Membership of the Music Educators National Conference from 1912–1938: A Demographic and Economic Analysis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between the membership of the Music Supervisors National Conference/Music Educators National Conference (MENC) from 1912–1938 and selected demographic and economic variables. The results include the following: (a) MENC membership grew considerably more rapidly than the nation’s general and teacher populations; (b) membership and membership as a percentage of the population differed significantly between MENC divisions; (c) membership correlated with mean teacher salaries and with per capita education spending by state; (d) membership by state correlated only slightly with geographical distance to convention sites; (e) women comprised a significant majority of the membership in each division, but a smaller majority than in the nation’s teaching profession as a whole; and (f) implementation of the MENC’s biennial convention plan did not affect membership totals significantly. We speculate that MENC membership as a percentage of music educators may have differed between MENC divisions, and that such membership differences may have resulted from regional identification or other cultural factors not examined in this study. We recommend further application of quantitative sociological research techniques and cultural research approaches to the study of past and present practices in music and music education.

The Study

The history of the Music Supervisors National Conference/Music Educators National Conference (MENC) has been investigated by several researchers (Houlihan, 1961; Kauffman, 1942/1943; Kidd, 1984; Lehman, 1979/1980; Molnar, 1948; Timmerman, 1960), all of whom used traditional historical research techniques to examine the organization’s administrative leaders and structures, finances, publications, conventions, and philosophies (Biffle, 1991). However, just as most of the research literature on music education history does not focus on ordinary music teachers, students, and programs (Humphreys, 1996/1997, 1997a, 1997b, in press), the literature on MENC history is largely silent about the organization’s rank-and-file membership.

The period 1912–1938 encompassed much of the period of great change in American education that resulted from the nation’s transformation to an industrial economy, rapidly increasing immigration and urbanization, and other major shifts in the social and economic landscape that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Not coincidentally, the years 1912–1938 also encompassed the heyday of the Progressive Education Movement, which exerted a profound effect on American education in general and on music education in particular (Humphreys, 1992/1995).

Proponents of progressive education stressed compulsory school attendance laws, and they emphasized high school education. The fact that many more students attended school in the early 20th century than previously likely explains much of the increase in the number of teachers relative to the increase in national population from 1912–1938. The period 1912–1938 also saw large increases in the number and size of public school music programs. In 1912, relatively few schools supported bands and mixed choirs, whereas, by 1938, these ensembles had become the norm in American high schools and in many junior high and elementary schools. General music had existed throughout much of the 19th century, but it too fared well under progressivism as well as other influences (Humphreys, 1992/1995).

Mark and Gary (1992) noted that Midwestern music educators dominated the MENC during the early years of the organization, but they provided little explanation and scant documentation for that assertion other than a membership list for the first meeting, which occurred in 1907. Molnar (1948) made a similar claim, which he supported with annual membership figures by state. To gain a more complete understanding, membership data should be examined across an extended period of time and in the context of other demographic and economic variables. For example, the Midwest may have contributed more MENC members than did the other regions during the early years simply because it had a larger population and a larger number of music teachers.

A visual inspection of MENC convention attendance figures (Birge, 1937/1966) and membership lists suggests that a much larger percentage of members attended the organization’s conventions during the years prior to World War II than is the case today. During its early years, the MENC offered few tangible advantages to its members beyond subscription to the Music Supervisors Journal/Music Educators Journal and access to conventions. That fact, coupled with low membership fees and the fee structure itself, suggests that many individuals may have joined the MENC mainly to enable them to attend the conventions. If convention access was a major factor, distance to the convention sites might have influenced individuals’ decisions about whether to join the organization. Indeed, the large number of conventions held in certain geographical regions during the MENC’s early decades might explain the large numbers of members from those regions.

Economic variables may also explain regional membership disparities. Molnar (1948), for example, suggested that the Southern Division supported
fewer music programs and music teachers and thus produced fewer potential MENC members than the other divisions because of the region’s relatively weak economy. However, it is also possible that regional differences in teachers’ salaries affected individual teachers’ ability to pay the membership dues and convention expenses. To date, no one has presented solid evidence that supports or refutes either of these explanations.

It appears that the majority of the MENC’s early leaders were men. Indeed, most of the published research on MENC history, and on other aspects of music education history as well, is by and about men (Humphreys, 1996/1997, 1997b; Humphreys, Bess, & Bergee, 1996/1997). Researchers, however, have not examined the gender of the MENC membership throughout the organization’s history. Furthermore, researchers have not studied relationships between the gender of the general teaching population and that of the music education profession.

