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The Social Costs of Sounding Gay:
Voice-based Impressions of Adoption Applicants

Abstract

In three studies (total N = 239) we examined the unexplored question of whether voice conveying sexual orientation elicits stigma and discrimination in the context of adoption. Studies 1 and 2 were conducted in Italy where same-sex adoption is illegal and controversial. Study 3 was conducted in the UK where same-sex adoption is legal and generally more accepted. The three studies show that listeners draw strong inferences from voice when judging hypothetical adoption seekers. Both Italian and British listeners judged gay-sounding speakers as warmer and as having better parenting skills, yet Italian participants consistently preferred straight over gay-sounding applicants, whereas British participants showed an opposite tendency, presumably reflecting the different normative context in the two countries. We conclude that vocal cues may have culturally distinct effects on judgement and decision making and that people with gay-sounding voices may face discrimination in adoption procedures in countries with anti-gay norms.

Keywords

Voice, sexual orientation, parenting, adoption, gaydar

The Social Costs of Sounding Gay: Voice-based Impressions of Adoption Applicants

People frequently comment, approvingly or critically, on other people's parenting skills. Often, these judgments are merely based on first impressions rather than on actual knowledge of the person's ability to be a good parent. These impressions are particularly important in relation to adoption involving same-sex parents, because it is often claimed that gay parents do not possess the necessary parenting skills to support children's adjustment and development (Baiocco, Nardelli, Pezzuti, & Lingardi, 2013). In this article, we examine such first impressions of adoption seekers whose sexual orientation (henceforth SO) is not explicitly mentioned, but conveyed by vocal cues (Fasoli, Maass, & Sulpizio, 2016). First impressions of gay men are often elicited by subtle cues, including someone's voice. Voice is able to trigger stereotypes and discrimination without people necessarily being aware of its powerful influence (Fasoli & Maass, 2018). Furthermore, we consider impressions of individuals living in Italy or the UK since the two countries differ in terms of same-sex adoption laws and individuals' attitudes toward same-sex parenting (ILGA-Europe, 2018; Takács, Szalma, & Bartus, 2016).

Same-sex Parenting and Adoption

In many European countries, same-sex couples are denied adoption rights and attitudes toward gay parenting are either negative or ambivalent (Yerkes et al., 2018). In Italy, a recent national survey found that 67% of the general population opposes same-sex adoption (Osservatorio Politico e Socio-Economico Nazionale, 2016). Same-sex parenting is often seen as "unnatural" and gay parents may be perceived as incompetent (Pacilli et al., 2017). Specifically, negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting are associated with the belief that gay men cannot provide typically male role models and that this affects children's development (Baiocco & Ioverno,

2016). Despite evidence to the contrary, people often believe that same-sex couples lack parenting skills (Armesto, 2002) and that children raised by gay parents are less likely to develop normative sexual and gender identities (Carnaghi, Anderson & Bianchi, 2018; Gato & Fontaine, 2013). Recently, Ioverno et al. (2018) distinguished between a) *parenting skills*, namely the practical and emotional skills to respond to the children's needs such as their diet, hygiene or cuddles, and b) *parental adjustment*, namely the ability to provide adequate female and male role models, to face challenges, and to support the child's development. These authors found that both dimensions are related to sexual prejudice. However, different attribution of such skills to same-sex parents can be justified at a theoretical level. As suggested by Steffens, Jonas, and Scali (2015), attributes of good parenting (e.g., being warm, caring) usually refer to feminine traits (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Since gay men are usually associated with feminine traits (Kite & Deaux, 1987), this leads to the potential paradox of gay men being perceived as having better *parenting skills*, hence as more suitable for adoption, but also as deviating from traditional gender roles and family norms, hence lacking in *parental adjustment* (D'Amore, Miscioscia, Scali, Haxhe, & Bullens, 2013), hence less suitable for adoption.

In prior research conducted in Germany, Steffens et al. (2015) had manipulated the SO of couples seeking adoption by explicitly mentioning the target SO. They found that participants preferred heterosexual couples over gay male couples mainly because they worried about children's adjustment and about the challenges they may face if raised by gay fathers. This worry about *parental adjustment* may, however, vary depending on the cultural context. In countries, like the UK, where same-sex parenting is legally recognized and socially accepted, individuals may see same-sex parents as particularly good at managing social challenges and at facilitating children's adjustment (see Pereira, Monteiro, & Camino, 2013 for the impact of social norms on

sexual prejudice). In more prejudiced countries like Italy where same-sex parents are not the norm, people may doubt gay parents' parental judgments skills to a greater extent.

Auditory Gaydar

Hearing someone saying "hello" is enough to form an impression of the speaker's personality (McAleer, Todorov, & Belin, 2014). Similarly, it only takes a few seconds to form an impression of a speaker's gender, age, race (Kleinschmidt, Weatherholtz, & Jaeger, 2018), or SO (Rule, 2017). The case of SO is particularly intriguing since sexuality is a private matter that needs disclosure to be affirmed. Nevertheless, listeners guess whether a person's SO on the basis of the sound of his/her voice (Kachel et al., 2017, 2018; Sulpizio et al., 2015; Tracy, Bainter, & Satariano, 2015). Very often such categorization is driven by stereotypes associated to beliefs about how gay vs. straight individuals typically sound (Barton, 2015). As a consequence, gay-sounding speakers are at risk of stereotyping and discrimination (Fasoli, Maass, Paladino, & Sulpizio, 2017).

