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Introduction

Learning popular music takes place in many different contexts and educational practices, for example in clubs, garages, at home, and in classrooms. During the past few years, debate in music education research has resulted from Lucy Green's (2001, 2006, 2008) suggestions that formal music education look to how popular musicians learn and use informal learning as a model. Those places where popular musics have for many years been part of formal music education, it is especially obvious that the assumed distinction between formal and informal is too simplistic (Lindgren and Ericsson 2010). In Sweden, where I live and work, it has been standard procedure for several decades to use Western popular music instruments and materials in classroom teaching. For some students, learning the basic structure of a pop song and the basic skills of playing keyboard or electric guitar at school is the beginning of a band-playing "career." Interest in these activities appears to be more than marginal: a 2005 survey of leisure-time activities among all students aged 10–19 in Gothenburg, Sweden, shows that 16% of the boys and 20% of the girls in high school (grades 10–12) stated they were "very interested" in the activity of singing or playing in a band (Stockfelt 2005). But is band-playing a "free" option open to anyone who has an interest in it?

On an international level, the popular music industry has been described as "permeated by gender norms and expectations at all levels; some of the most unequal labour relations can be found there" (Connell and Gibson 2003, 8). Looking at the local situation, females are still found to be in minority within different contexts for learning popular music outside school in Sweden, while music teaching in institutional settings presents various sex-based imbalances, for example in terms of instrument and genre involvement (for an overview, see Björck 2011). If one assumes that there is equal opportunity for anyone who desires to pursue an interest in popular music-making as a hobby and/or career, then the

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conclusion must be that men's outnumbering women in such practices reflects either greater interest or greater capabilities among men compared to women. From my experience, the question of interest is often articulated when issues of popular music, learning, and gender are debated among teachers. However, as I point out in this article, interest and motivation are problematic concepts, involving issues of normalization and desire to appear as an intelligible subject. From this perspective, sex-based imbalances appear as problems of a more complex character.

The aim of this article is to examine how notions of freedom are linked to popular music practices in previous research literature. I will discuss how two competing discourses depict popular music practices on the one hand as "freedom," on the other hand as "constraint," and how these ideas relate to gender. I will also argue that unproblematized assumptions of popular music as "free" may instead function as exclusionary normalization. Before going any further, however, I explicate two central terms discussed in this article, namely gender and popular music.

Gender and Popular Music

The term *gender* was originally introduced to signify social and cultural interpretations of sex. The sex/gender distinction was then used by feminist researchers, starting in the 1970s, with the aim of moving beyond biologically oriented explanations of female subordination in order to show how social and cultural patterns form our conceptions of the sexes. Since then, the term has been used in various and distinctly different ways. In the 1990s, the sex/gender distinction was criticized, among other things for simplifying the relation between sex and gender. Some scholars (e.g. Butler 2006[1999]) rejected the distinction altogether, arguing that sex and gender are both constructed. I use terms such as *gender*, *masculinity*, and *femininity* to signify the constructedness of these concepts. Acknowledging that terms such as *female*, *male*, *women*, and *men*, are problematic by their function to reaffirm a dualistic model of gender, I still use them in some instances here—not with an intention to refer to any assumed core differences, but rather because it seems very hard to avoid these categories if one wants to talk about structural imbalances.

The term *popular music* "defies precise, straightforward definition" (Shuker 2005, 203); while the term "popular" connotes such diverse ideas as "of the folk," "contemporary," "mass-produced," and "oppositional" (as in counter-culture), particular genres or songs

often—if not always—blur these categories (Kassabian 1999). In this article, I bring together texts about very different contexts and genres, in and out of classrooms. The label "popular music" hosts a plurality of genres which differ from each other in terms of aesthetic values and how these are enacted in musical practice, for example in relation to gender. Labels like "pop," "rock," and "jazz" similarly appear as simplistic and blunt categorizations. My point is that these varying practices nevertheless appear to be joined by connotations to freedom and, in some instances, to constraint. I thereby view the issues discussed in the article as relevant to popular music practices in broad terms, but the specific meaning and nuance will shift between different genres and contexts.

Issues of gender and popular music have previously mainly been explored by researchers in sociology, culture studies, media studies, and popular music studies. While many studies have focused primarily on Western pop and rock music, the body of research also includes texts about a variety of musical genres and cultures. The significance of gender is shown to be evident in a number of areas: for the construction of popular music history; the perceived masculine or feminine nature of particular genres/styles; audiences, fandom, and record-collecting; occupation of various roles within the music industry; youth subcultures; and gender stereotyping in song lyrics and music videos (Shuker 2005). These issues can be seen as matters of both numbers and norms—two perspectives which are, in effect, interdependent. From the quantitative perspective of *sexual representation*, some genres have been pointed out as particularly over-represented by males, but an overwhelming structural differentiation between men and women seems to be prevalent in a broad spectrum of popular music practices, where women are in a definite minority in all positions, except for that of vocalist. From the qualitative perspective of *gendered signification*, popular music appears to be broadly aligned with two traits associated with masculinity: first, with assertive and aggressive performance, and second, with technological mastery. These two traits are combined and played out in different ways within different genres and contexts. Aggressive physical and sonic performance is perhaps most strongly played out in various subgenres of rock. Although enactment of technological mastery also shifts depending on the context, it has relevance for popular music practice in broad terms by its connotations with the instrumentalist position, whether we speak of dance music, hip hop, country music, or jazz—the latter nowadays often classified as art music rather than popular music.

