Women, Identity, and Bedroom Music Production: Finding Room in the Music Industry

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Introduction

Scrolling through TikTok's or Spotify's discover pages, you will find artist after artist recording music in their bedroom with a laptop, headphones, microphone, and preamp. Social media, technology, and lack of access to the traditional music industry have pushed bedroom production to the forefront of popular music creation especially among Millennials and Gen-Z. As one researches bedroom pop as a genre, you will find that so many of these artists are women, often queer women. Throughout this paper, I will argue that the growth of bedroom production is a direct result of women, particularly those that also belong to underrepresented groups like people of color and the LGBTQ+ community wanting to create a safe space to release and produce music and to find ways into the male dominated music industry.

We will begin my paper by addressing the evolution of bedroom production and how technological advancements have made it possible to create studio quality music at home. Then, we will talk about women and their place within the music industry both historically and in the present era. Connecting that to bedroom production, we will talk about how bedroom production can foster a space of creativity, collaboration, relaxation, and safety and how that has enabled the perfect environment for women to write, play, produce, and distribute their music. We will then talk about the issues with bedroom production like problems with work life balance, addressing how working at home can blur the lines between rest, work, and play and how that effect can be amplified for women. Next, we will look at artists including mxmtoon, girl in red, UMI, Clairo, and dodie as case studies for women in bedroom production. Lastly, we will tie in my own experience writing and producing an EP from my bedroom this semester, addressing my own opinions about the positives and negatives of bedroom production.

History of Bedroom Production

In this first section, we will focus on establishing the background of bedroom production and how it came to be what it is today. We will begin by defining what bedroom production really is using the genre bedroom pop and the idea of home studios. Then we will address the technological advancements that made bedroom production possible including MP3s, DAWs, the internet, and social media. Lastly we will address the social and industry aspects of music production explaining the history of major labels versus independent music.

What is Bedroom Production?

In order to approach this topic, we must define bedroom production. However there are many different ways to go about defining it. In this opening section, we will address the genre of bedroom pop and the idea of home studios to create our definition for this paper.

Let us first use bedroom pop to develop our definition. Olivia Roos (2020) in her article, "What's bedroom pop? How an online DIY movement created a musical genre," says that the term emerged in the mid 2010s and started out sounding like the lo-fi genre. As the genre grew the sound diversified as Roos states that "Unlike other genres, bedroom pop isn't differentiated by its sound. Bedroom pop artists tend to span a variety of sounds and mix different types of music. Some bedroom pop artists don't sound anything like each other" (n.p.). What ties artists defined in the genre together is the style of production, meaning that the artists made their styles at home, often self-produced alone. However, many artists in this genre only got their start using this method and later went on to sign to labels and use professional studios, not their homes for their records. One example of this is Billie Elish who started as a bedroom pop artist producing in their bedroom with her Brother Finneas. However after signing to a major label, she has become more and more distanced from the genre of bedroom pop whereas other bedroom pop artists that have signed to

smaller independent or indie labels have kept their attachment to the label. This establishes two aspects to our definition of bedroom production, that it is mainly done alone in one's home and that it requires not being a part of a major label in the music industry.

Roos explains that the genre was "established by the internet, fueled by online platforms, easy access to high-quality music software and algorithmically driven recommendation systems that can take an artist from obscurity to fame" (n.p.). This establishes the genre in terms of how it exists in the modern day, as something that would not exist without the internet. She later states that bedroom pop centers around individualism as "artists have the freedom to explore their more personal and intimate experiences" which often results in the identities of artists shining through in their music. She says that this is one of the reasons that many people of color and queer artists produce bedroom pop music. These other reasons will be addressed throughout my paper. This provides another aspect to our definition as bedroom production is fueled by the internet and provides intimate, personal music.

When it comes to bedroom production, one may also try to define it using location, the bedroom, or in other words a home studio. However this allows for some blurred lines. Anders Groenningsaeter (2017) says that "Home studios come in many different forms, from a laptop and a mic in a bedroom to a soundproof basement with a soundboard and mixer" (21). Kaloterakis compares a few different definitions in his research and summarizes them to a few key points. Home studios must be in a home environment, create a professional sound, and be cheaper than professional studios. This last point is key as it removes the home studios that are essentially professional studios placed in one's basement.

