

# Gender Performativity through Musicking: Examples from a Norwegian Classroom Study

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## ABSTRACT

*This article is based on findings from the doctoral thesis *Gender at Stake: A Study of Secondary School Pupils' Musicking*. The study explores how pupils stage and construct gender through the music they perform in the lower-secondary school music education in Norway. The observations and interviews of four music teaching practices in two urban lower-secondary schools that provided the qualitative data of the study are intended to highlight both the teachers' and the pupils' perspectives. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity is combined with Christopher Small's concept of musicking to examine how gender is at stake in the music classroom. The study reveals that pupils relate to the gender constructions that often figure in popular music as almost predefined packages in relation to the forms and the genre definitions. This article therefore discusses how gender becomes interwoven into musical form and influences pupils' aesthetic formation. The study makes a contribution to music education research, adding new nuances to existing findings related to the gendered meanings music education practices can construct among pupils and teachers.*

*Keywords: Gender Performativity, Musicking, Aesthetic Formation, Informal Learning*

## Introduction

Norway ranks high on global measures of gender equality, and women's rights are safeguarded in relation to childbirth, and employment, as well as other legal issues. Compared with many other countries, women in Norway are as active as men in public life and employment, and the government is continuously striving to achieve gender balance in society. Given this ideal, it may seem surprising that the field of music still has an overrepresentation of male musicians, male conductors, male producers and male composers in all genres.<sup>1</sup> Several studies have been carried out to gain a deeper understanding of this situation (Björck, 2011; Lorentzen, 2009), and findings indicate that specific musical expressions are strongly connected to gender (Lorentzen & Kvalbein 2008). Similar distinctions have been found in systematic studies of children's preferred instruments (Harrison & O'Neill, 2000; Harrison & O'Neill, 2002), for example, statistics from the culture schools in Norway show that children's choice of instrument is clearly related to gender (Kjøk, 2008).

In the Norwegian school system, the curriculum could be said to reflect the politics of gender equality. In the 1970s and 1980s the curricula were quite radical, offering detailed descriptions of how the politics of gender equality should be implemented in particular subjects. In history, for instance, issues related to women and children's lives were to be added to political and territorial issues. Another example was literature, where texts of specific female authors were suggested. For no obvious reason, no such detailed description was provided for music. Since the 1990s the politics of gender equality has been less clearly articulated in the curriculum in favor of an increased focus on ethnic equality. Yet, music is not a gender neutral subject. This has been demonstrated in classroom studies at various school levels, and in studies of music programs and key stages both in Norway and several other countries (Abramo, 2009; Bergman, 2009; Borgström Källén, 2014; Borgström Källén, 2011; Green, 2010; Kamsvåg, 2011). The view that gender is always at stake in one way or another in situations where music is performed is the premise of the study on which this article is based. So, *how is gender an issue in pupils' actions and talk when they practice and perform music in the music classroom?* This is the main question raised in this article, which will be discussed in relation to situations taken from the classroom study that resulted in the doctoral thesis *Gender at Stake: A Study of Secondary School Pupils'*

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1 The following websites show some statistics: <http://jazzforum.jazzinorge.no/files/2011/03/Musikermedlemmer-per-190814.pdf> [http://www.gramart.no/assets/Dokumenter/Pressemeldinger/Gramarttrapport\\_Lorentzen%202011-2.PDF](http://www.gramart.no/assets/Dokumenter/Pressemeldinger/Gramarttrapport_Lorentzen%202011-2.PDF)

*Musicking* (Onsrud, 2013).<sup>2</sup> Pupils' actions and speech have been studied employing the theoretical concepts *musicking* and *gender performativity*. The theoretical approaches governing the analysis are presented in the first part of this article. This is followed by a brief description of the methodology employed in the study, before a presentation of some concrete situations taken from the data material. The interpretations of these situations show, in short, that pupils make musical choices which confirm traditional understandings of heterosexual femininity and masculinity. The article concludes with a discussion of these results in relation to pupils' aesthetic formation, a concept that will be explained and further developed in the course of the discussion. The effects of the informal learning strategies, which were evident to some extent in the study, will also be discussed in relation to gender.

