

Show No Quarter: Combating Plausible Lies with Ex-Ante Honesty Oaths
(Babin/Chauhan)

**(Consent form, sign with MTurk worker ID), proceed
Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

You are being invited to participate in an economic study (IRB approval # 006-20). We would like you to engage in a few reporting tasks. You are being asked to participate because of your status as an AMT worker living in the US. At the end of the study, you will be asked a series of questions about aspects of your life. All of your responses will be anonymous. You will sign your submission with your MTurk ID to ensure confidentiality. You may be one of many hundreds of people to volunteer. Feel free to ask any questions as necessary.

We cannot accept submissions from respondents under the age of 18. By volunteering for this study, you are stating that you are 18 years or above.

Your compensation for participating will be the US \$0.25. During the study, you will have the opportunity to gain extra earnings, given your responses to the reporting tasks. We will pay all earnings directly into your Amazon worker account.

The results we obtain from this study will 1) yield insight into the private and societal benefits that arise from online reporting decisions and 2) identify types of individuals that derive benefit from possible policy interventions. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk or harm than you would experience in everyday life. We have procedures in place to avoid loss of confidentiality, such as the use of numerical identifiers and encrypted data sets. Your IP address will not be logged. Once data are collected, they will be stored on an encrypted hard drive and kept in a lockbox in the PI's office when not in use. We may publish the results of this study. However, we will only write about the combined information gathered. Thus, you cannot be personally identified in any written materials.

This study is not designed to impart any direct benefit to you. There are no costs associated with taking part in the study, other than your time. The study should take less than 15 minutes to complete. You will not be treated differently if you decide not to take part in the study. You have the right not to answer any individual question. If you opt-out, your decision will have no impact on the results; however, investigators may withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you do not follow directions. You may only participate once.

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The principal investigators of this study are [REDACTED] Before participating, please ask any questions. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, contact the investigator at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at [REDACTED]. Note: neither [REDACTED] has any funds budgeted for compensation for any injury, damages, or other expenses in research studies.

By entering your MTurk worker ID, you indicate that you 1) are at least 18 years old, 2) reside in the United States, 3) have been explained the research, and 4) voluntarily agree to participate.

I have read the consent form. I agree with the Statement of Age of Subject and, therefore, consent (note: you cannot be compensated for your participation without your ID as signature).

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For this study, you will need a flappable coin (such as a quarter).
Please make sure you are in a well-lit area.

In this study, we ask you to complete a simple task and report the results. After completing them, you will fill out a short questionnaire. Remember, your responses are completely anonymous.

(Treatment only)

You are about to proceed to the reporting phase.

Will you swear an oath to honestly report accurate responses to the questions you are asked?

I swear an oath to honestly report accurate responses to the questions I am asked.

I'd like to opt out of the oath

Click to write the question text



I'm not a robot



reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

Next>>

You are about to proceed to the reporting phase. Click "Next" to continue.

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Welcome to the reporting phase

The first reporting task requires you to flip a coin. Please find a quarter or other suitable coin now.

We want you to flip a coin 10 times in a row.
You will be paid a bonus of 10 cents per head flipped.

Note: On average, 5 heads should be reported across the task. Zero heads or ten should be very uncommon.

Next>>

(Comp check)

Out of 10 ten coin flips, which outcome would be the most uncommon? Once you answer this question you will proceed to the task.

5 heads

6 heads

10 heads

Next>>

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Timing

These page timer metrics will not be displayed to the recipient.

First Click 0 seconds
Last Click 0 seconds
Page Submit 0 seconds
Click Count 0 clicks

Complete the task. Flip a coin 10 times in a row.

How many heads did you flip?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Number of heads flipped



Next>>

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Welcome to the Questionnaire phase

We will now ask you some questions about you and completely.

Please answer honestly, thoughtfully,

You participated in a reporting task (coin flips). Describe what you think this HIT is about. (open response)

What is your household's yearly income (estimated)?

\$0 \$250,000 \$500,000+
0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450 500

My household's annual income in \$1000s is best described as:

A horizontal slider bar with a yellow circular handle positioned at approximately the 400 mark on the scale.

How satisfied are you with your household's financial situation? Put yourself on the scale below with the slider.

Completely dissatisfied Completely satisfied
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How satisfied are you with your household finances?

A horizontal slider bar with a yellow circular handle positioned at the 0 mark.

Next>>

What best describes your gender?

How old are you in years?

18 26 34 43 51 59 67 75 84 92 100

How old are you in years?

A horizontal slider bar with a yellow circular handle positioned at the 18 mark.

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What best describes your ethnicity (choose all that apply)?

African-American

South Asian

East Asian

Central Asian

Caucasian/European

Hispanic/South American

Native American or Native Alaskan

Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian

Other

What is your highest level of education?