Marion Leonard (2007, 181) argues that the differentiation between men and women in the music industry is

> not simply a hangover from the domination of early rock 'n' roll by male performers, nor is it premised solely upon the fact that male performers in rock have been more visible within rock practice . . . but results from a process of reproduction and continual enactment.

Leonard, drawing her examples from the genre of so-called "indie-rock," provides a number of close analyses of how discourses operating within the music industry contribute to this reproduction, and how they thereby uphold "systems of evaluation and aesthetics and produce particular constructions of the nature of the artist" (181). One example is the heroic language used to describe male musicians in the written media. Similarly, Green (2002, 137) argues that "despite appearances, the school plays a major role in reproducing pre-existing musical gender divisions in the wider society, through reinforcing discursive constructions about gender, musical practices and music itself." One of these reproduced divisions, Green notes, is women's minority status in, or exclusion from, practices of "highly technological or electronic instruments, especially those associated with popular music" (139). From this perspective, *discourse* appears as a significant study object for examining gender issues in popular music. In the following, I elaborate on the role of discourse, and how the scrutiny of discourse may provide a tool for music educators and researchers striving for critical reflection of what their own teaching and writing might produce or reproduce.

Theoretical Framework

The theory I deploy is based on a critical constructionist framework, one I have chosen for a number of reasons. First, it gives attention to the construction of meaning through discourse. Second, it is concerned with issues of power and provides ways of discussing subjectivity, agency, resistance, and change. Third, it has a problematizing approach that seeks to identify what is excluded as possibilities by unquestioned normativity, thus exploring how alternative organizations of the social world would offer other possibilities. In the following sections I outline some of the main ideas of the framework.

Discourse and Embodied Experience

The term *discourse* has acquired various meanings in the field of social sciences, each "laden with particular assumptions about the social world and the way we attain knowledge of it"

(Howarth 2000, 3). From a *constructionist* view, meaning is constructed in and through language. Michel Foucault (1972, 193) describes a discourse as a "way of speaking" which constitutes a network of rules establishing what is meaningful. Meanings may shift between different discourses and they may change within a certain discourse as well. Discourses are further relationally structured into *discursive formations* (Foucault 1970), which could be described as a number of (competing) discourses operating within the same conceptual terrain. These formations are created through *discursive practices*—culturally and historically specific sets of rules for organizing and structuring knowledge. For example, music education is a discursive formation comprised of discourses such as musical literacy, value of large ensemble performance, nurturing value of music, and the emerging discourse of informal learning of popular music. This discursive formation is created through practices such as classroom teaching, educational policies, student discussions, and research literature.

Foucault (1972) rejects the idea of language as constituted by the world, as a reflection of a pre-existing reality. Instead, he sees language as constitutive, which is to say it shapes how we see things. Discourses are thus "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (54). It is important to note that discourse is not equated with words, but refers to networks of meaning, structured by language. This means that non-verbal objects and acts—including for example music, gestures, and spatial arrangements—can be seen as discursive as well, by their being made meaningful only within such networks of meaning.[1] Along these lines, Judith Butler (1993) argues that not even one's sex, the being "female" or "male," stands outside discourse:

> [O]nce 'sex' itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. 'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility. (2)

Embodied experience—for example feelings of what seems "natural" to oneself in terms of conduct and postures—is thus seen as interwoven with the (discursive) norms that regulate femininities and masculinities. Accordingly, discourse makes "gendered sense" of bodies and actions.

POWER, RESISTANCE, FREEDOM

Among the various discourses surrounding us, certain ones have stronger authority than others. Foucault (1980) calls these systems *regimes of truth*, defining what may be said or thought in certain eras or cultures, and what is seen as true or false. This idea of knowledge as inextricably linked to power and discourse provides new perspectives for considering learning. For example, learning to play the electric guitar or learning how to play in a band—or, for that matter, learning music history or music theory in a conservatory context—are practices where participants must relate to the "truths" of how to do things and what is seen as significant.