## **Gender performativity as a theoretical approach to the study of pupils' *musicking***

Feminist theory can be broadly categorized into different theoretical waves extending from Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of gender through body-phenomenology (Beauvoir, 2000 [1949]), via the poststructuralists' understanding of gender through symbolic structures<sup>3</sup> (Irigaray, 1985 [1974]), and finally to Judith Butler's understanding of the gendered subject through verbal and bodily practice, which has had a hegemonic position in feminist research in recent decades. Informed by Lacan's psychoanalysis, Derrida's deconstruction, Foucault's discourse-analysis and Austin's linguistic theory, Butler has developed a theory based on the concept of performative gender (Butler, 1999 [1990]) which I argue can be fruitful in understanding school pupils' *musicking*.

Judith Butler claims that speech is not only language, but also bodily action. However, actions are not always conscious or necessarily understood as intended. Furthermore, action and speech do not always correspond, although they are interdependent. Following the philosophical tradition of Nietzsche, and later Foucault, Butler claims that the subject is formed through its actions.<sup>4</sup>

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2 This is a monograph written in Norwegian. The original title is *Kjønn på spill – kjønn i spill: En studie av ungdomsskoleelevers musisering*, defended at the University of Bergen in November 2013.

3 Here I am thinking about the French *difference*-feminist theorists Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. For an introduction, see for instance Chris Weedon's book *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Weedon, [1987] 1997).

4 From Nietzsche she has taken the quite radical statement that the doer is variably constructed in and through the deed (Nietzsche, [1887] 2010), and Foucault writes in *The Archeology of Knowledge* that the

In addressing the issue of power and gender, Butler begins with a description of a traditional power ideological system which she calls *the heterosexual matrix*. According to this matrix, female and male identities, as social structure (gender), develop against the background of a supposed biological nature (sex), which results in harmonized heterosexual practice. This is a traditional way to explain heterosexuality as natural and normal, the so-called heteronormativity. Butler then turns this logic upside down. She claims that heterosexual practice is an ideologically conditional and enforced practice which has constructed binary gender ideologies. This in turn shapes the performance and the understanding of the body, the so called "nature." According to Butler, the power of gender leads people to imitate practices considered feminine or masculine, thereby being considered a reasonable gendered subject. The imitation of already existing practices is both verbal and bodily, and the actions contribute to the shaping of gender identity. In this sense, the actions can be considered performative, so gender is not something you are, but something you do. The body is involved in the verbal action. Gender performativity is not simple actions, but repetitions of a set of normative practices. The actions are not performed intentional and self-consciously, but are forced to the fore by the regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality (Butler, 1999 [1990]).

The power of gender which Butler describes is not fixed and without potential for change. She uses the parody and drag show as examples of a gender performativity which crosses the borders of normality (heterosexuality) and which diverge from the usual understanding of gender. The parody challenges our common understandings and therefore has subversive potential. However, this does not mean that all gender-crossing performances can be understood as drag, which is one of the critiques Butler's book, *Gender Trouble*, has received. She does not consider that drag is necessarily unproblematically subversive. Drag is just one example of imitation or repetition that is unfaithful to the gender norms which the heterosexual matrix helps to maintain. For example, the repetition that a speech act represents can turn out wrong, and, instead of confirming already existing gender, it can create a slide between interpellation<sup>5</sup> and resistance (Butler, 1997). Unintentional resistance like this is due to the fact that the norm does not exist as a fixed form or exact original which the individual's actions can be measured against. Not only the unconscious, unintentional and failed repetitions, but also the conscious and intentional parodies have the potential to break norms and produce change. They also have another

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discourses form the objects and subjects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Interpellation is a concept from Althusser: Through interpellation individuals are turned into subjects (which are always ideological). Already before it is born, the individual is given certain positions to think, speak and act from.

function: failed imitations help to reveal the phantasmatic or fictional character of gender, and thereby undermine the illusion of the ideal gender figuration. When the fantasy of unified gendering is disrupted, an opening is created for different ways of performing gender (Butler, 1999 [1990]).