Compared to straight-sounding speakers, gay-sounding men tend to be perceived as less gender-typical (Munson, 2007), as having more feminine interests, and as being less suitable for leadership positions (Fasoli et al., 2017); they are also more likely to be stigmatized if their voices do not match their declared SO (Gowen & Britt, 2006). Thus, voice-based discrimination represents a subtle form of prejudice that can easily occur in everyday life and that is not necessarily recognized as such. Indeed, discrimination occurs even when SO is not explicitly mentioned and therefore represents a sort of 'unconscious bias' likely to emerge in modern societies where being non-prejudiced is the norm. Here, we extend previous studies (Steffens et al., 2015), by testing people's parenting impressions and stigmatization of adoption seekers whose SO was conveyed by voice rather than being explicitly disclosed.

Aims and Hypotheses

The main aim was to investigate the role of gay voice in an applied setting (adoption and foster care) that, to our knowledge, has not received any attention in the literature so far, but that is of great relevance given the debate surrounding same-sex parenting. We focused on male targets because prejudice toward gay fathers is stronger than that toward lesbian mothers (Steffens et al., 2015).

Across 3 studies, two conducted in Italy where same-sex adoption is illegal and one in the UK where same-sex couples have the right to adopt (ILGA-Europe, 2018), we examined whether gay- and straight-sounding voices would affect listeners' preferences for and perception of speakers as potential foster parents. In all three studies, participants listened to a gay-sounding and a straight-sounding man calling an adoption info-line for information about adopting a child. Participants judged the speakers' adoption suitability, by indicating whether they would give a child in adoption to that person and then expressed a preference for one of the two speakers (forced choice). Our general hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) was that listeners would be biased against gay-sounding applicants and be less likely to assign children to them.

We also tested additional hypotheses. In Study 1, participants rated the speakers' pleasantness and competence. In line with previous studies on voice-stereotyping (Fasoli et al., 2017) and same-sex parenting (Pacilli et al., 2017), we hypothesized that gay-sounding speakers would be perceived as less competent, but more pleasant than straight-sounding speakers (Hypothesis 2a). Study 2 extended this idea by also investigating the perception of the speakers' warmth, gender typicality and of their parenting and parental adjustment skills. We hypothesized that gay-sounding speakers would be perceived as less gender typical, less competent but warmer than straight-sounding speakers (Hypothesis 2b). Moreover, we examined several hypotheses for

parenting and parental adjustment skills. Since same-sex prejudice refers to gay individuals lacking both these skills (Ioverno et al., 2018), straight-sounding speakers could be perceived as having better parenting and parental adjustment skills than gay-sounding speakers (Hypothesis 3a). However, a different pattern of results could be predicted: gay-sounding speakers may be judged as lacking parental adjustment skills because they violate traditional gender role expectations (Fasoli et al., 2017; Kite & Deaux, 1987). At the same time, gay-sounding speakers may be seen as having better parenting skills since such skills are typically feminine attributes and gay speakers are stereotyped as ‘gender inverted’ (Hypothesis 3b).

Study 3 examined speakers' impression as potential adoptive parents in a country (UK) where same-sex adoption is legal and more tolerated. It was important to understand whether the voice-based anti-gay bias hypothesized in Studies 1 and 2 would generalize to a country where people hold more favorable attitudes towards the LGTB community, especially with regards to attribution of parental adjustment skills that may vary depending on the social context.

Study 1

Study 1 tested whether straight-sounding speakers are perceived as more competent, but less pleasant, than gay-sounding speakers, and whether they are perceived as more suitable and preferred as potential adoptive parents. The listeners included both heterosexual and LGB participants. Given that LGB people have been found to have a similar or even more positive perception of same-sex over heterosexual parents (Pacilli et al. 2011; Riggs, McLareb, & Mayes, 2009), we expected them to be less likely to discriminate against gay-sounding men applying for adoption.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 107 participants (54 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 22.61$, $SD = 2.81$), including 75 heterosexuals and 32 LGB participants. Participants were all Italian native speakers. The majority had a high school diploma or a higher level of education (94%), politically identified as center-left/left (39%) or preferred not to respond (36%), and were currently not employed (62%). Many of them were in a relationship (49%) and a minority (13%) had children.

Speakers. Two gay and two straight speakers were asked to record a short sentence while imagining they were calling a phone-line providing information about adoption. Each speaker uttered “*I would like to get more information about adoption of a child*”.

Pleasantness and competence. Participants were asked to indicate, for each speaker, how pleasant, secure and determined he was on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*). The last two items (r 's > .58, p 's < .001; gay: $\alpha = .86$, straight: $\alpha = .73$) were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater competence.

Adoption Suitability. Participants indicated whether they would give a child in adoption to the speaker on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*).

Adoption preference (forced choice). After having listened to both speakers, participants were asked to indicate a preference for one of the two speakers (*if you had to choose between the two people whose voice you have listened to, to whom would you give a child in adoption?*).

Participants were also asked to motivate their choice in an open-ended question.