Foucault (1977/1991) points out that power is still generally conceived of as *sovereign power*, which in previous societies functioned as an oppressive force from above, for example by the state or the king. He observes that "when one speaks of *power*, people immediately think of a political structure, a government, a dominant social class, the master and the slave, and so on" (1984/1997, 291).[2] In contrast, he argues that modern, *disciplinary power* is present in all human relations, a sort of energy flow in constant circulation in which we are all to some extent taking part, even in relation to ourselves: "I mean that in human relationships, whether they involve verbal communication . . . or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always present . . . these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all" (291–292). Foucault's attention is consequently turned *not* to the grand, overall strategies of power, but to the small, local level, what he calls the "micro-physics of power." Further, power is not necessarily seen as negative, but above all is productive: "it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault 1980, 119). Finally, power is seen as a relation, rather than an entity. This is to say, power is not something that can be possessed, but only executed. In music education, these ideas can be applied for example in terms of relations between master and apprentice, or between conductor and ensemble, where musical authority is enabled only by the relations involved, and where power can be seen as not just flowing "top–down," but may change direction. The ideas also enable a view of gender and popular music as a field of dynamic power relations.

Like his concept of power, Foucault's ideas of freedom and resistance demand a new and different way of thinking. While a common definition of freedom is usually the *absence*

of constraints or interference (AR 2009), Foucault instead conceptualizes both freedom and resistance as *immanent* to power relations; they are both necessary for power relations, and cannot exist outside such relations. He says that

> in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides. . . This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. . . I am sometimes asked: 'But if power is everywhere, there is no freedom.' I answer that if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere. (1984/1997, 292)

Foucault's concept of power, then, could be described as a "package deal," implying that *liberation*, in terms of moving outside power, is a utopian notion; furthermore, that resistance can never stand apart from that which is resisted. Following this line of thinking, in order to understand sex-based differentiation in popular music practices, we need to consider the power relations played out in those practices. Attempts to dissociate such relations, for example by bringing more women into popular music practices, necessarily involve both freedom and resistance.

SUBJECTIVITY , PERFORMATIVITY, NORMALIZATION

The use of popular music in everyday life is often associated with youth and self-identity (see e.g. DeNora 2000). In order to avoid associations to psychological notions of identity as inner, stable, and coherent, I choose to use the term *subjectivity*, connected to a notion of subject-becoming as an ongoing, fluid, and ambiguous process. The subject is here seen as involved in a dual structure; it is produced by culture, but also reproduces culture; it is produced within discourse and at the same time subjected to discourse (Butler 1997). Moreover, this is a conflicting and contradictory process, not the least with respect to gender:

> [T]he very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a sexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once. (Butler, 2006[1999], 199)

Butler claims that gender, and even sex, are enacted in our daily actions and in our lives in broad terms: that we "do" gender through words, gestures, movements, and styles. This is to say, gender is *performative*. Simply speaking, according to Butler, a feminine gesture does not reflect some inner feminine core, and can therefore not be seen as expressive of such a

perceived core or essence. Rather, it should be seen as productive, as it is that which *produces* femininity. Subjectivity thus cannot be revealed to show "what we really are." Although it appears to be stable and unitary, it is always fluid (Butler 1993), produced in a continuous and necessary process of negotiation and *becoming*, where the subject is interwoven in the many meanings and demands encountered through life. Butler's concept should not be confused with *performance*, where an actor can remove a mask and costume when offstage. Her notion of performativity instead disputes the very notion of an independent subject. When discussing popular music practices in terms of "freedom" or "constraint," this perspective of subjectivity troubles[3] both the idea of "free choice" and the idea of a coherent subject making that choice. But, as Butler (2006[1999], 201) points out, "Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible."

In order to be taken seriously within a certain community or society, a subject needs to fulfill certain conditions. Along with statements, this includes gestures, behavior, rituals; a whole range of signs (Foucault 1970/1981). These conditions constitute *norms* for human behavior, for what and who is to be seen as normal or deviant. Foucault calls these procedures *normalization*. He argues that each discourse offers only certain available positions for the subject (Foucault 1982). These *subject-positions* represent a distribution of the "places" from where a subject may speak.

Looking at normalization in terms of gender, certain sexual relations, desires, movement patterns, and discourses become more eligible, privileged, significant, and comprehensible than others. Those who trespass such gender norms are not only perceived as provocative but they are so because they are perceived as *unintelligible*. Butler (2006[1999]) conceptualizes this as a *heterosexual matrix*, which can be described as a framework, screen, or grid making sense of gender. It is a model of "gender clarity" with the prerequisite that culturally intelligible bodies are based on stable and binary genders, where masculine expresses male, and feminine expresses female. In Foucauldian terminology, the heterosexual matrix may accordingly be seen as a regime of truth about sex/gender, where the "truths" conveyed are that women and men are fundamentally different, where one sex (male) is given a dominant position over the other (female), and that relations between men and women are based on heterosexual desire.

In sum, agency and "choice" are in this line of thinking pictured as bound up with imagination and desire, taking place in a sphere of competing, contradictive and fragmented subjectivities calling us, some more recognizable and available than others. To put this thinking to work in music education research means to examine how "doing musician-ness" intersects with "doing gender," and how these doings affect how learning might take place.