In contrast to the more traditional second wave approaches to gender in the classroom which operates with the dichotomies girl-boy and femininity-masculinity, Butler's concept of gender performativity opens up for gender which crosses these traditional understandings. While feminist action research tries, for instance, to encourage more girls to play the guitar because it is traditionally viewed as a masculine activity, or while critical feminist studies focus on the dominance of boys and marginalization of girls, Butler's concept encourages descriptive studies of so called *queer* gender. *Queer* is originally slang for homosexuality or other sexualities that defy the heterosexual norms (Jagose, 1996). Since the early 1990s, queer theory has become associated with a certain form of analysis, often building on Butler's theory. According to Stephan Seidman, it is an analysis of the hetero/homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations – in a word, the constitution of the self and society (Seidman, 1995: 128).

So, how can gender be performed through music? The publication of the book *Queering the pitch* (Brett, Thomas & Wood 1994), marked the introduction of *queer* analysis into the field of musicology. These effect analyses of musical performances have not been able to describe what happens among teenagers who are doing music activities together in school. In analyzing the data from the above mentioned study, it was necessary to employ a theoretical concept which was capable of grasping the social negotiations which were intertwined with the musical performances, and *musicking* fulfilled this requirement. *Musicking* has become a familiar concept to music researchers since its introduction by musicologist Christopher Small about twenty years ago. Small states that "Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do" (Small, 1998: 2), and challenges positions that focus on music as solely an artistic object, disconnected from the social context. *Musicking* is a social negotiation either with other performers or with listeners. It is both practicing and performing in the form of playing, singing or dancing, in addition to composing and listening. The meaning in *musicking* is, according to Small, both social and individual, since it always takes place in a social context. Since individual identity is based on relations, all *musicking* will be a social enterprise in which identity is investigated and potentially changed (Small, 1994 [1987]). In my opinion, it would not be fair to the participants in the study, to analyze their musical performances employing the *queer* concept as gender performativity, without connecting it to the social environment and the negotiation processes taking place among the pupils. That is why the concept of

*musicking*, with its social focus is used to supplement the concept of *queer* in order to avoid a focus on the isolated musical performances of individuals. Since, in my view, gender performativity is one aspect of meaning constructed through *musicking*, these two concepts complement each other.

## Methodology

The design of the study is inspired by so called performance ethnography (Hamera, 2011). When using this method of inquiry, there is a focus on the denotative, sensory elements of the event: how it looks, sounds, smells and shifts over time, as well as on how emotions and behaviors intersect to produce meaning. Performance as an inquiry strategy also demands that the researcher locate the site of inquiry within larger sets of ongoing historical, political, intellectual, and aesthetic conversations (ibid.: 319). This method of inquiry is compatible with the theoretical approaches chosen for analyzing the musical performances in this study.

The research data were generated by visiting two urban Norwegian lower-secondary schools with pupils aged between 13 to 15 years old. Data were collected between the autumn of 2008 and the spring of 2010. The majority of the participants in the study were 13 years old, but some were 15. The pupils were selected from the music classes of 4 music teachers, 2 men and 2 women. Less than 10 % of the pupils at these two schools were from non-Norwegian ethnic backgrounds, which is the average for Norwegian schools although many in urban areas have a greater ethnic variety. The only selection criteria for choosing schools was that they should be average lower-secondary schools following the standard music program as described in the national curriculum.

Four blocks of teaching were observed during the data collection period, one for each teacher. Each block lasted for about 6 weeks with the exception of the two-week period when the pupils at one school were engaged in the production of a show; that was an intensive project. In the first block, pupils were preparing a concert that they would perform in small groups for each other. Each pupil had told the teacher which instrument they wanted to play in which genre. Based on this information, the teacher divided them into groups. In the second block, the pupils were learning the basics of playing the guitar, the piano and the drums. They were divided into three groups, one for each instrument, and after some time they switched groups, so that everyone would learn a little about each instrument. In the third block, the pupils were working with hip-hop, in order to learn about rhythm. They could choose between three activities:

1) making loops on instruments, 2) writing lyrics for a rap or 3) producing a dance to the loops and lyrics of a rap. The fourth block was the production and performance of a school show. The usual schedule was put aside for about two weeks, including all the key stages, and most of the pupils had tasks connected to the show. Both pupils and performances were chosen based on auditions, so not all the pupils performed on stage. In all of the three first blocks, the pupils were aged 13 years old, while the parts of the fourth block which I observed closely involved 15-year-olds.

