ambiguously aggressive manner and rate his personality. Previous research has shown that participants who were primed to have hostile thoughts accessible were more likely to judge Donald to have a more hostile and angry personality than those left unprimed with hostile thoughts (Srull & Wyer, 1979). Participants exposed to profanity in our study, however, rated Donald as less hostile and angry than those not exposed to profanity.

From these studies we have found that profanity can lead to increases in aggressive behavior. Against what we previously hypothesized, however, these changes in aggressive behavior do not seem to result from increases in hostile cognition. Another factor could be emotion. Research has shown that increases in general arousal and specifically aggressive affect (Anderson, Deuser, & Deneve, 1995) can lead to increases in aggressive behavior (Zillman, 1971, 1983). Profanity often carries a great deal of emotional content (e.g. Goffman, 1978; Jay, 1999). We measured mood in several studies using the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS; Mayer & Gaschke, 1988) and hostile affect, as measured by Anderson, Deuser, and Deneve’s (1995) state hostility scale. No differences emerged between those participants exposed to profanity and those who were not exposed to profanity. Apparently, there is some other
mechanism that stands as a mediator between profanity and aggressive behavior. The studies proposed here will test the idea that profanity leads to decreased motivation for self-control. This decreased motivation to engage in self-control might explain the effects profanity has on aggressive behavior.

**Profanity and Self-Control**

Self-control has long been implicated in the control of aggressive behaviors (e.g. Baron, 1976, 1983; Baron & Bell, 1977). Underregulating and/or lacking the ability to use self-control have been shown to increase aggressive behavior. Low levels of dispositional self-control have been found to be associated with higher levels of aggressive behavior (Caspi, 2000; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004; Murphy & Eisenberg, 1997). Temporary decreases in self-control can also lead to increases in aggressive behavior (Dewall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2006). If profanity can somehow decrease an individual’s level of self-control or motivation to engage in self-control, this could explain the increases in aggressive behavior.

Similar to aggression, lack of self-control seems to be a consistent contextual factor that coincides with the use of profanity. Jay (1992) found that swearing was judged to be more likely in less formal environments on campus (e.g. parking lots and dormitories) than in more formal academic settings (e.g. the dean’s office). Pezdek and Prull (1993) found that participants had better memory for sexually provocative language when it was presented in the context of a high rules environment (an office) compared to a low rules environment (a singles bar). They suggest that this is because such language is less likely in formal settings, and hence more noticeable than in less formal settings. In a series of case studies, Baruch and Jenkins (2007) have found that while employees often put on a good “public face” when dealing with the customer, many organizations have a culture of “social swearing” when the customer is absent. Baruch and Jenkins go on to suggest that, while swearing is often frowned upon in the workplace, management can use swearing to break down social hierarchies in the workplace. By engaging in social swearing with their employees, managers can bring themselves down to the employee’s level. Social norms and rules concerning politeness and propriety tend to frown upon swearing. In environments where self-control is less often used, however, swearing becomes more likely.

Profanity also appears to be a tool used more frequently by those lower in self-control. Fast and Funder (2008) found that those participants who used profanity more often during the
course of a 2 hour open interview were more likely to be judged by their friends and unacquainted observers to be lower in conscientiousness. We have obtained similar findings in our own research. Participants asked to judge the personality of an individual based on a personal narrative that contained profanity were more likely to judge that individual as lower in conscientiousness than if the profanity had been removed. We have also found some evidence that individuals who swear more are lower in self-control (Gitter & Cougle, unpublished data). In a survey of 114 participants (73% female), we found a partial correlation, controlling for gender, between reported frequency of swearing and a measure of trait self-control (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), such that those who reported swearing more frequently also reported lower levels of self-control ($r = -.419, p < .001$).

The Theory of Normative Conduct

There does seem to be a link between self-control and profane language – with those having lower levels of self-control being more likely to swear and situations in which self-control is less often used leading to a greater likelihood of swearing. We would like to go one step further, however, and suggest that being exposed to swearing could lead to decreased motivation to engage in self-control. In effect, we suggest that because swearing is so strongly tied to the concept of norm violation, the utterance of a swear word will signal others who are present that self-control is not necessary in the current situation.

The idea that instances of norm violation will lead to increases in inappropriate behavior is not new. Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990) laid out such a possibility in their theory of normative conduct. This theory suggests that two types of norms drive human behavior. Injunctive norms are the standard rules of what people ought to do. In the absence of any other information, these are the norms that guide human behavior. Descriptive norms, on the other hand, are context sensitive and activated by the actions of others. Both types of norms function as heuristics (Cialdini, 1988). When we see others performing a certain act, we use that information to guide our own behavior – especially if that act is consistent with the prevailing injunctive norms. Potent examples of descriptive norms that violate injunctive norms, however, can lead to the injunctive norm becoming more salient and therefore having a stronger influence on behavior.
Norms concerning swearing vary wildly from situation to situation. Swearing is much more likely in more casual contexts like a bar than at more formal contexts like one’s place of business (Pezdek & Prull, 1993). Additionally, the people that we are interacting with can change the current norms about appropriateness of swearing – individuals are more likely to swear in the context of same-sex friends than when in the presence of family members and people we are unfamiliar with (Wells, 1989). While the injunctive norm that swearing is inappropriate will remain relatively stable across situations, descriptive norms concerning swearing will be influenced by the immediate actions of others. If someone swears it should set the norm that swearing is appropriate in the given context.

Where we differ from Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren’s theory, however, is in what behaviors will be affected by the instance of swearing. Whereas Cialdini and colleagues suggest that injunctive and descriptive norms influence closely related behaviors (e.g. littering and turning off the lights) more than distally related behaviors (e.g. littering and voting), we suggest that swearing will affect self-control more generally (preliminary study & Study 1). Recent research by Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg (2008) found that norm violations can lead to increases in even distally related subsequent norm violations. Additionally, as outline above, swearing often occurs in permissive environments where self-control is encouraged less; not just when swearing is permitted. Therefore, being exposed to a descriptive norm, swearing, should lead to decreases in motivation to perform other acts that require self-control, not just the likelihood that the individual will swear. We expect this to be moderated by the individuals own personal injunctive norms concerning swearing – whether they find swearing to be appropriate or not (studies 1 & 2). We also expect that the status of the individual instigating the descriptive norm will affect the influence of swearing on motivation for self-control – those in higher power who set a descriptive norm of permissiveness concerning swearing should have a stronger effect than those perceived to be in low power who set the descriptive norm (study 1).
PRELIMINARY STUDY

Stimuli

Four research assistants were asked to write narratives about the best meal they had ever eaten. Of these, one narrative was selected and altered to include casual swearing. Care was taken to ensure that the swearing used would reflect casual speech rather than an invective tone. The narrative is provided in Appendix A.

Procedure

87 students (59 females) enrolled in introductory psychology participated for course credit. After obtaining informed consent, participants were informed that they would read over a set of narratives and provide personality judgments of the author of those narratives. In actuality the narratives were used to subtly manipulate exposure to profanity. Each participant read four narratives written by ostensive participants from an earlier study. For half of the participants one of the narratives was altered to include casual profanity. The other half read the narrative as it originally appeared. To bolster the cover story, participants rated the author of each narrative on the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

After participants completed their ratings of all four authors, the experimenter returned and informed them that they would complete a task that examined how individual letters remind them of words. Following a procedure used by Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister (1998) Participants were given a sheet containing 20 anagrams with an explanation of how to solve them and the instructions, “This is not a test. Work on these anagrams for as long as you want and when you feel you can’t solve anymore, please ring the bell to notify the experimenter you are done.” Unbeknownst to participants four of these anagrams were completely unsolvable. Immediately upon exiting the lab room the experimenter secretly began timing the participant. Upon the participant ringing the bell, the experimenter noted the time, and reentered the room to probe for suspicion and debrief the participant. Any participant who exceeded 15 minutes was stopped and had his or her time recorded as 15 minutes.

