

## **Performing gender when music is, or is not, at stake – a meta-analysis on students' adaption to discourse**

*Carina Borgström Källén & Monica Lindgren*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In this article, a meta-analysis is conducted in order to explore how gender is constructed in relation to music classroom school discourses, in three qualitative studies. Conducting meta-analysis is a way of reflecting on data in new ways, and it is argued that it could be productive in creating new understandings of issues within the field of music education research. Theoretically, all three studies, as well as the reinterpretation, draw on social constructionism and the method is based on qualitative meta-analysis in the social sciences. The result of the analysis indicates that construction of gender is a matter of what is at stake in the music classroom – music or education.*

*Key words: music education, gender, meta-analysis, discourse*

## Introduction

This article aims at exploring gender in music education, using a qualitative meta-analysis for reinterpretation of three music classroom studies, conducted by us between 2009 and 2013. A second objective is to explore meta-analysis as a method for reflecting specifically on data within music education research. Using meta-analysis in order to synthesize qualitative findings might provide a broader perspective than the individual studies afforded, and can be conducive to further discussion on specific research issues. Within the Nordic music education research field, meta-analysis is insufficiently developed. Only a few meta-analyses have been conducted. One example is Olsson's (2008) discussion on theories used in doctoral studies between 1995 and 2005. Another is Folkestad's (2006) meta-analysis of studies dealing with the concepts of formal and informal learning. A survey conducted in Norway by Dyndahl, Karlsen, Graabræk Nielsen and Skårberg (2016) is a more recent example. By using the entire corpus of master's and doctoral theses, written within the field of music and produced 1912 to 2012 in Norway, the academisation of popular music in higher music education was explored. The studies mentioned above contributed to several important conclusions and further research issues. However, we see a potential in developing and discussing the method of meta-analysis more specifically.

Our research interest, in this meta-analysis of studies focusing on the music classroom, is students' adaption to discourse in relation to gender. Music education focusing the significance of *school discourses* in relation to gender is, as far as we have identified, not yet problematized. Though a large body of research is conducted focusing gender representation in the music classroom, such as gendered choices of instruments and musical activities (Abeles, 2009), research on gender in music education that deepens our understanding of gender norms in conjunction with the specific music classroom appears to be less explored (Green, 1997; Abramo, 2011; Armstrong, 2011; Wych, 2012; Onsrud, 2013). In a study set in an Anglo-Saxon secondary school context, Green (1997) shows that the music teachers' notions of gender governed their expectations of pupil performance, qualities, interests and goals, and that the students were restricted by gender norms when playing. Abramo (2011) finds that high school students used gendered rehearsal strategies when playing pop/rock ensemble. Armstrong (2011), whose informants were aged 15–18, focuses on music technology in the music classroom, and her result shows a subordination of the girls. In addition to the Anglo-Saxon research referred to, we have identified five studies, all conducted recently in Scandinavia, that deepen questions of gender norms in music education: Onsrud (2013) and Kuoppamäki (2015), conducted in Norway

and Finland respectively, and Björck (2011), Borgström Källén (2014) and Kvarnhall (2015), conducted in Sweden.

We stress that the lack of studies exploring the significance of *school discourses* in relation to gender in the music classroom is a shortcoming, as a greater understanding of the dynamic processes that govern students' construction of gender in the music classroom can challenge and rethink how issues of gender are understood in music education, and thereby counteract gender-marked restrictions when learning music. Based on three larger research projects, this paper aims at *exploring how gender is constructed in relation to music classroom school discourses by using a qualitative meta-analytic approach*. Our research questions are: How is gender performed in school music classrooms? How can meta-analysis be used in re-interpreting three completed research studies in music education?

## Theoretical Framework

School music practices are here understood as *discursive practices*. As defined by Foucault, (1969/2002), this refers to a practice in which a particular pattern of action arises in accordance with the rules prescribed by the discourse. From a post-structuralist approach, discourse is understood as a social practice in which object and subject have historically been shaped and reshaped in interaction and action by means of specific power strategies. Educational, political and scientific discourses of music education and music teaching play central roles in shaping a discursive practice in the music classroom. Other aspects, such as social status, cultural background along with the sex and age of the teacher and the students involved are also examples of important discursive factors in the determination of who is given the mandate to claim place and create space within a specific school classroom. Moreover, the physical music classroom can be regarded as discursively constituted (Ericsson & Lindgren, 2011). A specific discursive practice, such as a music classroom, consists of and is shaped by a complex net of micro and macro discourses (Ericsson & Lindgren, 2011).

