Despite the aspirations of women to obtain powerful leadership positions in a range of careers and fields of expertise, women make up only about ten percent of disc jockeys (DJs) and producers in electronic dance music (EDM) culture worldwide.\(^1\) EDM DJing and production is a primarily male-dominated industry, in which females are limited in many of the opportunities, support from other experts and representatives in popular music culture, and experiential growth that their male colleagues access easily. In the book *Beyond the Dance Floor: Female DJs, Technology and Electronic Dance Music Culture*, Rebekah Farrugia explains the marginalization of women in popular music genres, focusing specifically on the lack of support and opportunities women receive from their male counterparts, as well as recognizing various instances in which females can enhance their DJ skills in order to pursue their goals and build successful careers in the realm of EDM culture. Through the incorporation of in-depth interviews with female DJs and producers, Farrugia delves into a fairly under-researched topic in order to present popular music scholars with the relationship between gender and significant advances in technology, as well as women’s efforts and strategies to overcome negative stereotypes associated with females pursuing technological and musical careers.

In order to establish foundational knowledge of electronic dance music culture and women’s contributions to musical and technological innovations, Rebekah Farrugia first draws connections between gender and technology before presenting her audience

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with the origins of EDM DJing, as well as a brief explanation of the social and gender divisions in popular music (regardless of whether one is assuming the role of consumer or music writer). Supporting Farrugia’s claim that technology is strongly associated with masculinity, Ruth Hubbard explains that, over the course of history, “there is no denying that women tend to be the users of machines and men their inventors, makers, and repairers.”2 Further reinforcing this notion, Sara Cohen, distinguished sociologist of popular music, argues that male members in rock bands tend to assume positions as guitarists, drummers, and keyboardists, while females are more likely to be recruited as the backing vocalists to appear primarily as objects of sexual desire.3 With the substantial use of computers, sound, and technical equipment being fundamental for an EDM DJ’s skills and techniques, these descriptions of gender roles remain consistent with today’s societal expectations of technological careers being masculine, which, in turn, suggests one explanation why EDM production is a male-dominated field.

And yet, Farrugia mentions how the 1990s Riot Grrrl movement allowed women to establish themselves as dedicated consumers and musicians in punk rock music, though prior to this era, most music genres, including punk rock, were mainly governed by men (25-26). Farrugia intentionally provides this example to show how women’s efforts have overcome societal objections to women’s involvement in the music and technological industries. After delivering an intricate discussion of the historical and social dimensions of the relationships between gender, technology, and popular music, Farrugia examines how females have been able to distinguish themselves from their male counterparts, and in so doing negotiate identities for themselves as EDM DJs.

Just as rock musicians, along with other types of performers, portray themselves on stage through the style of clothing they wear, female DJs must decide what message they want their audiences to receive based on how they, as the focal point of viewers, present themselves while performing. In her discussion of a DJ’s presentation of personality and character, Farrugia mentions the three most popular forms of stage identities that females accept: “sex kittens, t-shirt DJs, and dykes” (44). As described thoroughly in the book, the “sex kitten” is a woman who wears sexually provocative clothing in order to attract a significant number of male listeners and viewers (44-45). On the other hand, “t-shirt DJs” tend to wear baggy jeans and long sleeved t-shirts, while “dykes” wear similar clothing and identify themselves as lesbians. As illustrated


by an interview with Megan Andricos (aka Sappho), male EDM DJs have a tendency to be more tolerant and accepting of “dyke” DJs, because they use their mixing and production skills to build successful EDM careers and attract audiences instead of exposing their bodies to viewers, and thereby competing with male DJs for club and venue bookings (56). Based upon these findings, popular music scholars can draw inferences that one possible factor causing the discrimination of women in EDM culture is that their male DJ counterparts may feel as though they are at a disadvantage to “sex kitten” DJs. Because of the different choices they make in representing themselves on stage, this issue may cause males to view “sex kitten” DJs’ revealing clothing and sex appeal as contributing to her success in the industry.

Along with presenting their styles on stage through the clothing they wear, female DJs must also negotiate their identities through the stage name they choose. While Farrugia explains the process of naming, she mentions that gender differences currently do not exist in this aspect of EDM culture. Regardless of gender, both males and females struggle with establishing meaningful and appealing DJ names that reflect the style of music they play; some create unique names for themselves, while others simply use their birth names, as demonstrated by the various female DJs interviewed for Farrugia’s project. In addition to Farrugia’s claim, Jannis Androutsopoulos supports the non-gender-specific process of DJ naming by explaining that the “links between DJ names and references to various elements of EDM culture, including futurism, space, science fiction, music/rhythm and hallucinogenic drugs” are represented in aspiring male and female DJs. However, once female DJs determine their stage identities in electronic dance music culture, Farrugia points out yet another challenge these women encounter in establishing influential positions and making successful careers from their passions: friendly networking with other EDM DJs in order to improve skills and techniques and build capital.

In EDM culture, the roles of females have largely been restricted because of limited opportunities in gaining expertise and technical knowledge necessary for becoming celebrities and “superstar” DJs. Farrugia, among other prominent scholars of technology and music, discusses that the majority of two and four-year universities do not offer courses in electronic production and DJing, which negatively affects not only females, but males, as well (69-70). Furthermore, coursework and numerous majors that involve complex technical aspects and technology primarily consist of male students, further inhibiting women from obtaining practical knowledge about the mechanics of sound, as well as networking connections with other prospects in the field. Therefore, as Farrugia argues based upon multiple interviews conducted with current female DJs,

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most females do not begin to explore their interests in EDM DJing until their twenties or thirties, by which time many have already produced families and have full-time careers (72).