Results

A 2(Narrative Condition: Profanity vs. No Profanity) X 2(Gender) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between condition and gender, $F(1, 83) = 7.097, p < .01$. Inspection of the
graph of this interaction (Figure 1) suggested that although males exposed to profanity persisted less than males not exposed to profanity, the reverse seemed to hold true for female participants – those exposed to profanity persisted longer than those not exposed to profanity. Consistent with our hypothesis that exposure to profanity would decrease persistence at the anagram task, contrast analyses showed a marginally significant difference between men exposed to profanity ($M = 540.38$ secs, $SD = 221.45$) and men not exposed to profanity ($M = 683.58$ secs, $SD = 209.64$), in persistence on the unsolvable anagrams, $F(1, 83) = 3.244, p < .075$. Contrary to what was expected, women exposed to profanity ($M = 688.83$ secs, $SD = 188.94$) persisted significantly longer than women not exposed to profanity ($M = 571.39$ secs, $SD = 230.24$), $F(1, 83) = 4.622, p < .05$, and men who were exposed to profanity, $F(1, 83) = 4.419, p < .05$. The difference between men and women not exposed to profanity was marginal, $F(1,83) = 2.894, p = .093$.

**Discussion**

Although we did not find strong evidence for the effect of profanity on self-control, this study does provide some important insights. Men trended toward a decrease in self-control, but this effect did not reach full significance. The failure to reach full significance may be due to the measure of self-control used. Profanity likely only affects the motivation for self-control and not the ability to engage in self-control. As such, it likely does not have as strong of an effect on self-control effort as those factors that are proposed to influence ability, like self-control depletion (Baumeister, Brataslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). The only motivation for participants to give up on the anagrams task was the desire to finish the experiment quickly in order to leave the lab. Perhaps some participants were more motivated by solving the anagrams than finishing the experiment. To examine this possibility, our later studies employed highly aversive self-control tasks that would be influenced by both ability and motivation to engage in self-control.

That women increased in persistence at the anagrams task is also telling. Previous research has shown that women have different perceptions of the perceived appropriateness of swearing. Although women do swear relatively frequently in the presence of other women and in private, they are much less likely than men to swear in public situations (Jay, 1980). Although we left the gender of the swearing author ambiguous, participants might have been more likely to judge the author of the narrative as male, due to the higher frequency of swearing in public for
males – hence the effect of the narrative would be stronger amongst male subjects than female subjects. Additionally, there are norms in our society that men should not swear in the presence of women. This normative factor might have led to the variable influence of exposure to swearing on men compared to women.

Personal norms concerning swearing likely affect the possibility that swearing will effect subsequent motivation toward self-control efforts. Those who are more permissive of profanity may be more strongly affected by swearing than those who are stricter concerning the rules of swearing. Having more restrictive norms concerning swearing, women might become reactive to swearing in public with efforts at more self-control. This might also explain the marginal effect for men. Some of the men in the sample might have been relatively opposed to swearing and showed a result similar to the women in the sample. Future studies will account for this factor by assessing participants’ general perceptions about the appropriateness of swearing and their frequency of use of profanity (studies 1 & 2). These studies will also present gender consistent exposures to swearing. Women will be exposed to female swearers and men will be exposed to male swearers (studies 1 & 2).
STUDY 1

With new insights from our preliminary study, we conducted the following study to examine the effect of profanity on self-control. To deal with the issues highlighted by the preliminary study, we exposed participants to an actual incident of swearing in the lab. The gender of the swearer and a research assistant who was present were also gender consistent – male subjects were exposed to a male swearer in the presence of a male assistant and female subjects were exposed to a female swearer in the presence of a female assistant. Because women potentially evinced more self-control in the preliminary study due to an aversive reaction to hearing someone swear based on personal norms, we also gave participants a measure of their personal norms concerning swearing. Participants were exposed to a confederate who either did or did not swear. To measure self-control, we had participants sustain physical pain, by submerging their hand in ice water, for as long as they could tolerate. We expected that, compared to those in the no profanity condition, those participants who were exposed to profanity and reported more permissive norms concerning swearing would show decreases in self-control whereas the effect would be reduced, or even reversed, for those who reported swearing less frequently.

Procedure

103 undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology classes were recruited for a study on personality and physical discomfort through the online sign-up system. Five participants were excluded from the final analyses because the beginning temperature of the cold water bath during the cold-pressor task was greater than 3 degrees above freezing. Each of these participants persisted for the entire 5 minutes allowed, indicating that the cold-water bath was not aversive at this temperature. The temperature of the cold-water bath for all other participants was within 1 degree of freezing. A starch-based chemical was used to maintain freezing temperatures in the ice water bath. Therefore, the online sign-up system asked that individuals with allergies to starch, corn, or potatoes not participate in the experiment.

Participants were brought to the lab room and given the opportunity to provide informed consent. Next participants were left in the lab room for several minutes to fill out several surveys including measures of trait self-control scale ($\alpha = .70$; TSC; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone,
2004) and social desirability (α = .71; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) as well the Discomfort Intolerance Scale (α = .75; DIS; Schmidt, Richey, & Fitzpatrick, 2006) which was assessed to control for baseline levels of pain tolerance. All scales can be found in appendices B1-B4.

Participants then performed the cold-pressor portion of the experiment. Participants were again asked if they were allergic to starch, corn, or potatoes. No participants responded yes to this question. Participants were then asked to submerge their nondominant hand into a bath of room temperature water for two minutes to standardize limb temperature across participants. We took this opportunity to expose participants to swearing. About a minute after the participant submerged his or her hand, a confederate entered the room pretending to be in the wrong place. In the control condition, the confederate recognized his mistake and said, “Woops, wrong room,” and then promptly left the lab. In the profanity condition, the confederate recognized his mistake and said, “Shit, wrong fucking room,” and then promptly left the lab. The experimenters and confederates were blind to the hypothesis of the study.

To bolster the chance that participants will view profanity as the norm, we also manipulated the perceived power of the swearer. For participants in the high power condition, the confederate who accidentally entered the room was wearing a lab coat. For those participants in the low power condition the confederate was wearing street clothes. Wearing official outfits has previously been used as effective manipulation of power (Bickman, 1974).

After the remainder of the two minutes of submersion in the room temperature water, participants were asked to submerge their nondominant hand to 7 cm below the wrist into a circulating coldwater bath (0 – 1 degree celcius). Participants were asked to report when they first experienced the sensation of pain (threshold) and when they could no longer withstand the pain (tolerance). The research assistant kept track of the time using a stopwatch and recorded the participants’ response times for threshold and tolerance. Immediately after removing their hands from the ice bath, participants were asked to report, on a 1 – very little or no pain to 10 – worst pain I have ever felt, the amount of pain they experienced during the task. Finally, participants filled out a measure assessing their permissiveness regarding swearing. This scale asked participants to respond to 16 items assessing their personal norms concerning swearing (e. g. Swearing is never appropriate, I don’t think swearing is wrong) on a 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) scale as well as an additional item asking participants how many times they
swear per week. The full scale ($\alpha = .84$) can be found in appendix B4. Scores on these items were standardized and then summed to construct a variable of permissiveness vs. restrictiveness concerning swearing. After filling out this scale, participants were then debriefed, awarded credit, and escorted out of the lab.

Results

Preliminary analyses.

There were significant correlations between the normative swearing measure and TSC ($r = -0.407, p < .001$), DIS ($r = 0.260, p < .01$), and social desirability ($r = -0.244, p < .05$), such that those who were more permissive concerning swearing reported lower TSC, more discomfort from pain, and less social desirability. TSC was also positively correlated with social desirability ($r = 0.332, p < .001$) such that those with higher trait self-control responded in a more social desirable manner.