For analysing the discursive practice in the music classroom from a gender theoretical point of departure we will use Butler (1990/2006; 1993) and Connell (2000, 2005, 2009). According to them, gender is socially constructed, socially embodied and performative. The points of departure are therefore, firstly, that gender has a unique position among social constructions since it is addressed to our bodies and plays on

reproductive differences (Connell, 2000) and, secondly, that gender is understood as performative, i.e. as a “repeated stylization of the body” (Butler, 1990/2006: 45) that congeals over time and produces the appearance of a natural sort of being. A distinction between construction and performance is made throughout the text. Construction is used as an overall theoretical concept and performance is used when analysing how gender constructions are highlighted (Butler, 1990/2006, 1993), i.e. how gender is expressed or articulated in a specific musical situation. Performativity and performance are not to be read as synonyms. While performativity is used to make clear the ontological understanding of gender as fluid, as a repetition, a ritual and as non-binary, performance is deployed to describe how gender constructions are expressed or articulated in a particular situation.

In our analysis the concept *the heterosexual matrix* (Butler, 1990/2006) is applied to understand how gender is always related to a heteronormative framework, i.e. when heterosexuality is taken for granted as “the normal” whereas, for example, homosexuality is constructed as “the other”. The matrix regulates which bodies, genders and desires that are assigned to be culturally intelligible and naturalized. According to Butler (ibid) the heterosexual matrix is compulsory; one is forced to adjust to heteronormative frames since not complying comes at a cost of not being intelligible and thereby risking exclusion among peers. As a consequence of this concept, *normative femininity* and *masculinity* respectively are utilized to discuss how the heterosexual norm, in the society in question, for “man/boy” and “woman/girl” is constructed in the music classroom. Here it is important to keep in mind that when a student, in the empirical data or in the result, is labelled boy/man or girl/woman it does not say that gender is regarded as binary, it only shows how the students labelled themselves and their peers as boys/men or girls/women.

Furthermore, three interlocking gender dimensions; *production relations*, *power relations* and *symbolic relations* (Connell, 2009: 76) are used to facilitate analysis and understanding of variations within and between local gender practices. Production relations are employed to interpret all musical tasks that bring about a need for a division of labour. Power relations are applied to analyse hierarchical patterns, and symbolic relations are brought in to problematize factors such as musical instruments, gestures and spoken and written language. Another concept is *social embodiment* (Connell, 2009: 66), essential for the understanding of how gender is bodily displayed in musical action.

## Methodology and design

### Meta-analysis

In order to obtain our objectives of the study, we applied a meta-analytic strategy inspired by McCormick, Rodney and Varcoe (2003) when approaching the empirical data underlying the analysis of the three studies. Their approach to meta-analysis is not directed at providing a more accurate or truthful account by virtue of having more data. Rather, the objective is to reflect on the data in new ways by another reading, demonstrating both convergences and differences across the studies. Meta-analysis of qualitative studies within educational research is still not as common as in other disciplines, e.g. qualitative health research. Inspired by research where meta-analysis is more developed, our aim was to use the broader scope offered by several studies, to re-examine critical aspects, common to all studies included, by another reading of data. This proved to be a way of finding new perspectives on the issue selected.

However, according to McCormick et al. (2003), some problematic aspects are posed by the meta-analysis of individual qualitative studies. Meta-analytical techniques are relatively new and poorly developed within the qualitative field and there are methodological questions raised, such as how to approach meta-synthesis of studies with different methodological backgrounds, as well as differences due to the theoretical framework. In our meta-analysis, however, the three qualitative studies used derive from the same methodological as well as ontological and epistemological tradition: social constructionism (Burr, 2003). This common point of departure, joining the three studies involved, does not mean that we aspire to provide greater “truth”, rather, we make use of the opportunity to reflect on the data of three self-conducted studies in new ways and from a slightly new angle (ibid, p. 936).

