

Pair finds lawyers with deep voices less likely to win cases at Supreme Court

January 5 2015, by Bob Yirka



Credit: Eva Kryl/public domain

(Medical Xpress)—A pair of researchers, Alan Yu of the University of Chicago who is a linguist and Daniel Chen who studies legal theory at ETH Zurich in Switzerland has found, via a study they conducted, that lawyers with higher, less masculine voices, tend to have a better chance of winning a case presented to the U.S. Supreme Court than do those with deeper voices. The two will be presenting their findings to attendees

at this year's Linguistic Society of America meeting in Portland later this month.

Prior research has found that the way a person sounds has an impact on people listening—it is not just about the content of the message. Studies have shown that men are more likely to vote for a man that has a deep voice, over one who has a high voice. And both men and women have been found to prefer women leaders who have low [voices](#). Also, many CEO's tend to have deep, booming voices, which can command attention. But in this new study, it appears that such a voice may not be the best asset when presenting a case before the Supreme Court.

The researchers enlisted the assistance of 200 volunteers to listen to 60 recordings of male [lawyers](#) making a pitch to the high court, specifically to their opening statement, which is the same for everyone. The volunteers were asked to rate the person by voice alone regarding masculinity, confidence, etc. The team then used the data from the volunteers (and from acoustic statistical analysis) to compare against how successful the lawyer had actually been in making their case. They found that one single trait stood out from the others, the degree of masculinity of the voice. Those with high or less masculine sounding voices fared much better than did those with low, masculine sounding voices.

The findings by the team suggest that the sound of a lawyer's voice can be added to the list of unintended biases that can be at play during other types of trials, such as criminal or civil cases. It also suggests that lawyers who manipulate their voice in court to try to sound more masculine, may be doing themselves and their clients a disservice.

More information: The peril of sounding manly: A look at vocal characteristics of lawyers before the United States Supreme Court, Linguistic Society of America meeting 2014:

www.linguisticsociety.org/system/racts/lsa2015_11.pdf

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Citation: Pair finds lawyers with deep voices less likely to win cases at Supreme Court (2015, January 5) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-01-pair-lawyers-deep-voices-cases.html>

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