Never graduated high school

High school

Some college

Associates degree

Bachelors degree

Advanced degree

Next>>

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Generally speaking,
are you a person who is always ready to take risks or are you trying to avoid risks?

Never willing to take risks 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 Always willing to take risks

How often, as a percentage of the time, are you willing to TAKE risks?

Have you ever suffered a fatal heart attack?

Yes

No

Next>>

How many days out of an average month would you say you attend church or religious/spiritual gatherings?

0 3 6 9 12 15 18 21 24 27 30

Days

In general terms, how would you describe your political orientation relative to others?

Very Conservative 0 10 20 30 40 Moderate 50 60 70 80 Very Liberal 90 100

My political orientation is best described as:

Next>>

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You are almost finished with the HIT.

Note that there is no penalty for your response to any question, so please answer honestly. Your responses cannot be used against you in any way.

Have you ever misrepresented yourself in order to complete an mTurk HIT (such as, on your profile)?

Yes

No

Have you ever completed an mTurk HIT with a lack of effort, attention, with nonsensical responses, or by "clicking through?"

Yes

No

Do you ever lie to your significant other?

Yes

No

Have you ever misrepresented yourself on online dating profiles or matching apps?

Yes

No

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You are almost finished with the HIT.

Note that there is no penalty for your response to any question, so please answer honestly. Your responses can not be used against you in any way.

Again, that there is no penalty for your response to any question, so please answer honestly.

Your responses can not be used against you in any way.

Did you intentionally misreport factual information on the coin task?

Yes

No

If people were being completely honest, the most common number of heads reported in this HIT should be 5.

What do you think the most common number of heads reported in this HIT will be? We will pay a \$0.10 bonus if you're correct.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Most commonly
reported number of
heads

Please enter your Amazon worker ID into the box below.

After you submit, you will receive a completion code. You must enter this code into Amazon mTurk to get credit for completing the HIT.

Please click next to submit.

Next>>

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Debrief and completion code

We thank you for your time spent completing these tasks. Your responses have been recorded.

Take a screenshot of this page to ensure compensation.

Many others like you completed the task and made decisions as you did. We are interested in whether having individuals take an oath of honest impacts how they report information online, both about performing a simple task and about reporting personal characteristics. We are also interested in whether people are influenced by what they perceive others believe, even if it conflicts with their own beliefs. This research is important since people often provide false or exaggerated information when there are economic incentives for misreporting. This research may allow us to identify ways to elicit factual information in studies and to compensate workers for not shirking on the job.

Your completion code is:
xxxxxxx

For compensation:

- You will need to enter your completion code on the HIT page
- Compensation for participation will be paid directly to your worker account
- All bonus earnings will be disbursed at the end of the study
- If you arrived at the end of the study before entering your completion code, it means you failed a competency check. If you did not complete the task you did not complete the HIT. In either case, you are not eligible for extra earnings in the study and may only receive \$0.25 for your time.
- Workers are only eligible to participate in our study once. No additional compensation is allowed. We screen for automated responses and “bots”

Take a screenshot of this page to ensure compensation.

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If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact [REDACTED] or the IRB staff at [REDACTED]. We will provide a copy of the consent form you signed, on request.

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Supplemental Appendix

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Abstract

Misreporting – a form of lying – is common in online labor and remote work settings. We execute an experiment on Amazon MTurk to determine how ex-ante honesty oaths and worker beliefs impact lying behavior across a range of plausible and implausible lies. Using a novel quantile exposition of the types of lies reported and the effect of worker expectations of others' behavior, we find that oaths elicit more truthful behavior, reducing both small, plausible lies as well as large, implausible ones. Worker expectations of group reporting are primarily related to individual reporting of plausible lies. Males misreport more on average than females, yet female and male workers are equally responsive to oath-taking.

Keywords: Oaths, Self-reporting, Lying, Beliefs, Plausible lies, Experiment

JEL Codes: D90, D91, C93, J9

Data is currently available on request.

Declarations of Interest: none. The authors have no funding to declare.