Speakers' SO Recognition. Participants listened once more to the audio registrations and judged each speaker's SO on a scale from 1 (*exclusively heterosexual*) to 6 (*exclusively homosexual*).

Moreover, they guessed the gender of the speaker's partner on a scale from 1 (*certainly a man*) to 6 (*certainly a woman*).

Attitudes Toward Gay Men. Participants completed a translation of the 10 items (e.g., Male homosexuality is a perversion) of the Attitudes toward Gay Men (ATG; Herek, 1988; $\alpha = .72$). Answers were provided on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating more negative attitudes.

Measure of Internalized Sexual Stigma for Lesbians and Gay Men (MISS-LG). Participants who identified as gay/lesbian completed a 9-item internalized sexual stigma scale in the version corresponding to their gender (e.g., “*I don't tell my friends that I am gay/lesbian because I am afraid to lose them*”; Lingiardi, Baiocco, & Nardelli, 2012; $\alpha = .85$ for lesbian version and $\alpha = .75$ for gay version). The items were averaged, with higher scores indicating higher internalized stigma.

Procedure. Participants were recruited through students' contacts and social networks. As part of the cover story, they were told that a new info-line had been activated by the municipality for people who want to adopt children. They listened to a voice-recording of two people who called this service; in order to protect the speaker's anonymity, they would listen only to the first few seconds. Participants listened to each speaker (presentation order was counterbalanced) and rated each speaker on the dependent measures in the same order as presented above. After expressing their preference for one of the two speakers, they were told that both speakers were gay and asked to confirm or change their initial preference in light of the new information provided (for results see Supplementary Materials 1). Then, they completed the ATG scale and, in the case of LGB participants, the MISS-LG. Participants provided demographic information (gender, age, SO, nationality, native language, level of education, political orientation, number of children, number of gay men they knew), were fully debriefed and thanked.

Results

Preliminary Analyses.

Sample differences. Participants reported low levels of ATG ($M = 1.84, SD = .76$). Straight participants reported slightly more negative attitudes than LGB participants ($M_{straight} = 2.06, SD = .78$ vs. $M_{LGB} = 1.37, SD = .40, t(105) = 14.37, p < .001$). LGB participants reported low levels of internalized stigma on the MISS-LG ($M = 2.10, SD = .97, t$ -test against scale midpoint: $t(31) = -11.05, p < .001$). On average, participants reported to know 16 gay individuals ($M = 16.12, SD = 51.75$), but this number was higher for LGB ($M = 43.46, SD = 92.66$) than for straight participants ($M = 5.34, SD = 4.60$), $t(97) = 15.02, p = .001$.

Manipulation check. In order to test whether our speaker manipulation was effective, a 2 (Speaker SO: straight vs. gay) x 2 (Participant SO: straight vs. LGB) mixed ANOVA was performed on the two items of speakers' SO recognition. A main effect for Speaker SO on SO ratings indicated that participants judged gay speakers ($M = 3.97, SD = 1.18$) as more likely to be gay than straight speakers ($M = 3.00, SD = .97; F(1,104) = 41.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$). Also, LGB participants ($M = 3.78, SD = .61$) judged the speakers as more likely to be gay than straight participants did ($M = 3.33, SD = .82$), $F(1,104) = 7.53, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .07$.

A main effect of Speaker SO on the perceived likelihood that the speaker had a female partner indicated that gay speakers ($M = 3.01, SD = 1.16$) were seen as less likely to have a female partner than straight speakers ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.10$), $F(1,104) = 31.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$. Moreover, straight participants ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.10$) thought it was more likely that the speakers had female partners than LGB participants did ($M = 3.01, SD = 1.17$), $F(1,104) = 4.15, p = .044, \eta_p^2 = .04$. No significant interaction emerged ($F = 3.39, p = .07$). Hence, overall our manipulation was effective since the speakers' voices correctly conveyed their sexual orientation. We refer to the speakers as gay- and straight-sounding speakers.

Main Analyses. We performed a 2 (Speaker SO: straight vs. gay) x 2 (Participant SO: straight vs. LGB) repeated measures ANOVA on each dependent variable, except for adoption preference. Pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni correction) were applied where significant interaction occurred. Due to the very limited number of LB women ($n = 8$) in the sample and the fact that no gender differences were found among straight participants, gender was not included in the analyses.

Adoption suitability and adoption preference. Disconfirming Hypothesis 1, the main effect of Speaker SO was non-significant, $F(1,100) = 1.91, p = .17, \eta_p^2 = .019$. The straight-sounding speakers ($M = 4.18, SD = 1.40$) were seen as similarly suitable for adoption as the gay-sounding speakers ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.76$). No other significant main effect nor interaction were found ($F_s < 2.78, p_s > .10$).

To examine that the preference for one target over the other was different from chance (50%), a binomial test was performed. Confirming Hypothesis 1, among those who expressed a preference ($n = 95$), participants chose more often the straight- over the gay-sounding speakers (58 vs. 37, respectively; binomial $p = .04$). However, this was only the case for straight participants (straight-sounding speakers: 43 vs. gay-sounding speakers: 23, binomial $p = .019$), whereas LGB participants showed no bias (straight-sounding speakers: 15 vs. gay-sounding speakers: 14, binomial $p = 1.00$; see Figure 1).