In addition to the observations, individual interviews were arranged and recorded with the four teachers and with 14 pupils. Group interviews were also carried out with 32 pupils. All of the pupils interviewed were 13 years old. Written sources such as the curricula, textbooks and song repertoire were collected as supplementary data. The benefit of using so many different sources of data is that it allows for confirmation of observations. Sometimes the observer's descriptions and interpretations of a situation are similar to the participants' own descriptions, but descriptions of "the same" situation can also be different. As Emerson, Fretz & Shaw suggest, there is no "best description", only variations in perceptions (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995: 5). This is, in itself, an interesting finding in an ethnographic study. The performance ethnography also considers the researcher as performer. The chosen way of performing the research is always just one of several possibilities (Hamera, 2011). It could just as well have been done in a different way. That is why transparency is so important.

In this article, three narratives based on situations selected from the observation protocol will be analyzed with supporting references to other data collected. The first narrative is from the dancing group in the third block of teaching where the pupils were working with hip-hop in order to learn about rhythm. The second narrative is from the rap group in the same block. The third narrative is from the fourth block of teaching which was the production and performance of a school show.

## **Dealing with heteronormativity: Three examples**

How can gender performativity be revealed in the singing, rapping, playing and dancing of 13-year-old pupils? Should the possible effects of pupils' musical performances be interpreted, or is it necessary to go 'behind the performances' and see how they were constructed? In the following analysis of three narratives constructed from observed situations in the study, gender performativity will be investigated; an effect analysis will be carried out *and* the social negotiations involved in constructing the pupils' *musicking* will be interpreted.

**1) A hip-hop dance confirming heteronormativity?**

*Five girls and four boys are dancing vis-a-vis each other to the sound of rap music. The girls' moves are recognizable from the way female R&B and hip-hop artists dance in contemporary music videos. Their chests are moving rapidly in and out and they make wave-movements with hips and breasts as they walk towards the boys. Some of the moves are technically advanced, as well as having erotic connotations. While the four boys are doing a simpler dance, it is more like a pantomime. They are walking towards the girls with severe expressions, beating with their hands and kicking with their feet like some kind of gangsta. The girls look excited at the same time as they giggle when the boys move towards them. Suddenly one of the girls spontaneously reacts to one of the boys' moves with hips and hands: "Hello, you can't do that! It's so feminine!"*

If one just watches the performance of this dance, it can easily be interpreted as actions confirming heterosexuality. The girls and the boys are appealing to each other to be attractive as heterosexual boys and girls. However, the picture may not be that simple. A closer examination of the performance reveals that the girls are very focused on the technically advanced movements of the dance, as if they want to impress the boys with their dancing skills. A statement from an individual interview with one of the girls confirms such an interpretation. She claims that the boys are dominant in her class, and the dance is an opportunity for the girls to position themselves. This "power-demonstration" culminates with one of the other girls' saying to one of the boys: "You can't do that! It's so feminine!" This is a familiar power technique; by more or less consciously humiliating others it is possible to strengthen your own position. Nevertheless, the girls' performance can still be understood as confirming heterosexual norms. Dancing is typically viewed as a feminine activity and art form, also in school (Lindqvist, 2010). Using Lucy Green's division of musical practices into categories affirming, interrupting and threatening femininity (Green, 2010), the girls' dancing in this example could definitely be considered a confirmation of femininity and heteronormativity. Their repetitive imitations of female R&B artists' performances, reproduces a certain configuration of femininity in the music classroom. This *musicking*-situation gives the girls an opportunity to perform gender in a way that differs from those usual in the classroom. This relates back to Butler's view of gender as not being fixed, but rather something that can be performed in diverse ways.