A MANOVA predicting TSC and scores on the normative swearing measure found no differences based on profanity exposure condition or status condition, all $F$'s < 1. There were no differences based on gender except that men ($M = .21, SD = 1.00$) reported more permissiveness concerning swearing than women ($M = -.22, SD = .95$), $F(1, 88) = 4.913, p < .05$.

A one-way MANOVA of gender on the pain variables revealed significant effects of gender on tolerance, $F(1,95) = 5.775, p < .05$, and threshold $F(1, 95) = 4.431, p < .05$, and a marginally significant effect of gender on perceived pain, $F(1, 95) = 3.741, p = .056$ with men reporting higher threshold and tolerance and less reported pain than women. Reported scores on the DIS also correlated significantly with pain tolerance, $r = -0.35, p < .01$, with those who reported higher discomfort intolerance showing lower pain tolerance. There were no relationships between TSC, the normative swearing measure, or social desirability and any of the pain measures. Because of the strong intercorrelations between the normative swearing measure and TSC, DIS, and social desirability, the correlation between DIS and pain tolerance, as well as the gender difference in normative swearing scores and the pain variables we used TSC, DIS, social desirability, and gender as covariates in all main analyses that do not use these variables as main effect terms. Exclusion of these variables as covariates does not result in any substantive change in any of the findings reported below.
Main Analyses.

We tested the four-way interaction of the normative swearing measure, gender, status condition, and profanity exposure condition as well as all lower order three-way and two-way interactions on threshold and tolerance. The four-way interactions and all three-way interactions failed to reach significance.

Threshold. One participant failed to report threshold. Therefore, the following analyses did not include this participant. The only significant two-way interaction was between profanity condition and the normative swearing measure, controlling for gender, TSC, social desirability, and DIS scores, on threshold, $\beta = -0.545$, $t(89) = -3.906$, $p < .001$. Following Aiken and West (1991) we first graphed the interaction at 1 SD above and below the mean on the normative swearing measure (figure 2). Next, we probed the interaction by testing the significance of the slopes at 1 SD above and below the mean. At +1 SD on the normative swearing measure (permissive swearers), the slope of the regression line was marginally significant, $\beta = -0.269$, $t(89) = -1.944$, $p = .055$. At 1 SD below the mean on the normative swearing measure (restrictive swearers) the slope of the regression line was significant, $\beta = 0.500$, $t(89) = 3.716$, $p < .001$, indicating that those who reported that they did not approve of swearing reported higher threshold levels when exposed to swearing compared to when they were not exposed to swearing.

Tolerance. As with threshold, the only significant two-way interaction was between the normative swearing measure and exposure condition, controlling for gender, TSC, social desirability, and DIS scores, on tolerance, $\beta = -0.439$, $t(90) = -3.327$, $p < .001$. As above, we first graphed the interaction (figure 3) and then probed the interaction at 1 SD above and below the mean. The slope of the regression line at 1 SD above the mean (permissive swearers) was significant, $\beta = -0.342$, $t(90) = -2.607$, $p < .05$, indicating that those who reported being permissive concerning swearing reported lower pain tolerance and were exposed to swearing compared to when those who were not exposed to swearing. This is consistent with our original predictions. Additionally, the slope of the regression line at 1 SD below the mean (restrictive swearers) was significant, $\beta = 0.280$, $t(90) = 2.165$, $p < .05$, indicating that those who reported being generally restrictive concerning swearing and who were exposed to swearing reported higher pain tolerance than those who were not exposed to swearing. Unexpectedly, the normative
swearing measure was positively and significantly correlated with pain tolerance \((r = .451, p < .001)\) and pain threshold \((r = .456, p < .001)\) in the no profanity condition. This effect was reversed in the profanity exposure condition for threshold \((r = -.307, p < .05)\) but not significant for tolerance \((r = -.184, p = .221)\).

There was no effect of condition or any interactive effects on reported level of pain other than the previously reported gender difference. We also failed to obtain any main effects or interactions with the status manipulation.

**Discussion**

As expected, participants who reported general permissiveness concerning swearing and were exposed to swearing reported significantly lower pain tolerance and threshold than similar participants who were not exposed to swearing. Those participants who reported being generally restrictive concerning swearing and were exposed to swearing reported higher levels of pain threshold and tolerance than similar participants who were not exposed to profanity. We believe the findings concerning restrictive swearers may have resulted from a reactance to the swearing; people who swear infrequently likely experience exposure to swearing as particularly averse and a direct threat to their own personal beliefs about swearing. The increase in pain threshold and tolerance amongst these participants may stand as an indicator to others that they can still maintain a high level of self-control when others are acting in a less than self-controlled manner. Essentially, these participants might want to show that even though the norms of society, and in this case the local situation, start to become more lax, they still have high standards and levels of self-control.

Unexpectedly, we found a significant relationship between the normative swearing measure and pain tolerance and pain threshold in the no profanity condition indicating that those who reported more permissiveness concerning swearing reporting higher pain tolerance and threshold than those who reported more restrictive norms concerning swearing. Although unexpected, this finding is consistent with recent findings by Stephens, Atkins, and Kingston (2009) showing that when individuals are asked to swear, they report higher levels of pain tolerance. Stephens, Atkins, and Kingston (2009) explained this finding by suggesting that swearing is used as a pain management strategy. It is possible that participants who reported
more permissiveness concerning swearing might have been mentally repeating swear words, or engaging in other pain regulation techniques, that were unbeknownst to the experimenter.
STUDY 2

Study 2 sought to extend the findings of study 1 by examining a potential factor that could explain the relationship between profanity exposure and self-control. Specifically, as indicated above, we examined whether profanity would influence the effect of profanity exposure on the perceived strictness of social norms. Rules and standards are a necessary component of self-regulation (Carver, 2004; Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). If there are no rules to follow, there is little need to engage in self-regulation. Therefore, if swearing can lead people to perceive that the rules are unimportant or nonexistent, swearing should reduce a person’s motivation to engage in self-regulatory efforts.

We used a different manipulation of profanity in study 2; profane and non-profane comedy routines. To measure participants’ perception of the strictness of social norms, we asked participants to assess fines to individuals who had committed crimes. We expect that those participants who hold higher standards and believe the rules should be stricter will set higher fines than those who believe the rules should be more lax. As such, we expected those exposed to profanity will reduce the fines they assessed to the criminals. We also expected this to be moderated by the normative swearing measure with those who are more permissive concerning swearing showing the predicted effect of profanity exposure. We expected those who are more restrictive concerning swearing, however, to either show a reduced effect or, as in study 1, that the effect will be reversed.

Procedure

151 participants enrolled in undergraduate courses at a large Southeastern university participated for course credit. Participants were told that these studies were completely independent of one another. Participants were told that the first study would examine the relationship between personality and humor and that the second study would examine lay perceptions of guilt. In actuality, the procedures for both studies comprised only one study.

To bolster our cover story, participants read and signed two informed consent forms before each section would begin – one for the humor study and one for the perception of guilt study. After reading and signing the first consent forms participants filled out several questionnaires including the TSC and normative swearing measure used in study 1. Because we
were using comedy routines as a manipulation of swearing in this study, we excluded one of the items on this scale that asked participants if they like dirty jokes and bathroom humor. We also assessed socioeconomic status (SES) by asking participants to report their parents’ level of education and occupation. These scales were embedded in several other measures of personality to draw attention away from their presence and to further bolster the cover story.

