

A COMPARISON OF VIRGINIA BAND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS
IN RELATION TO DIRECTOR GENDER

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The purpose of this study was to compare the concert band assessments of male-directed ensembles and female-directed ensembles in the state of Virginia. Data included overall ratings of male-directed and female-directed bands ($N = 3,229$) that performed at District Concert Assessments held across the state in the past 6 years (2013-2018), which were publicly available on the website of the Virginia Band and Orchestra Directors Association. Results showed a statistically significant association between ratings and director gender at both the middle school and high school levels. In both instances, male-directed ensembles were more likely to receive a “I” rating while female-directed ensembles were more likely to receive a “II” rating. This association was more pronounced at the high school level. Implications include a need for further exploration of possible bias in band festival rating systems as well as increased sensitivity to equitable hiring and representation of women in the field of secondary band teaching.

Keywords: adjudicated events, conductor gender, performance ratings, secondary instrumental music, sex/gender equity

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Although recent reconceptualization of gender characterizes it as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy, imbalances in traditional male/female representation persist in certain roles within the music education profession. Specifically, women have been drastically underrepresented in the field of secondary band teaching. While 58.9% of high school teachers, 72.5% of middle school teachers, and 68.1% of “arts and music” teachers at all levels in the United States were female in 2015-2016, (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a, 2017b), the percentage of band teachers who were female ranged from 24.2% to 32.7% during the years 1996-2012 (Heston, Dedrick, Raschke, & Whitehead, 1996; Leimer, 2012; Music Educators National Conference, 2001). This gender imbalance tends to be more pronounced at the high school level, with recent research indicating that women have made up approximately 37% of junior high/middle school band directors but only 18-25% of high school band directors (Leimer, 2012; Music Educators National Conference, 2001). In a study by Greaves-Spurgeon (1998), a mere 9.4% of high school bands in Georgia had a female director or assistant director, with most of those being small and/or rural schools. Sheldon and Hartley (2012) found that men accounted for 92.4% of primary conductors featured at the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic since its inception and 83% of conductors during the 2000s. As of 2008, 35 of the 52 total female-led bands that have performed at this event were junior high/middle school groups, only 15 were high school level, and none were university level.

The fact that there are far fewer women in secondary band teaching positions may be related to assumptions about what a band director should be and look like, specifically the common gendering of secondary band teachers as male. Griswold and Chrobak (1991) asked undergraduate students to rate the masculinity/femininity of the categories of “instrumental conductor” and “choral conductor,” and results indicated the position of instrumental conductor was perceived as masculine and choral conductor as feminine. In an examination of drawings depicting teachers created by 150 music education students in Canada, China, and the U.S., Dolloff (2014) found a prevalence of male teachers drawn by instrumental music education students, noting that “there were no women portrayed, even by women. This seems to uphold the image of the male band conductor” (p. 24). Visual representations in publications also reinforce this image. In a content analysis of *The Instrumentalist* magazine over two years (2000-2002), McWilliams (2003) found that only 9% of the 368 images of band conductors or wind band experts featured in the 24 issues were female. Although they did not differentiate between choral and instrumental conductors, Kruse, Giebelhausen, Shouldice, and Ramsey (2015) discovered that women made up only 21% of all photographs depicting conductors in *Music Educators Journal* during the years 1962-2011, and the issues published in 2001 featured zero photographs of female conductors.

Due to the underrepresentation of women in the band teaching profession, a number of researchers have investigated the unique experiences and perceptions of female band directors at the secondary level (Coen-Mishlan, 2015; Fischer-Croneis, 2016; Gathen, 2014; Greaves-Spurgeon, 1998; Jones, 2010; Mullan, 2014; C. Sears, 2014; C. A. Sears, 2017; C. A. Q. Sears, 2010). These studies have revealed numerous challenges faced by female band directors, including a lack of female role models in these positions (Gathen, 2014; Jones, 2010; Mullan,