In contrast, the boys are confirming heterosexual masculinity through the way they choose to dance, by imitating *gangsta* from the hip-hop genre. This Afro-American male image has become an international symbol of a certain kind of masculinity

which many teenagers consider to have high status (Chang, 2005). From another perspective, the boys' dancing is disrupting heterosexual masculinity since dancing in many contexts is considered a feminine activity and art form. From this position, gender and sexuality are more critical issues in the boys' performance. They enter the dance floor knowing it is more the girls' territory than theirs. This in itself makes the boys' performance much more risky than the girls'. According to Michael Gard's study, dancing in school is a threatening activity for boys of this age (Gard, 2001). The statement in which the girl claims that one of the boys is acting too feminine probably does not make it any easier for the boys. The dance illustrates how heteronormativity is a power regime governing the pupils' action and speech. The girls in the example had chosen the dance activity, while the boys were asked to participate in order to obtain a balance of sexes in the group.

## **2) Are rapping girls necessarily challenging gender stereotypes in hip-hop?**

*A whole school class of 13-year-old pupils has filled the gym and turned it into a music stage. In the middle of the room, a huge band of 15 players on percussion and electric instruments are playing a loop over and over again. On the right side of the band, two girls are standing with microphones ready to rap. On the left, 9 dancers (from the previous example) are standing in freeze position facing each other ready to start the dance when the girls start rapping. With 15 instruments, the band makes a great deal of noise. To match the enormous number of percussionists, the volume on the electronic instruments has been turned on very high. All this noise is hard competition for the girls when they start rapping, even though they have microphones. For the dancers, it is important not only to follow the rhythm of the band, but also the lyrics of the rap which accompanies the patterns of the dance. This is difficult for the dancers when they can hardly hear the rap. "We can't hear you! You have to rap louder!" one of them shouts in frustration. No one questions the high volume of the band.*

This is an example of a gender performativity in which girls are rapping, something that most people would consider as a masculine activity since male MCs are much more common in hip-hop than female. The two rapping girls are performing lyrics with lines like "I'm the king of hip hop, I stay on top" and "I'm coming out strong like Muhammed Ali. You know that I'll be the world's greatest MC". The speaking subject in the lyrics is quite clearly male, while the voices of the two girls are light and fragile. This stands in contrast to the typically confident and smug male MC and the assertive

speaking subject in these lyrics. The girls' performance can be interpreted as a parody, like a *queering* of the stereotypical and assertive macho MC often accused of having misogynous, racist and sexist undertones (Ogbar, 2007). The effect of the girls' performance could possibly be to reveal the phantasmatic gender figuration many hip-hop artists construct through their performativity through their improper imitation. In this sense, the performance can challenge and destabilize the illusions of gender ideals in the hip-hop genre, and possibly contribute to opening a space in which alternative expressions of gender are possible when pupils are *musicking*.

Moving beyond the possible effects of the performance of the rapping girls for a moment, to consider the pupils' social negotiations before and after the performance, it may be possible to gain a slightly different picture of the gender performativity. This perspective adds some elements to the interpretation of the performance and enriches the analysis, making it more than a simple effect analysis.

As shown in the initial description, the girls were told to rap louder because no one could hear them. The girls themselves told me in an interview later: "Well, you know rapping is actually best suited for a male voice [...]. We would have preferred to change to the dancing group, but..." These statements imply that the girls didn't really want to break any rules or challenge any norms. However, they had clear opinions about this gender division. My interpretation is therefore that both the girls themselves and their classmates read the performance as "in-authentic"; it is not the way rap should be performed. The performance is happening at school, and the pupils are just completing a task the teacher has given them. Nevertheless, in my opinion the effect analysis is still relevant to some degree. The fact that girls are rapping lyrics with a male subject is in itself a gender performativity that challenges heteronormativity in hip-hop. The subversive potential rests on the repetition of such unfaithful imitations, so that it does not end with this specific event. According to Judith Butler, the potential for change lies in the repetitions of failed imitations.

