

## A HANDBOOK OF

# **EMPOWERMENT**

When working with young women & non-binary people





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## **INTRODUCTION**

The material in this handbook draws knowledge from gender equality projects throughout Denmark, Norway and Sweden using JM Norway's project elektroLOUD and Fryshuset's United Sisters as a starting point. In the part called *Examples from the real world* you find useful input from Danish Misfitz and Another Life.

All in all this is a handbook of theoretical approaches, own experiences, statistics, pedagogical guidelines and tips and tricks on how to utilize these tools in day-to-day work for a more inclusive music industry and society.

Note! The material in the Handbook of Empowerment is very useful when working with all groups in society, regardless of age, gender etc.



### BACKGROUND GENDER NORMS IN MUSIC

**Of the 800 most played songs** between 2012-2019, only 2,6 % had female producers, 12,5 % of the songwriters were female, and 21,7 % of the artists were women (Smith et al. 2020: 1-3). Most key gatekeeper-positions in labels, festivals and cultural organizations are also held by men. If we try to look beyond the gender binary, the numbers are hard to find. This might mean that non-binary and trans producers, songwriters and artists are even less represented. We believe that these power structures will keep reinforcing themselves if we do not act.

These numbers give us an idea of the gender norms existing in the music industry today. It also shows that surveys/analysis/statistics have struggled - if even so - with creating nuanced data if they have i.g. only asked their respondents about binary genders.

If you think back on your own childhood, who were your role models? Who did you look up to? Probably someone you could identify with. If you never see or hear about any female producers, how would you, as a young girl, imagine a life as one? Again; if you are a trans or non-binary youth, finding role models to look up to within the music industry is even more difficult. With this in mind, we believe a norm critical approach to our work is meaningful in order to promote agency and empowerment for young girls, trans and non-binary youth. This handbook aims at presenting some ways in which we can promote empowerment, and recruit even more young girls, trans and non-binary youth to the music production scene.



## **EMPOWERMENT**

BACKGROUND

**Empowerment is a term** likely coined by the civil rights movements in the US in the 60s. It has later been used by the feminist movement. This is as shown a term often used by various oppressed groups. Empowerment explains a person's ability to gain control over decisions and actions in their life. A person's ability to do this is of course dependent on many different factors. It is therefore important to see empowerment-focused work through an intersectional lens.

Intersectionality: a term that explains how different social categories such as skin colour, gender, ethnicity, ability, economy, religion, class and sexual orientation work together, and determine and influence a person's life, opportunities and abilities.

This means understanding all the different factors that influence and determine a person's ability to gain control over decisions and actions in their life. An example is that the things needed for a BiPoc woman (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) and a white woman to feel empowered might not be the same. The way a person experiences empowerment is also of course very personal, and difficult to determine only in terms of social categories.

## How do you work with intersectionality? How do you make sure that you don't overlook some of these social identity categories in your own work?

When we talk about empowerment in this specific context, it can be seen as the ability to decide to be a producer, or create your own music. Also the ways in which creating music and expressing yourself can enable a feeling of empowerment. Through the guidelines presented in this book, we hope you will be able to create a safe space where all participants can feel empowered, regardless of musical background and previous experiences. As we wrote in the beginning, we believe that a norm critical approach to our work is important to achieve this.



## NORM CRITIQUE

Close your eyes for a second. Imagine a car mechanic.

What does the car mechanic look like? Sound like? How do you behave towards them? Your expectations of a car mechanic are based on the norms in the society where you live. Norms, expectations and prejudice are tightly knit together. Why did the mechanic look like they did? Why did you imagine that exact person? How would you react towards a car mechanic who looked completely different?

#### NORMS SANCTIONS AND PRIVILEGES

**Norms** are unwritten rules and expectations that regulate small and big communities or societies. They are man-made and change over time and space. Some norms are positive because they regulate how we function as a society. Some are not positive, because they lead to discrimination and harassment. An example of a positive norm is waiting in line. You have probably experienced waiting in line, but maybe never thought of it as exercising a norm? In this example, not following the norm and sneaking in line, might result in stares or annoyed comments. These are examples of sanctions.