Finally, it appears that the MENC implemented its biennial convention plan (alternating yearly between division and national conventions) in 1927 to accommodate the emerging division (sectional) conferences while preserving a single, unified organization (Mark & Gary, 1992). The effects of that plan, if any, on national membership figures have not been documented.

The purpose of this study was to examine selected demographic and economic variables in relation to membership of the MENC from 1912–1938. We examined MENC membership for each of the years 1912–1938 in relation to: (a) general population, (b) number of teachers, (c) teacher salaries, (d) education spending, (e) MENC division, (f) distance to convention sites, (g) gender of members, and (h) the biennial convention plan.

Method

The MENC published membership lists in its conference proceedings and yearbooks for 27 consecutive years (1912–1938) (see Appendix A for citations). The lists include each member’s name, address, and membership status. We included regular individual members from the 48 states and the District of Columbia in this study. We excluded associate members, individuals for whom no address appears, institutional members, and regular members from United States territories and foreign countries.

Each member’s state and geographical region were assigned using the six current MENC division configurations. We determined the gender of each member from the first (given) and middle names on the membership lists. Individuals with initials only for first and middle names were deemed males. In some ambiguous cases, we determined gender of members from information found in various biographical sources. We excluded indeterminate cases from the analysis (1.7% of all cases).

We obtained state population figures from summaries of United States census reports (Bogue, 1985). We estimated state populations for non-decen-

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nial census years by interpolating from the two closest census years using a formula designed to compute compound interest. The formula assumes a constant annual percentage increase or decrease throughout a given decade. We performed these calculations on a spreadsheet program (Microsoft, 1985–1992).

Annual per capita education spending for each state was calculated by dividing the total state educational expenditure for each year by that state’s population (or population estimate). We obtained data on annual educational expenditures, mean teacher salaries, and teacher gender by state from United States Bureau/Office of Education documents (see Appendix B for citations).

For each of the 27 years, distance to the convention site was defined as the number of miles from the largest city in each member's state to the national convention site or the nearest division convention site, depending on the year. We used decennial census data for large cities (Androit, 1980) to interpolate non-census-year estimates for the largest city in each state using the formula mentioned above. Distances between cities were taken from a military road mileage compendium (Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, 1981).

Results

Significant changes occurred in MENC membership, numbers of teachers nationally, and the national population from 1912–1938. MENC membership rose from 119 in 1912 to 3,255 in 1938, an increase of 2,735%, whereas the number of teachers nationally rose from 546,689 to 877,266, an increase of 60.5%. During the same period, the national population rose from 94,494,000 to 130,104,000, an increase of 37.7%. MENC membership as a percentage of state population was significantly correlated with year (1912–1938) (r = .53, p < .001). These data indicate that MENC membership grew considerably more rapidly than the number of teachers nationally and than the national population.

To examine trends in selected variables over time, we divided the 27-year period into three 9-year periods (1912–1920, 1921–1929, 1930–1938). Analysis by division for the three periods suggests consistent geographic differences in MENC membership patterns (see Table 1). Division differences in MENC membership were significant for each period (1912–1920, χ² = 96.2, p < .001; 1921–1929, χ² = 75.65, p < .001; 1930–1938, χ² = 56.1, p < .001). More than 40% of MENC members in the two periods spanning 1912–1929 were from the North Central Division; the Eastern Division had the second largest number of members. In the 1930–1938 period, the Eastern Division contributed a slightly larger number of members (34.7%) than did the North Central Division (33.5%). The Northwest, Southern, and Western divisions each contributed less than 11% of total MENC memberships during each
9-year period. However, as the decreasing $\chi^2$ values across the three periods indicate, the magnitude of divisional disparities in membership decreased over time.

| Table 1 |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|         | Eastern          | 31.5            | 26.6            | 34.7            | 31.8            |
|         | North Central    | 44.9            | 43.1            | 33.5            | 37.4            |
|         | Northwest        | 1.4             | 2.3             | 4.5             | 3.6             |
|         | Southern         | 5.5             | 9.8             | 6.7             | 7.6             |
|         | Southwestern     | 15.3            | 16.1            | 10.1            | 12.4            |
|         | Western          | 1.5             | 2.1             | 10.5            | 7.2             |