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Appendix A Study Design

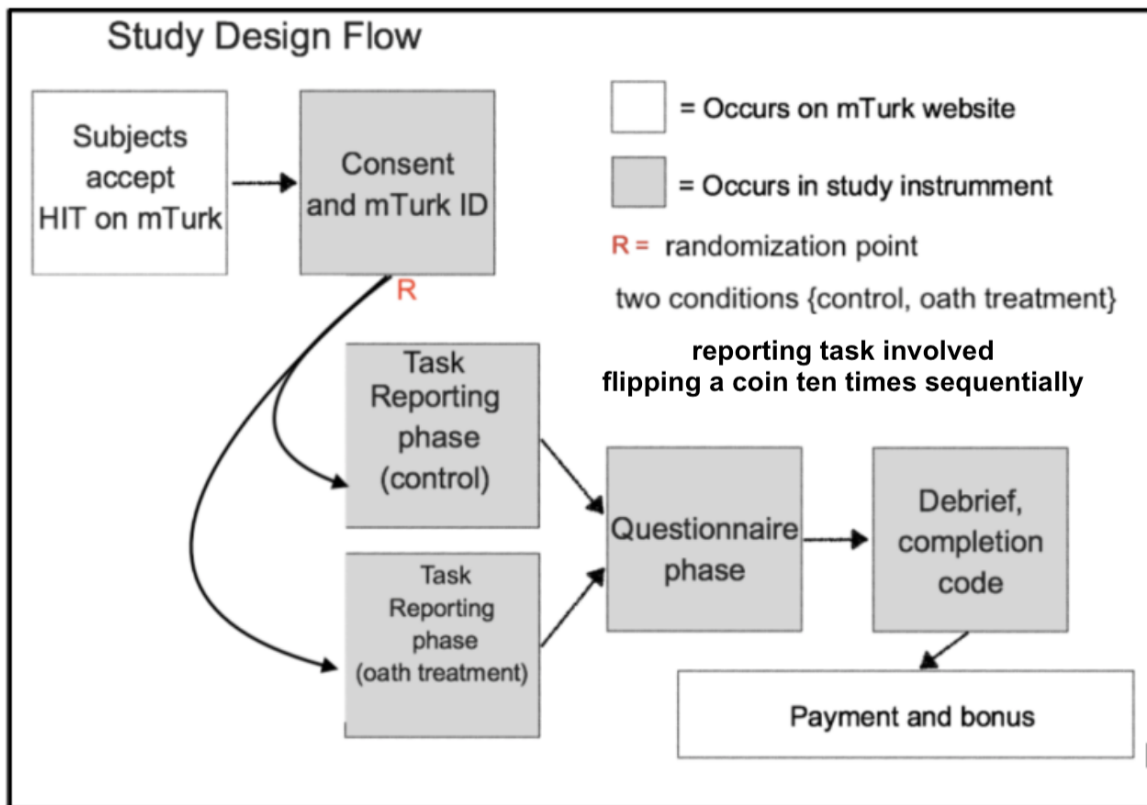


Figure 1: Experiment Design flow

Appendix B Summary Statistics

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Full Sample ($n = 1410$)		Control ($n = 707$)		Treatment ($n = 703$)	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
Task Variables						
Worker took oath (binary)					0.997	0.075
Oath Treatment (binary)	0.498	0.500				
Timer, coin task seconds	34.645	44.784	31.277	42.816	38.032	46.465
Number heads reported in ten flips	5.775	1.779	6.082	1.902	5.467	1.589
Worker shirked, coin task (binary)	0.674	0.469	0.726	0.447	0.623	0.485
Payments Variables						
Payout for coin task (per worker)	0.578	0.178	0.608	0.190	0.547	0.159
Payout for all tasks (per worker)	0.838	0.328	0.910	0.353	0.765	0.282
Worker Demographics						
Female worker	0.577	0.494	0.557	0.497	0.596	0.491
Female*treatment	0.297	0.457	0.000	0.000	0.596	0.491
Age	38.645	12.526	38.479	12.542	38.812	12.517
Worker HH income (in 1000s)	87.180	88.232	89.539	91.288	84.808	85.048
Risk tolerance	42.768	24.917	43.494	24.644	42.037	25.186
Questions on Lying and Expectations						
Worker thinks oaths matter	0.462	0.499	0.448	0.498	0.477	0.500
Worker admits misreporting number heads	0.051	0.220	0.057	0.231	0.046	0.209
Worker expected modal number heads reported	6.258	1.505	6.328	1.544	6.188	1.462

Appendix C Misreporting Costs

Table 2: Oath Effect and Misreporting Costs.

	Total	Control	Treatment
Number of Workers	1412	709	703
Expected Cost (\$)	706.00	354.50	351.50
Observed Cost (\$)	815.80	431.50	384.30
Misreporting Costs	109.80	77.00	32.80
Change from Expected	15.55%	21.72%	9.33%

Decrease in misreporting costs from treatment = 10.18%

Notes: Following the binomial distribution the expected cost is \$0.50 per worker (5 heads @0.10/head). The decrease in misreporting costs are calculated as the percentage difference in per worker payout to the control and treatment groups. Specifically, $1 - \frac{384.30/703}{431.50/709}$.