Kaloterakis completed a 2013 study on creativity in home studios interviewing a variety of musicians and sound engineers in Greece. There were a variety of responses from participants

in the study, some of which conflicted. When asked about what a home studio is, one participant responded, "What is a home studio? Nothing! Somebody that bought a computer and is experimenting in his house. The term home studio is inappropriate! It has to be banned!" (n.p.). Others emphasized that home recordings have a sense of imperfection compared to professional ones. Multiple participants stated that if a professional sound engineer is working in that studio, it is a professional studio meaning that sound engineers recording at home "even if you are at your shower," as one participant stated, can not have a home studio (n.p.). Participants that were sound engineers said that to them part of the difference was personal or professional use and that if they were recording alone, it would be a home studio versus if they were recorded by someone else, then it would be a professional studio (n.p.). This brings a new aspect to our definition as home studios are not only defined by the location, quality, and price of equipment, but also the expertise and number of those recording.

Using both these investigations of the bedroom pop genre and home studios, we can come to our definition of bedroom production. The four key aspects are that bedroom production (1) is done in a home environment, (2) creates a professional quality sound, (3) is cheaper than professional studios, and (4) is done mainly alone or at least without the help of a professional sound engineer or major label. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that bedroom production should also be in some way fueled by the internet and social media as well as create an intimate, personal sound, expressing the identity of the artist. We will use this definition criteria as the basis for our discussion of bedroom production.

Advancements in Music Technology and Social Media

Sound recording equipment is more accessible now than ever before as over time it has become smaller while maintaining quality and often decreasing in price (Groenningsaeter 2017,

8-10). Kaloterakis reported in his study that "the sound quality of home recordings is at top level quality, and this is something that all focus group participants agree upon. Even sound engineers who believe that the studio is a better place for recording go along with this position." The biggest innovation that led to high quality bedroom production becoming possible is the development of Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs), which made it so music writing, mixing, and releasing all can be done on one computer even by one person (Groenningsaeter 2017, 11). Before DAW's and laptops, home studios were often digital tape and mixers which were not affordable nor did they make it easy to create high quality recordings (23). Therefore much of what was recorded at home were demos. However final products were still recorded in a traditional studio setting (10). One of the things that was strange about the advent of DAWs is that they made it possible for music making to be a solitary experience (11). One person with a laptop could record a whole album. With digital instruments like drum machines and synthesizers as well, a musician did not even need to know how to play all the instruments they wanted on their record.

In Kaloterakis's 2013 study that addressed Sound Engineers, Hobbyists, Professional Pop/Rock Musicians, Professional Classical Musicians he asked participants if "the use of computers has changed the way we record music. Professional recording equipment is now at a low price and near the reach of amateurs. Do you believe that this is a step forward for musicians, producers and sound engineers?" For the group of sound engineers, one participant expressed that this technology helps musicians but damages sound engineers as they can lose money to home recording. However they also added that it provides good opportunities for those who can not afford a studio but still want to record their music. This created a shift towards a "mixer's market" as many people will record at home but need a professional to help them mix and master the audio. In the classical musicians group, one participant expressed that many people use DAWs without

knowing how to really use them which just decreases the quality of the product and takes money away from the sound engineers.

In the pop/rock musicians group there was a similar discussion where artists discussed whether home recording led to more "garbage" being able to be recorded. This spawned a debate about how to consider music "garbage." One person said that there is no"garbage" music, only "…CDs that we don't need to own…" Another said, "some CDs shouldn't exist." One of the conclusions drawn in the discussion was that "technology changed the ratio of "good/bad" records only because of the advances in technology, which gave the recording capability to far more users, boosting productivity that results to mediocrity." In the hobbyist group, participants discussed that technology has created a drive for "too perfect recordings." Many in the group believed that having errors makes the song more human. Kaloterakis addresses that this is a fear held by more than this group as the prevalence of autotune and other ways to perfect a performance of impacted music and the quality of musicians. He said that "Jimmy Douglas, an engineer that worked with a variety of artists from Rolling Stones to Justin Timberlake, expresses his disappointment when collaborating with artists that rely mostly in technology for their performances."