Participants were then asked to listen to several comedy clips and rate how funny they found each clip on three likert scale items (e.g. how funny did you find the comedian, how funny did you find the presentational style of the material, how likely would you be to recommend this comedian to a friend). Participants listened to 5 clips in total. Two of these clips were edited to manipulate profane content. For half of the participants these two clips were in their original form, which contained profanity. For the other half of the participants the profane language was edited out of the clip. To be sure, the profanity in the routines was not central to the jokes themselves. Rather, the swearing was more incidental. As such, removing the profanity did not change the content of the joke and was barely noticeable. The gender of the comedian across all of the clips was matched to the gender of the participant – male subjects listened to male comedians, female subjects listened to female comedians.

After completing these ratings, participants were then asked to read and sign the consent form for the second study on lay decision making. In this portion of the experiment, participants were presented with four police reports describing criminal acts (see appendix C). Two of these crimes were more serious offenses (DUI, embezzlement) and two were more minor offenses (prostitution, assault). One of each crime level was perpetrated by a male and the other was perpetrated by a female. Participants were asked to assume the role of a judge and assign fines for each of the crimes. Participants were given a range ($500-$5000) for sentencing for each of the offenses and told that they must make their judgments within that range. Our assumption is that those who perceive norms and rules to be important would assess higher fines than those who perceive norms and rules to be less important. We expected this effect to be stronger for the minor crimes than for the more serious offenses. We also asked participants to rate the acceptability (1 – not very acceptable to 7 – very acceptable), how strict the judge should be (1 – not very strict to 7 – very strict), and how justified (1 – completely unjustified to 7 – completely
they judged the behavior to be. The experimenters were blind to hypothesis and condition.

Results

Preliminary analyses.

There was a strong, negative correlation between the TSC and the normative swearing measure, $r = -.438, p < .001$, such that those with lower trait self-control were generally more accepting of swearing than those higher in trait self-control. SES was unrelated to both TSC and the normative swearing measure. A MANOVA predicting SES, TSC, and the normative swearing measure as a result of gender revealed only a significant difference on the normative swearing measure, $F(1, 146) = 3.18, p = .076$. Men indicated greater acceptance of swearing than women. A MANOVA predicting TSC, SES, and gender based on condition did not show differences in TSC and scores on the normative swearing measure. There was, however, a significant difference in SES based on condition, $F(1, 146) = 7.073, p < .01$, with participants in the profanity condition reporting lower SES than participants in the no profanity condition. As such, we used gender, TSC, and SES as covariates in all analyses that did not include these variables as main effects. Exclusion of these variables as covariates did not substantively change any of the findings reported below.

Main Analyses.

Fines. We tested all higher order interactions between our continuous variables, gender, and our manipulation on the average fine assessed across the four crimes as well as the crimes individually. No higher order interactions were significant. There was, however, a main effect of condition on fine levels assessed. Specifically, a MANCOVA of the effect of condition on average fines, controlling for TSC, SES, and gender was statistically significant, $F(1, 146) = 5.687, p < .05$. Participants in the profanity condition set lower fine levels ($M = 2582.81, SD = 989.09$) than participants in the no profanity condition ($M = 2260.44, SD = 2260.44$). Looking at individual crimes, there was no effect of condition, controlling for TSC, SES, and gender, on the two more serious crimes (DUI, embezzlement), $F$s < 1. There was however, a significant effect of condition, controlling for TSC, SES, and gender, on both of the more minor crimes. Participants in the profanity condition set a significantly lower fine level for the prostitution case ($M = 2193.06, SD = 1508.48$) than those in the no profanity condition ($M = 1565.19, SD = 20$)
1330.11), $F(1, 146) = 8.042, p < .005$. Participants in the profanity condition also set a lower fine level for the assault case ($M = 2125.69, SD = 1508.48$) than those in the no profanity condition ($M = 1531.01, SD = 1262.08$). The fine values based on condition can be found in figure 4.

Neither the normative swearing measure nor SES correlated with the fine values. There was, however, a small but significant negative correlation between TSC and the fine assessed for the embezzlement case, $r = -.190, p < .05$, as well as a marginally significant negative correlation between TSC and the fine assessed for the DUI, $r = -.151, p = .065$, such that those higher in self-control assessed lower fines for these crimes than those low in trait self-control. The findings concerning the effect of condition on the fine values do not change substantially when not controlling for SES, TSC, or gender.

*Acceptability, strictness, and justifiability.* As before, we tested all possible higher order interactions between TSC, the normative swearing measure, gender, and our manipulation on the questions of the acceptability, justification, and strictness. No significant higher order interactions were significant. There were also no effects of the manipulation on these variables. There were, however, several effects of gender. Men ($M = 3.0375, SD = 2.089$) judged the embezzler to be more justified in her actions than women ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.51$), $F(1, 149) = 6.122, p < .05$. Men ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.69$) also judged the prostitution case to be more acceptable than women ($M = 1.80, SD = 1.05$), $F(1,149) = 9.915, p < .005$. In contrast, however, men ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.64$) also indicated that they thought the judge should be stricter in the prostitution case than women ($M = 3.06, SD = 1.65$). No other significant relationships were found.
GENERAL DISCUSSION

Findings from the preliminary study were somewhat consistent with our prediction that individuals exposed to profanity would show decreased levels of self-control. Although men exposed to profanity showed a marginally significant trend toward less self-control, as indexed by persistence at unsolvable anagrams, compared to men not exposed to profanity, women showed the opposite effect – women exposed to profanity showed increased self-control on this measure. Additionally, study 1 found that profanity exposure did indeed reduce self-control, as indexed by pain tolerance in a cold pressor task, compared to a no profanity control condition among those participants who reported general permissiveness concerning swearing. This effect was reversed for participants who reported swearing infrequently. Finally, study 2 found that participants exposed to profane comedy routines assessed lower fines to criminals who committed minor crimes compared to those who were exposed to edited, non-profane comedy routines. This suggests that the reason that profanity might lead to reductions in self-control is by reducing the participant’s perceptions of the strictness of social norms. When social norms are perceived as less strict, there is less need to engage in self-control.

Previous studies examining broken window theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) and the theory of normative conduct (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) have produced results consistent with our findings. For example, just as swearing led to decreased self-control in our studies, Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg (2008) found that the presence of graffiti increased other rule violating behaviors (e.g. littering). The novel theoretical contribution of this research, however, is that our studies were able to examine the motivational processes that influence how observing rule violations influences subsequent behavior. Previous research testing these ideas has relied primarily on field studies, which do not allow for the measurement of internal mental states. The findings of these studies implicate the role of self-regulation and the perception of social norms concerning rule-violating behavior in the break-down of self-regulation after exposure to rule violating behavior. Participants exposed to profanity gave reduced fines to criminals compared to those not exposed to profanity. We interpret this to suggest that observing rule violations signal that controlling one’s behavior is less than necessary. Following the rules is less essential if no one else is putting forth the effort to do so. The findings of the preliminary study as well as study
I suggest that this reduction in the perception of the necessity to control one’s behavior reduces the motivation for self-regulation, specifically among people who generally perceive swearing as permissible.

We also found several indications that exposure to profanity could actually improve self-regulation. This is consistent with findings from research by Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990). In these studies participant’s littering behavior was increased by seeing other people litter. This effect only occurred in already littered environments. When the environment was clean, seeing another person litter decreased littering. Cialdini and colleagues reasoned that these differences were due to variations in injunctive and descriptive norms. When an environment is generally free of litter, the injunctive norm that littering is not permissible is most salient. Seeing someone else litter in a clean environment violates the injunctive norm and consequently makes the injunctive norm more salient. When an environment is already littered, however, seeing someone else litter reinforces the descriptive norm that littering is permissible. The descriptive norm becomes more salient than the injunctive norm and littering increases as a consequence.