Appendix D Figures

D.1 Distributions

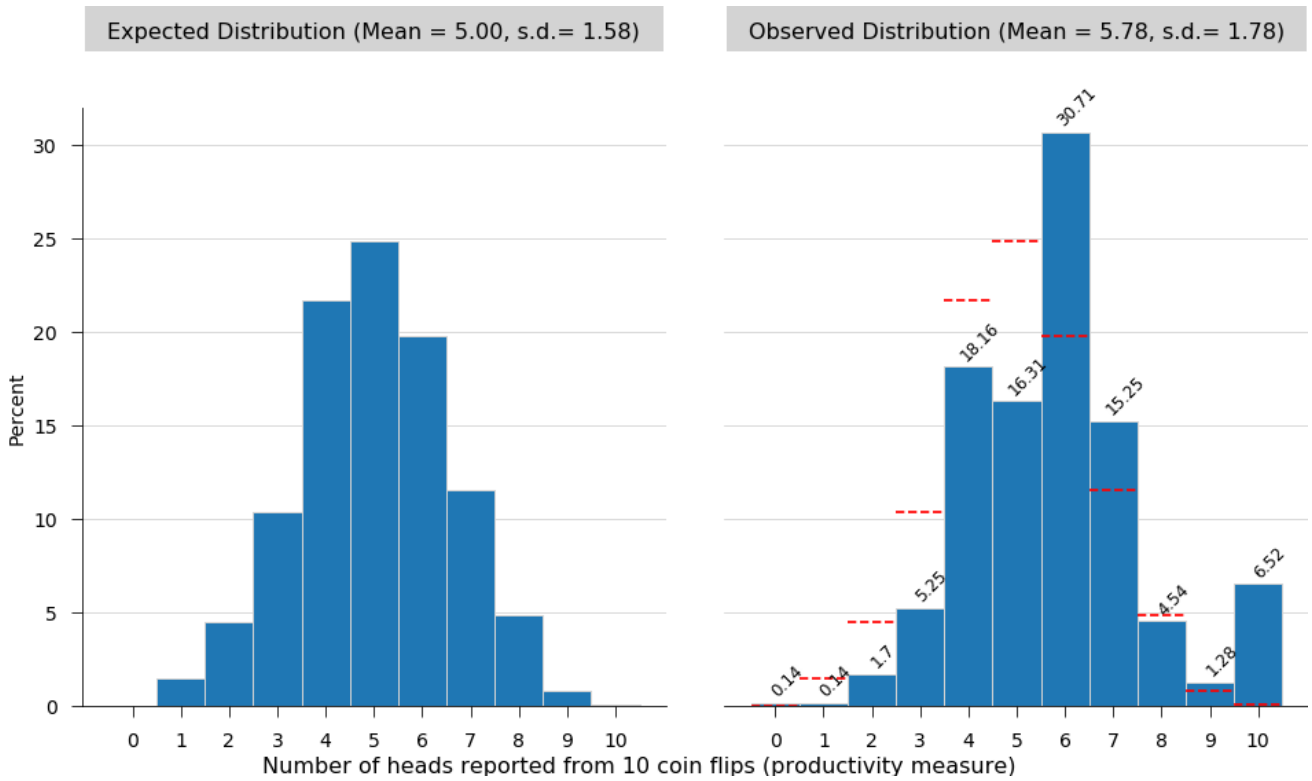


Figure 2: Distribution of Heads in 10 Coin Flips.
 Left panel displays the theoretical binomial probabilities ($f=10, p=0.5$).
 Right panel displays observed distribution with ghost bars represent densities of the expected distribution.
 Full sample: $n=1410$.

