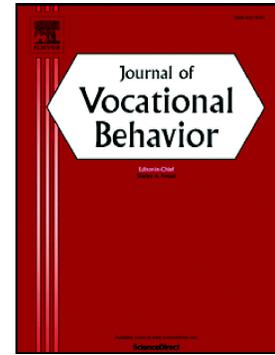


## Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0001-8791(18)30079-4  
DOI: doi:[10.1016/j.jvb.2018.07.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.07.003)  
Reference: YJVBE 3199

To appear in: *Journal of Vocational Behavior*

Received date: 31 August 2017  
Revised date: 26 June 2018  
Accepted date: 5 July 2018

Please cite this article as: Dawn Bennett, Sophie Hennekam, Sally Macarthur, Cat Hope, Talisha Goh , Hiding gender: How female composers manage gender identity. *Yjvbe* (2018), doi:[10.1016/j.jvb.2018.07.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.07.003)

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**Hiding gender: How female composers manage gender identity**

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## Hiding gender: How female composers manage gender identity

### ABSTRACT

The gendered nature of careers in music composition has attracted scholarly attention for some 25 years, but the strategies employed by female composers to manage their identity remain largely unaddressed. We report on a qualitative study in which we investigated the careers and identities of female art music composers. Phase 1 involved an in-depth survey, which attracted 225 responses. This was followed in Phase 2 by 27 semi-structured interviews. The data highlight the persistent marginalization of female composers, as a result of which the female gender is viewed as a career disadvantage. The intersection of gender and age is a contributing factor. To lessen the impact of their gender, women employed the passing tactics of concealment and fabrication. Many women repeated previously unsuccessful tactics because of the severity of the image discrepancy and the deficit of viable alternative strategies. Findings are discussed in relation to these tactics, which are usually associated as identity management techniques for *invisible*, rather than visible stigmatized identities.

### 1. Introduction

The extent to which workers tailor their behaviors in order to “fit in” (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005) is in part the result of industry and professional norms. Historically, many female composers have minimized or fabricated their gender identities. English composer Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979), for example, took the pseudonym Anthony Trent and reported

that the fabrication “brought her works greater attention” (Citron, 1993, p. 98). Other composers such as Nancy Van de Vate (born 1930) and Margaret Sutherland (1897-1984) substituted their first name for their initial, thus concealing their gender identity (Appleby, 2012). The extent to which these and other strategies are in use by female composers today remains unknown.

There has been little progress to modify male-domination in music composition despite successful efforts elsewhere in the music industry (see Fowler, 2006; Macarthur, 2002; 2014; Stempel, 2008). In Australia, for instance, women represent 32% of musicians and 27% of composers (Throsby, 2012). Yet, in 2013, only 11% of the pieces performed in Western art music concerts in Australia were composed by women (Macarthur, 2014). These figures suggest that female composers, already in the minority, are less likely than male composers to have their works performed. Feminist scholars including Browning (2016), Macarthur (2010) and McClary (1991) agree that female composers struggle to be commissioned, performed, recorded and recognized. These challenges are perpetuated by normalized sexist attitudes including an essentialist belief that women’s biology prevents them from being “great” composers (see Gates, 2006; Seashore, c.1947; Thompson, 2015). Given the stigmatization of women’s gender in the field of music composition, in this article we ask whether, how and why women composers employ passing strategies in relation conceal their gender and we explore the consequences of doing so.

## **2. Managing stigmatized social identities**

For most people, the question of “Who am I?” (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008) differs according to context and reveals itself dynamically as multiple identities (Markus & Kunda, 1986). These are defined according to a sense of self and belonging (Johnson & Yang, 2010; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Theories of social categorization (Tajfel, 1981) and

social identity (Turner, 1982) assert that individuals classify themselves and others into social categories using salient and available characteristics such as gender. This involves impression management (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), which is the process by which people control the impressions others form of them. Difference can be visible, for example in terms of gender, age and ethnicity, and invisible in sexual orientation, chronic illness and certain disabilities (Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Given that these characteristics of difference serve as a basis for social categorization, an important distinction between the visible and the invisible concerns how individuals deal with stigmatized visible and invisible identities.

Individuals activate social identities that are likely to lead to the most positive outcomes in a given situation and they adapt their behavior accordingly (Leavitt, Reynolds, Barnes, Schilpzand, & Hannah, 2012). However, the activation of an identity that is stigmatized can also underline the feeling that one is part of a devalued social group. In the case of invisible, stigmatized identities, previous studies (see Clair et al., 2005; Creed & Scully, 2000) illustrate that disclosure relates to the level of stigma attached to that identity and also the extent to which individuals feel the need to remain authentic or true to themselves (see also Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). Possible consequences of belonging to a stigmatized social group include job loss, limited career advancement, difficulties in finding a mentor and developing professional networks, and isolation at work (Cox, 1993; Day & Schoenrade, 1997).

This study was located in the music industry, which is a highly-networked environment in which professional relationships are crucially important to creating and sustaining both work and reputation (Flum, 2001; Luonila & Johansson, 2016). A number of writers note the discriminatory and exclusionary aspects of these kinds of networks (see Christopherson 2009; Smith & McKinley 2009). Gregory (2009) and Wreyford (2015) also observe that the homosocial behavior within music and the broader creative industries

networks plays a role in reproducing gender inequality in these industries. Below, we outline the strategies identified in relation to managing visible and invisible stigmatized identities and we distinguish between two passing strategies (concealment and fabrication) and two revealing strategies (normalization and differentiation).

