

Her voice is hot—his is not: Study examines what happens when we try to manipulate our voice to attract a mate

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Trying to sound sexier? Sorry, guys, it seems you just don't have what it takes.

New research by Albright College associate professor of psychology Susan Hughes, Ph.D., suggests that [men](#) cannot intentionally make their voices sound more sexy or attractive, while [women](#) have little trouble. And true to the stereotype, women will lower their pitch and increase their hoarseness to dial up the allure.

"This ability may be due to culture and cuts across cultures and time," said Hughes, an expert in [evolutionary psychology](#) and voice perception. "There is a stereotype of what is a sexual voice in our culture – a low, breathy voice."

The findings are part of a larger study and outlined in Hughes's article "The Perception and Parameters of Intentional Voice Manipulation," appearing in this month's *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*. The research examines the patterns that emerge when men and women intentionally modify their voices to project four traits related to mate selection and competition – sexiness/attractiveness, dominance, intelligence and confidence – and how others perceive these manipulations. The study is co-authored by Albright alumnus Justin Mogilski '11 and Marissa Harrison, Ph.D., assistant psychology professor at Penn State University's Harrisburg campus.

For the study, 40 participants (20 men, 20 women) provided intentionally manipulated voice samples for the desired traits, plus a normal speech sample. Each sample consisted of participants counting from one to 10. Another 40 people assessed the degree to which each sample effectively projected the given trait.

The researchers found that women could make their voices sound more attractive, but men could not. "In fact, although not significantly, it got a bit worse when men tried to sound sexy," said Hughes. The difference may be rooted in mate selection, according to the study. Women know that men place greater emphasis on attractiveness when choosing a partner, and that voice attractiveness can predict physical attractiveness. Thus, it is beneficial for women to sound sexier to enhance their value to potential mates and to stave off competition from rival females.

Spectrogram analyses of the samples revealed that both sexes slowed their speech to sound sexy/attractive, while women also lowered their pitch and increased their hoarseness. Ironically, men prefer higher-pitch females, but a woman will signal her interest in a man by intentionally dropping her voice, said Hughes.

The study found that both sexes can manipulate their voices to sound

more intelligent. Women, however, could not sound more confident. Men could, but only when judged by female raters. This may be true, according to the study, because it's important for men to project confidence to women (and for women to perceive it), since confidence can indicate financial and personal success, which women value in a potential partner. Men, on the other hand, may be more attuned to detecting male posturing and more inclined to underrate their competition.

Researchers were surprised to find that both [men and women](#) could equally and effectively manipulate their voices to sound more dominant. This may indicate a cultural shift. As more women enter traditionally male-dominated roles and leadership positions, they may choose to modify their [voices](#) to sound more formidable. As example, the study points to former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who received vocal training to [sound](#) more domineering when coming into office.

The authors believe the study could have practical applications for vocal coaching, including in the fields of public speaking and acting, and in more effectively communicating with an audience.

More information: The complete study is available online: link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10919-013-0163-z#page-1

Provided by Albright College

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