Summary and Relevance

I link this theoretical framework to issues of gender in popular music practices in the following ways. First, the framework inevitably gives discourse a central role in research, as it is seen as the site where meanings are produced, maintained, and/or subverted. Examining discourse not only gives an insight to how certain issues are "talked about," but provides the means for understanding the different and competing logics that constitute the base for knowledge formation in a certain field or discipline. A careful reading of discourse on popular music and gender can thus reveal and clarify how these things are understood.

Second, the framework provides a view of power, resistance, and freedom as fluid and always already present in all human relations, challenging notions of freedom as unproblematic and self-evident. If we think of resistance as necessarily performed *inside* power relations, rather than produced independently from that which is resisted, it follows that resistance against gender norms in popular music is to some extent embedded in those very norms, taking place within what Butler calls a heterosexual matrix.

Third, the concept of normalization directs attention to how discourse on popular music and gender shapes possibilities and limits for the subject: who can become a popular musician? These limits are not found solely in oppression from above, but are also produced by the self in the process of becoming an intelligible subject. The concept of performativity provides ways of understanding how actions involved with a certain musical practice, such as band-playing, can produce feelings of bodily "unnaturalness" when different subject-positions contradict each other.

What this framework offers is, above all, a shift of focus. It entails searching for what is multi-faceted, dispersed, contradictory, and ambiguous, instead of homogenous and consistent. It entails viewing human actions as performative and producing something, instead of viewing them as expressing something (an inner core, identity, ability, for example). This in turn shifts the focus towards the action that is performed, rather than the

acting individual. It is also a shift regarding the idea of the researcher. Rather than discovering the truth (or at least getting one step closer to it), the role of the researcher is to investigate how truths are made to work and how they may be challenged. This enables a shift of focus for music teachers as well as researchers, from thinking about gender in terms of "how girls and boys are," "how women and men learn," to instead look at how writing and teaching practices are shaped by dominant and/or competing assumptions of gender and musical learning.

Research on Popular Music and Gender

Having outlined a theoretical framework for considering gender issues in popular music practice, I now use that framework to look at how previous research relates band-playing and music-making to issues of freedom. The selection of literature leaves out a number of relevant texts; my intention, however, is not to examine certain authors, nor to present some evidence of how certain musical practices "are." Rather, the aim is to examine discourse, the logic it is built on, and the effects of what is articulated.

POPULAR MUSIC PRACTICES AS FREEDOM, AUTONOMY, AND OWNERSHIP

Stith Bennett (1980, 3) finds that "[w]hile elite musicians are required to train and pass tests, the status passage to *rock musician* is easy—anyone who can manage to play in a rock group can claim the identity." This illustrates how band-playing and popular music can be conflated with notions of freedom. Popular music-making is, in academic research as well as in folk theory, generally associated with informality and leisure time, but also with youth, rebellion, the shaping of identities, and freedom of expression. An early example of this is a study by Howard Becker (1966) of "dance musicians" in the 1940s U.S. The musicians are described as torn between on the one hand, employers' demands to play certain entertainment music, and on the other, their preference for other forms of jazz. Becker describes the profession of dance musician as "deviant," with an ethos fostering a disregard for the rules of society in general through a desire for freedom from outside interference. Trine Annfelt (2003) notes that similar issues are articulated in contemporary jazz discourse. In the accounts of Norweigan jazz musicians, as well as in texts by jazz scholars and critics, she finds that the jazz musician is often described as an independent musical rebel, located in the margins of

society, but free. Jazz improvisation is furthermore depicted as a risky business demanding a strong psyche and a fighting spirit.

The theme of resistance to control is also taken up in a very different context by Johan Fornäs, Ulf Lindberg, and Ove Sernhede (1995) in a study of learning processes in rock bands. These processes are described as *voluntary* and *informal*, as opposed to compulsory schooling, and as *open*, in the sense of being largely without fixed learning goals. In the study, three young Swedish rock bands were followed during the course of a year. Band-playing is described as a *free-zone*, an activity in most cases located outside adult-supervised institutions and thus functioning as a *collective autonomy*. Fornäs et al. argue that formal education should not interfere with, but rather leave alone, the expressions of young people's "own" music. This conception of "one's own" comes back in a number of studies. For example, Ruth Finnegan (1989) found that local rock and pop players in an English town stressed the importance of individuality and artistic creation, especially through composing their own music. In this way, "playing in a band provided a medium where players could express their own personal aesthetic vision and through their music achieve a sense of controlling their own values, destiny and self-identity" (130). Claes Ericsson (2007), drawing on data from group interviews with Swedish eighth and ninth grade students, found the adolescents defined motivation and interest as conditions for learning music, and that these aspects were made meaningful in relation to *identity* (to find a music "to call one's own")[4] and to *autonomy* (to understand oneself as in power regarding artistic expression). All these studies stress the importance of autonomy, being in charge, and finding "one's own" music when it comes to learning and making popular music. Ultimately, such arguments bring up questions of power and *ownership*: who "owns" a piece of music or a musical learning process, and to what degree is such ownership possible?

