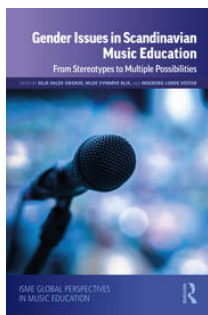


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Gender Issues in Scandinavian Music Education



Gender Issues in Scandinavian Education: From Stereotypes to Multiple Possibilities

S. Valde Onsrud, H. Synnøve Blix & I. Lunde Vestad, Eds.

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Gender Issues in Scandinavian Education: From Stereotypes to Multiple Possibilities is the first collection which brings together a range of researchers who are currently or who have previously worked on issues regarding gender in relation to music education in the Scandinavian countries. It represents a current that has been an important part of music education research in Scandinavia since the early 2000s, and collates some of the most influential voices researching gender in Scandinavian music education. The book succeeds in bringing together a number of older and newer research projects and perspectives in one place for the first time in English, and even the Scandinavian languages.

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The relevance of this book is not just that it offers insights into Scandinavian music education, for those of us living and working in the region (and the Nordic countries more broadly); but it takes perspectives from a region which has a global international reputation for implementing gender equality measures and has been known for cultural democratic approaches to policy, and teases out the contradictions, problems and potential of these. Far from merely critique, the collection points to productive tensions and attempts to deal with these problems, highlighting the tensions between political rhetoric and lived experiences. The book represents a solid overview of trends in music education research as they relate to issues of gender and specifically gender equality in Scandinavia. The book has a transformative goal, namely of imagining how music education might be done differently and how to overcome the gender stereotypes which persist within music education (pp. 16–17). To this end, the book's title emphasizing "gender issues in...", rather than "gender equality in..." indicates that whilst equality is a vital part of the discussion of how gender works, what counts as equality involves understanding how gender is produced and how it might be done in different ways.

In the introductory chapter the editors outline the paradox of gender equality in the Scandinavian (and often Nordic) countries, noting that despite their reputation for gender equal policies and attitudes, similar problems persist in Scandinavian and Nordic countries as those which have been identified outside of the region, namely in English-speaking contexts. Perhaps as a result of the focus on gender equality there has been a strong focus on questions of gender equality in relation to music education over the past 20 years in the Nordic countries, but this has intensified in the last 10 years with a series of articles, projects and conferences dedicated to the subject of gender equality in relation to music. The chapter also provides a series of different definitions of gender, from the more anthropological work of De Beauvoir and Mead; to the more performative approaches offered by Butler, drawing largely from Johnson's (2014) work around the "gender knot" – a book which is much less known outside of the US – to address the tensions between solidifying gender by attempting to address the problems it causes. The chapter notes links between other fields of research with relevance for perspectives on music and gender (namely childhood studies and popular music), as well as broad approaches to gender equality.

Cecilia Björck's *Music, gender and social change: Contemporary debates, directions and challenges* maps out strategies to tackle gender inequalities through a systematic review of literature on gender equality and music education from 2015 to 2018, supplemented by a broader literature review over a period stretching back to the 1990s and support from networks and organisations. The chapter (which has a more explicit focus on Sweden) explores diagnostic approaches to the problem; as well as solution-oriented approaches which have emphasized initiatives at individual, collective and state level. Björck importantly outlines how in the post #MeToo context, there have been widespread grassroots mobilisations to

the problems identified in both music education institutions and music institutions more broadly.

In *Singing like a child: Transgressive girlhood in the music classroom*, Eirik Askerøi and Ingeborg Lunde Vestad draw from childhood studies and more musicologically oriented notions of voice, looking in depth at the notion of what the authors term “transgressive girlhood” (perhaps evoking Lucy Green’s notions of “interrupting femininity”). The book’s third chapter does so through a case study of a child in a Norwegian music classroom and the reception of her voice, as well as drawing from other examples which illuminate how gendered notions of child voices have shifted over time. Focusing on the case study, the authors observe how ideals around girlhood singing are constructed through teachers’ implicit discourse and the tensions that this throws up for “conflicting value systems” with respect how girls are expected to behave within the Norwegian educational system (p. 55). This is something which is undoubtedly shaped by both more “traditional” notions of femininity as well as more emancipatory discourses around gender equality outlined in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, the chapter also foregrounds how voices construct gender as much as they are shaped (and even constrained) by it.

The fourth chapter by Carina Borgström Källén (*Binary oppositions and third spaces*) pursues a deconstructionist approach to demonstrate how gender is constructed and reconstructed through the stress on binary oppositions within Swedish music classrooms. Drawing from a diverse range of perspectives from Derrida to Butler, Bourdieu and Connell, the chapter posits an argument for a “third space” which is both a normative and empirical observation. The chapter deals with the way in which closeness and distance to specific instruments, which feed into well-documented binary divisions in instrument playing within education systems across the world, are produced through micro-interactions. The chapter highlights especially how implicitly gendered assumptions are built into the aesthetic traditions of different genres and style (individuality in rock ensembles as opposed to a certain erasure in choir singing) and are unwittingly reproduced through teachers’ emphases on different activities. It argues that when pupils are unfamiliar with aesthetic norms, specifically in relation to jazz constellations, then binary boundaries and hierarchies become increasingly unstable.