### 3. Passing Strategies

Leary (1999, p. 85) defines passing strategies as “a cultural performance whereby one member of a defined social group masquerades as another in order to enjoy the privileges afforded to the dominant group”. This performance can be intentional, for example, concealing one’s gender; or unintentional: for example, when someone is mistakenly assumed to be of the opposite sex. According to Herek, fabrication occurs when a person deliberately provides false information to others, and concealment is to actively prevent others from acquiring information about oneself.

Leavitt and Sluss (2015) argue that fabrication can serve a social-functional purpose, used as a tool to uphold identity-based motives when valued identities come under threat. Indeed, positive self-view and being viewed positively by others is fundamental to the way in which human beings behave and interact in social settings (Baumeister, Dori, & Hastings, 1998; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Following this line of thought, fabrication might be employed within or outside organizational contexts to satisfy social identity motives (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Mead, 1934), thus becoming positively regarded by others while retaining the sense of an identity that has high intrinsic value.

In line with Leavitt and Sluss (2015), we contend that fabricating gender can be triggered by a threat to an aspect of identity that is valued, such as professional identity or standing. This identity threat can stem from an internalized lack of self-confidence or self-efficacy and also from external sources as the result of socialization (Logel, Walton, Spencer,

Iserman, von Hippel, & Bell, 2009). Gender identity threat is likely to be exacerbated in a male-dominated sector where men's accomplishments are visible and celebrated (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016) and where the competition for work is fierce. As female composers will interact most often with male composers, the stigmatized gender identity of the female composer could be highly visible and salient. This might amplify the identity threat and the associated likelihood that female composers need to adopt identity management strategies.

Concealing one's stigmatized identity allows individuals to present an alternative, more valued social identity (Goffman, 1963; Katz, 1981). It follows that concealing a stigmatized identity can enhance the belief that one will make a positive impression on others (see Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006). Newheiser and Barreto (2014) observe that concealing an important social identity comes at a cost, which might include feelings of rejection, impaired intimacy and acceptance within social interactions, and anxiety (see also Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). Although concealment is arguably the primary coping strategy employed by individuals who belong to devalued visible and invisible social groups (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), to the best of our knowledge no research has previously looked at the experiences of individuals who conceal or fabricate visible stigmatized identities such as gender.

Although the focus of our study was on passing strategies, research on visible and invisible stigmatized identities has identified that people use a range of revealing strategies when engaging in impression management. Of relevance to the female composers in our study are people who assimilate by attempting to fit in to the majority group (for example, adopting male characteristics in order to fit into male-dominated professional networks) and those who attempt to minimize the extent to which the stigmatized identity is salient to others.

A second revealing strategy — differentiation — concerns people who “highlight their invisible social identity and how it differentiates them from others” (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, p. 83). Differentiation makes the identity salient and allows individuals to express personal, occupational or social identities which are important to them, positioning these identities as unique and equally valid. In the case of a stigmatized identity, people may differentiate in an attempt to change the perceptions and behavior of the individuals who stigmatize them (see Bernstein, 1997; Creed & Scully, 2000). This is important in the development and management of an individual’s distinct identity or self-concept.

Against this background, the article reports from a qualitative study which investigated the careers and identities of female composers. We focus on the composers’ management of their stigmatized gender: the composers’ use of passing tactics and their rationales for concealing gender. We make three interrelated contributions. First, we show that female composers conceal and fabricate their gender to avoid male-bias, negative stereotypes and discrimination. Second, we contend that although the identity management strategy of concealing gender can be advantageous in the short-term, it may not be feasible in the longer term and might produce feelings of inauthenticity.

Our final contribution relates to the theoretical understanding of concealment, with an example of workers who conceal or fabricate an identity that is *visible* to the outside world using passing techniques that are usually associated with *invisible* stigmatized identities. Art music composers will typically work in an isolated environment, such as a studio, when creating their music. However, for getting it performed and recorded, composers rely on their professional and social relationships and networks with other musicians and the personnel of arts organizations. In these contexts their gender becomes visible, such as in face-to-face rehearsals, and concealed, such as when submitting a de-identified score for competitions. In these settings, women composers can use identity management strategies such as

concealment and fabrication, typically found in individuals with invisible stigmatized identities, as well as strategies such as normalization and differentiation, found amongst individuals with visible stigmatized identities. Our unique context of music composition sheds light on the identity management strategies of individuals with stigmatized identities, which are visible in some contexts and invisible in others, by showing that they can draw from the strategies previously associated with either visible *or* invisible identities.

#### **4. Method**

The article reports the findings of a qualitative study which investigated the careers and identities of female composers. Ethical approvals were obtained before the study commenced and all participants received an information sheet and an assurance of anonymity. The study was conducted in two distinct phases comprised of an in-depth survey related to work and career (phase 1) followed by 27 semi-structured individual interviews (phase 2) with survey respondents who had agreed to be contacted for an individual interview.

##### *4.1 Theoretical model*

Asserting that professional image construction is “a critical element of navigating interactions with key constituents”, Roberts (2005, p. 685) provides a conceptual model for how and why professional image construction occurs. Roberts’ model was selected because it acknowledges the importance of workers’ self-perceived competence and character (see the Construction element of Figure 1).

[Please position Figure 1 near here]

Fig. 1. Roberts' conceptual model of professional image construction (simplified)

Roberts focuses on workers within organizations, whereas the composers in our study were likely to be engaged in project-based work which occurs outside of traditional employment contracts. Although this is potentially challenging, the relevance of Roberts' model is evident in her observation that individuals might employ social, identity-based impression management to manage the perceptions of others whilst *simultaneously* employing impression management strategies to demonstrate desirability. This highlights the non-linear nature of impression management that we expected to find in the sample of female composers.