Open-ended answers where participants indicated the motivation behind their preferences were first examined by the researchers who identified the following categories: competence (e.g., convinced, determined, strong), warmth (e.g., friendly, nice, affectionate), morality (e.g., sincere, trustworthy), formal (e.g., formal, concise), mature (e.g., mature, adult), and others (e.g., keen for adoption). Next, one male and one female rated coded the participants' responses as 1 if the

answer referred to a given category and as zero if it did not. The interrater-agreement was good (Kappa ranging from .798 to 1.00). Participants indicated competence as the main reason for choosing the straight- over the gay-sounding speakers. This was true for straight (5 vs. 26 respectively, $\chi^2 = 9.02, p = .003$), but not for LGB participants ($\chi^2 = .68, p = .41$). The opposite occurred for warmth, which was indicated by straight participants as the reason for preferring the gay- over the straight-sounding speakers (10 vs. 1, respectively; $p = .046$, Fisher's exact test), while no difference occurred for LGB participants ($p = .18$, Fisher's exact test). No other differences were observed.

- Figure 1-

Competence and pleasantness. In line with Hypothesis 2a, a main effect of Speaker SO, $F(1,101) = 12.41, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$, indicated that the gay-sounding speakers ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.46$) were perceived as less competent than the straight-sounding speakers ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.24$). No other significant effects were found ($F_s < 2.29, p_s > .13$). No significant main effects or interactions were found on pleasantness ($F_s < 1.48, p_s > .23$).

Discussion

Study 1 provides first evidence that vocal cues affect listeners' impression of speakers applying for adoption. Gay-sounding speakers were judged as less competent (but no more pleasant) than straight-sounding speakers. Voice also affected participant's decision to assign a child to the adoption seeker creating an advantage for the straight-sounding applicant. Although gay- and straight-sounding applicants were perceived as equally suitable as adoptive parents, when participants were forced to choose between the two adoption seekers, they over-proportionally chose the straight-sounding one. Participant SO affected only the choice between the two applicants. Indeed, straight and LGB participants formed very similar impressions of the straight-

vs. gay-sounding speaker in terms of pleasantness, competence, and adoption suitability. However, they differed in their (forced) choice of the adoption applicant, with straight participants being biased against gay adoption seekers, and LGB participants being largely unbiased.

Interestingly, in the answers to the open-ended question, participants who preferred the gay-sounding speakers indicated that they sounded warmer and nicer, qualities usually considered to be typically feminine (Fiske et al., 2002) and associated with parenthood (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). Since Study 1 did not examine perception of speakers' warmth or gender typicality, Study 2 overcame this limit by including both of these measures.

Study 2

Study 2 aimed at testing the main hypothesis of the present research, namely that participants would consider straight-sounding adoption applicants as more suitable and prefer them over gay-sounding adoption applicants. Given that the hypothesis was supported for the forced choice, but not for the suitability measure in Study 1, we improved the suitability assessment by including 3 items that formed a more reliable measure.

In addition, since in Study 1 preference for the gay speakers was sometimes motivated by the greater warmth of the adoption seeker in participants' open-ended explanations, we included warmth among our measures assessing voice-based impressions of speakers. In Study 2, we therefore measured both warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002) and dropped pleasantness since no effects were observed on this item. We also added gender typicality as this dimension is strictly related to SO (Kite & Deaux, 1987). This allowed us to fully test Hypothesis 2b.

Moreover, we tested whether participants would infer different parenting styles from vocal cues following the distinction between *parenting skills* and *parental adjustment skills* put forward by Ioverno and colleagues (2018). Hence, we addressed Hypothesis 3a/b.

Method

Participants. After excluding the small number of LGB participants ($n = 8$), the final sample consisted of 97 heterosexual participants (46 women, $M_{age} = 35.44$, $SD = 9.62$) who took part in the study in exchange of 1.5 Euro. The majority of participants had a high school diploma or a higher qualification (90.6%), half of the participants (49.5%) were unemployed, and politically identified as center-left/left (41.3%). The majority of participants were in a relationship (56.4%), and a minority (35.1%) had children.

Speakers. Speakers were the same as in Study 1. However, only half of participants listened to the speakers pronouncing the same adoption-related sentence as in Study 1. The other half listened to the same speakers uttering three neutral sentences unrelated to adoption (e.g., “*The dog runs in the park*”, “*The English course begins on Monday*”). In this condition, as part of the cover story, participants were told that we were not allowed to expose them to the actual conversation about adoption and therefore the audio materials consisted of sentences they had pronounced in other contexts. Since the same pattern of results emerged when the type of audio stimuli was included in the analyses, we will no further consider this variable (see Supplementary Materials 2).

Competence, Warmth, and Gender Typicality. Participants rated each speaker on two competence-related items (secure, determined; r 's $> .85$, p 's $< .001$; α ranging from .78 to .81) and two warmth-related items (friendly, affectionate; r 's $> .62$, p 's $< .001$; both $\alpha = .93$) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*). Ratings for each scale were averaged with higher

scores indicating greater competence and warmth. Participants also rated each speaker on masculinity and femininity on the same scale. Since the two items were negatively correlated for both gay- and straight-sounding speakers (r 's < $-.60$, p 's < $.001$), the femininity item was reversed and averaged in a gender typicality score, with higher values indicating greater gender typicality.