Linn Hentschel and Cecilia Ferm Almqvist also focus on the Swedish context in *Equality and sustainable development in Swedish music classrooms*. This fifth chapter looks at the implementation of gender equality policies in the music classroom by utilizing De Beauvoir’s phenomenological approach (and specifically her categorizations of transcendence and immanence) to understand girls’ experiences of these spaces. The chapter, which largely lets the voices of two teachers at a summer music camp for girls and non-binary people speak for themselves, connects the macro-gender equality policies with the micro-strategies and experiences; and aims to connect the teachers’ understandings of the problems facing girls’ participation in music education with the experiences of the girls they teach.

Positioning in a Swedish music profiled school by Mikael Persson again draws from Sweden, and looks at the issue of “positioning” within the broader neoliberal context where pupils have gone from being citizens to consumers. This entails, as the chapter notes, a shift in how pupils see themselves as in open competition with other pupils for prestige and selective schools. Unlike many of the other chapters, the author notes that the “analysis does not presume gender as a category of given importance”, following a Butlerian notion of gender as performative and constructed. It combines this notion with the social psychological notion of positioning as a form of psycho-discursive practice, using literature on gender to explore positioning rather than the other way round. The chapter is based on rigorous observations of 10 music lessons using conversation analysis to look at how literature on gender is relevant for understanding positioning within selective schools. The approach is interesting given that there is a well-worn antagonism between discourse analysts and conversation analysts, and specifically the latter’s approach to gender, which the chapter seeks to reconcile through the empirical material; though the chapter focuses more on how positioning is done rather than how gender is produced.

The seventh chapter by lead editor Silje Valde Onsrud explores the concept of queer pedagogy. *Thinking queer pedagogy in music education with Girl in Red* draws on Gould’s focus on queer pedagogy’s implementation in music pedagogy in order to understand its potential for enhancing LGBTQ+ individuals’ engagement in Norwegian music classrooms. The chapter does so by focusing primarily on the ways in which the song *Girls* by Norwegian artist Marie Ulven might disrupt or disturb some of the binary assumptions inherent in music classrooms, building on a long tradition of using popular music as a tool to challenge these assumptions. The chapter contains an extensive discussion of the concepts of queer pedagogy and queer theory, drawing from Hawkins’ musicological analysis of queer music; and a multimodal analysis to the song in order to demonstrate how queer-ness is rendered visible, audible and readable through a focus on the combination of song lyrics, visuals and music. In this respect, the chapter combines approaches from “new/critical musicology” with music pedagogical research, showing how the two might be fruitfully brought into dialogue with each other; as well as foregrounding the issue of queer pedagogy as both a pedagogical tool and theoretical approach.

Chapter 8 looks at gendered normativity in Norwegian music and performing arts schools (SMPAs) and specifically the well-worn division of instrument choice by gender. Adopting a model inspired by Butler and Foucault, Hilde Synnøve Blix and Live Weider Ellefsen indicate how normativity is discursively constructed using a number of rigorously constructed quantitative datasets (a survey of SMPA administrators self-reporting of instruments, content analysis of text and pictures from school websites about teachers and students as well as policy documents). By using this model to explore how gender normativity is expressed and upheld in SMPAs, the chapter indicates similar trends to what have been observed in a number of other studies on gender and instrument choice since Abeles’

and Porter's first study in 1978. The findings indicate the stubborn persistence of certain gendered perceptions around instruments in contemporary Norway – which, again, with reference to Chapter 1, might surprise those from outside of the region. *On breaking the "citational chains of gender normativity" in Norwegian art and music schools* offers some insights and ideas as to how these patterns might be changed through a focus on role models and non-normative messaging, but also offers considered caveats on the potential unintended consequences of direct interventions.

The final chapter from Lilli Mittner and Hilde Synnøve Blix presents findings from the Gender Balance in Arts Education project in Norway, a national research council funded initiative with a specific focus on higher music education (HME) institutions. The naming of the initiative in itself indicates something of the tensions identified in Chapter 1; namely the desire to provide structural support for gender equality at the state level and, as the authors note, the erasure of certain issues through the focus on equality as equal proportional representation. *Career paths in higher music education: Challenges for gender equality in the arts* adopts a structuralist perspective, taking as its starting point the idea of structural gender inequalities in society, as a means of understanding how inequalities in HME careers manifest and solidify over time. Mittner and Blix build on notions of vertical and horizontal gender segregation in order to analyse these processes and specifically the devaluing of women and girls in traditionally male-dominated areas of music education which, as the authors note, is seldom true in reverse. Using this framework, based on quantitative data from HME institutions in Norway 2009–2017, the chapter notes how intensely vertically segregated Norwegian HME is in terms of seniority in career track positions, as well as horizontally in terms of the wider cultural status of the genres/areas that men and women work in.

