

# Gay men and lesbian women less likely to be employed in a leadership position

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Gay men and lesbian women face discrimination when seeking leadership positions due to the sound of their voice, a new study in the *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* has found.

The study, carried out by researchers at the University of Surrey, also found that people thought gay men should be paid less than their [heterosexual](#) counterparts.

During this study researchers presented voice samples of gay and heterosexual speakers and pictures, devoid of any background features and other characteristics, to a heterosexual sample group. Participants were not informed of the [sexual orientation](#) of the person but allowed to freely guess from the voice or face of the individual. The sample group were asked to form impressions about applicants for the fake position of CEO and evaluate the employability of candidates by responding to five statements (which were rated on a scale of one to five) and to report the amount of monthly salary they considered adequate. The process was then repeated with [lesbian](#) candidates.

Researchers discovered that participants perceived men and women who they considered to be gay or lesbian, as inadequate for a leadership position.

For male candidates, auditory and not facial features impacted on whether they were deemed suitable for the role. Researchers discovered that having a heterosexual- rather than a 'gay- sounding' voice created

the impression that the [speaker](#) had typically masculine traits, which in turn increased their perceived suitability for the role and the chance of receiving a higher salary. Lesbian candidates were associated with a lack of femininity and identified as gender non-conforming and received less positive evaluation than heterosexual counterparts.

Dr Fabio Fasoli said: "These results demonstrate that the mere sound of a voice is sufficient to trigger stereotyping denying gay- and lesbian-sounding speakers the qualities that are considered typical of their gender.

"It is revealing, that despite all the work to lessen discrimination against the LGBT community, people subconsciously type cast an individual before getting to know them. This study highlights that it can be a real problem in the workplace and for people's career prospects."

In another [study participants](#) were also asked to listen to the voices of two different speakers who pronounced a single sentence of neutral content and then requested to evaluate the speakers' likely personality traits and personal interests (i.e. sports and fields of study). The traits and interests were manipulated in order to be recast characteristics/interests perceived to be "typically masculine" (e.g., football) and "typically feminine" (e.g., dance). In addition, participants were asked which of the speakers they would choose as an acquaintance. Similarly to the first study this was repeated with lesbian candidates.

Researchers discovered that participants attributed more feminine traits to the gay than to the heterosexual speakers and lesbian speakers were more likely to be associated with masculine than to feminine characteristics. Interestingly, this happened without any mention of sexual orientation of the speakers demonstrating that vocal cues can lead to unfair stereotyping.

When asked which of the speakers' participants would choose as an acquaintance for an interaction, [researchers](#) found that male participants were more likely to avoid male gay-sounding speakers, suggesting a subtle impact of [voice](#) on social exclusion of gay individuals.

Dr Fasoli added: "What is most concerning about this study is the subconscious behaviour intention of participants, where heterosexual male participants avoided choosing a gay male as an acquaintance.

"This study demonstrates that unacceptable levels of discrimination, be they subconscious or conscious, still exists in our society, and we need to do more to tackle the discrimination faced by the LGBT community."

**More information:** Fabio Fasoli et al, Gay- and Lesbian-Sounding Auditory Cues Elicit Stereotyping and Discrimination, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-017-0962-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-0962-0)

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