The meta-analysis model used is developed by McCormick et al. (2003: 938–940) and includes several steps that we have followed to a great extent. (1) we decided on our question for the qualitative meta-analysis: How is gender constructed in school music classrooms?; (2) we identified relevant interpretations of our own work, compared them and discussed how the identified interpretations could be analysed in order to achieve a richer interpretation; (3) we raised a central question by returning to the original data to verify, contradict, extend or enrich interpretations: What is at stake when gender is constructed in the music classroom?; (4) we synthesized the translations, i.e. compared them with each other in order to determine if some metaphors/ concepts were able to encompass those with other accounts; (5) we expressed our

synthesis in a model followed by text. In this final step, we created a new interpretation, which goes beyond the original interpretations in the three studies, and describes the cultural phenomena of gender in relation to the music classroom in a broader perspective.

### The three qualitative studies

The three studies chosen for this article generated empirical data from music education within three Swedish school forms; the lower secondary, the upper secondary and the university.

#### *Study 1*

The Swedish National Agency for Education is responsible for reviewing the quality of education in Sweden. Evaluations are made on a regular basis as a part of the agency's quality mission. During the year 2013, music as a subject in the Swedish compulsory school (lower secondary) was evaluated. The report (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015) consists of two parts, one quantitative and one qualitative, and the latter provided empirical data for this meta-analysis. The aim of the qualitative part of the evaluation was to deepen the results of the questionnaire sent out to the students. One of the central topics to be followed up was the gender issue, since the questionnaire showed that the students' final music grades co-varied with sex, in favour of the girls.

The empirical data of the qualitative study comprises a total of 30 video-recorded classroom observations, 10 audio-recorded interviews with teachers and 10 audio-recorded focus group interviews with students in grade 9, produced in the autumn of 2013. Ten classes at ten different schools were selected, based on a variety of parameters such as size of school, geographic location, the students' socio-economic and ethnic background as well as the profile and governing of the school. One of the classes specialised in music and offered extended music education.

The results show that in nine out of ten school classes involved in the study, no gender-marked performance specific for musical actions was found. Although gendered division of labour and power and symbolic relations (Connell, 2009) were constructed in these compulsory music education classes, gender was not performed *specifically* in relation to music. Despite the fact that the focus was on playing music within the pop and rock genres, i.e. genres that research has highlighted as emphasizing normative

masculinity (Whiteley, 1997; Leonard, 2007; Björck, 2011). The fact that no clear gender-coded positions were visible in the music classroom in nine of the schools, regardless of the focus on pop and rock music, seems to be related to the general low level of musicianship and knowledge in music in compulsory school. The students did not master the instruments, or showed disinterest, a fact that appeared to neutralize gendered division of labour, gender-marked power relations and gendered symbolic relations such as gender-coded instruments. In the tenth school, however, normative gender performance was constructed *in relation to music*. This school offered voluntary music education in musically profiled classes, i.e. additional music lessons on the everyday schedule that were open to students who passed the musical entrance tests. The musical focus for this specific school is choral singing. In the observed classroom, the focus was on singing to enrich knowledge in music, rather than on singing as being merely a school task. Most of the students also had music as a favourite pastime activity. The focus on vocal activities in relation to music was highlighted in the classroom design, since the only furnishing in the classroom consisted of chairs placed in a choir setting. Hence, the room lacked desks and musical instruments, except for one digital piano at the front. In this music classroom, construction of gender in relation to music was performed through the act of singing, and since almost 90 per cent of the students were girls, gender performance through singing was governed by how normative femininity is constructed in the girls' every-day life. The under-representation of boys could be regarded as an example of the well-known "missing males problem" (Freer, 2010) in choirs, i.e. boys avoid choirs since their peers construct singing in this context as a feminine activity. A condition that constructs girls' bodies, performed according to the heterosexual matrix in the students every-day life, as the norm for how to become a successful singer in a choir (Green, 1997).