Injunctive and descriptive norms appear to influence the effect of swearing on self-control as well. In studies 1 & 2, we assessed injunctive norms by asking participants to rate their personal beliefs about the appropriateness of swearing. In study 1, those who held the injunctive norm that swearing is inappropriate reacted to swearing by increasing their self-regulatory efforts. For these individuals, the descriptive norm (people are swearing) violated the injunctive norm (swearing is not appropriate). This made the injunctive norm salient and led to more controlled behavior. Those who held the injunctive norm that swearing is appropriate, however, responded to swearing by decreasing self-regulatory efforts. For these individuals, the descriptive norm reinforced the injunctive norm and their behavior became less controlled.

Although not significant, study 2 found a similar interaction between personal norms concerning swearing and profanity exposure, $\beta = -.143$, $t(145) = -1.197$, $p = .233$. The results of this analysis are presented in figure 5. Participants who held the injunctive norm that swearing is generally permissible responded with decreased fines for criminal behavior. The slope of this line was significant, $\beta = -.364$, $t(145) = -2.41$, $p < .05$. Participants who held the injunctive norm that swearing is not permissible also assessed lower fines for criminal behavior, but to a lesser degree. The slope of this line was not significant, $\beta = -.086$, $t(145) = -.735$, $p = .464$. The less
severe effect found in this study may have been due to the nature of the manipulations used across the two studies. Previous research has found that the appropriateness of swearing varies by context and the perceived acceptability of swearing within that context (Jay, 1992; Pezdek & Prull, 1993). Although often still judged as inappropriate, swearing is rather common, and therefore more acceptable, during comedy routines. It is less common, however, during experiments at major universities. Therefore, the violation of the injunctive norm to not swear may have been perceived as less severe by those participants who were exposed through comedy routines than by those who were exposed to swearing by a bumbling individual who interrupted their psychology experiment.

This reasoning could help to explain the gender differences found in study 1. In this study we found that women increased their self-control in response to profanity. Although we did not measure personal norms concerning swearing in this study, there are general rules in society that men ought not to swear in the presence of women. The gender of the author of the narrative in this study was not identified. Nevertheless, the behaviors that the author performed were more typical of male behavior; the narrator was eating barbecue and drinking cheap beer. Additionally, Jay (1980) has found that while men are comfortable swearing across a variety of situations and in public, women are more reserved in their swearing and are more likely to swear in private situations with close friends. These factors might have led participants in this study to assign male gender to the unidentified swearer. When women read this narrative, it violated the injunctive norm that male swearing in the presence of a lady is inappropriate. Just as individuals who reported perceiving swearing as impermissible increased in self-control in study 1, so did the women in this study. Characteristics of the situation, as well as characteristics of who is being exposed, appear to moderate the effects of swearing on self-control.

There also seem to be differences based on whether one is exposed to swearing or swears oneself. While our studies found that exposure to others’ swearing can either increase or decrease pain tolerance based on characteristics of the individual, previous research by Stephens, Atkins, and Kingston (2009) has found that pain tolerance increases when the person who is experiencing the pain is the one who swears. The authors explained this finding by suggesting that swearing can be used as a pain management strategy. Many of us have had the experience of stubbing a toe and letting loose with a barrage of profanity. The findings from the control
condition of study 1 provide some support for this effect. Although not allowed to speak (and consequently not allowed to swear), participants who reported more permissiveness concerning swearing were able to withstand the cold water bath for longer periods of time than those who reported less permissiveness concerning swearing. It is possible that permissive swearers in this condition were repeating swear words in their head (or were using other pain management strategies) to tolerate the pain they experienced.

While some of our findings are consistent with the idea that one’s own swearing can increase pain tolerance, we would also suggest that the present research presents an alternative interpretation of the Stephens, Atkins, and Kingston (2009) findings. Stephens and colleagues asked their participants to swear repeatedly. Some of the participants may have been uncomfortable with performing this behavior as it conflicted with their own personal norms concerning the appropriateness of swearing. For them, swearing might indicate to others that they lack control over their behavior. For these individuals, the increased persistence during the pain tolerance task may have resulted from a motive to show the experimenter that they still had control, even though their swearing indicated otherwise. Future research on the effect of one’s own swearing on pain tolerance should assess the individual’s personal norms concerning swearing. If the effect is stronger among those participants who perceive swearing to be inappropriate, this would support the notion that motives to maintain an image of self-control influences pain tolerance.

The current research is itself not free of alternative explanations. Specifically, we did ask participants to refrain from speaking during the cold-pressor portion of study 1. Exposure to swearing might have primed participants with the motive to swear to regulate their pain. This motive would likely be stronger among participants who are more permissive concerning swearing than those who are restrictive concerning swearing. In effect, these participants would be engaging in self-censorship. Self-censorship is a form of self-regulation. Regulating one’s behavior has previously been found to temporarily deplete one’s capability to engage in self-regulatory efforts (Baumeister, Brataslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). Therefore the decrease in pain tolerance might have been due to a self-regulatory depletion effect.

There are several reasons to believe that this “private swearing” was not what caused the decrease in self-control in this study. First, the alternative explanation that a depletion effect
caused the decrease in pain tolerance among permissive swearers would require that swearing be a more difficult to control behavior than other pain expressions. All participants were asked to refrain from speaking during the cold-pressor portion of the experiment. Even if they would not regularly swear, it is likely that participants would normally use some vocalization to express and attempt to control their pain. In effect, we were asking all participants to self-censor all language, not just taboo language. Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that the self-censorship of swearing has any more of an effect on self-regulation than the self-censorship of any other language – although such a finding would be very interesting and not completely unexpected. Second, concerns about this possibility arose near the completion of this study. To check for this possibility, we asked the last 22 participants to report what they were thinking during the cold-pressor portion of the experiment, followed by a question asking them if they swore in their head during this time. Only four of the 22 participants reported swearing in their head. Two of these participants were in the control condition and therefore had not been exposed to profanity. Finally, such a depletion effect would not be able to explain why participants who are normally less permissive concerning swearing would increase in their self-regulation when exposed to swearing. Therefore, we suggest that the change in the perceived permissiveness of the strictness of social norms is a much better explanation for the changes in participant’s levels of self-regulatory effort - although we do not rule out the alternative explanation.

Implications

Swearing appears to have an influence on behavior by altering processes associated with self-control. Future studies should examine the impact of exposure to swearing on other behaviors that result from a lack of self-control. Our own studies have found that swearing can influence aggression, but there are many other behaviors including prosocial behavior (Dewall, Baumeister, Gailliot, & Maner, 2008), self-presentation (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005), and decision making (Vohs et al., 2008), among others, that have been shown to vary as a result of an individual’s level of self-control.

There also seem to be some benefits of swearing. Research by Stephens, Atkins, and Kingston (2009), and supported by our research, has found that swearing can be effective in pain regulation. People often swear not only to regulate pain, but also to express frustration, anxiety, and anger. It would be interesting to see if swearing could have the same effect on psychological
stressors as it does for physical stressors. Although research has found that cathartic aggression increases rather than decreases aggression (Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack, 1999) it has been shown to aid in mood-regulation (Bushman, Baumeister, & Phillips, 2001). Swearing might serve as a similar, but less dangerous, outlet for regulating negative emotional states.

One thing that we did not address in the current studies is the effect of censorship of swearing on behavior. It could be suggested that censoring swear words has limited effects – although the swear word has been obscured by a “bleep” (or some other sound), the bleep signals that a swear word has been vocalized. Someone has still sworn, the listener just doesn’t know what the swear word is. As such, even censored swearing would still result in the effects obtained in the studies reported herein. The findings of the present research, however, indicate that censorship might not only eliminate the effects of swearing, but could actually result in greater self-control. Bleeping does more than obscure the word; it also indicates that the word is inappropriate. By exposing individuals to rule-violations that have been reprimanded, it indicates to the audience that violations of the rules will not be tolerated. As such, censorship, as well as other sanctions on rule-violations (e.g. fines, jail time), should increase self-control.

