

# Study suggests sexual orientation unconsciously affects our impressions of others

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(Medical Xpress) -- Studies by psychologists at the University of Toronto reveal that when it comes to white men, being straight may make you more likable but in the case of black men, gays have a likeability edge.

In one study, 22 women and nine men viewed 104 photos of straight and gay black and white males and rated their likeability on a scale of one (not likable) to seven (extremely likable). Participants were not informed that some of the men pictured were gay. While overall, white straight men were rated as more likable than white [gay men](#), [black men](#) were rated in the opposite manner: gay blacks were more likable than straight black men.

"We observed that people judge others based on [sexual orientation](#) even if they are not consciously aware of whether someone is gay or straight," said doctoral student Jessica Remedios, lead author. "By understanding how sexual orientation affects the rapid evaluations we form about others, we can learn more about predicting and minimizing the [negative consequences](#) of homophobia."

In a second study, 36 women and 14 men were divided into groups to view the same 104 photos. One group was instructed to approach whites and avoid blacks by pulling a joystick toward them when a white face appears and pushing the [joystick](#) away when a black face appears; the

other group was instructed vice versa, to approach blacks and avoid whites.

Among participants approaching whites, the responses were faster for the straight men than for the gay. Among participants approaching blacks, however, responses were faster for gay than straight men. "Given that faster approach responses indicate greater positivity toward stimuli, the second study is consistent with the liking expressed in the first study," says Remedios.

"These findings suggest that sexual orientation, despite lacking explicit perceptual markers, infiltrates the automatic impression that is formed. Further, our judgment of gay men depends on whether they are white or black."

The paper "Impressions at the intersection of ambiguous and obvious social categories: Does gay + black = likable" was written with U of T associate professors Alison Chasteen, Nicholas Rule and Jason Plaks and published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* on June 12.

Provided by University of Toronto

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