The notion of "one's own" is problematic in several ways. First, when it is linked to *individuality*, collective aspects are easily obscured. This happens for example if the "one"—the perceived individual subject—is implicitly assumed to be male. Second, if it is attached to *a group*, for example by referring to "young people's own music," it obscures both individual and cultural variation within that group. Eva Georgii-Hemming and Maria Westvall (2010) find,

> One objective with an informal pedagogical approach is to emphasise the individual student's personal experiences and his/her freedom to choose. Although Swedish

> music teachers' general intention is to take account of the students' 'own' music, studies have shown that this purpose is not fulfilled since not all students' musical life worlds are represented. (22)

Instead, a certain canon of pop and rock music dominate music teaching in Sweden, while Western art music, jazz, folk music or music from other cultures are only marginally integrated into the teaching, leading the authors to question whether this pedagogical strategy is, in fact, leading to participation, inclusion, and emancipation. This question reveals a mismatch between pluralistic individuality, an idea so central in contemporary Western society, and the collective conformity that might appear in music education practice.

Third, the notion of ownership is problematic when it is linked to concepts like "personal taste," as it may evoke an image of subjectivity as fixed identity rather than a fluid process of becoming. Georgii-Hemming and Westvall observe, "It seems that the primary goal is for every student to be offered the opportunity to discover his/her own musical preferences rather than widening their knowledge about different forms of music and different ways of engaging with music" (25). I note that this idea of music and personal taste aligns with contemporary popular psychology discourse, urging individuals to "find themselves." Such requests draw on the idea of an inner pre-existing core, which appears as "personal," but in effect does not stand free from normative expectations.

In sum, the linkage between popular music-making and notions of freedom, autonomy, and ownership is articulated in relation to very different genres and contexts. Through such linkages, popular music-making is portrayed as a way to escape the demands of mainstream society. In some respects, schools can be seen as representing these very demands, and in formal education contexts, freedom appears as more easily linked to "personal taste" rather than to rebellion and marginality. In the popular music classroom, this freedom might however in effect be standardizing, guided by certain assumptions of what "young people" prefer and who belongs to this group.

POPULAR MUSIC PRACTICE AS THREAT AND CONSTRAINT

So what happens with the discourse of freedom when the focus is turned to women in popular music practices? To what extent are women included in the "one" of "one's own" in such practices? Analyses of female pop and rock stars' performance on stage or on screen, for example that of Madonna (McClary 1991) and Patti Smith (Whiteley 2006), often evoke a

sense of freedom by emphasizing popular music as an arena for toying with gendered identities. However, accounts of everyday popular music-making in rehearsal studios or classrooms seldom refer to women and girls as "autonomous" or "free," but they rather are linked to expressions like "lack," "threat," "risk," "fear," and "exclusion" (Bayton 1998, Clawson 1999, Cohen 1991, Green 1997). Instead of being depicted as doing their "own" thing, playing in a band here seems like endlessly striving to conquer someone else's territory. In the context of rock bands, Mavis Bayton (1998) explains the lack of female instrumentalists in terms of social "constraining factors." Bayton divides these constraints into "material" (such as lack of money, lack of access to equipment and transport, and lack of time) and "ideological."[5] Ideological constraints are, according to Bayton, primarily constituted by hegemonic masculinity of rock music-making—the perceived masculinity of the musical discourse itself and that embedded within rock instruments and associated technology—but also by a femininity "which encourages young women to spend a lot of time on the physical presentation of self and the pursuit of the boyfriend" (Bayton 1998, 188). Green, discussing how musical meanings may "affirm" or "interrupt" femininity and masculinity, makes a similar argument about popular music in broad terms. She points out a conjunction of sexual display and loss of musical value for the woman instrumentalist: the more overt and affirmative her bodily display, the more she signifies a lack of commitment to the music itself as an art form, "the less likely she is to be regarded as a serious musician, and the less seriously her music itself will be taken" (Green 1997, 81). Bayton, like Green, talks about the risk of not being taken seriously, but defines this risk as triggered by the mere fact of being female: "The status 'woman' seems to obscure that of 'musician'" (Bayton 1998, 195). This may be referred to as contradictory subject-positions, entailing one's having to choose between being a "real musician" or a "real woman."[6] One may navigate between the two, but they are not compatible, according to Bayton and Green.

Bayton points out that as a result of this incompatibility, female rock musicians face a double rebellion. If rock music signifies rebellion against authority, for girls it also entails rebellion against gender norms—at least as regards playing instruments. In the popular music classroom, Green says, the act of *singing* may offer girls opportunities to resist conformity to school norms, while it still affirms patriarchal constructions of femininity. In contrast, Green finds that "performance of popular music involving drums, electronic instruments and other

technology is interruptive to femininity, and provides a space into which masculinity can enter" (Green 1997, 192).