Even though swearing can influence behavior, it appears that the effects may be limited. The results of study 2 found that those exposed to swearing assessed lower fines only for the more minor crimes. No such effect was found for more serious crimes. Concerns that swearing alone will eventually devolve a person’s self-control to such exceedingly low levels that they would engage in serious crime and/or aggressive behavior are therefore unwarranted. Rather it seems that the effect of norm violations are graduated – seeing small infractions leads to other small infractions. This might explain why social psychological studies have been able to produce findings consistent with broken window theory (Keizer, Lindenberg, & Steg, 2008) and the theory of normative conduct (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) where criminological studies have failed to show such effects (Thacher, 2004). Social psychological research tends to focus on small infractions (e.g. littering, parking bikes illegally) while criminological research has looked at more severe infractions (e.g. aggravated burglary, robbery). Similarly, we found an effect for small infractions (prostitution, assault) but not more serious crimes (DUI, embezzlement).

Finally, while the findings of these studies indicate that swearing can influence behavior, the effect does not seem to lie in the words alone. Rather, profanity influences behavior because
swearing is seen as a violation of the rules. In effect, by virtue of breaking a rule, swearing signals that the rules that normally govern behavior need not be followed. If people did not hold swearing as a rule-violation, swearing would not influence behavior in this way. Although rules regulating swearing likely stem from good intentions, the rules ultimately may be the primary source of the effect of swearing on behavior. For example, if you rearrange the letters in the word \textit{shit}, you can get the word \textit{this}. The same letters and a similar structure are use for both words. Most people aren’t offended by \textit{this} but most are by \textit{shit}. It is only because we have been told that it is appropriate to use \textit{this} and inappropriate to use \textit{shit} that the latter has a stronger effect on us than the former.

An ironic solution to the change in behavior resulting from swearing would be to take away the sanctions that hold swearing as inappropriate. Of course, this is not likely. There are strong beliefs about the appropriateness of swearing that a few studies will not erase (nor should they). Additionally, such action would come with a cost. By their very virtue of being perceived as rule violations, swear words have the ability to communicate emotional meaning. Someone saying, “That fucking hurts,” in response to stubbing his or her toe is implying greater pain than if he or she said, “that hurts.” This experience is so painful for this person that they are willing to ignore the rules and conventions of society to express that pain. If swearing were no longer against the rules, swearing would lose its expressive power.
Figure 1: Effect of Profanity and Gender on Anagram Persistence
Figure 2: Effect of Profanity and NSC Scores on Pain Threshold

* - denotes significant at the p < .05 level

** - denotes significant at the p < .01 level
Figure 3: Effect of Profanity and NSC Scores on Pain Tolerance

* - denotes significant at the p < .05 level
Figure 4: Effect of profanity on fine assessment

* - denotes significant at the p < .05 level
Figure 5: Effect of Profanity and NSC Scores on Fine Assessed

* denotes significant at the p < .05 level
1: There was a significant within subjects effect of crime severity, $F(1, 150) = 90.191$, $p < .001$, with participants assessing higher fines for the more severe crimes (embezzlement; $M = 3240.73$, $SD = 1739.02$; DUI; $M = 2736.76$, $SD = 1723.32$) than the more minor crimes (assault; $M = 1814.57$, $SD = 1411.99$; prostitution; $M = 1864.57$, $SD = 1447.78$)
APPENDIX A

PROFANITY NARRATIVE (PRELIMINARY STUDY)
The best meal I ever had was at a barbecue joint just outside of Memphis. It wasn’t so much the food as the atmosphere that made it such a great meal. Everybody was having a [really/damn] good time. There was an old style Blues band playing and everybody was really feeling the music. The walls were decorated with old road signs that were all weathered and just as dirty as [could be/hell].

I ordered a Pabst Blue Ribbon, the only beer on the menu. Normally I wouldn’t think twice about ordering this brand of beer, as it usually tastes pretty [terrible/shitty] to me. But for some reason it tasted so great mixed with the general feel of the restaurant. The salad really was nothing special. Just iceberg lettuce, tomatoes, and carrot slices with Ranch dressing on the side. What really got my taste buds watering was the pulled pork sandwich that I ordered. What I expected to be a simple sandwich turned out to be a gargantuan meal. It was [absolutely/fucking] overflowing with meat. The barbecue sauce that covered the sandwich was so [incredibly/damn] tangy. This resulted in an incredibly messy and sloppy eating experience. By the end of the meal I had barbecue sauce all over my pants!!! I also had a side of baked beans and coleslaw with my sandwich. The coleslaw wasn’t all that spectacular, but man...whoever came up with the recipe for those beans really knew their [stuff/shit]. I don’t know what it was about these beans but they just tasted so [freaking/fucking] good with the rest of the meal.

For desert I ordered some peach cobbler with ice cream. I didn’t think anything could top the meal I had just had but that cobbler sure did the trick. The cobbler was piping [freakin/fuckin] hot when it came out to the table and it was already melting the ice cream. This led to a fantastic mixture of my two favorite flavors - peaches and vanilla ice cream. It was so good I almost collapsed out of my seat. What was even more amazing than the meal itself though, was how absolutely cheap it was. I’ve never had such a good meal for such a [cheap/cheap-ass] price. I’m going back to Memphis next month and you can be [absolutely/damn] sure that I’ll hit up this place when I get there.
APPENDIX B1

TRAIT SELF-CONTROL SCALE (TSCS)
Trait self-control scale (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 1993)

Using the scale provided, please indicate how much each of the following statements reflects how you typically are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Very Much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I am good at resisting temptations
2. I have a hard time breaking bad habits
3. I am lazy
4. I say inappropriate things
5. I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun
6. I refuse things that are bad for me
7. I wish I had more self-discipline
8. People would say that I have iron self-discipline
9. Pleasure and fun sometimes keep me from getting work done
10. I have trouble concentrating
11. I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals
12. Sometimes I can’t stop myself from doing something, even if I know it is wrong
13. I often act without thinking through all the alternatives
APPENDIX B2

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY SCALE (SDS)
Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)

Below you will find a list of statements. Please indicate whether that statement is true or false regarding your own behavior.

1. Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.
   T or F
2. I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.
   T or F
3. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work, if I am not encouraged.
   T or F
4. I have never intensely disliked anyone.
   T or F
5. On occasion I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life.
   T or F
6. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.
   T or F
7. I am always careful about my manner of dress.
   T or F
8. My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant.
   T or F
9. If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen, I would probably do it.
   T or F
10. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability.
    T or F
11. I like to gossip at times.
    T or F
12. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.
    T or F
13. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.
    T or F
14. I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something.
    T or F
15. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.
    T or F
16. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
    T or F
17. I always try to practice what I preach.
    T or F
18. I don't find it particularly difficult to get along with loud-mouthed, obnoxious people.
    T or F
19. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
   T    or    F
20. When I don't know something I don't at all mind admitting it.
   T    or    F
21. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.
   T    or    F
22. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way.
   T    or    F
23. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.
   T    or    F
24. I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrongdoings.
   T    or    F
25. I never resent being asked to return a favor.
   T    or    F
26. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.
   T    or    F
27. I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car.
   T    or    F
28. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.
   T    or    F
29. I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off.
   T    or    F
30. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.
   T    or    F
31. I have never felt that I was punished without cause.
   T    or    F
32. I sometimes think when people have a mistfortune they only got what they deserved.
   T    or    F
33. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.
   T    or    F
APPENDIX B3

DISCOMFORT INTOLERANCE SCALE (DIS)
Discomfort Intolerance Scale (Schmidt, Richey, & Fitzpatrick, 2006)

Instructions: Below are statements about how some people feel and behave. For each statement below, circle the number which best describes the degree to which the statement applies to you.