2014). In order to fit in to the heavily masculinized profession, many female band directors feel pressure to alter the way they dress or act in order to conform to expectations of traditional masculinity (Draves, 2018; Fischer-Croneis, 2016; Greaves-Spurgeon, 1998; C. Sears, 2014; C. A. Sears, 2017; C. A. Q. Sears, 2010). Many also have experienced challenges in the hiring process and/or a perception of not being taken seriously by administrators (Coen-Mishlan, 2015; Fischer-Croneis, 2016; Greaves-Spurgeon, 1998; Mullan, 2014; C. Sears, 2014; C. A. Sears, 2017; C. A. Q. Sears, 2010). For example, one of Sears's (2014) participants stated, "I definitely think that people like administration or supervisors or whoever's interviewing for those jobs definitely take women less seriously.... Having a man's face on that role is more accepted than putting a young female face on that role" (pp. 6-7).

Many female band directors have expressed feelings of isolation and exclusion due to the small number of women in the field and the existence of what participants in numerous studies have referred to as the "Good Old Boys Club" (Coen-Mishlan, 2015; Fischer-Croneis, 2016; Gathen, 2014; Greaves-Spurgeon, 1998; Jones, 2010; Mullan, 2014; C. A. Q. Sears, 2010). They experience this most notably when attending meetings, competitions, or other events in which they feel outnumbered by their male colleagues and may even perceive that they are not accepted or taken seriously in these settings. In a study of female instrumental music education students, Robinson (2010) found that feelings of isolation and exclusion from this "old boys club" was a reason several of his participants decided not to pursue careers in secondary band teaching, one participant saying, "It's hard for women to be taken seriously as directors sometimes because the system is so male-dominated" (p. 40).

In addition to these feelings of isolation and exclusion, some female band directors experience explicit discrimination from their colleagues (Gathen, 2014; Jones, 2010; Mullan,

2014). One of Mullan's (2014) participants "expressed concerns that the male directors do not treat female band directors as equals" (p. 133). A participant in Gathen's (2014) study said,

You can tell which band directors look down on you for being a woman. . . . Last year at one of the clinics . . . there was a female director there and there were a few of the 'good ole boys' . . . and they were standing in the back kind of talking, making fun of the woman on the podium. (p. 58)

According to one participant in Jones's (2010) study, "That is where I found gender discrimination. . . . Not from the [band] members. Totally from my colleagues" (p. 47).

Besides feeling that they are treated differently than their male peers, some female band directors express a perception that they are judged differently in competitions and other adjudicated events (Coen-Mishlan, 2015; Mullan, 2014; C. Sears, 2014; C. A. Q. Sears, 2010). A participant in Mullan's (2014) study described her experiences with festivals:

I would go to festivals and just get trashed. The judges were brutal and then you'd sit there and listen to a male directors [sic] band and they sounded about the same as your band, but their rating was much higher. (p. 131)

Several of Coen-Mishlan's (2015) participants also felt that their bands were judged more critically at adjudicated events, both having experiences that led them "to question their ratings at contest, and question whether being a female director was an influence" (p. 12).

A number of researchers have examined ratings from adjudicated performance events in the U.S., such as state festivals/contests. Hash (2013) and Mick and Pope (2018) found differences in ratings between middle and high school ensembles, with middle school groups generally receiving lower scores than high school groups. Similarly, ensembles performing more difficult classifications of music may tend to receive higher ratings than those performing easier

music (Hash, 2012, 2013; Mick & Pope, 2018), and larger bands may tend to be rated more highly than smaller bands (King & Burnsed, 2009).

While many female band directors feel they are judged differently because of their gender, no research exists that quantitatively examines band contest/festival ratings in relation to director gender. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare the concert band assessments of male-directed ensembles and female-directed ensembles in the state of Virginia during the years 2013 through 2018. Specific research questions included the following:

- 1) Is there a significant association between overall ensemble rating and director gender at the middle school level?
- 2) Is there a significant association between overall ensemble rating and director gender at the high school level?

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