### **3) How subversive is a parody of Spice Girls by school boys?**

*Four of the older boys (15 years old) at one of the lower secondary-schools in the study enter the stage wearing high heels, mini-skirts and short singlets to the soundtrack of "If You Wanna Be My Lover" by Spice Girls. Their exaggerated hip movements, waving arms and swiveling wrists, receive spontaneous applause from the audience. When they start singing, one can recognize their voices among the female voices on the track; some sing in a light register and others in a neutral pitch for a male voice. The choreography is not very well coordinated, but the response of the audience indicates that they appreciate the performance.*

This Spice Girls parody took place in the school show mentioned in relation to the fourth teaching block included in the study. As implied in the description above, two of the boys sang in falsetto, while the other two sang in a neutral pitch for a male voice. This mix of voices and pitches in this particular song *If You Wanna Be My Lover* has the effect of *queering* the Spice Girls' version. However, this *queering* lies not only in the boys' voices, but also in the visual performance; in the movements and appearance of the performers with their tight mini-skirts, makeup and glittering hair. The performance may be considered to challenge, or at least twist, to traditional understandings of femininity and masculinity. An effect analysis may view a performance like this as a destabilization of habitual gender categories inside the heteronormativity.

However, additional light can be cast on this performance by referring to other data collected, which opens up for further analysis that takes into consideration how this performance was realized, what position these boys had among their classmates and what it was that motivated this parody. The boys appeared to be popular and considered attractive by the girls at school. Their teacher told me in an interview that it was some of the girls who had encouraged them to do the parody. As an observer, I perceived this as a test on the girls' part to see whether the boys were confident enough in their heterosexual masculinity to dress and perform like girls. In an individual interview, one classmate talked about the Spice Girls parody: "Everybody at this school think it's funny if someone makes a fool of themselves on stage, for instance. You almost become more popular by doing something like that. It's just cool to do something "way out"". This statement is certainly debatable. It is not likely that just *anyone* could have carried off such a parody and aroused the same excitement and applause as these boys did. One factor is age; it is doubtful whether these boys would have dared to do such a parody one or two years earlier, at the same age as the pupils in the two previous examples. Another factor is the privileged position of the four boys; much more would have been at stake for less popular pupils if they had tried a parody, especially if they were low in the social hierarchy. Since the pupils know each other, it is unlikely that a parody like this will have the subversive effect that Judith Butler sees as the potential of parody. In this example, the parody serves rather to establish and strengthen the heteronormativity. The boys' performance can be understood as an ironic distancing from the femininity they perform, a concept Butler also uses. However, this is not to say that parodies in isolation cannot, like transgression or habitual gender categories, have a subversive effect.

## Gendered aspects of aesthetic formation and informal learning processes

From these three examples, it is evident that gender is at stake when pupils in Norwegian lower-secondary school are *musicking*. The ways in which gender is performed and articulated are quite complex and subtle. These examples were chosen in order to highlight features that counter the most traditional gender patterns in musical practices; but, as the analysis has shown, one may question how, or even whether, these examples actually challenge heteronormativity. One explanation for the gender-stereotyped patterns in the pupils' *musicking* can lie in the fact that they are allowed to choose activities, instruments and repertoire. A clear finding in the study is that the more freedom of choice the pupils have, the more gender stereotypical and heteronormative their *musicking* becomes. This serves as a starting point for many interesting discussions, two of which have been chosen for the last part of this article.

Bearing in mind the complexity in the pupils' performances, and at the risk of oversimplification, the following sections consider the implications these findings can have for our understanding of pupils' aesthetic formation; and what the findings may reveal about the effects of informal learning processes in the music classroom, especially in connection to gender patterns.

### 1) Aesthetic formation

As a school subject, music is an important forum in which pupils can gain a register of aesthetical forms. Aesthetical forms can serve as a tool for expressing meaning, emotions, creativity, knowledge, and so on. However, the very act of using these tools will also shape the user. By watching, listening to and using aesthetical forms, and by being exposed to this reservoir, pupils will undergo *aesthetic formation*.<sup>6</sup> This chiasmatic notion that formation is interwoven into action and speech is recognizable from Butler's theoretical landscape. As mentioned, Butler has been influenced by Nietzsche and Foucault in her claim that the subject is formed by its actions. By acting in certain ways, a person is constructing meaning; but at the same time the actions are forming the person, which means that there is an element of both consciousness and unconsciousness in the formation process.