1. I can tolerate a great deal of physical discomfort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Like Me</td>
<td>Moderately Like Me</td>
<td>Extremely Like Me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. I have a high pain threshold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Like Me</td>
<td>Moderately Like Me</td>
<td>Extremely Like Me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. I take extreme measures to avoid feeling physically uncomfortable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Like Me</td>
<td>Moderately Like Me</td>
<td>Extremely Like Me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. When I begin to feel physically uncomfortable, I quickly take steps to relieve the discomfort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Like Me</td>
<td>Moderately Like Me</td>
<td>Extremely Like Me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. I am more sensitive to feeling physical discomfort compared to most people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Like Me</td>
<td>Moderately Like Me</td>
<td>Extremely Like Me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B4

NORMATIVE SWEARING SCALE (NSC)
Normative Swearing Scale (Gitter, Cougle, & Hamilton, unpublished)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Agree nor</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Swearing is never appropriate  
2. I often swear to strengthen and argument  
3. Swearing is an effective tool for getting what you want  
4. I often swear to express my anger  
5. Swearing is acceptable in certain circumstances  
6. I often swear out of habit  
7. I often swear in the company of strangers  
8. I swear frequently  
9. I often swear to express negative emotions  
10. I never swear in front of my parents  
11. I enjoy dirty jokes and bathroom humor  
12. I never swear in front of people in higher positions than me  
13. I often swear to express positive emotions  
14. I only swear with close friends  
15. I don’t think swearing is wrong  
16. I only swear when I am by myself

How many times per week do you swear? Please try to be as accurate as possible
APPENDIX C

POLICE REPORTS
Police Report 1: Assault and Battery

On Feb 18th 2009 I was dispatched to [business name and location deleted] in reference to a disturbance in progress. As I was en route, dispatch advised the male customer was now being combative and physical.

Upon arrival, I observed the defendant being held in a bear hug. Upon approaching, the defendant was released from the bear hug. I spoke with the defendant and asked what was going on. He stated he did not know and had just gotten attacked. The defendant did not have any sign of injury, but was very intoxicated to the point he was unable to stand without holding on to something for balance.

I then made contact with the victim, an employee at the bar, who provided a written statement and advised that while he was inside the bar, he observed a the defendant and a female patron getting into an argument. The victim said that he had attempted to break up the argument, at which point the defendant began to become even more belligerent and pushed the victim. The victim attempted to escort the defendant out of the bar. Upon exiting the bar, the defendant struck the victim, knocking him to the ground. At this point, the defendant jumped on the victim and they began wrestling on the ground. With the help of several of the defendant’s friends, the victim eventually subdued the defendant. This is when I arrived at the scene.

I spoke with witness one and two who corroborated the victim’s story. The defendant informed me that he had suspected that his girlfriend, the woman he was initially arguing with, was flirting with another patron at the bar. He admitted to being heavily intoxicated and out-of-line with his behavior.

The defendant was arrested, handcuffed, and transported to the [location deleted] Detention Facility. The following morning, the defendant was charged with assault and battery and then released on his own recognizance.
Police Report 2: Prostitution

During a routine vice operation, the defendant was arrested under suspicion of prostitution. Officer Crocker posed as a “John”, a prostitution client. Officer Crocker approached the client in his car. The defendant pretended to know Officer Crocker and got into his car and told him to drive five blocks and then park around the corner. Upon reaching the specified location, Officer Crocker asked how much it was going to be at which time the defendant informed him of her prices for fellatio and vaginal intercourse. At this time Officer Crocker revealed that he was a police officer and called in his supporting officers.

The defendant was brought to booking and charged with solicitation of money for the purposes of prostitution. The defendant was assigned a court date and then released on her own recognizance without bail.
Police Report 3: Driving Under the Influence

October 13th, 2008, 11:47 pm – Driving Under the Influence
While on patrol I noticed the defendant take a turn too sharp and clip the curb. The defendant over corrected for his mistake and briefly swerved into the oncoming lane. I followed the defendant and pulled him over. When I approached the vehicle and asked for the defendant’s license I noticed the smell of alcohol on his breath. I asked the defendant if he had been drinking to which he replied that he had had a drink.

I asked the defendant to step out of the car, at which time I administered a breathalyzer test. The breathalyzer showed that the defendant’s blood alcohol content (BAC) was .16 – well over the legal limit. Upon being informed of his BAC, the defendant informed me that he had had more than one drink. The defendant reported that he was out with several of his coworkers celebrating a big deal that he had closed that week and was just trying to have a good time. Unfortunately, he had a few more drinks than he had originally intended to.

The defendant’s car, a black Mercedes Benz, license plate NJC-873, was impounded overnight. The defendant was held overnight at the police station in a holding cell and released with bail in the morning.
Police Report 4: Embezzlement

The defendant, [name deleted], associate manager of PR at [company name deleted; a fashion magazine] pled guilty to charges of embezzlement on July 5th of this year. Upon review of the defendant’s client billing list, the defendant’s superior noticed a discrepancy in her accounting. Apparently the defendant was taking small amounts of cash ($20-$100) before the clients’ bills were logged in accounting. All told, the defendant embezzled $5,000 over the course of 2 years. The defendant explained that she felt that, as part of her job was to impress customers, the company should pay for her wardrobe expenses. The money she embezzled was used to purchase high end clothing for business purposes. The defendant has worked out an agreement with the company to garnish her wages to repay the embezzled money.
APPENDIX D1

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER (STUDY 1)
Office of the Vice President For Research  
Human Subjects Committee  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742  
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392  

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM  

Date: 8/28/2009  

To: Seth Gitter  

Address: 4301  
Dept.: PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT  

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair  

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research  
Profanity and self-control  

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the research proposal referenced above has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 08/12/2009. Your project was approved by the Committee.  

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.  

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.  

If the project has not been completed by 8/11/2010 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.  

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.  

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.  

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.
APPENDIX D2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (STUDY 1)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled “Personality and physical discomfort”. This research is being conducted by Seth Gitter, a graduate student at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose of this research is to examine the personality correlates of physical discomfort. I understand that if I participate in the project I will be asked to fill out several questionnaires and to submerge my hand in ice water for a period of time. I understand that while there are no physical risks, I will experience some physical discomfort.

I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at anytime. The total time commitment would be about 30 minutes for the entire project. I will be compensated by receiving 1/2 credit toward by General Psychology class. If I decide to stop participation, I will still be entitled to the 1/2 credit. All my answers to the questions will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and identified by a subject code number. My name will not appear on any of the results. No individual responses will be reported. Only group findings will be reported. Consent forms will be stored in a location separate from the experimental materials in a locked cabinet that is only accessible by the principal investigator and destroyed on or before May 15, 2015. All information will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law.

I understand that I must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate. I understand there is a possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study. Specifically, I will be asked to endure moderate discomfort as the result of submerging my hand and forearm into freezing water. There is no risk of permanent damage, however. I will benefit by being awarded credit for my introductory psychology course and by learning about the research process. The research assistant will be available to talk with me about any emotional discomfort I may experience while participating. I am also able to stop my participation at any time I wish.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Seth Gitter, Florida State University, Department of Psychology; 2136 Psychology, Bldg. C, gitter@psy.fsu.edu, or his faculty supervisor Dr. Dianne Tice; 2144 Psychology, Bldg. B, dtice@psy.fsu.edu, 850-644-2897 for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Group results will be sent to me upon my request. If I have questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Office of the Vice President for Research, at (850) 644-8633

I have read and understand this consent form.

(Signature) (Date)

(Print Name)

FSU Human Subjects Committee Approved on 8/28/09 VOID after 8/11/2010 HSC# 2009.3079
APPENDIX D3

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER (STUDY 2)
October 6, 2009

Salli Glick
Department of Psychology
College of Arts and Sciences
Box 870348

Re: IRB #: 09 OR 292, “Proximity and Self-Control”

Dear Mr. Glick:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 15 CFR part 316. You have also been granted approval for the expedited waiver. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behaviors (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human subject evaluation, or program importance methodologies.