**Sanctions** are punishments or reactions to not following a law or rule. Regarding the law, normal sanctions are fines or prison time. When sanctioning people breaking a norm, we use other means of punishment. Like in the example with the line. Sanctions are comments or stares. In other cases, sanctions may be more consequential and dangerous. One example of this is breaking the norm that everyone is straight (the heteronorm). Sanctions to breaking this norm can be harassment, discrimination, and even violence. Maybe you have never thought of being straight as following a norm? That is because the more established a norm is, the more invisible it becomes. Also, if you follow the norm, you are not punished with sanctions. Instead, you are rewarded with privileges.



## NORM CRITIQUE

NORMS SANCTIONS AND PRIVILEGES

**Privileges** are advantages only given to some people or groups of people. To be a given part of the group that follows the strongest (and most invisible) norms, gives privileges. Even though you might not be aware that you are exercising norms at all. Privileges are sort of like a membership card to the more powerful parts of society. It gives you access to more opportunities, rights, and power, and can present itself in various forms. From money or education, to never having to feel left out or discriminated against, having parents that can help you with your homework, or being able to marry who you want, and the intersections between these.

Norms are often disguised with arguments such as "this is the way it has always been" or "this is just the way it is done".

#### When something "just is", it is a sign that a norm has been established and become a part of reality.

Because many norms are invisible, we are often not that aware of the extra rights, advantages and power that comes from following the norm. But norms are not set in stone. We have different norms at work than we do at home. Different social groups also have their own norms. A hundred years ago there were different norms, and other things that were considered acceptable and unacceptable.

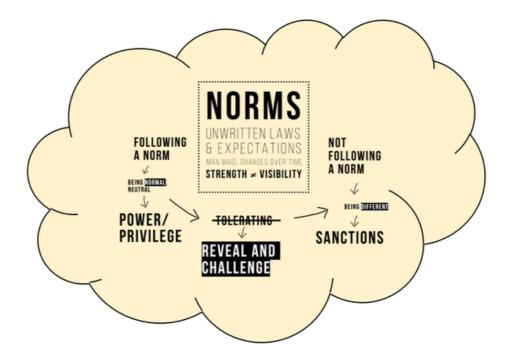
Luckily norms change over time and space, which means that it is possible to change norms that are suppressing/harmful.



## NORM CRITIQUE

#### NORM CRITIQUE AND TOLERENCE

**Tolerance** might sound like a nice word. But have you ever tolerated someone? Or been tolerated? Imagine if you had a friend who got a new haircut. You approach your friend, look them in the eyes and say that you tolerate that they wear their hair in their very own style. Without anyone asking your opinion. What message are you sending to your friend? What does it mean that you are able to approve your friend's choice of hairstyle?



By tolerating norm breaking or normbreakers, we are reinforcing the power structures that create privilege and sanctions. In doing so, we also decrease the norm breaker's power. Instead of encouraging tolerance, we want to create a space where both norms, and the privileges that come with them, are revealed, and challenged.

Through this awareness we are hoping to avoid reproducing prejudice or creating victims. Instead, we place the responsibility of revealing the norm with the privileged. In the music industry we can easily see that CIS-men are privileged by looking at festival bookings and number of CIS-male producers.



In this section we will present some pedagogical guidelines that have proven important and useful in projects targeting girls, trans and non-binary youth. These have been developed through almost ten years of music projects and have also been used specifically in working in the music production project elektroLOUD. With input from other projects around the world and experiences from a decade of camps we have translated our norm critical approach into some core pedagogic principles.

The goal when using these guidelines is to create safer spaces where participants can explore and express themselves. We want to establish a space where it is easier for participants to be themselves and get the opportunity to challenge norms on their own terms. This is also a way of increasing empowerment and agency within the participants.



SAFETY

It is important to feel safe to be able to try new things, get to know new people, and be yourself. When we are safe, it is easier to challenge ourselves, express our opinions and needs. At LOUD we work to create an environment where participants are safe enough to challenge themselves, and the norms they face in society.

Safety can be described as the opportunity to: -Express one's needs, meanings, and feelings -Participate, on one's own terms -Be met with respect, and show respect towards others -Feel that your surroundings wish you well

Feeling safe means different things for different people. It's important to know that you can't make everyone feel safe at the same time. Nonetheless, we think everyone should aim for a safer space for all participants. It is important to try to create safety for participants who experience microaggressions\* and stress outside of the current context.





COMPRESS

SAFETY

For those of us who are trans and non-binary, being addressed with the right pronoun is important to feel safe. Pronoun-rounds are a good way to avoid misgendering. Pronounrounds are rounds where we're able to express our preferred pronoun. It can be he, she, they, your name or something else.