## Study 2

Adolescents in Sweden who have a special interest in music have the opportunity to choose what is known as Aesthetic programmes when applying to upper secondary schools. These students, who are obliged to pass entrance exams in music, thus make an active choice in favour of music as their major subject. Pre-conditions to keep in mind when focusing on this particular group of students, conditions that differ from music education in compulsory schools (study 1), are that the students in the Aesthetic programme choose to specialise in a specific instrument and that they practice this instrument in school for three years. This means that they are not only identified as music students by themselves and by teachers and peers, they are also identified with their choice of instrument, for example as guitarists, bass players or singers.

In analyzing the school context described above, data from Borgström Källén (2014) is used. The study investigates the interplay between gender and genre practice based on empirical findings in eight ensemble groups. The study adopted an ethnographic approach (Hammersley, 2006; Walford, 2009), and it produced data from 71 students, aged 16 to 19, during a period of one year. The groups selected represented two pop/rock ensembles, two composition groups, one jazz ensemble, one early music ensemble and two vocal ensembles singing in a variety of genres but in the western classical tradition. Classes, rehearsals, concerts and breaks were documented continuously through fieldnotes from participant observations, group interviews and written documents, such as course syllabi and music scores, that provided a background to the participants' context.

The study shows that construction of gender is highlighted in almost every situation where the students make music together. It points out that the opportunities the students are offered choosing instruments and repertoire contribute to a gender-marked restricted acting space, since their choices are gendered. For example: Almost all the girls were singers. None of the girls played the drums and no boy played the keyboard. In the vocal ensembles, in total 26 students, only two boys participated and in the pop/rock ensemble groups, none of the boys were singing. A majority of the bass players and guitarists were boys. Findings also show that gender is performed and emphasized in different ways depending on genre. In pop/rock, in the composing groups and in vocal ensemble groups, division of labour and power and symbolic relations are clearly gender-marked, while gendered performance is less articulated and expressed in the early music and in the jazz ensembles. Further, results suggest that the vocal and the popular genre discourses work as a binary opposition, as they maintain a heteronormative dichotomy (Butler, 1990/2006), and since a hierarchical relation is constructed subordinating the vocal discourse. This subordinated position is understood in relation to the large number of girls in the vocal groups, but also as a consequence of the exposure the popular genre discourse has in the everyday life of the students (Lindgren & Ericsson, 2010). Finally, the findings suggest that concerts tend to reinforce students' heteronormative gender constructions in musical action, since the division of labour and the power relations are governed by gender-marked professional musician discourses.

### *Study 3*

The data in focus in study 3 (Borgström Källén, 2012) was produced 2010 to 2011 in the Bachelor programmes for World/Folk- and Improvisational music where, at the



time of the study, around 75 percent of the students were men (Olofsson, 2012). Due to demanding entrance exams and a limited number of positions (approximately 15 out of 300 applicants are accepted annually), almost all of the students who are finally accepted have studied music several years in preparatory settings.

The objective of this study was to problematize aspects of gender, such as hetero-normative discourses and the underrepresentation of women, aiming to increase understanding of how norms of gender in interplay with musical action contribute and/or restrict scope of action for the students in the above-mentioned programmes.

Methodologically, the study was based on participants' observations (Hammersley, 2006), and some 40 students wrote fieldnotes anonymously after every ensemble lesson they attended during a period of 6 months. The students were asked, when observing their own ensemble, to focus on what happened in class and how they responded/reacted. They were not asked specifically to look for aspects they related to gender, although they were fully aware of the purpose of the study. After every five weeks, the fieldnotes were analyzed and thematized from a gender perspective (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2000), and followed up by discussions in focus groups.