#### *4.2 Sample and procedures for phase 1 (survey phase)*

The survey (phase 1) was hosted online using SurveyMonkey. Respondents were recruited through educational and industry websites and social media groups; survey respondents were also asked to forward the invitation to their networks. No response rate is reported as this is an unknown population. The survey sample comprised 225 women composers from North America ( $n=69$ ), Australasia ( $n=61$ ), Europe ( $n=48$ ), and from Africa, Asia and South America (6 in total). Respondents reported an average age of 38 years with an age range of 18 to 88 years; they had practiced as composers for up to 70 years (mean 20 years), commencing their composition work at an average age of 18 years. Respondents worked in multiple genres including contemporary classical, jazz, electronic, orchestral and film music. Seventy-one per cent of respondents worked 30 hours or more per week in a combination of composition and other music and non-music roles. Work in composition was reported as "less than 10 hours" (35% of respondents) to "60 or more hours" (1.3%) per week.

General survey items were drawn from the Creative Workforce Initiative survey (Bennett et al., 2014). To these items we added four open-ended items specific to gender, shown below.

- To what extent do women composers perceive gender as having an impact on their compositional career?
- How do women overcome negative perceptions, if these occur?
- What positive perceptions do they report?
- What strategies do women employ to alleviate or lessen gendered aspects of their careers?

Survey responses were analyzed manually using content analysis (Stemler, 2001). Mindful of multiple possible meanings, frequency counting (Wilkinson, 2011) was also used. Two or more researchers independently coded the data to avoid bias and errors (Mays & Pope, 2000). Coding was compared and refined until agreement was reached; inter-rater reliability met the cut-off point of .80 (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### *4.3 Sample and procedures for phase 2 (interview phase)*

The prevalence of gender concealment in the 225 survey responses informed the interview schedule for phase 2 of the study. In particular, the interviews phase sought to understand composers' identity management strategies and why they felt these to be necessary.

In phase 2, 27 of the survey respondents were interviewed. Interviews were conducted face to face ( $n=3$ ), by telephone ( $n=2$ ) or via Skype ( $n=22$ ). The average age of interviewees was 54 years with a range from 23 to 86 years. Interview participants came from Europe ( $n=14$ ), North America ( $n=6$ ) and Australasia ( $n=7$ ) and their work encompassed multiple musical genres.

The interview instrument was trialed and refined twice before the final version was created. The instrument contained the following questions specific to identity and gender.

- Have you ever disguised or hidden your gender? *If yes:*
  - a. Why was that? Please tell me more.
  - b. What was the outcome?
  - c. How did you feel about (disguising/hiding) your gender?
- How does your identity effect how you see yourself?

The interviews were semi-structured and phenomenographic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, interviewers went beyond the questions to ensure a managed verbal exchange with appropriate pauses, prompts and probes (see Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2003). Four of the five researchers conducted the interviews, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded.

Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in order to capture and make sense of individuals' personal perceptions and experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In line with the phenomenographic approach, after each interview the interviewer recorded her thinking about the context and content. These observational notes were used during the analysis to better understand the unique context of each participant. Following Gioia and colleagues (2013), analysis of the interview data was conducted in three, inter-related steps without the use of a software package. Analysis was iterative in nature and involved going back and forth between the transcriptions, code book and observational notes. Figure 2 illustrates how the analysis evolved from first-order themes to broader categories and dimensions.

During the first step of the analysis, one researcher read the transcripts several times to get a feel for the data, then coded using an initial list of codes drawn from the literature

and survey findings. We were mindful to be open to themes not previously identified in the literature (Locke, 2001) and we let the codes emerge naturally from the data. The codebook was constantly modified by adding new codes, creating sub-codes or merging codes. First-order codes appear at the left-hand side of Figure 2. Next, we focused on connections between codes and the identification of higher-order conceptual codes. We moved away from the descriptive formulation of first-order codes where the words of the interviewees were used to a higher level of abstraction where meaningful themes were created (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We explored connections between conceptually meaningful themes and concepts to create a meaningful impression of the way in which women managed their gender. The second-order themes can be found at the center of Figure 2.

[Please position Figure 2 near here]

Fig. 2. Data structure: 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> order themes (left to right)

In the third and final step of analysis we returned to the literature to examine how the conceptual model related to previous research, to read more about emergent themes and to determine whether we had missed any key constructs. The final aggregated theoretical dimensions can be found at the right-hand side of Figure 2.

## 5. Results

The findings reveal that to lessen the impact of their gender, female composers employed two passing tactics (concealment and fabrication) and two revealing tactics (normalization and differentiation). As might be expected, the strategies used to manage stigmatized gender aligned with visible difference, but we also saw evidence of the use of

strategies previously identified as being used to manage invisible stigmatized identities. Whereas gender is a visible characteristic that can be hidden through the use of pseudonyms and other devices, it is rarely concealed when encounters are face-to-face.

The results are organized according to three key themes: the disadvantage of gender within music composition, including the intersectionality of gender and age; strategies for dealing with gender including the distinction between passing and revealing strategies; and the consequences of both these strategies. We emphasize the participant voice with the use of direct quotations. We identify survey respondents with a respondent (R) prefix and interview participants with an interviewee (I) prefix.

### *5.1 The disadvantage of gender within music composition*

The women composers felt stigmatized because they had not been taken seriously as composers due to their gender. This was often experienced as a dismissal of their expertise based on gender and applied to both performers and composers.