When working with music production there are some specific things that can be important to keep in mind, to make the workshop a safer space:

#### ★ Avoid overly complicated explanations of terms

It might be very natural and tempting for someone who has worked with music production for many years to use the "right term" for every function in i.e. Logic or Ableton. Keep in mind that this might make participants feel unsafe, because they do not know the terms you are using. If you feel something is essential for participants to learn; take your time to explain it, and make sure everyone understands what you mean.

Another good idea is to minimize and simplify things. If this is someone's first time hearing of the term equalizer, you might not need to go through the history of the equalizer, all the different types and 50 different examples where they use EQ in a specific way for participants to be able to use EQ in their song. Keep it simple! Just the bare minimum of information needed to produce sound.



SAFETY

#### ★ Language alert!

Another way to avoid people not understanding specific words is to ask one of the participants to be the "language alert" and alert the workshop leader if they use a word that needs explanation. If none of the participants wants to be the language alert, a workshop assistant or volunteer is a good second option.

#### ★ Parking lots for enthusiasts

In a group of participants, you might have someone who has worked more with music production than others. They might raise their hand and ask difficult, or very specific questions. Their engagement is great, but it might make other participants feel like this is something they should know. By saying: "That is a very interesting thing you're asking. When we're done with this, I'll come over to you and we can talk more about it".

Park the thorough detailing before other participants get anxious or feel like this is something they should know. At the same time, acknowledge that the enthusiastic participant's interest in music production is a good thing.

#### ★ Check-ins

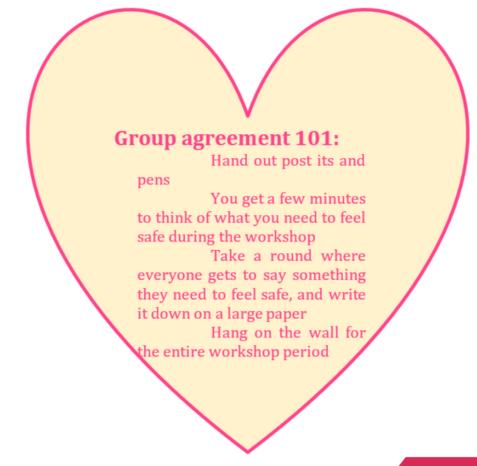
After you have explained a specific thing, for example how to create a bass line. Walk around to all the participants in the group and check in, did they understand what you just said? This is important for participants to feel safe enough to ask questions, and to feel seen and that they are following the program.



#### D.I.T - Do It Together

**D.I.T. is short for "do it together".** The term is inspired by D.I.Y. "do it yourself", a term historically used by punk musicians, and non-commercial artists. D.I.Y. refers to doing things independently, without the support or expertise of professionals. Producing music, distributing music, making fanzines and so on. The term incorporates a norm critical attitude towards quality: not only can you create something without being a professional, but you are just as equipped to judge the quality of what you produce.

In this context D.I.T. means that we have the ability and freedom to create something together that we might not have been able to do on our own. In regard to music production, Do It Together also involves creating a network of female, trans and non-binary producers and electronic musicians. Team building activities and icebreakers are very important to make participants feel like they are part of a network and a community. We always make a group agreement with the entire group.





#### DIT - Do It Together

**Lightning Rounds** are another way to increase a sense of community, and practice cheering for each other. The way to do a lightning round is to get one at a time to show where they are in the process to the entire group. Then, the other participants give positive feedback in a lightning round. One word is enough, but everyone should say at least one positive thing to everyone. Many might be hesitant to show what they've done. Some friendly pushing is important - everyone should show at least something. It can be 10 seconds, or the entire song. Emphasize the fact that this is a process, and no one is done.

As leaders it is important to give participants the power to define what "good" music is. When we give feedback, it should be focused on intention and efforts, instead of end result or talent. We need to be norm critical in regard to what constitutes "good" music.





#### THE BUMBLE BEE EFFECT

**The bumble bee** has such small wings that it shouldn't be able to fly. But because it doesn't know that it flies anyway. If we believe in ourselves, we can make things happen. Don't stop and think, just try - maybe you can do it.

Considering norm critical pedagogy, this approach also means that leaders should not let established structures and expectations control what is considered possible. When leaders motivate, highlight possibilities, and the value of trying, we believe everyone will be able to fly. Simplifying the way we talk about music production and cut back on the time from learning something to producing music is a way of enabling this.

