

Developing app could help transgender people struggling with their voices

by Brad Underwood, WKRC

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CINCINNATI, OH. (WKRC) -- Some transgender and non-binary people say they continue to struggle with their voice, saying no matter how hard they try it does not always match their gender.

University of Cincinnati researcher Vesna Novak, PhD is hoping to change that. Novak co-authored a 57-question survey interviewing transgender and gender diverse individuals focusing on voice, technology app usage, surgery, voice training, and gender expression and identity.

The data is being used to assist the creation of the app.

"Some of them it's an internal motivation," said Novak. "They say, 'Oh I don't like the way I sound, I want to change it.' And some people it's external and they say, 'I don't care how I sound but other people judge me for the way I sound so I want to change this.'"

That is one reason, Novak says, that transgender people may benefit from a smartphone app currently being developed.

"What we should do is make some software that will kind of tell you what to do and will give you feedback on how well you're doing it," said Novak.

On YouTube it is easy to find videos offering advice or exercises on voice training, coaching, and even changing. But a video can only do so much. There is also voice coaches, but Novak says that can be expensive. And there are trust issues.

"A lot of them feel if they do go to the therapist, the therapist won't take them seriously which is not necessarily true, but it is a thing that people feel," said Novak.

There are apps out there that specifically cater to transgender people, but Novak says they have weaknesses and do not provide enough accountability.

"Hey, remember to do this three times a week," said Novak. "Have you forgotten to do it? And maybe you're doing it too much, starting to sound raw. Feedback reminding you to do it, but not overdo it."

Novak hopes the app will be ready to download in the next year.