We sought further clarification of membership differences between divisions by examining MENC membership as a percentage of state population (see Table 2). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results show significant division differences in MENC membership as a percentage of state population for each of the nine-year periods: (a) 1912–1920 ($F_{5,435} = 8.468, p < .001, r^2 = .08$); (b) 1921–1929 ($F_{5,435} = 15.32, p < .001, r^2 = .15$); (c) 1930–1938 ($F_{5,435} = 31.56, p < .001, r^2 = .27$). In contrast to the trend toward less regional disparity in MENC membership noted above, the increasing $r^2$ values for the effect of division on MENC membership as a percentage of state population increased over time. Post hoc (Scheffé) tests indicate that: (a) for 1912–1920, the North Central Division contributed significantly more MENC members as a percentage of its population than each of the other five divisions ($p < .05$); all other comparisons within this time period are non-significant ($p > .05$); (b) for 1921–1928, the North Central Division contributed a significantly higher percentage of its population than did the Western, Eastern, and Southern divisions, and the Southern Division contributed a significantly lower percentage than the Eastern, Northwest, Eastern, and Southwestern divisions ($p < .05$); (c) for 1930–1938, the Southern Division contributed a significantly lower percentage of its population than all other divisions, and the Southwestern Division contributed a significantly lower percentage than all divisions except the Southern Division ($p < .05$).

The mean of the states' teacher salaries nationally rose from $484 in 1912 to $1,299 in 1938, an increase of 168.4%. Mean per capita spending for education rose from $5.33 to $16.13, an increase of 202.6%. Hence, per capita spending for education increased faster than did teachers' salaries. However, the partial correlation between per capita education spending and teacher salaries by state (controlling for year) is moderately high (partial $r = .72, p < .05$). There were significant differences in mean teacher salaries among divisions during each of the three periods (1912–1920 $F_{5,435} = 55.73, p < .001, r^2 = .39$; 1921–1929 $F_{5,435} = 73.41, p < .001, r^2 = .46$; 1930–1938 $F_{5,435} = 90.71, p < .001, r^2 = .51$). Scheffé tests indicate that mean teacher salaries were significantly lower in the Southern Division and significantly higher in the Eastern and Western divisions than in the other divisions ($p < .001$). Furthermore, the increasing $r^2$ values indicate that the salary differences among divisions became more pronounced over time. Across the 27-year period, the partial correlation (controlling for year) is low between MENC membership and mean salary by state (partial $r = .36, p < .001$). When MENC membership is defined as the percentage of teachers within a state, the partial correlation (controlling for year) between that variable and mean salary remains low (partial $r = .33, p < .001$).

There were similar differences in per capita education spending by division for each of the three time periods (1912–1920 $F_{5,435} = 92.72, p < .0001, r^2 = .52$; 1921–1929 $F_{5,435} = 111.28, p < .0001, r^2 = .56$; 1930–1938 $F_{5,435} = 103.25, p < .0001, r^2 = .54$). Scheffé tests indicate that mean per capita education spending was significantly lower in the Southern Division than in each of the other divisions during all three periods ($p < .001$). Across the 27-year period, the partial correlation (controlling for year) is low between MENC membership and per capita education spending (partial $r = .23, p < .001$). However, when membership is defined as a percentage of state population, the partial correlation (controlling for year) between that variable and per capita education spending is somewhat higher (partial $r = .55, p < .001$).
We examined relationships between the geographical distance to convention sites and MENC membership through partial correlations (controlling for state population). Proximity to the convention sites explains statistically significant yet small amounts of variance in membership for 1912–1920 (partial \( r = -0.20, p < 0.01 \)) and 1921–1929 (partial \( r = -0.31, p < 0.01 \)), and a non-significant amount of variance for 1930–1938 (partial \( r = 0.07, p > 0.01 \)). There was a low negative, non-significant relationship for the entire 27-year period (partial \( r = -0.14, p > 0.01 \)).