This could be discussed in terms of exclusion and oppression, but the concept of the heterosexual matrix gives another dimension to such discussions: if band-playing is interrupting femininity, if it is to be seen as a performativity which produces masculinity (getting dirty finger nails, spreading legs, being loud, manipulating technology, for instance), then the woman playing popular music is an unintelligible one, one who we may only "read" if we redress the balance of the matrix by making her a sexual object. Again, enactment and specific meanings of gender vary between different genres and contexts.

Popular Music Practices as Male Free-Zones

So far, I have shown how the notion of "freedom" in popular music-making is on the one hand portrayed as significant in such practices "in general" (and note that the "general" popular musician is male); on the other hand, it is conceived as problematic for female musicians, who do not seem to be self-evidently included in the ownership and autonomy associated with such practices.

If we go back to the characterization of popular music practices as "free," we find that they are not only depicted as a space free from authority or adult supervision, but also as a refuge from females and/or femininity. The bands in Fornäs et al.'s (1995) study are said to represent a type of male *free-zone*,[7] in which the uncomplicated single-sex male conviviality is idealized. This expresses, according to the authors, "a need to test and experiment with one's own masculinity in peace" (204). To one of the bands in their study, girls in general represented a threat to the joint project, since the male members believed romantic relations would entail a decline in the group's musical priorities. Moreover, "taking a girl into the band would seem inconceivable as it could create rivalry and break up the band. Only as an audience do girls fill an important role: their response confirms sexual identity" (195). Again, this is possible to discuss in relationship to the heterosexual matrix, where women are intelligible only as different to men. Sarah Cohen (1991) found that in local rock culture in Liverpool, women were not only virtually absent from the practice of popular music-making, but they were *actively* excluded, as they were often viewed as threats to the male loyalty within the groups. Two things, women and money, were seen as enticing objects of desire but also as common reasons for groups to split up. In Becker's (1966) study of dance/jazz

musicians, the resisted "outside interference" was represented by employers, audience—and family/wives.

It occurs to me that perhaps it is not freedom from members of the female sex *per se* which is desired in these cultures, but a freedom from the heterosexual family project and the restrictions that it may pose on one's agency. Typically, women have been seen as the holders of such demands through their expected roles as caretakers, whereby they become representatives of family ties. However, as I discuss below, the family project, or heterosexual relations in general, may be viewed as a threat or obstacle to a musical career not only by male musicians but by female musicians as well.

Popular Music Practices and the Heterosexual Matrix

Bayton's (1998) study is rich in its descriptions of the various obstacles facing a female popular musician—or, in Foucauldian terminology, of the local micro-physics of power. Bayton brings up various ways in which relationships and creating a family systematically constitute barriers. At younger ages, this happens when girls prioritize the search for a boyfriend instead of playing in a band (in line with what Bayton calls hegemonic femininity). When marrying, Bayton argues, women are expected to give up their careers and their interests to support those of their men—which may be problematic in any type of career but particularly so for a free-lance musician, as the profession demands "total dedication" of time and energy. When babies are in the picture, even less time and energy is available for the female musician, as domestic work and childcare are usually expected to take more of her time than the father's time. Bringing babies to work, or the mere fact of having children, divert women from concentrating. In addition, breast-feeding and diapers do not go well with the heroic rock image. Moreover, I would add, they clash with images of music-making as a "free" and autonomous creative enterprise more generally.

We may assume that any relation can produce restrictions in the form of obligations and expectations to fulfill, which could compete with the pursuit of a musical career. Through heteronormativity, these obligations and expectations are tightly related to a matrix where male and female are seen as necessarily different. I propose that the "freedom" from norms and restrictions associated with popular music may partly, for both female and male musicians, be a desire for freedom from the heterosexual matrix. In the literature, men's

resistance against the heterosexual family project is mainly associated with freedom or deviance, whereas women's resistance is mainly associated with struggle and constraints.

Some factors may disrupt the stability of the heterosexual family project; one of these is war. Sherrie Tucker (2000) describes how American "all-girl" bands during World War II provided mobility and the chance to flee from housewifery and limited career choices. In contemporary society, all-female environments are also associated with freedom, which I discuss in the next section.