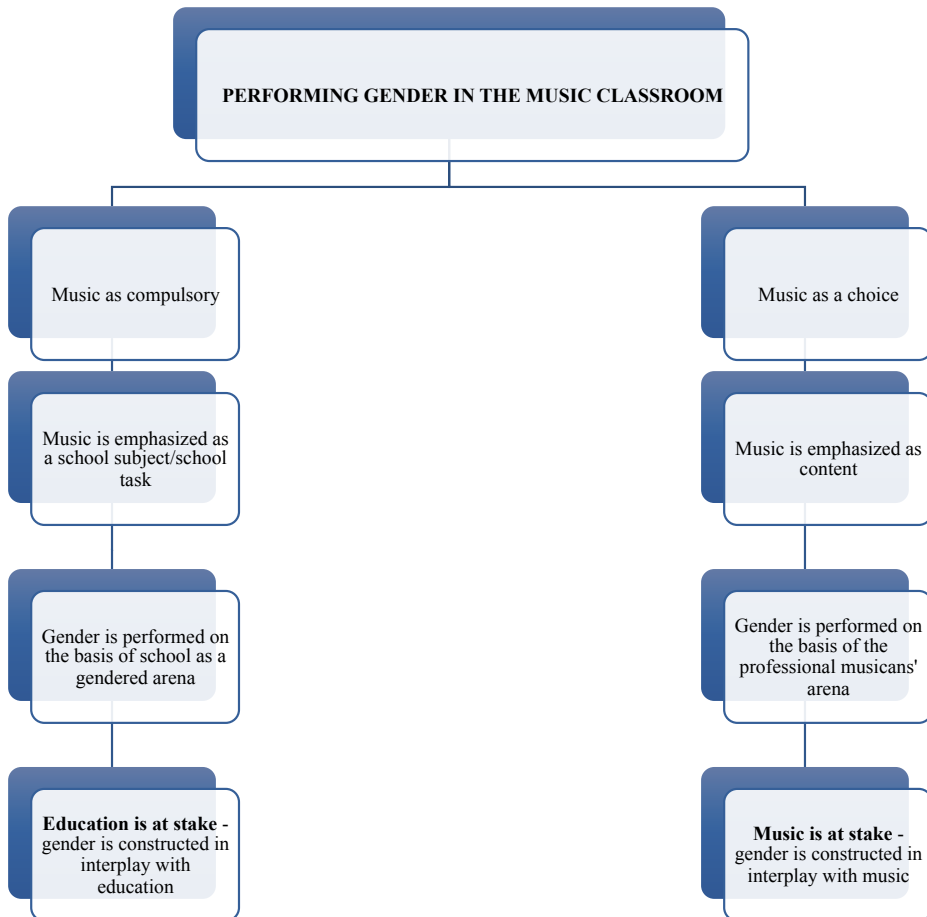
Not surprisingly, bearing previous research in mind (Annfelt, 2003; McKeage, 2004; Caudwell, 2010; Johansson, 2013), the result shows gendered representations of the instruments. That is, women are underrepresented in every instrument except the voice and the violin. The singers, all but one positioned as females, described a power relation between singers and instrumentalists, where the singers were positioned as subordinated. Gendered patterns were also shown when the students talked about gender in relation to their education. A majority of the female students expressed feelings of discomfort when raising gender-related issues, especially if it concerned equality in the ensemble room. They feared that the issue would mark them as difficult to cooperate with, and they were concerned it would be disadvantageous for a career as a musician. Male students asked for a less-restricted construction of male musician in the ensemble room, and they questioned what they described as a "blokes atmosphere", i.e. a men's club constructing a homosocial atmosphere that implicitly excludes everyone but heterosexual men (Bird, 1996; Connell, 2000). Furthermore, female students described division of labour as gendered during the ensemble lessons, while male students did not. The gendered divide was described as the male students being allowed to focus on playing and discussing matters directly connected to music, whereas female students, especially singers, were expected to assume responsibility for tasks such as taking notes for the next rehearsal and caring for social and

emotional relations in the group. Finally, the result shows that students expressed norms of quality by gendering concepts used in every day practice. For example; the concept *personal expression* was directly associated with the body if the student was a woman, but not if the student was a man. Female instrumentalists described that they felt expectations of performing a feminine expression and they feared being constructed as having a unique voice based on their supposed femininity.

## **Music or education at stake – two discursive practices**

Our meta-analysis shows that construction of gender in music classrooms is a matter of *what is at stake* for the students – *music as a choice* or *music as compulsory education*. This is not to be understood as if the construction of gender either is present or absent in the music classroom, rather as if we assume that gender is always present but constructed from different points of departure depending on whether the musical learning is performed in a voluntary setting or in a compulsory. The empirical data shows that the discursive practices are shaped by ideas which are taken for granted in the two settings represented. Ideas with regard to music, musicians, school, learning and teaching music, classroom design and allocated time for music in the schools constitute the practice. If the discursive practice is constructed as music-centred, music is at stake for both teachers and students, and positioning oneself as a musician becomes natural. However, if the discursive practice is education-centred, education is at stake, and positioning oneself as a teacher or as a student is taken for granted.