I have found that in the jazz world I have been often on the fringes. Sometimes I get to sit in and play with the elite local jazz big band but I do honestly get the feeling that they don't think of me as being on the same level as them — they say things like, “Isn't it nice that a girl is having a go at jazz?” — but I have the same specialist jazz qualifications as most of them and I've won national and international awards! (R4, 34 years of age)

In Canada, I definitely have heard some things about, “Oh, she got programmed [as a composer] because she's a woman”, or “My music is better, but because she's a woman...”. (I5, 32 years of age)

Overall, 61% of respondents disclosed in the survey that gender had been a disadvantage in their composition careers and 18.6% were unsure. Of the remainder, 14.5% indicated that their gender had had no impact on their career as a composer and 5.8% noted positive discrimination in terms of the additional opportunities for women. Both positive and negative impacts were noted by 11.2% of respondents overall. Respondents described the field of composition as a “male domain” and many women mentioned professional isolation, not being taken seriously and having to deal with unwanted sexual attention: . The view that gender was a disadvantage was exacerbated when technology was involved, as seen in the following comments.

... gender imbalance in terms of performance/recordings is occurring at a cultural/societal/structural level. (R37, 35 years of age)

I've been told multiple times over the past 20 years I wouldn't know where to plug anything in and I should just give up/leave the studio/gig. (R17, 41 years of age)

If people have a problem with your gender, that's their problem, so that's how I try (to alleviate or lessen gendered inequity). But then, still, getting knocked back job after job and looking at all the men getting appointed and looking at the screen industry, looking at all the men rising to the top, men of my generation who I was equal with, who are now at the top - I look at that and I just go, well that's not fair! (I23, 52 years of age)

The majority of participants had been excluded from professional networks on the basis of their gender. These included informal networks that meet out of hours and may

involve alcohol; these situations are known to be problematic for women (see also Hope, 2017). In other examples, academic networks were cited. The following example refers to conferences.

... there is still a palpable “old boys’ network” going on, even if the men themselves are unaware of it. They ask questions the most and are more aggressive about asking, for example. There are almost always more men on panel discussions than women, and almost always more men than women featured. (R21, 59 years of age)

In addition, the female composers highlighted the importance of social identities beyond that of a composer and they emphasized how these social identities intersected with their gender. Mentioned by 6 of the 27 (22%) interviewees, age emerged as an important issue. The stigmatization of gender seemed to increase as women aged, not least because men and women have vastly different experiences of ageing (see Haworth & Colton, 2015). In the words of the composers, whereas men become more respected and are seen as “role models” as they age, women’s ageing is characterized by “physical decline” and “less visibility”. This was mentioned by approximately a quarter of the participants.

[When women age] we’re discounted as a sort of moving force in music whereas the older man becomes a role model. (I9, 87 years of age)

Why should you feel that you’re getting towards the end of your use-by date in your thirties? Is it because you’re not going to be able to perform in a slinky dress or be sexually appealing to people in the audience? I think you become more invisible. (I12, 56 years of age)

There is generally less interest in older women than younger as well - this is also a real problem for women conductors, whereas the ancient male conductor and composer is revered. (R15, 65 years of age)

Of note, the women in their twenties were far less likely than older women to mention gender. Older women reflected that they had been unaware of gender imbalance until they had reached their thirties.

### *5.2 Strategies for dealing with one's gender*

The composers committed a substantial amount of thought and experimentation to mitigating the influence of gender on their careers. Their actions were carefully considered and they sometimes ran counter to the women's strong identification with their gender and their determination to create change.

The basis of my work is a processing and sharing of the world as I experience it.

Gender is inexorably tied to my every experience, it colors every interaction.

Composing is about choice. Part of my mission in composing, particularly as a woman, is to model behavior. I am actively choosing. I am building and rejecting within a frame. (S215, aged 29)

#### *5.2.1 Concealing strategies*

Concealment and fabrication emerged as passing strategies. Over 20% of survey respondents and seven of the 27 interviewees (26%) had disguised their gender to avoid the disadvantages of being a woman. Of these, three-quarters had disguised their gender in order to overcome the disadvantages reported earlier.

[As a student], I was told to [conceal my gender] in order to increase chances of winning competitions. (R23, 33 years of age)

I make sure I do not sign with my full name. I just sign with S, so I have more respect. (I18, 34 years of age)

When calls for scores ask for a pseudonym, I always choose a gender-neutral name so that no subconscious bias is applied. (R67, 28 years of age)

Approximately 50% of the composers had *thought* about disguising or hiding their gender.

Many people have done it [hidden or disguised their gender] through history, so when you read about those things, you kind of think, for a competition or something like that, you could ... it crosses your mind. (I12, 56 years old)

I actually thought of doing it once as a kind of hoax entry to a particular opportunity that tends to be heavy on male applicants. (I7, 35 years old)

Seen in the following comments, disguising or hiding identity was particularly prevalent when in early career and was associated with more positive career outcomes. It should be noted, however, that the need for passing tactics did not diminish over time; rather, the women used passing strategies across the career lifespan as and when they were needed.

[I disguised my gender] only when I was at student age, to avoid the prejudice that was around. (R15, 45 years of age)

[I disguised my gender] when I've submitted my compositions to international competitions where they didn't request gender to be indicated, in the first few years after finishing uni [university]. As my name is ambiguous to some, it doesn't necessarily give away my gender. (R17, 41 years of age)

Some women were adamant that concealing their identity was simply not feasible. This was because gender is so visible in the social media and because, eventually, "people will meet you in person anyway" (R53, 25 years of age). Composers in screen music explained that there are no opportunities to disguise or hide gender because of the contracted nature of the work.

In screen music, you sign a contract before every job, so there's kind of no disguising your identity really. I would [disguise my gender] if I had the option, because I think that people don't think women are up to the job. But if it was judged purely on its merits and everything else that goes into consideration with a job, which is track record and work experience and skillset and all those things, yes, if those things could be judged anonymously, I probably would consider I had a better chance as a man.

(I6, 51 years of age)

The comments also reflect the feelings of authenticity which can be gained by differentiation. We return to the authenticity and the consequences of using revealing strategies later in the article.