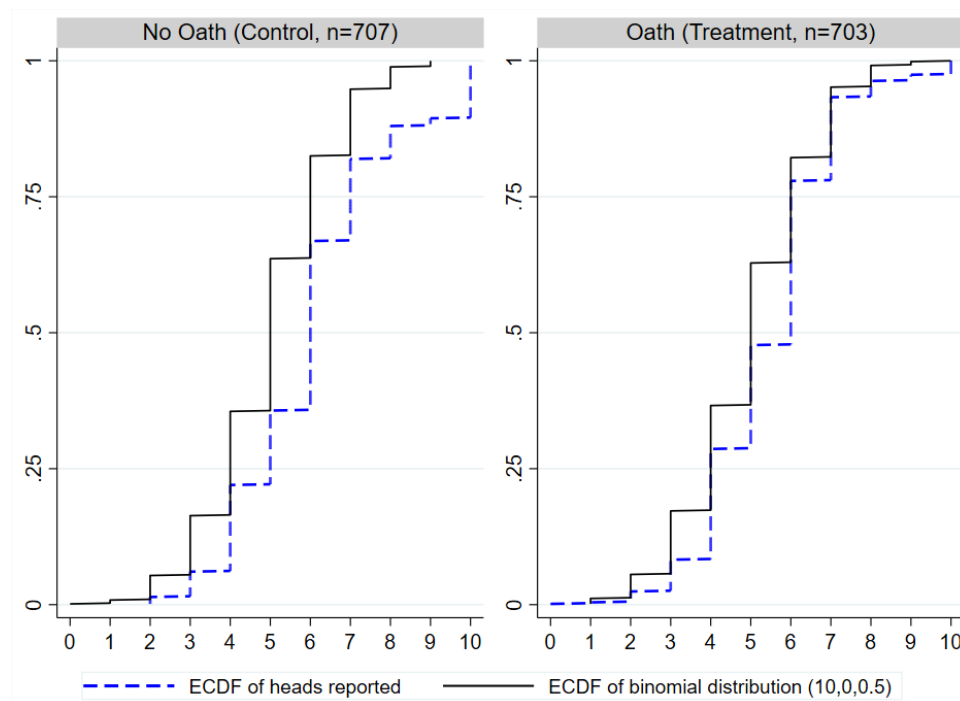


Figure 3: CDFs of Heads Reported in Observed Distribution versus those from Theoretical Distributions
 (separated by Treatment)

Control (No Oath) = 707 Treatment (Oath) = 703 Overall = 1410
 One Sample KS Test - Control: $p < 0.001$; One Sample KS Test - Treatment: $p < 0.001$;

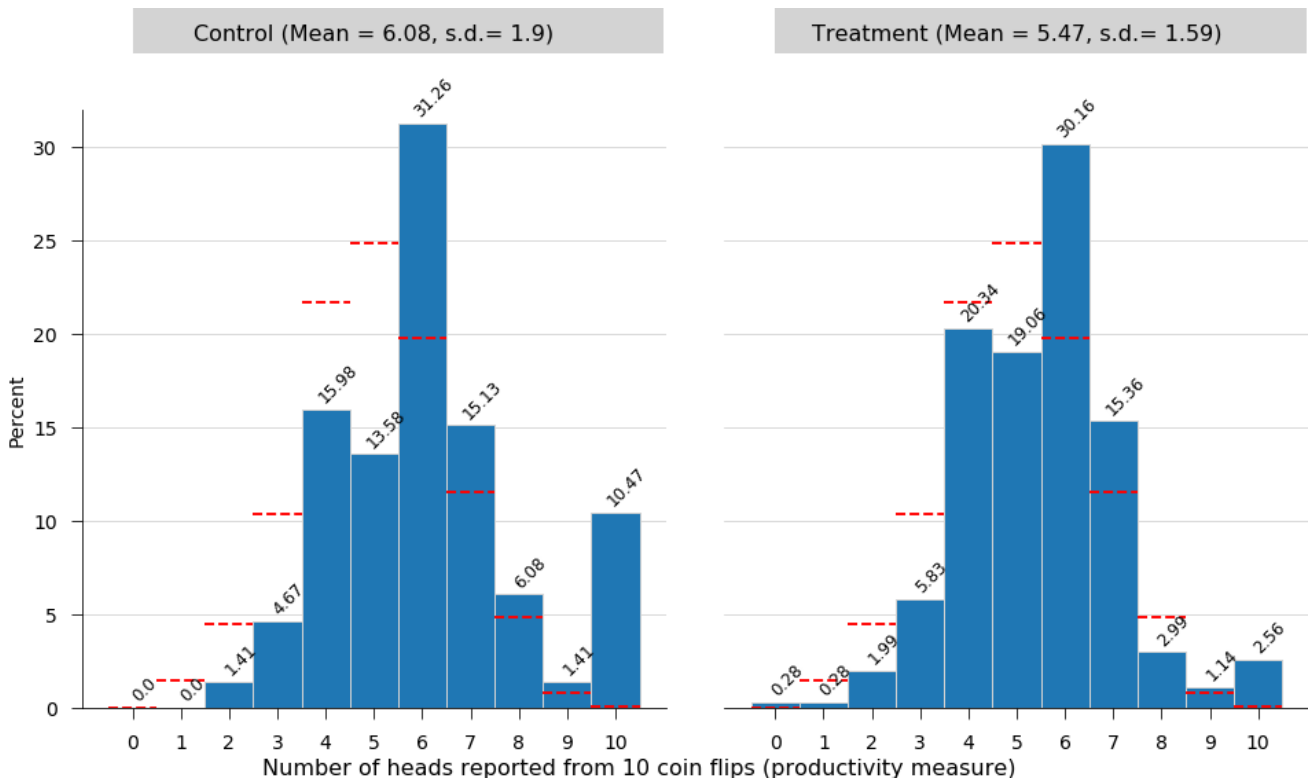


Figure 4: (Distribution of Reported (Observed) Heads in 10 Coin Flips. Ghost bars represent densities of the expected distribution. Full sample: n=1410 (mean = 5.78, s.d. = 1.78).