#### ROLE MODELS

**Many of us were lacking good role models** growing up. We did not see many instrumentalists that were not CIS-men. This influenced our dreams and expectations. We want to show youth what we did not see, by highlighting good role models. Highlighting good role models can be done in many ways. First, through workshop holders and volunteers. All adults at the workshop are role models. The attitudes and behaviours we demonstrate in all situations communicate what we value as a community. We must demonstrate those values clearly by being willing to try something new, make mistakes, be inclusive, challenge norms and be conscious of our own privileges.

Highlighting different types of women and underrepresented genders can be done in everything from the music examples we choose, in our promomaterial, our websites and so on. Maybe some very popular songs at the moment has a female or non-binary producer? Tell the participants this!



**PROCESS FOCUS** 

We strive to focus on the process rather than the end results. To work strictly towards a concrete end goal can be overwhelming and demotivating. It is therefore helpful to divide the process into many small steps, to facilitate a sense of accomplishment at many points along the way. This gives participants space to test their own ideas without letting concerns about the result restrain them, and it gives the space to take on small manageable challenges, rather than a huge task.

If I told you to write a song right now you might hesitate, but if I asked you to write two lines about your favorite weekend activity it might be more manageable? In the next step you might add two more lines, and after that perhaps a couple of chords? By building the process step by step like a little staircase, the participant reaches their goal without realizing it might be a little climb. Suddenly, they're on stage, and have totally forgotten the pressure and expectations connected to performing. At elektroLOUD the entire songwriting and producing is built up in this way. Step-by-step, with time limitations. This prevents participants from feeling too overwhelmed. The lightning rounds also remove pressure from the final concert.

#### LEARNING BY DOING

**If we talk too much about something** we might create expectations of a specific result, and in that limit creativity and agency. If your first meeting with a piano is trying out all the sounds and tones it can make, you are totally free to judge exactly what sounds and combinations of sounds you enjoy. But if you first had to memorize what combinations of sounds are "allowed", that's probably what you'll listen for. We believe that learning what you enjoy and what you want to express is just as important as learning what is correct, and potentially removes the stress and limitations that people put on themselves.

When we focus on action rather than talking, music can become available for everyone, regardless of previous experience and knowledge. This also increases the room for empowerment, because sometimes the action of daring to try something new is a victory on its own.



MISFITZ - written by Anna Vigsø, project leader

#### Methods and Background

The idea behind creating the initiative, Misfitz, is to give young women a better and safer environment, than I had, to explore Hip Hop. I have personally been discriminated against due to my: high pitched voice (compared to male mc's), being "too feminine", "too masculine", too much and not enough at the same time. Whenever I had a melodic chorus, where I was the vocalist, I got shamed for moving into pop music, regardless of some of the biggest/most respected rappers such as Biggie, Kendrick Lamar, Eminem etc., having done the exact same in some of their biggest hits. At RMC (conservatory), I've been rejected, not due to a lack of talent and skills, but because the teachers, selecting new students, were insecure whether I could balance/manage both being an artist and driving my own business at the same time. To put it short, I've always felt like there's been many rules to follow and ekstra obstacles as a female mc, but the same restrictions haven't been applied for male mc's. Hence my motivation to create a safer space to evolve musically and socially for young women and queers, without any sexist demands.

To have Misfitz go from idea to reality, I've had to fundraise from institutions like Koda, Statens Kunstfond and Tuborgfondet. Then, I've created a customized rap curriculum and various exercises, strengthening both writing and performance skills.

First and foremost, my top priority has been creating a safer space in Misfitz since it's challenging to flourish in an unsafe/uncomfortable environment. I've experienced that, to do so, it has required for me to have been as much of a social leader as a rap mentor, working as a kind of professional big sister. This initiative has shown to be about much more than just rap. I've had to handle everything from students with drug relapses to anxiety attacks during lessons. We've also had experience with a variety of psychological diagnoses regarding our students, like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, ADHD, autism, addiction and BPD. Therefore, it has become as important for Misfitz to be a social initiative as a musical grassroots movement.