Parenting Skills and Parental Adjustment. Eleven items were adapted from Ioverno et al.'s (2018) Beliefs on Same-Sex Parenting Scale. Participants were asked to indicate how likely it was that the speaker had 6 parenting skills (e.g., “*taking care of the children's hygiene*”; both $\alpha = .92$) or 5 parental adjustment skills (e.g., “*provide adequate role models*”; α ranging from $.86$ to $.88$) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Ratings were averaged so that the higher the scores, the higher the parenting skills and parental adjustment attributed to the speaker.

Adoption Suitability. Three items assessed whether the speaker was perceived as adequate to be an adoptive parent (i.e., *I would give a child in adoption to this person, I believe this person will be a good father, I would not entrust a child to this person*). Answers were provided on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*). The scale showed good internal reliability (α ranging from $.78$ to $.84$) and hence ratings were averaged with higher scores indicating greater perceived suitability of the adoption seeker.

Adoption Preference. See Study 1. However, no open-ended question was used here.

Speakers' SO Recognition, ATG, and Demographic Information. See Study 1 (ATG: $\alpha = .92$).

Procedure. Participants were recruited through *clickworker*, a crowd-sourcing platform where participants are paid for their participation in the study. The study was advertised only to Italians living in Italy. After consenting to participate in the study, participants read a similar cover story

as in Study 1. In this case, they were told that the recordings referred to actual conversations between people interested in adopting and the service. This change was made to create a cover story that was suitable for both types of audio stimuli. After listening to each speaker, participants completed the scales in the same order as described above. After being debriefed and thanked participants provided final consent to the use of their data.

Results

Preliminary Analyses.

Sample differences. Overall participants reported a low level of ATG ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.39$; t -test against the midpoint $t(96) = -9.38$, $p < .001$). Also, participants reported to know on average four gay individuals ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 4.51$).

Manipulation check. The gay-sounding speakers ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.25$) were rated as more likely to be gay than the straight-sounding speakers ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(96) = 6.05$, $p < .001$. Moreover, the gay-sounding speakers ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.36$) were perceived as less likely to have a female partner than straight-sounding speakers ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.75$), $t(96) = -6.24$, $p < .001$.

Main Analyses. A repeated measures ANOVA considering Speaker SO (gay vs. straight) as independent variable was performed on each dependent variable. When gender was included in the analyses of Study 2, no gender effects occurred, and the pattern of results remained the same.

Adoption suitability and adoption preference. As in Study 1, no difference was found on adoption suitability (gay-sounding: $M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.12$ and straight-sounding: $M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.22$; $F(1,96) = .77$, $p = .38$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$). However, participants chose the straight-sounding speakers more often than the gay-sounding speakers (65 vs. 41, respectively; binomial $p = .04$; Figure 1). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was only partially confirmed.

Warmth, competence, and gender typicality. As shown in Table 1, Hypothesis 2b was partially confirmed; participants perceived the gay-sounding speakers as warmer and less gender typical than the straight-sounding speakers, but not as less competent.

Parenting skills and parental adjustment. Partially supporting Hypothesis 3b, participants perceived the gay-sounding speakers as having better parenting skills than the straight-sounding speakers, whereas no difference emerged on parental adjustment (see Table 1).

Predictors of adoption preference. In order to test what predicted the preference for straight- over gay-sounding speaker, we ran a binomial logistic regression. Adoption preference was entered as a dependent variable. Due to the within-participants design, we calculated an index of perceived warmth and parental skills (difference scores gay minus straight) so that higher the score, higher the warm and parental skills associated to the gay over the straight speakers. These indexes were entered as predictors along with ATG. The only reliable (negative) predictor was perceived warmth, $B = -.35$, Wald = 3.98, $p = .046$. The greater the warmth attributed to the gay-sounding (vs. straight-sounding) speakers, the more participants preferred the straight- over the gay-sounding speakers.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated previous findings by showing that participants had an adoption bias in favor of the straight- over the gay-sounding speakers when forced to make a choice but not when rating the suitability as adoptive parents individually. This time no differences in terms of competence emerged, but participants perceived the gay-sounding speaker as warmer and less gender typical than the straight-sounding speaker. Interestingly, we found that the gay-sounding speakers were perceived as having better parenting skills than the straight-sounding speakers.

This seems to support the idea that parenting skills are typically feminine attributes that are more likely to be associated with gay men on the basis of stereotyping (Kite & Deaux, 1987).

The fact that participants perceived the gay-sounding adoption seeker more positively in term of warmth and parenting skills, but still discriminated him on the forced choice preference measure, seems contradictory but may be explained in terms of *moral credentials* (Monin & Miller, 2001). People generally want to be perceived as unprejudiced and behave in non-prejudiced ways to gain a record of credentials that “free” them up to engage in discriminatory behaviours without the fear of feeling or appearing prejudiced. This happens particularly in ambiguous situations where discriminatory behaviours can be explained by other reasons (Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). In our case, participants attributed positive traits to the gay-sounding target, demonstrating their lack of prejudice, but still discriminated him when forced to report a preference. In line with this interpretation, many participants in Study 1 had motivated their choice of the straight-sounding speaker by citing SO-unrelated reasons such as the person’s greater security or maturity, presumably in order to appear unprejudiced.