In an attempt to learn more about the characteristics of individual members, we broke down the MENC membership data by gender, division, and time period (see Table 3). The percentage of female members nationally increased and then decreased over time, but the female-male percentage ratio remained significantly different in favor of females in all three periods: (a) 1912–1920, 73.27 (\( \chi^2 = 21.16, p < 0.01 \)); (b) 1921–1929, 76.24 (\( \chi^2 = 27.04, p < 0.01 \)); (c) 1930–1938, 68.32 (\( \chi^2 = 12.96, p < 0.01 \)). Moreover, the female-male percentage ratio was significantly higher in favor of females for each division during each of the three periods. (Chi-square values range from 9.00 to 64.00, all significant at \( p < 0.01 \).)

Finally, we compared national MENC membership totals for the six division convention years included in this study (1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1935, 1937) with six adjacent national convention years (1928, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1938). The difference in mean membership by state between the division (\( M = 83.02, SD = 125.15 \)) and national (\( M = 91.08, SD = 162.85 \)) convention years was not significant (t(df=293) = -1.21, p > 0.05).

### Table 3

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Conclusions

The huge increase in MENC membership from 1912–1938 undoubtedly overstates the numerical increase in music teachers and in public school music programs during the period under study because the MENC was a fledgling organization in 1912 and its growth during the 27-year period likely outpaced that of the profession as a whole. Nevertheless, the MENC membership data may provide some indication of the rapid rise of public school music during that era despite the failure of the Bureau/Office of Education to collect data routinely on music teachers as a separate category.

Regardless, per capita MENC membership was not uniform across the country. There are at least two possible reasons for the regional disparities in membership revealed in this study: (a) there were different numbers of music teachers per capita among divisions; or (b) there were similar numbers of music teachers per capita but different percentages of them chose to join the MENC.

The partial correlation between MENC membership and per capita education spending by state appears to support Molnar's (1948) implied economic explanation for the divisional membership disparities; that is, different regions supported different numbers of music teachers (per capita). There is no evidence, however, that the Southern Division, for example, supported fewer music teachers per capita than the other divisions, aside from indirect evidence in the form of MENC membership figures. On the contrary, the number of teachers and population by state were highly correlated during the period under examination (\( r = .98 \)), which indicates that there were similar numbers of teachers per capita across MENC divisions. Therefore, a plausible explanation for the regional membership disparities is that there were similar numbers of music teachers per capita across divisions, but that the percentage of music teachers who chose to join the MENC differed among divisions.

Differences in teachers’ salaries can probably be eliminated as a reason for the regional membership differences because of the low (partial) correlation between the two variables and because MENC dues were extremely low. Similarly, distance to convention sites seems to have had only a small effect on membership, at least as that variable was defined and measured in this study. However, music teachers’ psychological identification with a region, as opposed to geographical distance, may help explain membership differences among divisions in relation to the location of convention sites. For example, in 1922, the only year under study in which the national convention was held in the Southern Division (Nashville), that division contributed 17% of all MENC members. In the 2 years immediately prior to and subsequent to 1922, the Southern Division contributed far lower percentages of members to the national totals (1920, 8%; 1921, 7%; 1923, 9%; 1924, 11%). Hence, only in the year in which a national convention was held in the Southern Division did that division come close to contributing its national population share of 21% to the MENC membership roster.
Considering these results, the question must be asked: If the convention sites had varied more geographically, would the organization have become more national in scope during its early history? The data for 1922 seem to suggest that this might have been the case. On the other hand, the regional membership disparities might reflect regional differences in attitudes toward music, professional organizations, public school music education, or public education in general, or perhaps even more fundamental regional differences in culture, values, or demographic variables other than those examined in this study. Another possible explanation for the early regional membership differences is that the MENC began in the North Central Division. Regional membership disparities later in the 27-year period may have resulted in part from the fact that state-level music educator associations in some divisions, namely the Eastern and North Central divisions, affiliated with the national organization sooner than those in other divisions.

Regardless of the reasons, the data do confirm historians' assertions that the MENC was represented disproportionately from the North Central Division from 1912–1920 (Mark & Gary, 1992; Molnar, 1948). However, although actual MENC membership differed less between divisions in 1930–1938 than in 1912–1920, regional differences in membership as a percentage of the population became more pronounced over time. This suggests that as the nation's population proportions shifted between regions, the MENC achieved more balance between regions in actual membership, which made the organization appear more national in scope despite larger disparities over time in the contribution of MENC members relative to the respective division populations.