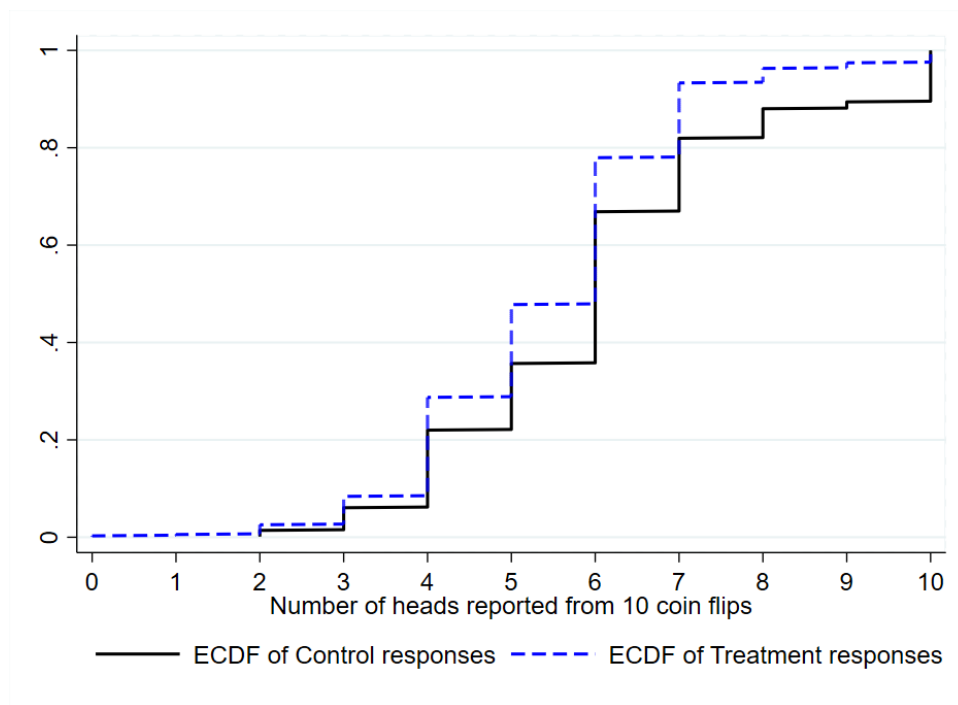


Figure 5: CDFs of Number of Heads Reported under different Experimental Conditions. Control (No Oath) = 707 Treatment (Oath) = 703 Overall = 1410 Two Sample KS Test: $p < 0.001$

