

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT PREFERENCES: GENDER-IMAGES AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

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Background

A part of an empirical study on young peoples' choices of musical instruments is presented. The study has been carried out by means of the questionnaire authoring system multimedia FrAuMuMe. What makes a musical instrument so attractive for teenagers that they want to play it? The study draws on concepts of gender specific aesthetic choices and preferences, and it follows previous research in musical instrument preferences.

Aims

The survey investigates the influence of the musical instruments' sound, appearance and movement of playing as determined by young people. Furthermore, sociocultural images ascribed to musical instruments are assumed to be important. The hypothesis was tested that the appeal of musical instruments varies with the ascribed gender-image. We examined whether the gender-image teenagers ascribe to musical instruments is influenced by sex, educational level, age and instrumental playing as well as by the other factors (see below).

Method

Young musicians as well as non-musicians were interviewed by the multimedia computer. Within an audiovisual questionnaire ten musical instruments (saxophone, clarinet, flute, trumpet, trombone, accordion, piano, keyboard, violin and guitar) were presented by the means of sound examples, pictures and – in addition – by means

of video sequences showing the instruments being played. 187 teenagers of different levels of education from the ages of 12 to 18 rated the appeal of sound, appearance and movement of playing of each of the ten musical instruments. To examine the effects of images on musical instruments' preferences, the "need" to be trendy was explored, as well as generation and genderspecific images. To investigate the gender-image of the musical instruments, we asked whether sound, appearance and movement of playing were perceived as being male or female.

Results

The results show that the saxophone is the most appealing instrument to the participants. The saxophone's attraction increases with the level of education. With respect to the saxophone, clarinet, trumpet and trombone, sound is more influential to the instruments' appeal than appearance and movement of playing. The saxophone has the image of being neither an adult specific nor a youth specific instrument. Girls as well as boys ascribe a male specific rather than a female specific quality to the saxophone. But girls are more attracted by the saxophone's sound when they perceive it as female, while boys are more attracted by the saxophone's sound when they perceive it as male.

Conclusions

The study shows that the appeal of musical instruments to young people is far more differentiated than is implied in the assumption of mere gender specificity.