### 5.2.2 *Revealing strategies*

Although our survey and interview questions were designed to understand concealment of gender among our participants, revealing strategies also emerged. One strategy, expressed by around one-third of the participants, was to normalize or downplay the importance of gender. To reduce the negative connotations of being a woman in a male-dominated environment, the women tried to divert attention away from their gender. This is a minimizing strategy; age and career stage were factors in many of the accounts.

I try to not draw too much attention to my gender because I am worried that it might affect whether my works are chosen to be performed or not. I would hate to be the “token” female in a concert program. Or, alternatively not be chosen because my work is “not as good as” male colleagues. I’m getting less worried about this, though, as I get older and more confident in my work and ability. (R4, 34 years of age)

The reduction of identity salience through normalization may include assimilating into the male social identity group by adopting stereotypical masculine characteristics (Roberts, 2005). There was no evidence of this in the women’s accounts; however, several women mentioned that they had sought to identify with men in order to overcome social isolation. Seen in the second quote, some women had tried unsuccessfully to become part of male-dominated networks.

Early on I identified with men, because I knew so few women. I have been told there are expectations for my aesthetic and I have often felt outside of the male bonding and socializing. (S216, 36 years of age)

... men tend to socialize with other men, and a lot of connections are made during informal events. It's difficult to become "one of the guys". (S78, 49 years of age)

In contrast, approximately half the participants had engaged in differentiation at times, highlighting their gender as unique and positive in order to be more visible in the sector. This strategy was described succinctly by the following interview participant.

I think in the professional context, it's nice to stick out because people will remember me! (I5, 32 years of age)

For some women, gender was so integral to their practice, it could not be ignored.

I am realizing that when you compose something, or track anything really, there's always a part of you that goes into it. That part of you could be your personal history, your personal experiences, personal biases, everything; your perspectives on something, your identity - and that could involve your gender. ... if you put an element of yourself into that work, you can't be really objective about it. You can't necessarily ignore it. (I25, 34 years of age)

My gender identity is intrinsic to my creative identity. It would feel bizarre to have to conceal or neutralize who I am. (R30, 51 years of age)

The comments also reflect the feelings of authenticity which can be gained by differentiation. We return to the authenticity and the consequences of using revealing strategies later in the article.

### *5.2.3 Using multiple strategies*

The women composers reported using multiple concurrent strategies in different situations.

I want to be perceived as equal, but that said, I get terribly frustrated when I see the patterns continuing and the preferences still going to men and their male colleagues and this boys' club. And so then, I feel like speaking up about gender. But I always go to the coalface not wanting to make an issue of it: wanting to be taken on my own terms and wanting to take people on their own terms. (I23, 52 years of age)

Sometimes, I want to present with a kind of minimizing gender [strategy]. Other times, it feels important to me to claim space for women by my presentation. (I16, 54 years of age)

Seen in the quotes above, the use of multiple strategies created significant tensions between women's use of passing strategies for the benefit of their own careers and their desire to take affirmative action against gendered behavior for the benefit of the group. The composers' use of multiple strategies is similar to strategies observed among entrepreneurs (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). The similarity with entrepreneurial behaviors is likely to lie in the need of individuals who are growing a business to simultaneously belong and to be

distinct, requiring multiple identity management strategies in the attempt to moderate the needs of distinctiveness, belonging and group advocacy.

### *5.3 Consequences of gender identity management strategies*

The various strategies led to both negative and positive consequences, which are discussed below.

When using passing strategies, the results of being “discovered” were often striking. In some cases, passing strategies had a lasting and negative impact.

The first orchestra piece I had performed, I sent off under [family name] and when I showed up for the performance (I had taken the pianist - it was my piano concerto), the conductor introduced me and the pianist to the orchestra and they hardly clapped. Then he said, “Isn’t your husband coming?” I was so befuddled, I said, “No, he’s home with the children!” He looked baffled. I said, “The N is for [first name]”. He turned to the orchestra. He said, “This is the composer”. Dead silence. I was never so humiliated. ... it had never even occurred to them that a woman would submit a work ... but you can only do that once, especially with a name people tend to remember. But yes, why shouldn’t you [hide your gender]? It should not come into question - just use your first initial. (I9, 87 years of age).

It seemed like a good idea. ... The orchestral works were performed both times, but the host institutions were not happy when I showed up. In neither case was another work of mine ever performed in those venues. (R11, 87 years of age)

I always refer to myself as Alex rather than Alexandra, so often, online, people might assume that I'm a man and — not until they Skype me or something do they that realize that I'm not. Sometimes you see in their eyes when they pick up the call. (I13, 23 years of age)

As seen above, a striking consequence of the persistent identity bias experienced by the female composers was their adoption of passing strategies including concealment and fabrication. Even though their gender would eventually be discovered, and despite previously experiencing the negative consequences of employing “short-term” passing strategies, women returned to these strategies throughout their careers.

Previous studies have found that the consequences of belonging to a stigmatized group can include job loss, fewer career opportunities, professional isolation, fewer professional networks, the rejection of peers, and anxiety. In our study, the use of passing strategies to lessen these challenges often ran counter to the women's strong identities as female composers. This could be seen in their comments about the desire to be authentic and also in their determination to create change. Although concealment and fabrication had a positive effect on the likelihood of the women's music being performed, the strategies were thus negatively related to their feelings of authenticity (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014).

Another consequence of persistent gender bias, then, was the determination expressed by many women to satisfy social identity motives by highlighting their gender. Individuals felt strongly about being “true to themselves”, a feeling which increased (or was more readily expressed) over time. As one participant reinforced, differentiation strategies often increased feelings of authenticity: “I'm me and I want people to accept me like I am!” (I27, 48 years of age).