Popular Music Practices as Male-Free Zones

We have seen that popular music practices are sometimes described as male free-zones. However, the image may be reversed and band-playing may be depicted as offering autonomy and freedom not *from* but *for* women, by providing *male-free* zones rather than male *free-zones* (note the placement of italics and hyphen). Green (1997) finds that some girls express resistance against playing certain instruments in front of boys. The question of single-sex teaching is, according to Green, most relevant in situations where learners work together towards a performance, a group composition or an improvisation. When learners are required to perform in front of each other, she argues, the gendered meaning of music is especially strong as a result of the enactment of display. Green suggests that the

> aspects of musical meaning that are interruptive and threatening for femininity . . . are strengthened by the physical presence of males as onlookers to the display of the female musical performer. For these reasons, all-girl groups present distinct advantages as learning environments in which the sexual risk of female display and the interruption and threat to femininity caused by masculine delineations can be reduced. (Green 1997, 248)

The presence of a "male gaze"[8] is here seen as increasing the pressure on girls to perform normative femininity correctly, whereas an all-female environment would reduce that imperative. The conceptualization of the all-female context as a safe space is also found when Bayton (1998) discusses "women's music projects" providing a safe atmosphere for young women in which girls can learn traditionally "masculine" instruments and sound engineering, thereby offering possible escapes from exclusion by male music-making peers. In an all-female environment, Bayton says, girls have more of a chance to express themselves and to engage in learning processes without having to fear being ridiculed by boys or competing with them for time and attention. Women's music projects can provide "some male-free,

protected spaces (in schools, community centres, youth clubs, and so forth) in which young women can be supported in learning to play" (Bayton 1998, 191).

Collective movements, such as the punk movement of the 1970s and the *Riot Grrrl* movement of the 1990s, have gained some attention in research (Gottlieb and Wald 2006, Kearney 1997, Leblanc 1999) for challenging male norms in popular culture. Leonard (2007) describes how the *Riot Grrrl* and *Ladyfest* movements managed to open new spaces for female participation in performance and communication, but also how calls for unity resulted in some women feeling on the margins because they sensed they did not fit in. She also describes how the expression *girl power* was emptied from its potentially radical connotations into a "marketable media soundbite" as it became synonymous with the pop music group, the Spice Girls. I find Leonard's study to be an example of how different discourses compete for the preferential right of interpretation to a concept or a category ("girls"). It also highlights the double-sided aspect of representation: that joint identities through naming and claiming the category or subject-position "girl" may be empowering and uniting, but may also have normalizing functions. The call for common ground, evoked by resistance to a male norm, constructs a fixed female subject—a new norm which, in turn, may evoke new resistance.

Conclusion

Gendered ideas about freedom, autonomy, and ownership are not unique for popular music, but appear elsewhere as well, for example in the discourse of the composer as genius, or in the concerns of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra that women's inclusion might compromise musical integrity. However, in popular music, the notion of freedom seems to take on a specific meaning through connotations with leisure time, informality, and counter-culture.

Freedom, autonomy, and ownership are concepts central to humanist liberalism and liberal individualism. These concepts are closely linked to each other and to concepts of self, power, and governance, and they have been described as some of the most controversial and least agreed-upon concepts (AR 2009). The (seemingly gender-neutral) discourse on popular music practice as "freedom" hence draws on broader liberalist discourse, communicating that if the subject has a desire to acquire popular music knowledge, there is freedom to pursue that desire. The "constraints" discourse, drawing on broader structuralist discourse, challenges

that notion by claiming that for women, the acquisition of popular music knowledge is a difficult journey full of obstacles. Structuralist discourse is also evident in some of the texts on ”general” (i.e., male) popular music practice. For example in Fornäs et al.’s study, rock music is presented as *offering* freedom by being a *means* in the struggle against authority. However, both liberalism and structuralism begin from the idea of an autonomous humanist subject. In the freedom discourse, that subject is already free to choose, act upon, and own music; in the constraints discourse, the subject first needs to be liberated, but beyond the obstacles there is freedom. The two discourses are hence politically opposed, but philosophically related.

Furthermore, from a perspective of performativity, both discourses *do* something by linking together certain concepts and ideas. The freedom discourse puts the entire responsibility on the subject and disregards the significance of power, (gendered) norms, and self-regulation. It could be argued that the “freedom” discourse is premised on the idea of the subject’s performativity. However, this discourse fails to acknowledge that performance must be intelligible and that there is limited possibility for action outside of “meanings already socially established” (Butler 2006[1999], 191). The constraints discourse may be seen as a *counter-discourse* (Foucault 1977), producing resistance to the freedom discourse, making the latter *visible as discourse* by questioning its assumptions and raising issues of inclusion and exclusion. The constraints discourse thereby demonstrates deconstructive[9] potential. But the constraints discourse also risks placing girls and women in a victim position by the linkage to concepts like “lack,” “threat,” “risk,” “fear,” and “exclusion.” Bayton (2000) denies such conclusions:

> This does not mean that women are simply ‘victims’ or passive in the face of this oppression because the very shared knowledge of that oppression can be, and often is, the source of empowerment and change: there is both ‘agency’ and ‘structure’. (161)

Still, the risk of alignment with a “deficit discourse” is close at hand.