MISFITZ - written by Anna Vigsø, project leader

To do so we've realized a need of minimum two "adults" (working mentors) during lessons alongside fewer students per class. We've created a youth volunteer group and an alumni group, since a lot of our previous students have wished for more classes and to re-enter a course, to give them the opportunity to still be a part of Misfitz' activities. The alumni group will be offered special opportunities such as open workshops, performance opportunities, etc. The volunteers get the same opportunity as the alumni group but also opportunities to be a part of a new class of Misfitz, by giving a helping hand (e.g., help cleaning, setting up tables, teaching, mentoring etc.). Our methods have been developed in close collaboration with our volunteers since they're the ones who have been students themselves, following the activities and the curriculum. This is the reason why Misfitz still exists and keeps developing to embrace diversity and grow stronger as a safer space.

I've become aware of what's so attractive about Misfitz courses - vs a lot of other youth music courses - is that our focus lies within the process and not the product. We aren't trying to create the next rap superstar, on the contrary, we try to remove all pressure of success, and instead, strengthen their creative processes and confidence as rappers and musicians. We strive to teach our students to be more independent, and to be cautious when moving into the music industry consisting of i.a. businessmen and producers who aim to capitalize on young naive musicians. We've created a course, where we take our students through everything from writing and performing, beatproduction and recording to mental-, singing-, and career-coaching, as well as music law. Besides all the technical aspects, we offer time and a space to grow as an artist, which is what Misfitz primarily is about.



MISFITZ - written by Anna Vigsø, project leader

#### Specific methods used to create an inclusive safer space within Misfitz:

- Name and pronoun round amongst new students
- At least two mentors present, in case a situation occurs where a student will need a private talk/comfort under four eyes
- No expectations, other than being present and trusting the process
- Stable mentors, structures, schedules, places etc., are extremely important. As soon as we show instability, we risk breaking trust and become another chaotic factor in their daily life. To earn their trust, and to build a grassroot movement like Misfitz, we need to be in front and be a rock for our students.
- We do not wish to diversify! We make conscious decisions regarding which mentors/teachers we hire, regarding gender, sexuality, race etc. We don't have gender quotas, we evaluate who is best fit for the assignment, and hire that person. E.g. a lot of rappers and gatekeepers in this industry are men. We don't deny this fact, and instead of working against it by not preparing our students to work with men, we invite them to network and build bridges with our students. We want to strengthen their network and strengthen their trust/expectations of working with cis hetero men. Of course, we prepare our students to be aware of the manipulation and historical power dynamics that can/will occur working with cis hetero men, but we also prioritize teaching our students how it can (should) be working with cis hetero men, alongside giving cis hetero male teachers/mentors the opportunity to meet/see young women/queer musicians and gain new insight. E.g., We've had my brother teaching our students about freestyle rap. He was shocked to learn that one of our students has experienced being yelled at and spat on in supermarkets due to their appearance. Unfortunately, that's not the only story of our students' experiences with discrimination due to their looks, gender and sexuality.



ANOTHER LIFE

**Another Life** is an award-winning non-profit association that works with representation and discrimination of all genders and minoritised individuals in the Danish music and cultural sectores. The association was founded in the beginning of 2021 with the purpose of securing a representative, sustainable and vibrant music and cultural life. Through our work we seek to contribute to and ensure structural changes in the industries, in order to have a healthy music environment where the most people possible have access, opportunities and influence.

Another Life's first project was carried out in the form of a comprehensive report which mapped out the Danish music industry through a survey and through written contributions from field experts. The report was very well received in the industry and on national news channels. It helped to shift the focus from a binary view on representation, to a broader focus that seeks to create better opportunities and circumstances for as many people as possible. In other words, it helped increase the focus on intersectional work with representation that focus on all genders, ableism, age, skin colour, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic class and more.

In December 2022, our second report 'Representation and discrimination in the Danish music industry 2022' was published. This included a more thorough analysis of which challenges and barriers arise due to discrimination and a lack of representation, as well as the current state of the music industry and its working environment and conditions. The report presents different perspectives from the music industry through advice given by various artists and people working within the industry. Both reports are available online at our website for free in both English and Danish.

Today, Another Life has expanded both its organisation and its project portfolio. We now operate with three project branches besides collecting data and creating reports.



ANOTHER LIFE

#### Talks, workshops & presentations

Another Life are facilitating and participating in talks, workshops, and presentations that all revolve around representation, discrimination, equality or working environments in the music and cultural sector.

The purpose of our workshop, whether it being short or long ones, is to present terms, tools, and actions for the participants to engage in representational work within their own organisations. We assist the participants in doing exercises which will increase their understanding of e.g. implicit barriers which can be prevented.