Unlike the 1990s, when women make up a small, statistically non-significant majority of MENC members (Humphreys, 1997b), the early organization was dominated numerically by women in all six divisions. However, the percentage ratio between female MENC members and female teachers nationally was 73:82 in 1912–1920, 76:83 in 1921–1929, and 68:81 in 1930–1938. In other words, the MENC membership was heavily female, but less so than the nation's teaching profession as a whole. If the female-male ratios for MENC members are representative of the music teaching profession at the time, the music teaching profession was more gender balanced than the nation's teaching profession as a whole. On the other hand, female music educators may have simply chosen to join the organization in larger numbers than did male music educators.

Finally, the decision to adopt the biennial convention plan seems to have had more to do with unifying the organization in the face of growing regional interests and conferences (Mark & Gary, 1992) than with trying to increase membership. In any event, the national organization continued to register relatively steady increases in national membership totals after the plan went into effect in 1927, regardless of the type of convention held.

Implications for Future Research

Research techniques similar to those employed in this study could be used to examine other historical aspects of the MENC, in part to broaden and deepen understanding about the organization, its members, and its constituents, and in part to gain indirect knowledge about the music education field as a whole. Increasingly in recent years, historians in other fields have embraced sociological approaches that utilize aggregate data to gain insights about groups of people and other phenomena (Humphreys, 1996/1997, 1997a, 1997b, in press). One reason for the shift in focus is a desire on the part of some contemporary historians to present more than the traditional top-down, largely narrative stories of elite political, military, and religious leaders and institutions. Aggregate, quantitative data can play an important role in "history from below," or the history of common people and their activities.

There is an inherent dichotomy and tension between the narrative and quantitative approaches to historiography, and between the two value systems upon which the approaches are based. The tension results from the fact that both approaches neglect certain aspects of history. As a solution, some historians tout microhistory, a methodological outgrowth of Marxist historical approaches to group behavior. Microhistorians attribute some importance to the volition of individuals by studying their actions in relation to their respective cultural systems of normative behavior (Levi, 1991). Music education researchers could use microhistory approaches to search for cultural reasons for the regional differences identified in this study, reasons that might explain why individuals act differently within different cultures. The aggregate data examined in this study fail to reveal and explain such regional and cultural factors.

The techniques employed in this study could be applied to other professional organizations. A recent pilot study, for example, revealed that the MENC North Central Division contributes a significantly larger percentage of its population to the current membership of the American Choral Directors Association than does any other division (Cornner, 1996). If the patterns found in the present study were replicated in studies of other music organizations, the findings on the MENC reported here might have great generalizability.

In addition to historical topics, the modern-day MENC and other contemporary aspects of music and music education could be studied using alternative research methodologies (Humphreys, 1996/1997). Quantitative, sociological techniques, together with cultural approaches, could reveal a great deal about music and music education, both past and present.

Endnotes

1In 1933, for example, two dollars of the three-dollar annual MENC dues fee went to the respective division conference, and the remaining one dollar
went for a subscription to the *Music Supervisors Journal* (1933 Membership Application and Renewal Form, 1932).

Membership lists were not published for all conventions held before 1912, and those that were published varied in content. No lists were published after 1938.

3MENC division configurations have changed several times. We also considered the possible effects of the postponement and eventual cancellation of the 1933 Southern and Southwestern division conventions due to the nation’s financial crisis (Buttelman, 1933). Because membership dues were payable several months prior to the convention dates (e.g., Parsons, 1932), and the postponement announcements were made just weeks before the scheduled dates (Catron, 1933; Francis, 1933), it is unlikely that these events significantly affected MENC membership that year. Therefore, 1933 membership data for those two divisions were included in the study.

The 47th and 48th states, New Mexico and Arizona, were granted statehood in 1911 and 1912, respectively. The 1910 census reports (Bogue, 1985) include the data on territorial populations needed to calculate population estimates for those two states for 1912–1919.

5The Bureau/Office of Education collected and reported such data annually through 1917, but only biennially after that (see Appendix B). We estimated the education-related figures for all missing years by computing the means of the two respective adjacent years.

In a few instances, the largest city in a given state in a decennial census was no longer the largest in the next decennial census. In these cases, we applied the interpolation procedure to both cities for that decade to estimate each city’s population for each year, and, hence, the largest city for each year. We defined the nearest convention site in division convention years as the nearest convention city, regardless of division, to a given state’s largest city.

References


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Appendix A

MSNC/MENC Membership Lists: 1912–1938


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Appendix B
U.S. Bureau/Office of Education Reports


