

Swearing & Good Health: Rethinking Social Norms and Wellbeing

Coordinated by Olly Robertson, University of Oxford; Kristy Beers Fägersten, Södertörn University; Thomas Evans, University of Greenwich; Karyn Stapleton, Ulster University; and Richard Stephens, Keele University.

Uttering a satisfying four-letter word might feel great but the consequences are assumed to be controversial and negative. Despite these 'common sense' assumptions, empirical evidence suggests that swearing performs powerful expressive, social, and regulatory functions; functions which can promote adaptive social and emotional wellbeing, such as improvements to social cohesion or acute pain tolerance. The present working group invites delegates to reconsider the norms and realities which define wellbeing and to construct a more nuanced understanding of the role swearing plays in social and emotional life. In this session, leaders in profanity research will share and discuss their perspectives. Richard Stephens will discuss experimental research characterising swearing as a convenient means of self-help. Karyn Stapleton will talk on the interpersonal and social outcomes of swearing, inviting subtlety into our understandings. Thomas Evans will outline parallels between humour and swearing, and the associated functions for well-being. Kristy Beers Fägersten will build upon this talk with a discussion on the humorous framing of English-language swearwords in Swedish. Olly Robertson will conclude the session and talk on the hidden improvements to emotional wellbeing available through swearword use. The working group welcomes further abstract proposals which complement the schedule and wish for these to be put forward via the call opening on January 11th.