



# OERE

Ontario Education Research Exchange



---

## Gender Stereotypes and Musical Instruments

---

### What is this research about?

This study investigated the perceptions of girls enrolled in a single-sex school about gender stereotypes in relation to musical instruments. The research study focused on whether stereotypes impact girls' decisions to play a certain instrument and how girls from an all girl school describe their experiences of playing their instruments in their own school and in co-educational environments such as band camp.

### What did the researchers do?

Participants in this study included girls enrolled in junior and senior band classes from a private, all-girls school in Ontario. The researcher used a variety of data sources including participant interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and a student survey to answer her research question.

### What you need to know:

This study examined gender stereotypes associated with musical instruments from the perspective of female students enrolled in a single-sex private school. These students acknowledged that these stereotypes existed but reported that they did not feel the impact of these stereotypes in their school. They did indicate that, when performing in co-educational settings such as band camp, they felt pressure to prove themselves by outperforming the boys if they played "boy" instruments such as the tuba or horn.

### What did the researchers find?

The girls in this study reported that they were aware of gender stereotypes associated with certain instruments but, being in a single-sex environment, they did not feel the impact of these stereotypes in their school. Students



# OERE

Ontario Education Research Exchange

tended to report that “girls can do anything”, especially in a safe and supporting environment.

Girls who played instruments that were stereotypically “for boys” (such as low brass and percussion like the tuba or the horn) indicated that they felt unique and they were proud to play those particular instruments. Girls who played traditional “girl” instruments (like the flute) sometimes reported being envious of the classmates who played “boy” instruments.

Girls in the study also reported being irritated and frustrated when they went to co-educational music environments and found traditional sex stereotyping in regards to instruments. Girls who played “boy” instruments indicated that, in these settings, they felt the need to prove themselves and out-perform their male counterparts.

Many girls also expressed concern for male students who play “girl” instruments, stating that it was easier for a girl to cross gender stereotypes than it was for a boy.

The researcher concluded that safe and secure environments, where students are encouraged and supporting in playing various instruments are important in

fostering a shift away from the gender stereotyping of musical instruments.

### How can you use this research?

The author recommends that teachers and administrators may wish to consider the following:

- Examine additional research that explores gender stereotypes in instrument choice to increase awareness of the impact of gender stereotypes on music students.
- Highlight students or professional musicians who have overcome gender stereotypes.

### Original article:

To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:

**Buttu, S.H. (2008). Perceptions of female students in a same-sex school: Gender stereotypes and musical instruments. *Canadian Music Educator*, 50(2), 30-33.**





# OERE

Ontario Education Research Exchange

## About the researchers:

At the time of this research, **Sommer Buttu** was an Instrumental Music teacher at Havergal College in Toronto and was completing her Masters in Music Education at the University of Michigan. She is currently completing her Ph.D. in Music Education, at the University of Michigan.

## Keywords:

Gender stereotypes, music education, musical instruments.

## About this summary

The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the *Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research*, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE's clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary has been adapted from the *ResearchSnapshot* series developed by York University and ResearchImpact and has been developed according to writing and design principles unique to OERE. For more information about this summary or the OERE network please contact [oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca](mailto:oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca).

This summary reflects findings from this study *only* and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject. Please consult the original document for complete details about this research. In case of any disagreement, the original document should be understood as authoritative.



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE  
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