As previously noted by Roberts (2005), the composers' impression management strategies were carefully selected for each specific situation. As a consequence, many female composers use disparate and simultaneous impression management strategies to manage different situations: for example, highlighting gender to demonstrate desirability and uniqueness in one context whilst simultaneously minimizing or concealing identity in another. The need for simultaneous impression management strategies is evidenced by the composer quoted below, who described in her lengthy survey response the different receptions she receives in different situations.

Lately I've been having a lot of positive reactions to me being a female and I see, more and more, that a lot of people like to work with a female producer/composer for a change. ...

... many people simply don't believe or can't grasp that I was "able" to compose and create these pieces without the help of a man. ...

... Frequently I experience a person showing a significant decrease in interest in the music they're hearing once they find out it was composed/ produced by a woman. It instantly becomes "lesser" music in many people's heads. (S166, 36 years of age)

## 6. Discussion

This article reported female composers' use of passing tactics and their rationales for concealing gender. The findings illustrate that the gender of women in composition is often negatively perceived by others. They also revealed that they were initially devoid of strategies to manage gendered assumptions, stereotypes and discrimination. Participating composers highlighted the negative impact of gender on the extent to which their work was taken seriously and their access to professional networks. Following Oakley and O'Brien (2016), the composers emphasized the importance of networks for obtaining work, accessing

peer learning and advice, finding role models and accessing opportunities for work. Their experiences were typical of a sector founded on grass-roots, community based social networks (Christopherson 2009) Although these networks were important to creating and sustaining work and reputation, they were often exclusionary (see also Smith & McKinley, 2009).

The findings also highlighted the intersectionality of gender and age. In line with Cleveland, Huebner and Hanscom (2017), participants noted that whereas men gain respect as they age, women's ageing is characterized by physical decline and less visibility. This aligns with the stereotypical image of the distinguished older male, as articulated by Haworth and Colton (2016, p. 2):

... a male composer's first symphony in his sixties might be understood as his crowning achievement, a culmination of previous successes, whereas a woman in the same position might be dismissed or patronized as a "late bloomer" or "retired amateur".

Duncan and Loretto (2004) agree that the combination of ageism and sexism can be particularly problematic. Moreover, the composers expressed what North and Fiske (2012) describe as a halo effect in which people with one negatively perceived characteristic are assumed to possess others.

As Blair (2009) notes, the network boundaries in sectors such as music shift constantly, highlighting the need for constant identity work including image construction. Within these networks the actions of individual composers emerged as what Rogers (2005, p. 704) describes as "a dynamic and recursive process, wherein actors continually assess their effectiveness based on the perceivers' responses to their self-representation". The composers' process involved complex interactions between subjective understandings of their individual

position and the constraints and opportunities—including those that were gendered—presented by objective social position. People who hold a negatively perceived social identity can respond by reconstructing the meaning of their identity, rejecting their identity or withdrawing themselves from that identity (see Pratt et al., 2006), or by assimilating by emphasizing similarities with a more positively perceived group. The findings revealed that composers in our study used a range of these passing and revealing identity management strategies.

Goffman (1963, p. 74) writes that “because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on some occasion by intent”. However, it is not always possible to hide an aspect of identity that is visible. Rather, women normalized or downplayed the importance of gender by using minimization strategies. In situations where withdrawal through an identity exit are not possible, as in the case of age (Fiol, Pratt, & O’Connor, 2009), disguising and hiding strategies emerge as valid options (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). Many women disguised or hid their gender to avoid stereotypes, discrimination and sexism, and to gain equitable access to composition opportunities. The strategies were perceived as necessary in order to navigate the hegemonic and male-dominated field of composition. Given the difficulties of becoming established as a composer, it is unsurprising that concealment and fabrication strategies were more common in early career; however, they were evident across the career lifespan. Although the strategies employed were informed by the success or otherwise of previous attempts, many female composers repeated previously unsuccessful strategies because of the severity of the image discrepancy and the deficit of viable alternative strategies.

Concealment and fabrication strategies often had negative psychological consequences, whether or not the strategy had been deliberate. In some cases, female composers had held an unintended “virtual” social identity (Goffman, 1963) because they had

been mistakenly assumed to be men. The findings point to the positive and negative consequences of identity management strategies. Other composers deployed deliberate fabrication or concealment strategies multiple times because it allowed them to retain, albeit temporarily, positive assumptions about their skills and characteristics, based on them “being male”. Whether or not they had applied a strategy, the composers felt reduced in the minds of others once their gender was discovered. Another impact of gender concealment and fabrication is that it leads individuals to monitor their behavior and the reactions of others in case their gender is discovered (Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). In our study, this monitoring behavior was evident among women who had experienced the results of disguising or hiding their identity, whether or not their tactics were deliberate.

Approximately half the female composers in the study focused on social identities that would be more positively perceived by others, moving attention away from their gender by applying something similar to a normalization or minimization strategy. Their actions included normalization strategies in which gender was revealed and yet minimized by diverting attention away from their gender and towards their compositional works. Clair, Beatty and MacLean (2005, p. 83) this as a strategy in which “the invisible social identity is subtly acknowledged, but its significance and stigma are minimized”. Royer adds that the strategy might often be used in order to preserve a sense of psychological well-being.

For some women, often-used strategies included highlighting their gender as “unique”. Although revealing strategies were employed to differentiate their gender as unique or positive, they were used only in certain situations. By differentiating or normalizing their gender, women — particularly women who were older and/or already established in their careers — attempted to alter the stereotypically male image of the composer both within the music industries and among the general populace. Some women reported that differentiating

themselves as women composers had the consequence of enhancing their feelings of authenticity.