As the empirical data in this study reveals, the ways in which gender is configured through performed music are closely connected to the musical form. It seems as if the

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<sup>6</sup> In Norwegian: *Estetisk danning*, developed as a theoretical term and analytical tool in the research program *Arts Didactics* at the Bergen University College. See for example the anthology *Teater som danning* (Heggstad, Eriksson & Rasmussen 2013) and *Ut frå det konkrete* (Nyrnes og Lehmann 2008).

pupils are trying to reproduce certain conventions and norms for what is feminine and masculine musical behavior. Popular music dominated in the observed music lessons, as it does in Norwegian music education at the lower-secondary level in general. With its extensive range of styles and genres, popular music offers various kinds of gendered figures for imitation. In the examples above, rap was defined as a masculine musical form, while dancing was considered a feminine musical form. Parts of the study material which have not been referred in this article, show other connections between gender and musical forms; for example, ballades, playing the piano and the acoustic guitar are considered feminine expressions, while electronic instruments, loud volume and high tempo are considered masculine expressions.

The pupils' narrow enactment and view of popular music may indicate an attempt to gain some kind of control and understanding of this multi-stranded genre and its diverse styles. The norms and perceptions of music and gender that can be derived from the pupils' talk and practice provide some insight into how aesthetic formation in school can be understood. The findings are probably not surprising and quite familiar to music teachers and researchers. They may be considered so natural and common that there seems little reason for analyzing them. However, if the analysis of the findings leads to a discussion of the lack of gender neutrality in aesthetic formation processes in school and the establishment of gender divisions, it may produce a more serious picture of this taken-for-granted situation. When the aesthetical forms are filled with gender metaphors, as the data in this study reveals, it is worth asking what kind of aesthetic education and formation the school contributes to. Are girls and boys given gender specific musical opportunities? If so, this would represent a failure to implement the politics of gender equality presented in the beginning of this article. I would also add that findings in this study indicate that gender practices are diverse and not necessarily about boys and girls or singular ideas about gender. Pupil's musicking can illustrate gender diversity rather than simply sexual inequality.

## 2) Informal learning strategies

As a result of the introduction of popular music and band instruments in school, the institutionalized and formalized learning strategies in music education have been challenged. The traditional teacher-controlled education has moved towards more pupil-controlled activities in which pupils have to carry out tasks on their own and supervise each other. Some researchers claim that today's music teaching, especially at lower-secondary level, produces both formal and informal learning situations and relies upon both kinds of learning strategies (Bergman, 2009). However, Lucy Green maintains that, despite the use of popular music and band instruments, the school is

still dominated by traditional, teacher-controlled learning strategies (Green, 2008).<sup>7</sup> Through action research, she introduced into school music education the informal learning strategies that she had identified in her previous study of popular musicians' practice (Green, 2002, 2008). Green found that the experiment was successful; the pupils in the study group learned more and gained a stronger sense of ownership of their newly acquired knowledge than pupils following the traditional music education. The study does not, however, evaluate the consequences these forms of learning have on gender patterns in the classroom, a topic that Green calls for further research on (Green, 2008).

Findings from the study upon which the present article is based, indicate that informal learning situations in which the pupils choose and control the activities help to reproduce stereotypical gender patterns. Similar results are to be found in Carina Borgström Källén's study of students on music programs in upper secondary level. Her findings suggest that teachers' intentions in regard to informal learning settings seem to gender the conditions for musical learning, especially in popular music practice (Borgström Källén, 2014). These findings, therefore, may be somewhat at odds with the positive attitude towards popular music and informal learning strategies that is elaborated in some music pedagogical research. Cecilia Björck expresses a similar concern regarding the consequences of informal learning strategies in the music classroom if the result is a redundant teacher who is unnecessary for the pupils' learning process. Her doctoral thesis focuses on *claiming space* as a musical performer in popular music genres. She maintains that if there is no teacher to supervise the pupils in claiming space in the music classroom, the forum is open to rule by the social hierarchies (Björck, 2011: 67).