#### Consultations

Besides being a platform for knowledge and education, through talks, workshops and reports, Another Life offers both long and short consultations for larger or smaller organisations that may need assistance to begin, continue or optimise their work to improve representation and fight discrimination in the music and cultural sector.

Our experience has shown us that co-creation is important when an organisation is creating new action plans to prevent discriminating structures. In the longer courses, we can help with identifying needs and areas of action, co-creating and implementing solutions, as well as evaluating the effect of the work. Depending on the need, we can tailor the process to suit the situation and size of the individual organisation. Remember to always create strategies and action plans which can be easily evaluated upon and developed further on so that we can create solutions on an intersectional level and therefore include more people in the process.



ANOTHER LIFE

#### **Concerts and festivals**

After a line of festivals and pop-up events Another Life Festival has been established as an important part of the work and output of the association Another Life. The purpose of the festivals is to create events that secure a safer space for creative development for everyone involved.

At our concerts and festivals the audience are presented to music, literature, art and an energy that we love and appreciate. You can as a participant expect to become acquainted with both Danish and international horizon-broadening artists.

We often engage in collaborations with Another Life Festival. In such collaborations all concerned are committed to securing representation and decent working conditions in the preparation and execution of the event.

#### Value set & safer space policy

Another Life strives for our value set to be a reference point throughout all our work levels - both internally in the association, in the community that is created around the association and for external collaborations and collaborators.

Everyone ensures not to practice discriminatory behaviour in all aspects of fx an event productions and processes; from the door, to backstage, technicians, bar staff, guards, etc.

Everyone is committed to advancing a safer space, where everyone no matter gender, ableism, age, skin colour, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and socioeconomic class are welcome.



#### ANOTHER LIFE

More and more people wish to contribute to a more just and equal culture industry, but many people also experience insecurity about beginning the work with representation. We appeal to everyone to seek out information and create collaborations with the associations and initiatives that work with these problems on a daily basis. Another Life is always available for consultations, conversations, collaborations, idea generating, project work etc.

## When collaborating, developing and producing a project, everyone promise to:

- Support representation of minoritised people and women in the Danish music and cultural industry
- Decrease discriminatory behaviour on both an interpersonal (meaning between people) and a structural level
- Create space and spaces which are safer for minoritised people and women

#### We have developed a set of workshop guidelines which we are doing our best to take in account when meeting participants, audiences and each other:

- Aspire both physical and mental accessibility through 1) level-free access which takes ableism into account and 2) creating a space where it is okay to take breaks and where there is a physical space fitted for the purpose of care and calm.
- Aspire economic accessibility by keeping prices affordable and/or not expect anyone to have a certain amount of resources to be able to attend.
- Never assume peoples' pronouns. Create a non-assuming space by setting an example and telling your own pronoun(s) first.



**ANOTHER LIFE** 

- In general, when assembling a workshop or a panel we find it extremely important to create wide representation among the educators or panellists and thereby give space to different perspectives in the conversation.
- We always encourage participants and the audience to contribute to an environment where it is possible to share lived experience.
- We also encourage everyone to keep an open mind by listening and maybe learn from the experiences of people with different perspectives than one's own.
- Never subject anyone to unsolicited physical contact or comments.
- When having conversations in groups listen and give space to different peoples' input no matter their identities.
- Prepare and inform everyone involved, e.g. staff, volunteers and participants, about the event and make them aware of your Safer Space policy.
- Create a plan of how to handle discriminatory behaviour and where/who people can address their experiences and thoughts to.



## **EPILOGUE**

**General note:** Trans women are ALSO women and trans men are ALSO men. Some identify a lot with their trans'ness and some want to be seen as "just another woman" or "man". They may be trans, but don't necessarily want to be categorized as "trans". Good terms to know; AFAB = assigned female at birth. AMAB = assigned male at birth.



## **ABOUT THE PROJECT 3C**

CONNECT//COMPRESS//CHANGE

3C – Connect//Compress//Change was a project and a collaboration between Danish Rapolitics, Norwegian JM Norway and Swedish Fryshuset that ran from March 2021 to February 2023. The project aimed at contributing to a long-term improvement of the conditions for young women and non-binary people in Nordic music production.

3C has consisted of several parallel processes where digital seminars, workshops, music events and material such as this has been produced. A group of young producers from Denmark, Norway and Sweden have been participating in the project and the network they have formed is in itself an important result. Here you find the seminars and educational handbooks from the project: https://fryshuset.se/verksamhet/3c









