

# Vocal fry hurts women in the labor market

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A form of speech known as vocal fry that is low in pitch and creaky sounding is increasingly common among young American women. Although previous research has suggested that this manner of speaking is associated with education and upward mobility, a new study indicates that vocal fry is actually perceived negatively, particularly in a labor market context.

The study, published online in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*, indicates that women who speak in vocal fry are perceived as less attractive, less competent, less educated, less trustworthy, and ultimately less hireable.

The corresponding author of the study, Casey A. Klofstad, said these findings suggest that perceptions of speakers based on their voices can influence hiring preferences for female job candidates.

"Our results show that the vocal fry fad is a hindrance to [young women](#) who are trying to find work," said Klofstad, associate professor of political science in the University of Miami College of Arts and Sciences and corresponding author of the study. "Lack of experience due to their younger age, a historically poor economic environment, and sex discrimination are all barriers to [labor market](#) success for this demographic. Given this context, our findings suggest that young women would be best advised to avoid using vocal fry when trying to secure employment."

For the study the researchers recorded seven young adult females ages

19-27 years, and seven young adult males ages 20-30 years, speaking the phrase "thank you for considering me for this opportunity" in both their normal tone of voice and in vocal fry. The pairs of recordings were then listened to by 800 [study participants](#) (400 women and 400 men). After listening to each pair of voices participants were asked to choose whether the person speaking in vocal fry or normal voice was the more educated, competent, trustworthy, and attractive of the pair. The study participants were also asked which person they would hire. Participants selected the speakers of the normal voices over 80% of the time for all five judgments. The results also show that while perceptions of education, competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness each affected willingness to hire, perceptions of trust had the greatest influence. That is, the study suggests that job candidates who use vocal fry are not preferred particularly because they are perceived as untrustworthy.

"Humans prefer vocal characteristics that are typical of population norms," Klofstad said. "While strange sounding voices might be more memorable because they are novel, humans find 'average' sounding voices to be more attractive. It is possible that speakers of vocal fry are generally perceived less favorably because vocal fry is accompanied by a dramatic reduction in voice pitch relative to normal speech."

Interestingly, the study also shows that while vocal fry is perceived negatively in both male and female speakers, women who use the affectation are perceived more negatively than men who use it. One explanation is that because women have higher voices than men on average, the lowering of voice pitch via vocal fry results in a sex-atypical voice pitch modulation for women.

"Previous studies show that when women try to lower the pitch of their voice they are perceived as less attractive," Klofstad said. "You could view the results we found as an extension of this to an economic context, whereby deliberate lowering of [voice pitch](#) in a sex-atypical manner by

women through vocal fry results in negative perceptions by potential employers."

**More information:** The study is titled "Vocal fry may undermine the success of young women in the labor market."

Provided by University of Miami

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