

# Voicing your preferences for a mate—and more

19 March 2021, by Armin Brott



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Dear Health Men: You have talked about how a man's height and weight affect how he's treated, perceived and how much money he makes. What about the pitch of his voice?

A: As superficial as it is, [voice](#) pitch makes a big difference, largely because we associate it with something equally superficial: body size.

That's at least according to a recent study by researcher Yi Xu and his colleagues, who found that men generally prefer women with relatively high-pitched voices (which are associated with smaller bodies) and a little bit of breathiness. Women generally prefer men with deeper voices (which are associated with larger bodies). However, women also seem to prefer a bit of breathiness, which Xu believes "softened the aggressiveness associated with a large body size."

Clearly, voice pitch evolved—at least in part—as a way for the sexes to attract each other so we can perpetuate the species. But men's deeper voices seem to take a two pronged approach to mating.

On the one hand, as we've discussed, the deep voice appeals to females. On the other, anthropologist David Puts believes that men's deep voices may have evolved as a way for males to scare off other males. That, of course, would increase the deepest-voiced men's chances of mating by reducing the number of competitors for those sexy, high-pitched, breathy—and scarce—females. Isn't it nice to know that we're not a whole lot further along, evolution wise, than gorillas and apes, who beat their chest and bellow to scare off other males?

Outside of the jungle, people have a tendency to associate deep voices with "greater physical strength, competence, and integrity," according to researcher Casey Klofstad. To test this theory, Klofstad, along with biologists Rindy Anderson and Steve Nowicki, had more than 800 men and women listen to pairs of voices saying the same phrase: "I urge you to vote for me this November." The listeners were asked to indicate who they'd vote for if the owners of those two voices were running against each other.

The deeper voiced "candidate" got between 60% and 76% of the votes. Curious as to whether the voice bias would hold up in real life, the three researchers went a step further and calculated what they called the "mean [voice pitch](#)" of candidates running for seats in the U.S House of Representatives in 2012. Those with deeper voices were more likely to win.

In addition, several studies have found a strong correlation between the pitch of men's voices and their career accomplishments. As it turns out, in addition to associating deep voices with competence and integrity, we tend to perceive men (and, to some extent, women) with deeper voices as more in control, more confident, and as leaders. Not surprisingly, deeper-voiced men tend to make more money and get more responsible positions.

Pitch sensitivity is very likely baked into our DNA. The proof? In much the same way as dogs and cats flop down on their backs when they meet a more dominant animal, humans adapt their pitch to the perceived status of the person they're talking to. For example, men and women tend to raise their [pitch](#) of their voice when speaking with someone of higher status (such as a boss, a celebrity, or a crush). On the other hand, just as animals growl to show dominance, humans tend to drop their voice when asking for something or giving an order.

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