With the empirical data as a point of departure we stress that music has to be at stake for the students if gender is going to be performed explicitly *in* music. In order to highlight and deepen our findings from the meta-analysis we will use the figure below.



Starting out with the right column in the figure, where music is at stake when performing gender, the discursive practice is related to musical learning as an active *choice* and as *emphasizing a specific content* with *the professional arena* as a role model. The two exemplified excerpts below, a music profile classroom in secondary school where 90 percent of the students are girls (study 1) and a music profile classroom in upper secondary school where two students talk about gender restrictions when singing (study 2), illustrates how gender is performed in musical learning in settings where students have made an active choice in favour of a specific content. A content that is essential for the students.

*One of the schools is offering voluntary music classes, possible to participate in after being approved in the musical entrance tests. The focus is on choral singing and the musical level is rather high since only the already musically skilled students pass the tests. The classroom of the music classes does not have any instruments at all, except one digital piano in the front. No desks, only chairs, placed in choir setting. Almost 90 percent of the students in these classes are girls. (Ericsson & Lindgren, 2015)*

*Erik: "Apparently a girl is supposed to sing in a special manner. A boy is allowed to scream and shout as much as he likes, but a girl is supposed to sing nice and ornamenting. It is rare that you can hear a girl who sings rough. That's too bad. It's also rare to hear boys use a lot of ornamentation. Then you can get the picture that he likes other boys. That makes you afraid of trying."*

*Hanna: "But girls are not, or at any rate it seems to me, that boys are judged more just as Erik said. If the boys do a lot of ornamentation or sing too sweetly, and if they sing in a cute (nice) manner, then they will be regarded as homosexuals. Girls who play the drums or the guitar are not judged in the same way." (Borgström Källén, 2014)*

The excerpts show how a specific musical content, vocal training in a choir or singing in a rock group, is gendering the classroom *in* musical action through representation, division of labour and power relations (Connell, 2000). In the first excerpt, where choral singing is in focus, the classroom is designed for group singing and all of the students like to sing. Boys as a group are under-represented (10 percent), a gender pattern that is well known in music education, since research shows that it is rare that boys choose a musical content focusing on choir (Freer, 2010; Borgström Källén, 2014). The latter excerpt shows how singing in a rock group is connected to both divisions of labour and to power relations regulated by the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990/2006; Connell, 2000). Here, students describe gendered restrictions with regard to how voices are allowed to sound if students want to adopt to discourse and if they want to be intelligible within a heteronormative framework as either boy *or* girl and as either hetero- *or* homosexual (Butler, 1990/1999/2006). Since the discursive practice in these two settings are emphasizing the content choir and the content singing pop and rock, activities that research have shown to be gender marked (Green, 1997, Björck, 2011; Borgström Källén, 2014), the student's choices of musical actions become gendered. Being a boy who sings in a choir or is interpreting a pop-song in a "cute" or "ornamented" manner, or being a girl who is claiming space as a singer who sings in a rough manner, comes with a risk of not being intelligible

among peers, since these behaviours is jeopardizing normative gender performance according to the discursive practice.

When music is a choice of the students, music education is connected to an explicit interest in learning how to play and perform a specific content; an interest combined with practicing a particular instrument and a specific genre and with the development of musical skills. In these practices, where students are specializing their skills in music through focusing specific contents (visible in all three studies), they are performing gender during class mainly with the *professional musicians' arena* as a point of departure. The next excerpt, produced in study 3, shows how students in the Bachelor programme of World/Folk and Improvisation music adapt to genre norms from the professional arena which at the same time relates them to construction of gender according to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990/2006).