While concepts such as *autonomy* and *ownership* are, in previous research, mainly constructed as resistance to, or dissociation from, authoritative supervision and control (for example by adults or employers), the concepts of *space* or *free-zone* are contrasted both against the adult/authoritative and the feminine—or, alternatively, against masculine dominance. However, the concepts are used with various meanings: as space for experimentation, protection, expression, or empowering communication. Notions of free-

zones, escapes, and autonomous spaces furthermore align with the traditional notion of *sovereign power* as oppression from above. This line of thinking implies that once the assumed authority is (temporarily) absent, so are the restrictions. In this view, if women represent control in terms of family ties and heterosexual demands, the absence of women (e.g. in an all-male band) grant freedom from such ties; and conversely, if men represent some kind of objectifying "gaze" or control over women, an all-female environment would be void of that objectifying power. In contrast, the theoretical perspective presented here disturbs these assumptions. If subjectivity is performative, producing a sense of "what I am" through subjection to gendered norms, it entails that an all-female environment, for example, does *not* simply free girls and women from normative pressures. However, I am not implying that all-female environments function exactly the same way as mixed or all-male environments. Here, Green's (1997, 248) statement that an all-girl group can *reduce* the pressure provides nuance.

The opposition between the two discourses of freedom and constraint is illustrated most clearly by the two statements about the subject-position "rock musician," where one asserts that "anyone who can manage to play in a rock group can claim the identity" (Bennett 1980, 3), while the other claims that "[t]he status 'woman' seems to obscure that of 'musician'" (Bayton 1998, 195). While the first quote presents the subject-position as fully available for anyone who cares to grab it, the second presents it as contradictory for women, thereby exposing the genderedness of "anyone" and adding complexity to what it means to "manage to play in a rock group." Bennett further notes, "it should be understood that the learning processes which I delineate take place *after* a person has initiated a self-definition by becoming a member of a rock group" (Bennett 1980, 4).[10] If self-definition, in this case as rock musician, is to be seen as the starting point of popular music learning processes, and if that subject-position is continuously marked as incompatible with femininity, this constitutes a crucial point of consideration for understanding sex-based imbalances in popular music practices, in and out of school.

As demonstrated, concepts of freedom and constraint in relation to popular music-making are in no way unproblematic, and I suggest they should be scrutinized. The romantic notion of freedom is a strong one, and it needs to be "troubled." I argue that discussions on gender and popular music would benefit from the theoretical framework presented in this article. Viewing power, resistance, and freedom as co-existing only in relation to each other

offers a conceptual framework different from both liberalist and structuralist ideas. This would add useful complexity to conceptualizing the problems of gender and popular music, which so clearly relate to both subjectivity and social change. From this perspective, popular music practices, like any other practices, are exclusionary and regulated by norms. Consequently, popular music-making may function as empowering but also as disempowering, and transgressive and transformative processes should be seen as constituted not by freedom *or* constraint respectively, but by both.

There are recent studies of gender and popular music where such a perspective is deployed (Abramo 2009, Annfelt 2003, Ceraso 2006, Dibben 2002, Lorentzen 2009, Schippers 2002). In these, the performance of gender—in various ways and in different genres—is highlighted as a form of "maneuvering" (Schippers 2002) providing "strategic means for mobility" (Ceraso 2006), but always taking place inside power relations. I propose that music educators and researchers could benefit from these ideas in examining the possibilities and limitations popular music may offer in terms of gender, to start raising questions about social justice: For *whom* is popular music-making perceived as liberatory or empowering, and in what ways? What femininities *and* masculinities are excluded or silenced? Are there ways to open up the possibilities for potential subject-positions and thereby expand the field to accessible musical knowledge? Can music education broaden the limits for "one's own?"

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Notes

[1] Although Foucault claims that nothing has any meaning outside of discourse, there are some texts where he talks about non-discursive practices, but he also states he does not believe it is important to make that distinction (Foucault, 1980).
[2] Original emphasis.
[3] To ”trouble” an assumption here means to problematize, disturb, and thereby destabilize it. For an exposition of the concept, used in this sense, see the 1990 preface to Butler (2006[1999]).
[4] Ericsson compares these findings to Theodor Adorno’s (1941/2002) claim that popular music listeners tend to speak of music as if it were a property.
[5] Bayton asserts her division of constraints into material and ideological is “merely an analytical distinction and the dimensions are inevitably interrelated” (188). Nevertheless, such division is problematic in that it conveys a dualism between material as associated with “real” or “body,” and ideological as associated with “mental” or “mind”.
[6] In sociology, this phenomenon is referred to as a *master trait*. A master trait “tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it” (Hughes, 1993, 147).
[7] In the English translation, the expression *male enclaves* is used.
[8] See Laura Mulvey’s (1975) exposition of cinematic objectification of women as viewed by a ”male gaze.”
[9] Deconstruction is a mode of analytical inquiry associated with Jacques Derrida. It denotes an approach for examining and “undoing” the meaning of a text or a discourse, emphasizing its inconsistencies, contradictions and unspoken assumptions.
[10] Original emphasis.

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