Study 3

The United Kingdom is a country that scores higher on LGBT rights recognition than Italy (ILGA-Europe, 2018). Study 3 aimed at extending previous findings by examining whether individuals living in the UK would perceive the speakers of Study 1 and 2 in the same way as Italian participants did and whether they would show the same bias in favor of straight-sounding speakers.

Method

Participants. Forty-one psychology undergraduates took part in the study in exchange of a credit. After excluding 1 participant who did not agree to the use of his/her data and 5 who did not

identify as heterosexual, the final sample consisted of 35 heterosexual participants (31 women, $M_{age} = 19.66$, $SD = 1.19$). They all spoke English fluently as they were enrolled in a degree course at the University of Surrey and the majority of them (71.4%) was British. They mostly self-identified as left/center-left politically oriented (54.1%), were unemployed (82.5%), single (60%), had no children (100%), and did not speak Italian (100%).

Procedure and Materials. Participants completed the same survey as in Study 2 except for three differences. First, the survey was in English, the suitability judgment was measured with a single item (i.e., *This person will be a good foster parent*), and gender typicality was excluded. Moreover, instead of ATG, we measured attitudes toward same-sex parenting (e.g., *Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexual or will be confused about their sexuality*, $\alpha = .64$; Costa et al., 2014). Participants indicated their agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Responses were averaged, with higher scores indicating more negative the attitudes toward same-sex parenting. Moreover, the main dependent variables (competence, warmth, parenting skills and parental adjustments) were reliable across speakers (α ranging from .72 and .89). The two items of competence and those of warmth were positively and significantly correlated across targets (r 's $> .55$, p 's $< .001$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses.

Sample differences. Participants reported overall positive attitudes toward same-sex parenting ($M = 2.80$, $SD = .61$), t -test against the scale midpoint: $t(34) = -11.63$, $p < .001$, and knew on average five gay men ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 3.56$).

Manipulation check. Gay-sounding speakers ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.01$) were more likely to be perceived as gay than straight-sounding speakers ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .81$), $t(34) = 7.66$, $p < .001$,

but no differences emerged in terms of perceived likelihood of having a female partner, $t(34) = 1.69, p = .10$.

Main Analyses. A repeated measure ANOVA with Speaker SO as the main factor was performed on each dependent variable.

Adoption judgment and preference. Results showed that participants rated the gay-sounding speakers ($M = 4.89, SD = .83$) as more suitable to be adoptive parents than the straight-sounding speakers ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.15; F(1,33) = 15.62, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$). Moreover, participants chose the gay-sounding speaker more often than the straight-sounding one as an adoptive parent (28 vs. 7, respectively; binomial $p = .001$; Figure 1).

Warmth and competence. As shown in Table 1, participants rated the gay-sounding speakers as warmer than the straight-sounding speakers. Again, we found no difference in terms of perceived competence.

Parenting skills and parental adjustment. As shown in Table 1, participants perceived the gay-sounding speakers as having better parenting and parental adjustment skills than the straight-sounding speakers.

Predictors of adoption preference. As in Study 2, we ran a binomial logistic regression with preference as dependent variable and attitudes toward same-sex parenting and the perceived warmth, parental skills and parental adjustment of the gay-sounding compared to the straight-sounding speakers (difference scores gay minus straight) as predictors. The only reliable (positive) predictor was perceived warmth, $B = .345, Wald = 3.79, p = .05$. The greater the warmth attributed to the gay- (vs. straight-sounding) speaker, the more participants preferred the gay-sounding over the straight-sounding speaker.

Discussion

Replicating Study 2, participants rated the gay-sounding speakers as warmer (but no less competent) and as having better parental skills. Moreover, participants in the UK perceived the gay-sounding speakers as also having better parental adjustment skills. Interestingly, in this case, participants rated the gay-sounding speakers as more suitable and consistently preferred them over the straight-sounding speakers as adoptive parents.

General discussion

Across three studies we have shown that SO vocal cues can affect perception and preferences for individuals seeking adoption. In the ambiguous situation created in our studies, where SO was not explicitly disclosed but inferred from voice, heterosexual participants stereotyped the gay-sounding individuals as warmer and as having better parenting skills, namely as being better at taking care of children's needs. This result is in line with gender inversion theory (Kite & Deaux, 1987) suggesting that gay men are perceived as possessing attributes typical of the opposite gender. As argued by Steffens and colleagues (2015), since warmth and child-rearing are usually associated with women (Fiske et al., 2002), gay-sounding men are perceived as possessing these traits to a greater extent than heterosexual men. Only in the UK gay speakers were also perceived as having better parental adjustment skills.

Differences across countries also emerged in terms of adoption seekers' preferences. In Italy, heterosexual participants consistently chose the straight-sounding over the gay-sounding adoption seekers. In the UK, participants judged the gay-sounding speakers as the more suitable adoptive parents and preferred them over the straight-sounding men. Interestingly, these preferences were predicted by perceived warmth, but in opposite ways. Perceiving the gay-sounding speakers as warmer led Italians to reject these speakers but induced British participants to prefer them as adoptive parents. Thus, the two samples drew very similar stereotypical

inferences from voice, but with opposite consequences for assigning vs. not assigning a child to the gay-sounding speakers.