D.2 Expectations and Lies

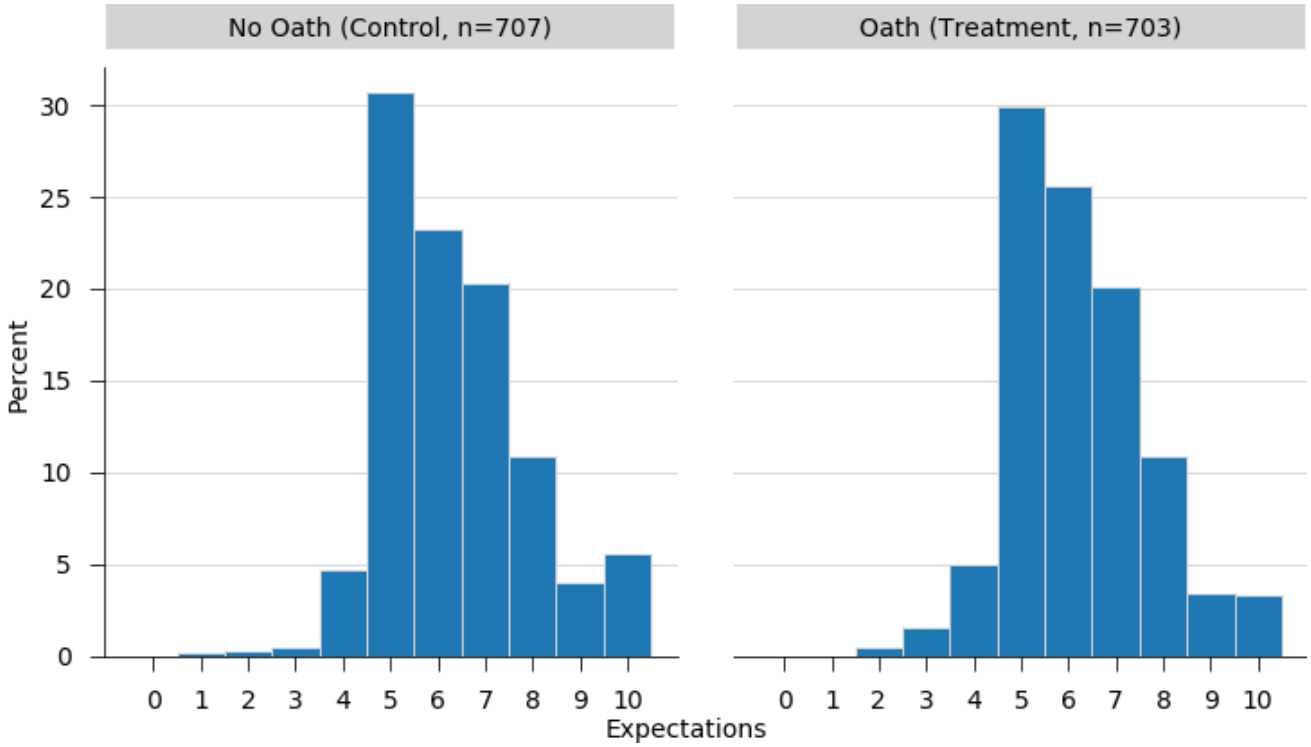


Figure 6: Distribution of Workers' Expected Modal Reported Heads in Coin Task.
Two Sample KS Test p -value = 0.90.

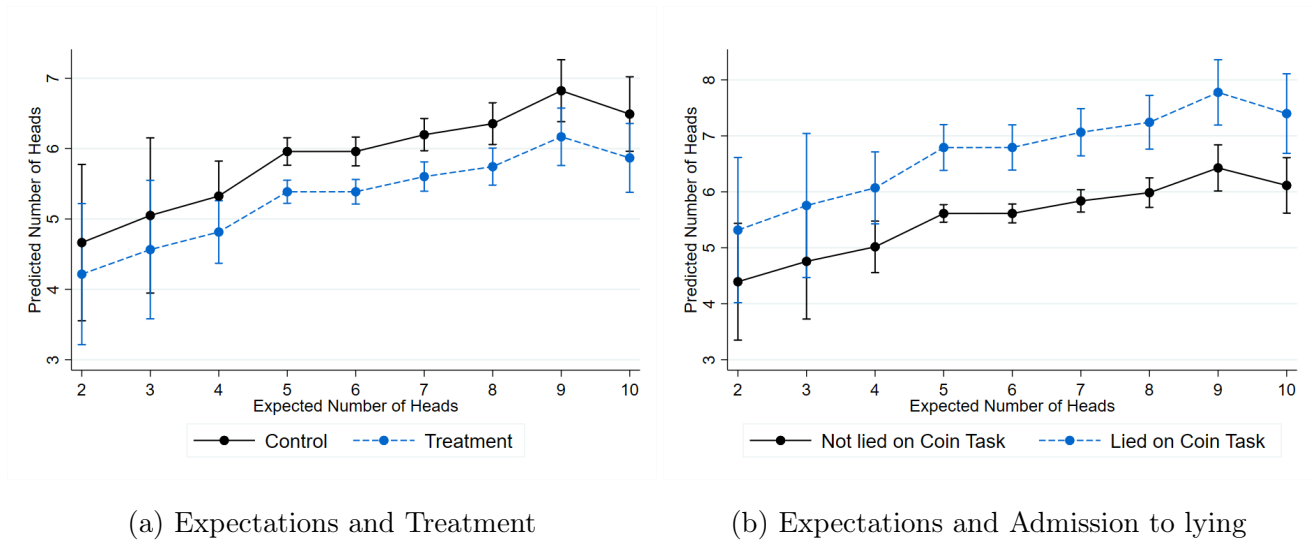


Figure 7: Effects of Expectations on Predicted Number of Heads (Predictive Margins).
Panel (a) shows the difference in the effects for the control and treatment group and Panel (b) shows the difference in the effects for respondents who admitted to lying and who did not. The figures exclude one observation reporting one head.

D.3 Effects of Gender

Table 3: Effects of Gender on Mean Number of Heads Reported.

	Males	Females
Overall	5.965 (0.075)	5.636 (0.060)
No Oath	6.262 (0.108)	5.939 (0.095)
Oath	5.637 (0.101)	5.351 (0.073)

Notes: Misreporting is represented by mean number of heads reported and shirking as a percentage of respondents shirked. Standard errors are in parentheses. Males: Control (No Oath) = 313 Treatment (Oath) = 284 Overall = 597; Females: Control (No Oath) = 394 Treatment (Oath) = 419 Overall = 813.