*Female students also describe how they inadvertently embraced a strategy based on adapting to what they perceive to be taken-for-granted genre norms. A strategy described as necessary since it made it possible for them to successfully pass the entrance exams and since it also helped them to adopt the genre norms at the school. When I ask them to describe these genre norms, they all talk of an unspoken, genre-coded community between male teachers and male students. A woman expresses it like: "Maybe it's a bloke's atmosphere that restricts women, making them avoid certain things" Another female student writes: "Sometimes I try to imagine what it would be like if women were in the majority." They also express a sense of being regarded as exclusive alibis, representatives for gender equality.*

*To a greater extent than male students, women show anxiety when playing their instrument in front of peers and teachers. They argue that the reason for this concern is the position as an under-represented group. In this position, they say, you cannot afford to make mistakes when playing. A female student writes: "Women feel more pressure to do well. To say that you do not want to play the solo is a defence mechanism, a coping strategy." A male student writes: "As a guy, you just play, no matter how it is received". Another male student puts it like this: "Typically, there is only one woman in the group, and she is so afraid of making mistakes. That never happens to me. I feel safe in the group even if I miss half of the notes when playing. I do not need to prove myself skilled. Strange, because I do not feel that it differs in skills between us"*

Here, the music classroom is mainly constructed as an arena for performing musicianship, preparing students for a life as a professional musician. Students' ambition to fulfil a school task just to get a good grade is not a priority. Instead, all that matters to the students is that their musical skills and their artistry adopt to the genre norms and to "real musicianship", no matter what the curriculum says. Adapting to genre norms for performing a professional musician therefore becomes crucial, and it is a dilemma for the students when the genre norm contradicts socially embodied constructions of gender.

The three excerpts above, exemplifying the right column, leads us to the conclusion that when *music is at stake* for the students, gender is constructed for the most part *in interplay with music*. That is, if musical content in itself is essential for the students and if joining the professional musicians' arena is the goal for their studies, then gender is performed mainly in interplay with music and to a less extent in relation to education in schools in general (Connell, 2000; Skelton, Francis & Smulyan, 2006).

On the other hand, as in the left column in the figure, if the discursive practice is related to music as *compulsory*, *music as a school task* is central in the discursive practice. When music is a subject in the compulsory education, only a few students have a special interest in music and only a few of them are skilled in music. We stress that gender in these kind of settings, more often than not, is constructed from a non-musical point of departure, such as how gender is constructed in school as a gendered arena in general (Skelton, Francis & Smulyan, 2006) and as how it is performed in different sport settings (Connell, 2000) or in other non-music pastime activities. In the left column (nine classrooms from study 1) it is not possible to observe gender performance related to musical ability, in spite of the rock musical framing. However, the activities in the classroom invite other types of gender constructions, related to the school task. It is mainly the boys who take leadership in group projects by assuming the power over what is allowed to take place in the room. In various ways, they prevent attempts to create music, for example by showing a lack of interest. The majority of the girls adopt a more distanced wait-and-see attitude or make more or less unsuccessful attempts to take on the responsibility for the group task.

Below, we will exemplify our findings from the left column with three excerpts from study 1 (Ericsson & Lindgren, 2015). The excerpts illustrate how students deal with a musical task initiated by the teacher when music as content is not at stake. In the first excerpt, four girls are meant to improve their skills on the guitar. Their intention

is to do the task as told, though not explicitly for the musical content, their goal is to achieve the top grade, an A:

*Four girls are placed in a room with two electric guitars, one electric bass and two acoustic guitars. They are practicing for the lesson next week, when they are going to sing and accompany one song of their own choice in front of the teacher. "Could you please help us," one of the girls asks me. "We don't know how to sing this chorus? And we don't know the chords in the verse." "I really want to have an A," says another. "Yes, so do I," says the third.*

In the next excerpt, masculinity is constructed in relation to the school task as well, though by neglecting it. Music is not at stake at all; instead the computer game becomes a way of performing gender (Armstrong, 2011). The fact that not all of the boys got the chance to grab a guitar or a music room for practicing does not seem to bother them at all:

*One group in this class consist of five boys. They are told by the teacher to practice harmonies on acoustic guitar and that they have to find some room to practice somewhere else in the school since all the rooms are occupied. Two of the boys end up in the stairwell, one with a computer on his lap and the other with a guitar on his lap, focusing on a game on the computer. I ask them why not both of them had a guitar? "There weren't any guitars left for me," one of them said with a laugh, without taking his eyes off the computer. "Stop, don't shoot," said the other one with a big laugh.*

Finally, the last excerpt, by which we exemplify the left column, where gender is constructed in relation to the school task rather than to music, illustrates how the girls distance themselves from how the boys are performing the school task. The fact that all the girls chose keyboard instead of electric guitar or drums, might at first sight be interpreted as girls choosing a feminine-coded music instrument. However, which becomes clear in one of the girls' statements at the end of the excerpt, the choice had nothing to do with music. Rather, by distancing themselves from the noisy behaviour of the boys, the girls constructed themselves as in need of silence and calm; or in other words as in need of a room of their own (Björck, 2011).

*As usual, the students are encouraged to choose instruments to play. In this class, very few of the students played any musical instrument in their spare time and no one seemed to have any instrumental preferences. The boys are*

*laughing and screaming: They scuffle with each other and stroll around in the classroom. They pick up one instrument, leave it and pick up another one. All the girls, however, immediately leave the room to play keyboard in the room next door. During the interview, I asked them why they all liked playing the keyboard: "No, it's not that we're so into playing keyboard, but since the keyboards are located in a separate room, we can escape the noise of the boys and practice in peace and quiet with headphones."*

The three excerpts above illustrate how *education* rather than *music is at stake* and therefore in interplay with gender construction (Skelton, Francis & Smulyan, 2006).

In all three studies, gender construction is governed, in one way or another, by the heterosexual matrix, i.e. the matrix works as a gatekeeper for a heteronormative way of living in the classrooms observed, since the students are always interacting with the surrounding society (Butler, 1990/2006). But *how* it works differs in the classrooms depending on the discursive practice. On one hand, in groups where music is at stake, that is to say where music is crucial for the students' identity, the music classroom becomes an arena for gendered power relations and division of labour, and gendered constrictions are performed when students play together. On the other hand, in groups where music is regarded as just another school subject, gender performance is not directly connected to music.

In other words, normative masculinity and femininity according to the heterosexual matrix are constructed in every-day life regardless of context, since the regulation of gender is socially embodied and always present, but gendered performances differ due to context and they are in a constant flux. The matrix illustrates how gender is constructed in the form of tension between bodies, keeping binary oppositions such as she *or* he and hetero- *or* homosexual at a distance from each other. Though construction of gender differs according to time and place, Butler stresses that the binary understanding of gender seems to be stable and firm regardless of context. Adapting to gendered discourses in schools cannot therefore be understood as a free choice (Connell, 2000). Adoption is rather a matter of being intelligible and thereby included in the peer group and it is a coping strategy to avoid becoming a student who blurs the binary categories of she *or* he and hetero- *or* homosexual (Butler, 1990/2006).



## Conclusion

Given the twofold aim of this article, our results should be seen as a contribution both to a larger discussion about the benefit of meta-analyses within the field of music education research, and to the specific research area of gender and music education. Regarding the former, we argue that the use of meta-analysis has provided a broader perspective than the three original studies separately. The method has enabled us to achieve a higher degree of abstraction, which in turn provided a deeper understanding of the question of gender in Swedish music classrooms. Our access to the raw data from the primary research made it possible to illustrate our interpretations. This data would not have been available had we not been the original researchers. However, we do not claim to be presenting the definitive way of conducting meta-analysis in music education research. The method has to be developed and its advantages and limitations require further discussion. Regarding the latter aim, an important conclusion of this meta-analysis is that construction of gender always takes place in a music classroom as part of a social process. Guiding *how* gender is constructed in the music classroom, however, is the students' adaption to discourse.

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PhD, Assistant Professor  
Carina Borgström Källén  
Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg  
Box 210  
405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden  
[carina.borgstrom.kallen@hsm.gu.se](mailto:carina.borgstrom.kallen@hsm.gu.se)

PhD, Professor  
Monica Lindgren  
Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg  
Box 210  
405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden  
[monica.lindgren@hsm.gu.se](mailto:monica.lindgren@hsm.gu.se)