Despite the arduous challenges female DJs have confronted in establishing their careers as electronic musicians, Layla, founder of Sister PDX, describes various instances in which female DJs can develop networking connections with fellow female DJs to give and receive substantial support, build powerful profiles for booking agencies, and enhance technical skills and knowledge. Though it is not essential to detail the specific networks and groups available to aspiring female DJs discussed thoroughly in Beyond the Dance Floor, it is crucial to note that a handful of these connections are either no longer in existence or are exclusively for locals in the regions they have been founded (73-74). Therefore, depending on the area in which one is located, that individual may not have the knowledge or the resources to obtain membership in a female networking group with other DJs, unless she relocates to a large city, such as Portland, Los Angeles, or New York, where several of these support and skill groups remain today.

These limitations bring Farrugia’s argument to a final brief discussion about the differences between EDM DJing and production, as well as a consideration of why a majority of female DJs do not further their musical careers by learning how to produce electronic sound. According to scholars Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, “Most successful DJs now carry the job title DJ/producer/remixer. Making their own records...is a natural extension of the club DJ’s trade...it’s how a DJ can most convincingly claim artist status.”\(^5\) Despite the substantial increase in popularity and income female DJs would experience if they chose to produce their own tracks, many do not have the desire to work in isolation, but instead would rather remain as performers and mixers in clubs and other social venues.

Through the use of adequate explanations, examples, and support from scholarly articles, books, and in-depth interviews, Rebekah Farrugia presents popular music scholars with sound, convincing claims regarding the largely overlooked relationships between gender, technology, and electronic dance music culture. Furthermore, Farrugia conducted interviews with female musicians for this research project as an expansion of her dissertation, which also focused on issues related to gender roles in technology and popular music genres. Extending her previous findings through this additional research marks Farrugia as a notable scholar. Her empirical investigation invites the exploration of future questions regarding statistical support of her arguments.

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Although Farrugia establishes compelling arguments throughout Beyond the Dance Floor, there are certain sections and themes within her discussions that could be further improved. Despite the extensive use of supporting claims from other authors and scholars, Farrugia neglects to include specific statistics about females pursuing careers not only in EDM DJing and production, but also in other popular music genres, which could suggest some implications concerning the conclusions she was able to draw from her current research project. Farrugia argues that the marginalization of women in EDM culture is largely influenced by the challenges they encounter and a lack of opportunities offered, however, the relationship between gender roles and technology is hardly a simple cause-effect relationship. Various factors contribute to the limitations females face in the music industry, and by providing empirical data and statistics on the number of females involved in DJing and sound production, the audience may grasp a more accurate understanding as to why so few women are represented in this field. Furthermore, from a psychology researcher’s perspective, statistics and percentages concerning the correlations between aspects of gender roles and technology or EDM culture would provide statistically significant evidence about the strength of such relationships, as well as whether or not a third variable could be impacting the marginalization of women in this field of expertise. Though it has been established by numerous popular music scholars with backgrounds in sociology that EDM culture consists of a diminutive portion of females, it is unclear whether one of the causes is that aspiring female DJs are confronted with countless setbacks and a lack of support from their male counterparts, or that a majority of females are simply disinterested in fields that require musical and technical knowledge and skills. Specific statistics regarding the number of females pursuing careers as DJs, engaging in other technology-based occupations, and primarily identifying as consumers of electronic dance music artists may help scholars and related audiences to gain an appropriate understanding of the advances women have made in other technological and musical fields considered masculine. Unfortunately, personal research has uncovered a disturbing lack of applicable statistical support regarding women in EDM culture, which should be a primary research topic for future extensive studies.

While women may very well be discriminated against in the electronic dance music industry, the diminutive percentage of females involved in EDM culture may be primarily due to females being disinterested in careers that incorporate technological aspects and require substantial technical knowledge and skills. In conjunction with reading Beyond the Dance Floor, it would be appropriate to consult DJing for Dummies: 2nd Edition in order to gain further insight into the realm of EDM culture and the technical knowledge necessary for aspiring DJs of whichever gender. Here, John Steventon

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provides foundational knowledge and critical applications about the basics of DJing, and about how to further improve existing skills and technical styles, for both men and women. Along with learning vital DJing techniques such as crossfading, beatmatching, and scratching, an individual who is new to the realm of DJing will also uncover the quintessential sound equipment necessary to appear professional. By initially referring to *DJing for Dummies*, musicological and sociological scholars would have the opportunity to appreciate the difficult tasks females encounter in accessing the necessary mechanical skills and tools to become successful EDM DJs and equally compete with their male colleagues. Furthermore, by recognizing a DJ’s substantial use of technology and that women do not typically pursue careers in technological fields, it becomes apparent that providing statistics and percentages of female EDM DJs, producers, and consumers is an essential area of improvement for future research. Although the incorporation of empirically-based statistics would critically enhance Farrugia’s research and claims throughout her book, she remains a prominent popular music scholar and continues through her work to negotiate feminist ideas and women’s identities in male-dominated occupations.

For Further Reading:


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