Many of the chapters have a certain theoretical consistency which runs throughout but can be read as standalone pieces in their own right. They fall either into structuralist or performative approaches to gender, for the most part; though there is some crossover in many of the chapters. As the editors themselves note, most of the approaches in the book are indebted to Butler's notion of performativity, slightly fewer in the book to poststructuralist and discourse-based approaches (*à la* Foucault or Derrida) and fewer still focused on more "second-wave" materialist approaches to gender. This tripartite may, at times, seem at odds with some of theoretical shifts specifically in feminist and gender studies research more broadly, which has moved toward new materialist and posthumanist theory: partly as a means of reconciling the three and partly in an attempt to grapple with the existential issues attributed to anthropocentrism. However, the focus on Butler, Derrida, Foucault and De Beauvoir as the "big-name theorists" represents an accurate overview of the field of research in music education in the Scandinavian countries. There is also a wider applicability of many of the approaches to other music education research contexts. The book's breadth of focus is a real strength for those who are new to the field. It provides excellent

overviews of trends and literature on the theme of gender and music, whilst the use of a variety of empirical analysis techniques, ranging from the more musicologically-inclined multimodal and hermeneutic analyses to the highly technical forms of conversation analysis developed in sociology, mean that the book's value is not just in its subject matter but also its methodological variety.

What strikes the reader is that, despite coming from different Scandinavian countries, there is also a certain resonance between the various culturally-situated perspectives; one which undoubtedly reflects a certain coherence in terms of both the dominant academic trends in the way gender is conceptualized and the strategies which have been implemented to support gender equality within the countries. Though this coherence may also stem from the fact that most of the chapters focus on Sweden and Norway and I suspect that the book used the term "Scandinavian" rather than "Swedish and Norwegian Music Education" to enhance its international reach. None of the authors looks at the extent to which Denmark either follows or departs from Sweden or Norway, even if this is briefly alluded to in the first chapter (p. 5) as well as the fictive opening vignette. This overrepresentation of Swedish and Norwegian perspectives reflects tendencies in music education research more broadly. It is true that the conferences which the editors and some of the authors reference have focused on the Scandinavian region – *Music and Gender in Balance* in Tromsø and *GeMus* in Örebro have been hosted in Norway and Sweden respectively (although *GeMus* was an international conference). Those of us who have attended *Nordic Network for Research in Music Education* have probably observed an underrepresentation from Danish music education researchers more widely in the last few years. This is not due to a lack of interest in issues of gender equality; but perhaps due to the vying cultural and economic dominance of Sweden and now Norway within the trifecta. As such, Denmark's absence is not the fault of the editors but represents something of the academic landscape since 2010. It will be interesting to see how the current "Gendering Music Matter" (GEMMA) project, based at the University of Copenhagen, complements this edited collection in the years to come.

There are several issues that are important in gender and education more broadly but which the book does not delve into further. This is both for reasons of a lack of academic work on the subject in Scandinavian countries and, potentially, as a result of how gender is often framed in the Scandinavian context. The editors note early on that:

This book's chapters demonstrate that research in Scandinavian music education largely focuses on girls/women and that masculinities are less researched... Queerness is a particularly under-researched area in Scandinavian music education research.

Onsrud's chapter (Chapter 7) is perhaps the first to pay attention to issues faced by LGBTQ+ students in the Scandinavian countries but this too looks at the potential for transforming attitudes through music rather than how gender is experienced by LGBTQ+ pupils.

Trans* and non-binary individuals' experiences are absent from this book. Yet their experiences are acutely shaped by the rigid gender binary framework which is undergirded by both a Scandinavian model of gender equality and the Scandinavian personal number system. This creates challenges and issues for trans* people within the education system and Scandinavian societies more broadly (this is briefly mentioned on p. 13 as well as on p. 40) on the basis of gender. Nevertheless, the specificities of trans* people's experiences are missing. How gender is experienced and inequalities amplified by intersecting inequalities – especially social class, ethnicity and race – are also largely absent from many of the chapters. These are vital given the intense racialization of inequality in Scandinavia at present. Again, these absences are (in my experience) a reflection of the field more generally rather than omissions by the editors. As such, they say more about the state of music education research in Scandinavian countries, and specifically the way in which the legal conception of gender equality shapes research agendas in music education. The book is intended to be a provocation rather than the definitive word on these issues.

The book is admirably affirmative and intentionally so. As noted above, the authors do not simply seek to approach “gender issues” in a diagnostic way, pointing out what is wrong with the current state of affairs; but they look for the potential to disrupt and destabilise in order to suggest what could be better. In an era in which gender studies and a focus on social justice has come under sustained attack in a number of countries, I wonder how much of this is strategy as well as encouraging pluralism within the field. Nevertheless, this is a precarious moment for research on gender and specifically gender equality. We in Scandinavia are not immune to the backlash by forces which look to portray such perspectives as passé or as privileging women over men. Indeed, this precarity is why thinking about gender issues in music education today is more important than ever.