



Bottle Shape Elicits Gender-Specific Emotion: A Startle Reflex Modulation Study

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Author(s)

Arvina Grahl, Ursula Greiner, Peter Walla

ABSTRACT

Does a bottle elicit a gender-specific emotion response that varies as a function of its shape? The answer to this question is of basic interest as well as of specific interest to the industry. We introduced startle reflex modulation to objectively measure emotion-related aspects of different bottles. This approach was chosen to complete behavioural data with objective physiological data. Three bottles differing only in shape were used as test stimuli. It is well known that the magnitude of an eye blink as a response to acoustic startle stimulation reflects current emotion elicited by a foreground stimulus. Reduced eye blink amplitudes reflect positive emotion, whereas enhanced eye blink amplitudes reflect negative emotion. No significant main effect of bottle shape on eye blink amplitudes was found, but a significant gender effect occurred for one specific bottle shape. Presentation of a medium-sized, polygonal bottle was associated with significantly larger eye blink amplitudes in male participants compared to female participants. We interpret that due to the nature of startle reflex modulation this particular bottle shape elicited a significantly more negative emotion in males than in females. Interestingly, although both genders rated this bottle least attractive only males demonstrated increased negative emotion as assessed with startle reflex modulation. It is difficult to further interpret this finding at this stage, but we discuss it in terms of providing evidence that startle reflex modulation is sensitive to subtle emotion-related differences of different bottle shapes. Thus, this method may become an important tool for product evaluation procedures. We can only speculate on what the gender effect means in terms of psychology. A link between emotion and the appreciation of aesthetics can be made.

KEYWORDS

Unbiased Emotion; Bottle Shape; Gender Difference; Startle Reflex Modulation

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