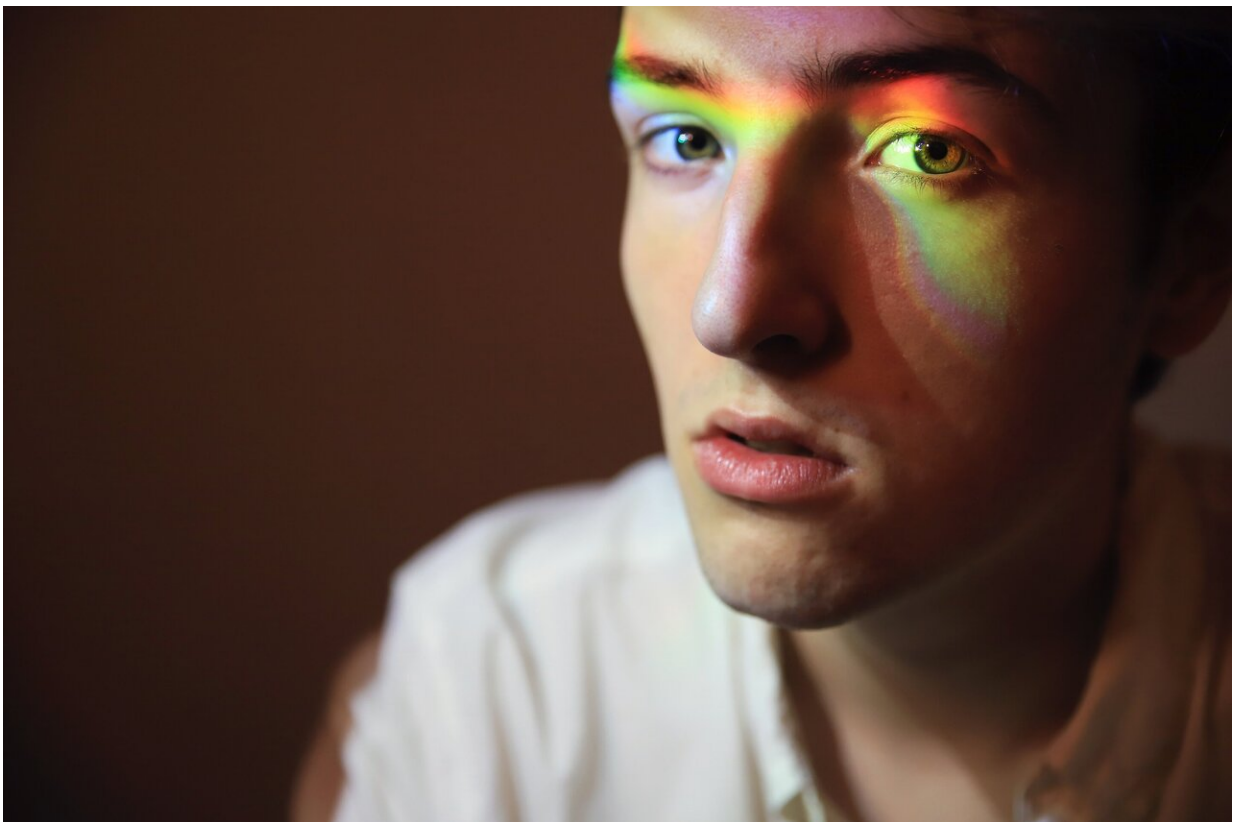


Gay men who 'sound gay' encounter more stigma and discrimination from heterosexual peers

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Gay men are more likely than lesbian women to face stigma and avoidant prejudice from their heterosexual peers due to the sound of

their voice, a new study in the *British Journal of Social Psychology* reports. Researchers also found that gay men who believe they sound gay anticipate stigma and are more vigilant regarding the reactions of others.

During this unique study researchers from the University of Surrey investigated the role of essentialist beliefs—the view that every person has a set of attributes that provide an insight into their identity—of heterosexual, [lesbian](#) and [gay individuals](#) and whether these beliefs lead to prejudice and rejection towards others. Previous research in this area has shown that gay men's and [lesbian women](#)'s experiences with stigma can lead to a higher likelihood of emotional distress, depression, and anxiety.

In the first part of the study, researchers surveyed 363 heterosexual participants to assess their essentialist beliefs regarding gay and lesbian individuals and asked a series of questions in regards to discreteness (e.g. "When listening to a person it is possible to detect his/her sexual orientation from his/her [voice](#) very quickly"), immutability (e.g. "Gay/lesbian people [sound](#) gay/lesbian and there is not much they can do to really change that") and controllability (e.g. "Gay/lesbian people can choose to sound gay or straight depending on the situation").

Researchers also investigated whether participants held any prejudices (e.g. "I think male/female homosexuals are disgusting) and avoidant discrimination (e.g., "I would not interact with a man/woman who sounds gay/lesbian if I could avoid it").

It was found that participants believed voice was a better cue to sexual orientation for men than for women, and their opinions on the discreteness, immutability and controllability of 'gay-sounding' voices was linked to higher avoidant discrimination towards gay-sounding men.

In the second part of the study researchers surveyed 147 gay and lesbian

participants to examine their essentialist beliefs in relation to self-perception of sounding gay, and whether this led them to expect rejection and be more vigilant, e.g., trying to avoid certain social situations and persons who may ridicule them because of their voices.

Researchers found that gay men's endorsement of beliefs that people can detect sexual orientation from voice (voice discreteness) and that speakers cannot change the way they sound (voice immutability) were associated with a stronger self-perception of sounding gay. Moreover, gay men who perceived their voices to sound more gay expected more acute rejection from heterosexuals and were more vigilant.

Dr. Fabio Fasoli, Lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of Surrey, said: "What we have found is that people have stronger beliefs about the voices of gay men than lesbian women. In particular, beliefs that gay men and straight men have different voices that allow people to detect their [sexual orientation](#) was linked to stigmatization, possibly explaining why some [heterosexual](#) individuals stigmatize gay-sounding men regardless of their sexuality. Understanding more about essentialist beliefs helps explain both the perpetration of stigma by heterosexuals and the experience of stigma by lesbians and gay men.

"It is clear from this study that voice and the perception of it are linked to stigma. This is important because it can have negative consequences for gay men's wellbeing."

More information: Fabio Fasoli et al. Stigmatization of 'gay-sounding' voices: The role of heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals' essentialist beliefs, *British Journal of Social Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/bjso.12442](#)

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