In an article commenting upon Green's presentation of informal learning as a new classroom pedagogy, Carlos Xavier Rodriguez writes: "Teachers [...] must become experts in helping students make things happen for themselves" (Rodriguez, 2009: 39). Rodriguez problematizes the fact that in order to use informal learning in the classroom, the role of the teacher, who is actually absent in informal learning, has to be redefined. He calls for clearer guidelines regarding what function the teacher should have, and writes:

I believe teachers need more concise recommendations on how to provide freedom and direction while remaining compassionate and resourceful

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<sup>7</sup> Similar findings come forward in Ericson and Lindgren's study of music education in Swedish school (Ericsson & Lindgren, 2010).

leaders, even as longstanding rules for teaching are replaced with newer, mostly untested ones (Rodriguez, 2009: 44).

Without the key involvement of the teacher, informal learning in the popular music genre in school may have undesired affects, not only with regard to gender, but also related to stigmatizing social borders.

In *Future Prospects of Music Education: Corroborating Informal Learning Pedagogy* (2012), future research themes and theoretical perspectives are discussed, including informal learning strategies. The editors take the new learning strategies seriously, but at the same time critically question where their use will lead music education in the future. They emphasize the importance of:

[...] discussing the appropriate theoretical and philosophical underpinning of such research, not just in order to engage in the general growth of the field, but also because there is a need to elicit such frameworks' specific ethical, moral and political implications and consequences through scholarly conversations (Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012: xx).

It can be fruitful to consider informal learning strategies in relation to the pupils' participation and involvement. It is a paradox that pupils often use their right to participation and involvement to limit themselves. The ideal is to set pupils free to choose, but their choices are still governed by norms and rules, allowing only a limited space for action. From this perspective, music teachers have to be aware of the mechanisms that govern the pupils' musical choices, and to actively contribute to expanding the pupils' space for action, so that social borders will not inhibit their involvement and participation. The pupils need knowledge and empowerment in order to make choices. If they are granted this, important political guidelines for the education in the Norwegian school will be fulfilled. The teacher's role does not have to stand in opposition to the use of informal learning in music education. As Green points out, there are many positive features associated with this way of learning that are worth fostering in institutional music education. To make pupils more aware, it may be important to allow gender markers and gender performativity be expressed in school music education, in order to provide a starting point for discussions about "what are we doing now and why are we doing it this way?" The relation between pupils' inclusion and teachers' leadership and control does not have to be mutually exclusive, but can rather be complementary.

## Concluding remarks

The aim of this article has been to highlight the position of gender performativity as a key feature of pupils' musicking in school music education. I will conclude by quoting a statement made by a 13-year-old girl in a group interview:

It may be that people like what they are used to best. They don't like different kinds of rap to appear, for example with girls. They don't think it's normal, and therefore they think it's stupid, maybe without even having tried to listen to it (Onsrud, 2013: 183).

This statement was a response to what the other pupils in the group had been saying. The girl was commenting on, or summing up, the core of what the others had stated. In a broader sense, the girl's words can serve to sum up of what has been discussed in this article. When the familiar seems natural, it is hard to understand how things could appear different and why it perhaps should be different. The *queering* perspective discussed by Judith Butler serves as a way to think outside the box about issues related to normality and common sense. It is a tool for questioning everyday, common practices in order to reveal the unconscious power structures limiting our lives.

Awareness of how heteronormativity governs music education in school can raise the awareness of teachers and pupils about the importance of allowing space for a variety of gender performativity through musical practices, which, in turn, opens up for the strange, odd, experimental and playful, without being threatening. Thus, the combination of Butler's perspectives on gender performativity and Small's notion of musicking as social negotiation can make a contribution to the development of pedagogical practices for creating an inclusive social and learning environment for pupils.

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