Your application will expire on October 5, 2010. If your research continues beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate sections of the Continuing Review and Closure Form.

Please use the reproductions of the IRB approved stamped information sheets to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Grapesman, J. Myers, MSM, CGR
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
The University of Alabama
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Title of Research: Personality and Humor

Investigator(s): Seth Gitter, M.S.

IRB Approval #: OSP #:

Sponsor:

You are being asked to be in a research study.

(please write name here)

The name of this study is “Personality and Humor”

This study is being done by Seth Gitter, M.S. Seth is a doctoral candidate at Florida State University and a visiting faculty member in the Department of Psychology at the University Of Alabama.

What is the purpose of this study—what is it trying to learn?

This study is attempting assess whether personality influences a person’s sense of humor - what he or she finds humorous.

Why this is study important—what good will the results do?

Previous research has shown that humor can reduce stress and provide benefits to well-being. By understanding what leads people to find things to be humorous, advice concerning the consumption of humor can be more directly given. Additionally, this research will help to inform our knowledge of how personality influences our daily lives and perception of the world around us.

Why have I been asked be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because you are a young adult enrolled in undergraduate courses. This group has been often been used in early research as a starting point due to their typicality when compared to the general population.

Page 1 of 4

Prospect Initials

UA IRB Approved Document
Approval date: 06/15/2014
Expiration date: 06/14/2016
How many other people will be in this study?

Approximately 80 subjects will be asked to participate in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

You will be asked to fill out several surveys concerning your personality. You will also be asked to listen to several comedy routines and rate how humorous you find those comedy routines.

How much time will I spend being in this study?
The study will require approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Will being in this study cost me anything?
The main cost to you is the time you will spend receiving instructions and writing your narrative.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

You will benefit by being exposed to the research process and learning from this experience. You might also gain some pleasure from listening to the comedy routines. You will also receive credit toward your introductory psychology research requirement.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

There are few risks to participating in this study. You may find some of the comedy offensive. If that is the case, please let the experimenter know.

How will my privacy be protected?

We will not tell anyone you are in this study. You do not have to answer any questions or give us any information that you do not want to. You will be asked to refrain from providing any identifying information in the materials you complete. All materials remain anonymous and confidential and identified only by a randomly assigned subject number. All materials will be maintained in a locked file cabinet in a locked room.
How will my confidentiality be protected?

We will protect your information by giving you and each person in this study an identification number. Your names will not appear on any study document. The data from the study will be kept in locked file drawers in locked offices. No one will have access to it except the investigators. We will publish scientific articles on this study but no names, towns, or Alabama counties will be identified. No one will be able to tell who you are.

Do I have to be in this study?

No. If you decide to be in this study it should be because you really want to volunteer. You can refuse to be in the study. You can also start the study and decide to stop at any time. If you refuse or if you start the study and then stop it, you will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have.

If you start and then stop, you may keep any items you have been given up to that point in the study.

If I don’t want to be in the study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in this study, the other choice is to refuse. We will thank you for your time and you will be free to leave.

What if new information is learned during the study that might affect my well-being or decision to continue in the study?

If new information becomes available that affects the tasks we are asking you to complete, the study protocol will be changed to reflect those changes. You will be informed of these changes. You can tell us at any time whether you want to continue in the study or not.

What if I have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?

If you have questions about the study now, please ask them. If you have questions or concerns later, you can reach Mr. Gitter at 850-459-7815 or sagitter@bama.ua.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, call Ms. Tania Myles, The Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama at 205-348-8461 or toll free 1-877-820-3086.
What else do I need to know?

You do not give up any of your legal rights by providing assent.

You will be given a copy of this assent form to keep. Save it in case you want to review it later or you decide to contact the investigator or the university about the study.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and the study is being carried out as planned.
APPENDIX D5

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (STUDY 2: LAY DECISION MAKING)
Title of Research: Lay Decision Making

Investigator(s): Seth Gitter, M.S.

IRB Approval #: OSP #:

Sponsor:

You are being asked to be in a research study.

(please write name here)

The name of this study is “Lay Decision Making”

This study is being done by Seth Gitter, M.S. Seth is a doctoral candidate at Florida State University and a visiting faculty member in the Department of Psychology at the University of Alabama.

What is the purpose of this study—what is it trying to learn?

This study is attempting assess how lay people compare to experts in making decisions. Specifically we will be examining decisions concerning punishment for criminal offenses.

Why this study important—what good will the results do?

Previous research has established that lay people and experts make decisions differently. Some of the ways in which experts make decisions are better than the way in which lay people make decisions. Due to experience and repetition, however, experts will occasionally make errors in their judgments and fail to attend to relevant information. Lay people, on the other hand, are much less likely to make these errors. This research hopes to identify some of these errors so that expert decision makers can be informed of how to correct their faulty decision making process.
Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because you are a young adult enrolled in undergraduate courses. This group has been often been used in early research as a starting point due to their typicality when compared to the general population.

How many other people will be in this study?

Approximately 80 subjects will be asked to participate in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

You will be asked to read information obtained from criminal cases. After reading this information, you will be asked to make judgments concerning the punishment for these offenses as well as to provide information about the thoughts and beliefs that led to your decision.

How much time will I spend being in this study?

The study will require approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The main cost to you is the time you will spend receiving instructions, reading the information concerning the criminal cases and make your judgments about punishment.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

You will benefit by being exposed to the research process and learning from this experience. You will also receive credit toward your introductory psychology research requirement.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

There are few risks to participating in this study. If you do experience any distress during this study, please let the experimenter know immediately so that this information can inform our future research decisions.
How will my privacy be protected?

We will not tell anyone you are in this study. You do not have to answer any questions or give us any information that you do not want to. You will be asked to refrain from providing any identifying information in the materials you complete. All materials remain anonymous and confidential and identified only by a randomly assigned subject number. All materials will be maintained in a locked file cabinet in a locked room.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

We will protect your information by giving you and each person in this study an identification number. Your names will not appear on any study document. The data from the study will be kept in locked file drawers in locked offices. No one will have access to it except the investigators. We will publish scientific articles on this study but no names, towns, or Alabama counties will be identified. No one will be able to tell who you are.

Do I have to be in this study?

No. If you decide to be in this study it should be because you really want to volunteer. You can refuse to be in the study. You can also start the study and decide to stop at any time. If you refuse or if you start the study and then stop it, you will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have.

If you start and then stop, you may keep any items you have been given up to that point in the study.

If I don’t want to be in the study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in this study, the other choice is to refuse. We will thank you for your time and you will be free to leave.

What if new information is learned during the study that might affect my well-being or decision to continue in the study?

If new information becomes available that affects the tasks we are asking you to complete, the study protocol will be changed to reflect those changes. You will be informed of these changes. You can tell us at any time whether you want to continue in the study or not.

What if I have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?

If you have questions about the study now, please ask them. If you have
questions or concerns later, you can reach Mr. Gitter at 850-459-7815 or sagitter@bama.ua.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, The Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama at 205-348-8461 or toll free 1-877-820-3006.

What else do I need to know?

You do not give up any of your legal rights by providing assent.

You will be given a copy of this assent form to keep. Save it in case you want to review it later or you decide to contact the investigator or the university about the study.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and the study is being carried out as planned.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Seth Gitter was born and raised in Stevens Point, WI by Jim and Cate Gitter. He attended the University of Minnesota where he received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Studies of Cinema and Media Culture (SCMC). He attended graduate school at Florida State University in where he studied a variety of influences on human behavior including profanity, violent video games, and rejection. Dr. Dianne M. Tice served as his advisor. He currently works as a visiting faculty member at the University of Alabama. Beginning in the Fall of 2010 he will begin serving as a visiting faculty member at Auburn University.