D.4 Distribution of Age, Household Income and Risk

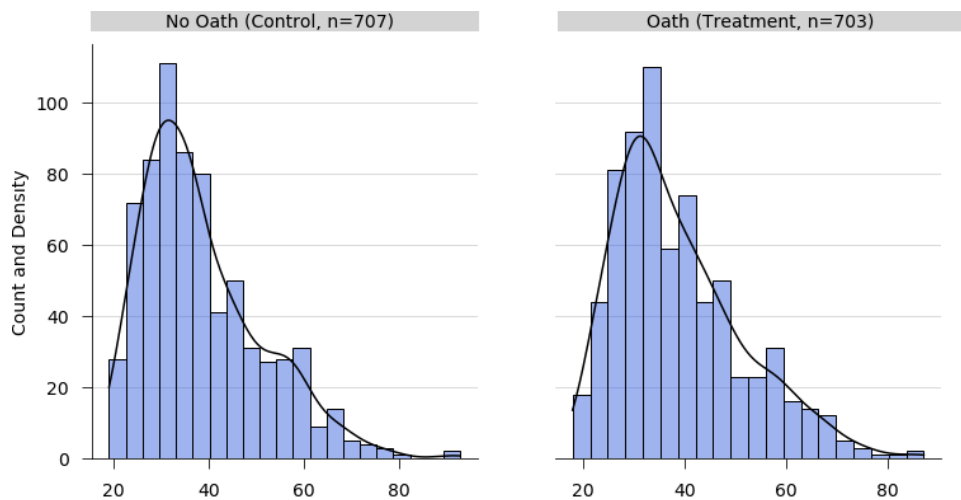


Figure 8: Distribution of Age, separated by Treatment.
Two Sample KS Test: $p = 0.740$

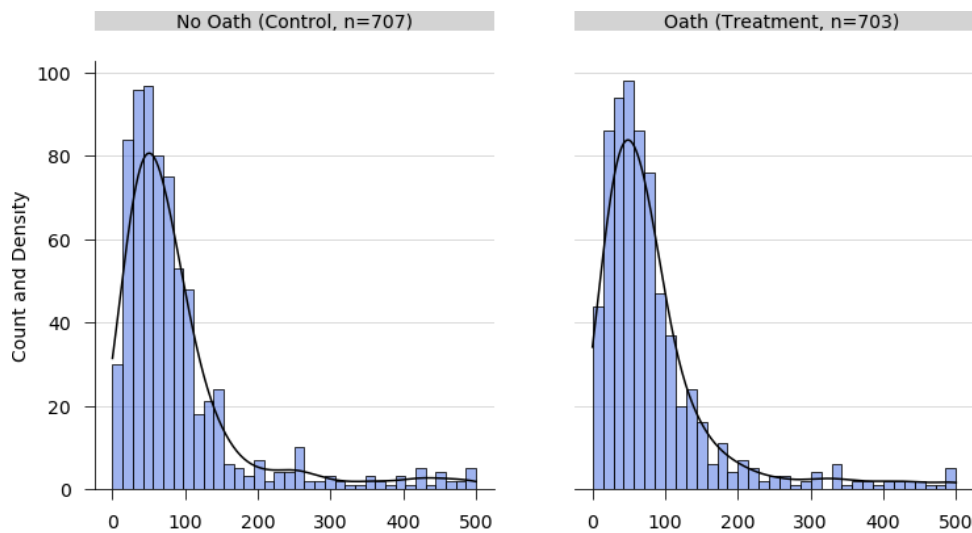


Figure 9: Distribution of Household Income (in 1000s), separated by Treatment.
Two Sample KS Test: $p = 0.631$

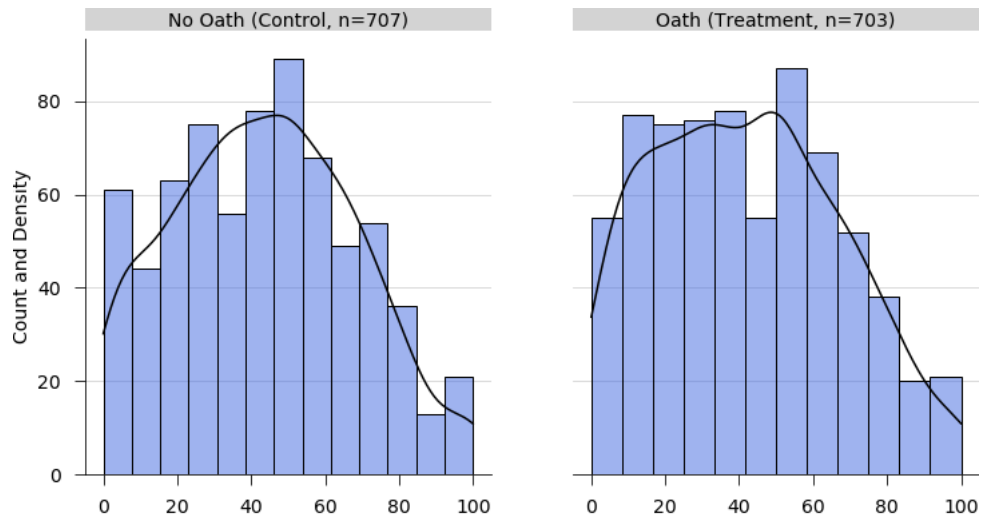


Figure 10: Distribution of Risk Tolerance, separated by Treatment.
Two Sample KS Test: $p = 0.269$