Overall this research expands the small but growing literature on people's beliefs concerning same-sex adoption. Our findings suggest that the cultural and normative context plays a key role in shaping individuals' preferences for gay and straight adoptive parents as well as their perceived skills to provide adequate role models. Notably, this is true even when SO is *inferred* from voice alone. In the UK, where same-sex adoption is legal and socially accepted, individuals preferred the gay-sounding speakers and were more likely to imagine gay parents as having developed good parental adjustment skills to create a supportive environment for their children's adjustment. However, in the absence of implicit measures, we cannot exclude that the preference of gay over heterosexual speakers among our British participants may reflect an attempt to appear unprejudiced and to align one's opinions to social norms.

The most interesting finding emerging from this set of studies is that people in both countries perceive the gay speaker as warmer and as possessing better parenting style. Yet, these shared inferences led to opposite conclusion regarding adoption, creating a disadvantage in Italy but an advantage in the UK. Different interpretations may be offered for this result. First, Italian and British participants may prefer different parenting styles, with greater emphasis on discipline (authoritarian or authoritative style) vs. nurturance and acceptance (indulgent style; Garcia & Garcia, 2014). Alternatively, Italian and British participants may value different degrees of parental role differentiation. Fathers and mothers are socialized to adopt different parenting styles and tend to show distinct parenting attitudes, with fathers generally holding more authoritarian attitudes that emphasize strictness, control and obedience and mothers reporting more lenient and progressive parenting styles (Bornstein, Putnick, & Lansford, 2011). Italians

may value such distinct roles of father and mother and may want to expose children to multiple role models. “Feminine” fathers (and “masculine” mothers) may be less suited to meet this goal. In contrast, British participants may value a single (more indulgent) parenting style, independent of gender. Note however that any interpretation advanced here is tentative since findings derive from separate studies. Therefore, cross-cultural research with representative or carefully matched samples is necessary to provide more definite answers.

This research also contributes to the current literature on auditory *gaydar* as it extends studies on the social consequences of sounding gay that have mainly been studied in work-related contexts (Fasoli & Maass, 2018). Here we have shown that SO-related vocal cues lead to stereotyping in the context of parenting, extending previous work on personality traits and interests (Fasoli et al., 2017), and induce discriminatory behaviour in less “LGBT-friendly” societies. To our knowledge, this is also the first research that tested the social consequences of sounding-gay for speakers that spoke the same language as the listeners (Study 1 and 2) and in those that spoke an unknown foreign language (Study 3). Previous work informed us that people make similar *gaydar* judgment of gay and straight male speakers regardless of own vs. foreign language (Sulpizio et al., 2015), a result replicated here (see similar SO recognition across studies).

Limitations and Future Directions

Given that this is the first research on voice and adoption, there are some limitations and many questions remain necessarily unanswered. First, future studies should involve a larger number of speakers varying in the degree to which their voice communicates their SO. Second, it remains to be seen whether voice affects only first impressions or whether it impacts the adoption process at a later stage when more detailed and relevant information is available. Third, the underlying

processes of the adoption bias remain to be investigated, including perceived deviation from gender norms, parenting beliefs (e.g., the need of a child to have a mother and a father) and stereotypes about fatherhood (e.g., indulgent vs. authoritative father). Fourth, research should test differences in bias toward same-sex male and female parents when their sexuality is conveyed by voice. Fifth, potential moderators of the adoption bias need to be identified, by including for instance participants with more heterogeneous attitudes and participants from cultures with a wider range of LGBT rights. Sixth, future studies ought to investigate whether the correct recognition of SO from voice is a prerequisite for the adoption bias to occur. It is well possible that a bias against gay speaker may occur also in the absence of correct identification (Fasoli et al., 2017), operating through a *feature-based* rather than *category-based* process (Blair et al., 2002). Finally, it remains to be seen whether the adoption bias varies as a function of how SO information is provided, namely explicitly or in more subtle ways (such as through voice). It is possible that people motivated to suppress their prejudice are able to do so when SO is disclosed openly, but suppression may become difficult when SO is conveyed in a subtle manner, such as through voice.

Conclusion

To our knowledge, this is the first research on gay vs. heterosexual adoption where SO was manipulated in a subtle way. Hence, its findings are important as they inform us about impressions and judgments that may occur during the adoption process. Voice seems to trigger stereotyping and influence decisions even among low-prejudiced people. It is therefore important that people who are involved in the selection of adoptive parents become aware of unconscious biases and possibly undergo appropriate training. This will allow them to detect potential biases in their judgments. Our findings also show the importance of policies and legal rights in

potentially shaping cultures where judgments toward same-sex parenting and adoption can improve.