The interesting thing about the music composition context is that the extent to which gender is visible varies. The female composers simultaneously used passing strategies typically seen with invisible stigmatized identities when their gender was *not* visible, and minimization strategies typically seen with visible stigmatized identities when their gender *was* visible. In line with Roberts (2005, p. 704), then, image construction emerged as a non-linear process “wherein actors continually assess their effectiveness based on the perceivers’ responses to their self-presentation”. In line with Roberts’ (2005, p. 691) conceptual model, the composers’ impression management varied “from interaction to interaction”. Some women revealed that they “played” with their multiple identities by employing the one where the most positive gains could be expected. Roccas and Brewer (2002) would term this social identity complexity, in which people recognize that their various communities or memberships are not fully convergent or overlapping.

### *6.1 Limitations and future directions*

The music composition sector is relatively small, as was our sample. As such, we do not seek to generalize. The findings may hold some relevance for research in other male-dominated industries, and future studies might build on the findings and model to focus on the selection, experience and impacts of strategies adopted to overcome the disadvantages of having a stigmatized gender. Future research might seek to understand the experience and impact of gender in a more intensive and nuanced way through longitudinal research with female composers. This would inform initiatives to better prepare and support women to overcome gender bias. Given that people tend to present themselves in a positive way, a second limitation of this study is the impact of social desirability bias. We employed several

strategies to alleviate social desirability bias including anonymity, a neutral location for the interviews and the development of trust (Brunk, 2010). However, we note this as a factor.

## **7. Recommendations**

We begin with four recommendations for higher education providers. First, ensure the inclusion of repertoire composed by female artists for performance students in ensemble and solo recital settings. Second, revisit musicological materials and include more women in the narrative of history. This will entail seeking out or creating new materials that are more appropriate for the task. Next, reinforce visibility by ensuring that visiting performers include works by men and women in their repertoire. Finally, composition departments have a role to play and should ensure that visiting composers reflect a balance of men and women.

We also make recommendations to arts organizations and to individual composers. Women should support other women composers by recommending female colleagues for opportunities, resulting in a type of direct action toward increased visibility. Ensuring equal representation on high-level organizational structures, such as the boards of music organizations, will also help to ensure awareness and inclusion (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017).

Given that self-disclosure is critical for developing intimacy, building networks and developing mentoring relationships (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Herek, 1996), it is likely that concealment and fabrication in the early career stage hinders the potential of female composers to develop the social and cultural capitals which underpin networked forms of work and reputation building. The women in our study increasingly adopted a differentiation strategy as their careers matured. They also assumed advocacy and mentorship roles, which suggests the potential for these women to “coach” early career and aspiring composers in the use of effective differentiation strategies. We recommend that more arts organizations establish programs to enable and support such peer mentorship programs.

We note also the women who reacted to their stigmatized gender by highlighting its uniqueness or seeking to normalize being a female in a male-dominated space. Women felt strongly about their gender and they would often champion change on behalf of their community even at the cost of their personal practice. This indicates the potential benefits if educational institutions and arts organizations were to support highly invested composers to create and enact programs of awareness and change.

## **8. Conclusion**

Our study confirms that many female composers disguise or hide their gender in order to access equal opportunities for career advancement. This is likely to remain the case until the prevailing norms and practices of composition are changed. Efforts can be made through education, mentorship, public image and career support strategies. In particular, we emphasize the potential for higher education providers to make all students aware of typical gendered behaviors and perceptions and to acknowledge that impression management is an important graduate capability. As we have argued previously (2018, p. 15), music educators must “be made aware of gendered behaviours and under-representation, and be empowered to create change from within their own practice”.

In adopting Roberts’ conceptual model of professional image construction (2005) we captured the dynamic nature of music composition as a profession which straddles both the inside and the outside of the organization. As insiders, composers must work with others in contexts such as rehearsals. As outsiders, they work alone in the solitary space in which they create their music. We have shown that Roberts’ conceptual model is able to capture the dynamics of impression management for this cohort, who manage the perceptions of others whilst using strategies to make themselves desirable. Although female composers work in an environment that continues to discriminate against women, we argue that impression

management is an effective tool, to paraphrase Roberts (2005), for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the challenges of the diversity that these composers bring to the world of music.

Homosocial behaviors perpetuate the extent to which gender inequality is experienced in the music industries. The more visible female composers become to others within and beyond the music sector, the more typical the idea of a “female composer” will become. This is at the heart of the revealing strategies disclosed by participants. The visibility of female composers can be enhanced by ensuring that female composers are a visible part of the musical canon, thus impacting future generations of performers, musicologists and composers. This should be undertaken in higher education, where the academy establishes and teaches the musical canon to a professional level.

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## Highlights

- Female composers are negatively perceived because of their gender
- There is persistent marginalization of female composers
- In music composition, the extent to which gender is visible varies
- Female composers graduate without strategies to manage discrimination
- Differentiation strategies enable women to feel authentic and to change stereotypes

Character count with spaces:

- 67
- 57
- 68
- 71
- 85



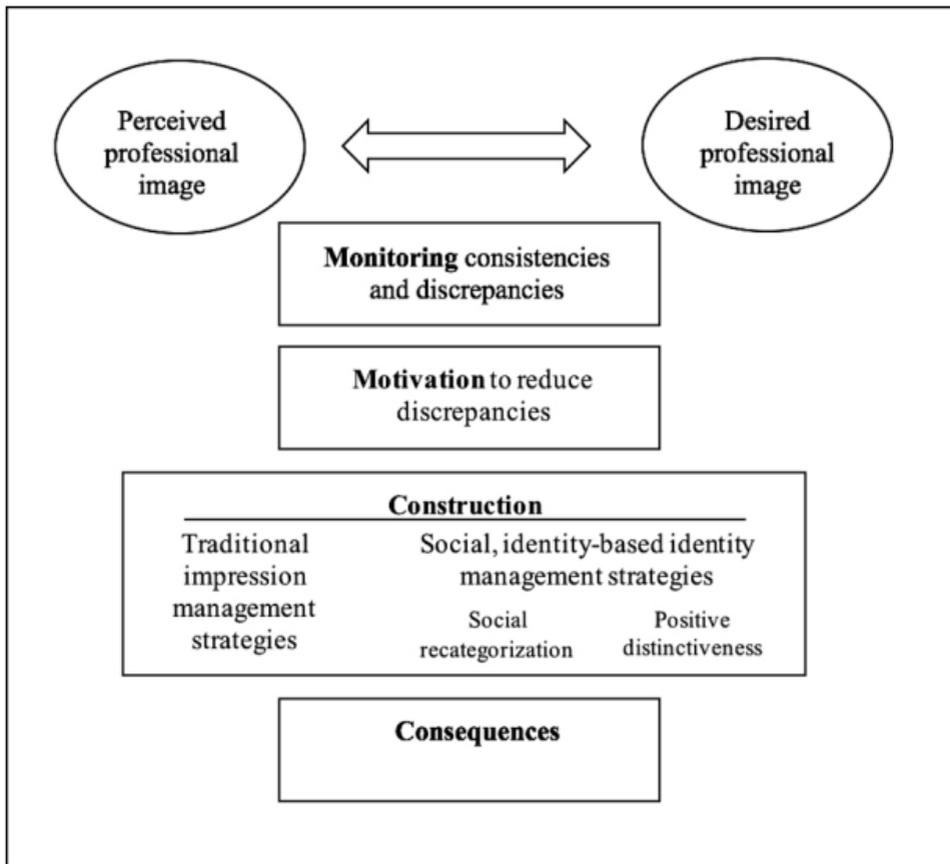


Figure 1

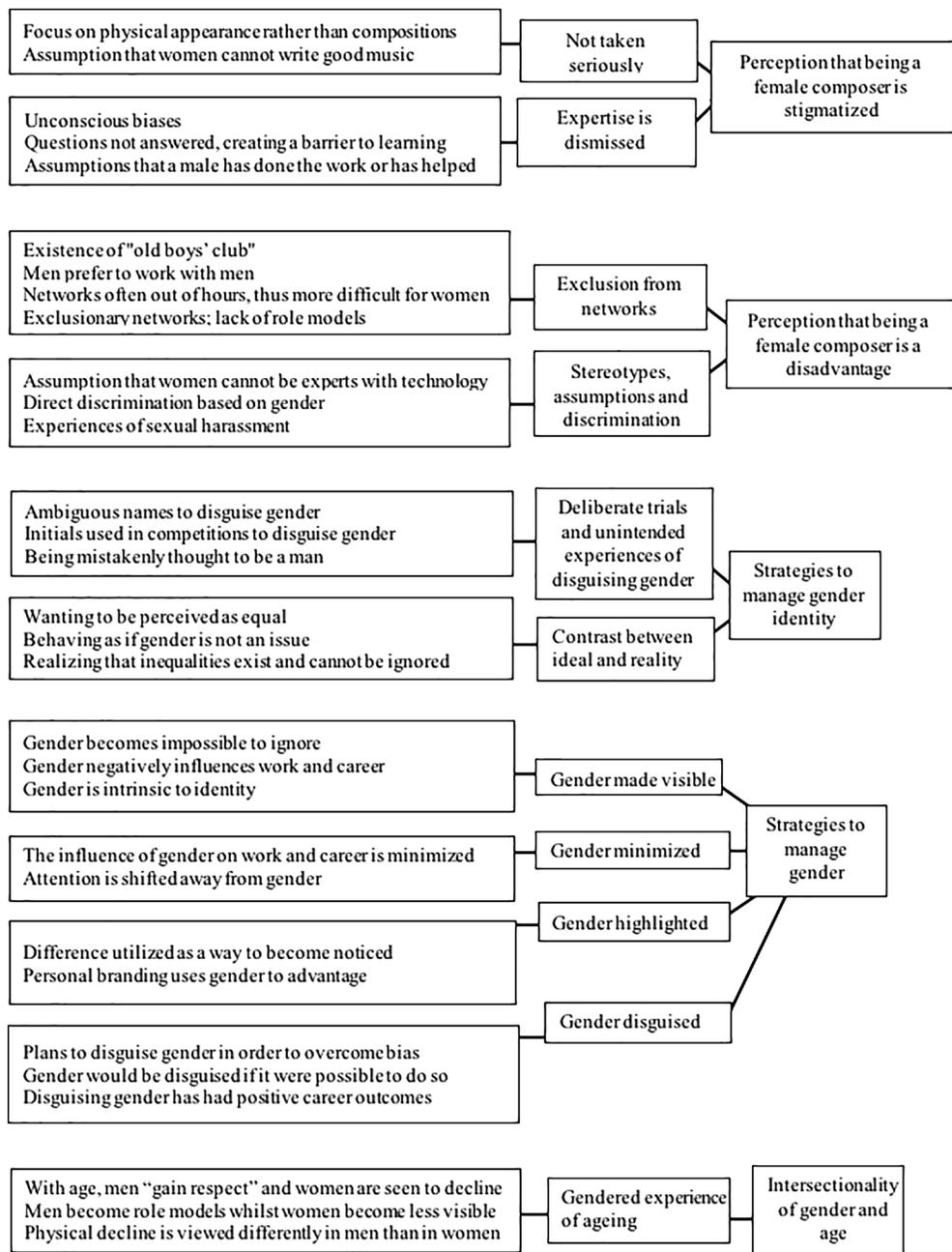


Figure 2