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Figure 1. Adoption Preferences Across the Three Studies

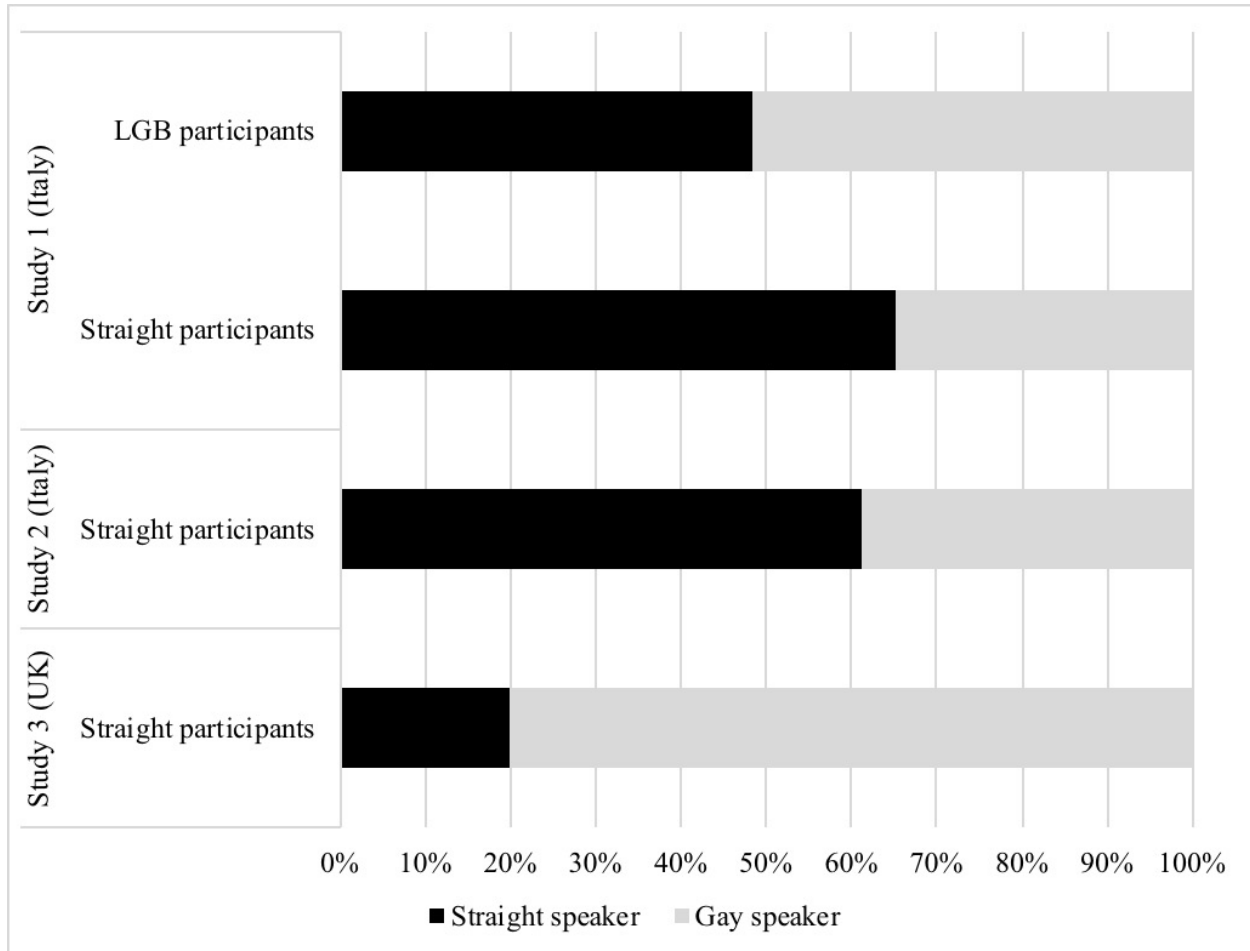


Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and pairwise *t*-test for dependent variables of Study 2 and 3

| | GAY | | STRAIGHT | | <i>F</i> | |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|---|
| | SPEAKER | | SPEAKER | | | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | |
| | Competence | 4.48 | 1.16 | 4.64 | 1.41 | $F(1,96) = .75, p = .39, \eta_p^2 = .01$ |
| | Warmth | 4.71 | 1.25 | 4.35 | 1.21 | $F(1,96) = 4.38, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .04$ |
| STUDY 2 | Gender Typicality | 5.34 | 1.77 | 6.42 | .87 | $F(1,96) = 34.98, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$ |
| | Parenting Skills | 5.21 | .95 | 5.00 | .99 | $F(1,96) = 3.90, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ |
| | Parental Adjustment | 5.00 | 1.03 | 5.02 | .94 | $F(1,96) = .08, p = .78, \eta_p^2 = .001$ |
| | Competence | 4.43 | 1.09 | 4.73 | 1.24 | $F(1,33) = 1.88, p = .18, \eta_p^2 = .05$ |
| STUDY 3 | Warmth | 5.13 | 1.04 | 3.71 | 1.32 | $F(1,33) = 27.94, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .46$ |
| | Parenting Skills | 5.14 | .79 | 4.32 | 1.04 | $F(1,33) = 17.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .35$ |
| | Parental Adjustment | 4.98 | .74 | 4.49 | 1.14 | $F(1,33) = 5.54, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .14$ |

Author Bibliographies

Fabio Fasoli is a Lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of Surrey. His research interests regard social communication, LGBT discrimination, voice-based categorization and homophobic language.

Email: f.fasoli@surrey.ac.uk

Anne Maass is a Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Padova. Her research mainly deals with the link between language and social cognition.

Email: anne.maass@unipd.it