Another technological advancement that helped bedroom production is MP3. Their "main purpose was to standardize pictures and audio files in order to facilitate international exchanges by the television industry (Hracs 2012, 445-6). However its "revolutionary feature" was that it required one-tenth of the storage space per minute than CDs did, meaning that they could be downloaded on 'narrow band' internet connections both quickly and easily (446). However this led to many file sharing networks like Napster for illegally spreading music for free (443, 446). Hracs reported that following the creation of MP3s "Global music industry sales fell by 5 percent in 2001 and then a further 9 percent in 2002" (446). How this affected the music industry and

independent artists over time will be addressed in the next section, The Music Industry: Major Labels Versus Independent Artists.

Social media and the internet has also been a large part of the development of bedroom production. Music consumption has changed over time shifting from records over to streaming services and TikTok (Groenningsaeter 2017, 8). Daniel Megarry (2020) wrote in his article for the *Gay Times* about bedroom pop artist girl in red, whom we will address more thoroughly in the case study section of this paper, that:

> The emergence of streaming and social media has opened up a world of possibilities for young independent artists like Marie. Where the prospect of creating and releasing music was once reserved for those signed to labels, anyone with the talent and ambition can now teach themselves to produce and record from their own bedroom. This has been especially significant for emerging queer artists, who may not get the same support from traditional entry routes into the industry as their straight, cisgender counterparts. (37)

These independent artists producing bedroom pop would not be able to find their audiences without being able to post and reach out to fans online or the ability to be featured in Spotify's discover or bedroom pop playlists. This is particularly true for women, the queer community, and people of color that are not as easily welcomed into the music industry.

The four key aspects of our definition of bedroom production would not be possible without DAWs. DAWs and digital instruments created the possibility for solo artists to create professional quality music in their home, cheaply, and without the help of a professional. Kaloterakis's study showed that there are debates about the positives and negatives of what these technological advancements have done for the music recording industry as a whole in terms of quality of music and supporting sound engineers. Our definition's secondary aspects would not be possible without MP3s and the internet. Finding an audience is key in becoming a successful musician and being able to make more money to create more music. MP3s, file sharing networks

like Napster, and social media created ways for those artists to share that music. We will see in the next section that these ways of sharing music are key to indie artists and bedroom producers being able to break away from major labels and make their music.

The Music Industry: Major Labels Versus Independent Artists

The earliest recording is a man singing, captured on a phonautograph in 1860. Just a few decades later in the beginning of the 20th century, recording music became a major industry with records beginning to be mass produced. These recordings allowed musicians to be bottled up and preserved for everyday listening and though this allowed more people to hear their music, many musicians had concerns. There was a loss of control as the music went from the artists hands to the recording engineers and public. With recorded music, live musicians were also not required in movie theaters which historically would have had live organists or bands. Robin D. G. Kelley, a professor of history at UCLA, noted that "At one point–across the country–something like 22,000 musicians worked in theaters" (Chung 2023, n.p.). However by the mid 1930s major cities like Chicago had less than 200 of these jobs left. These were consistent jobs, seven days a week, which as they were gradually fired left many musicians without consistent pay. Especially during the Great Depression, this was a huge loss for musicians.

At least at this time, musicians still had many jobs playing in bars and restaurants. However, with the introduction of jukeboxes and other record players in restaurants and bars, musicians were also not being hired for live venues. By 1938, there were at least 200 thousand jukeboxes replacing whole bands of musicians. This made musicians compete against their own recordings to get gigs and to be paid. Musicians were not paid for every time the record was played which was particularly a problem when it came to radio. It used to be that everything was live on the air. However with the introduction of records, radio stations could purchase and play one

recording as much as they would like instead of hiring the musicians themselves each time. These changes reveal one of the complicated things about the evolution of technology. As Kelley said "You know, technology is seen as providing more access, more opportunities. But then also you have that sort of hidden agenda; it's a labor-saving device. But 'labor-saving device' means people lose their jobs" (Chung 2023, n.p.).

One of the many concerned musicians was James Caesar Petrillo who was the president of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) from 1940 to 1958. He was described as a mediocre trumpet player who got involved with music politics in 1922 when he became the president of his local Chicago AFM. While president he pushed for increased membership but did not allow Black musicians to join. In this time period high quality electrical recording led to even more growth in the music industry. Petrillo adamantly fought for musician's jobs as they were fading away. He tried to force Chicago movie theaters to employ at least one union organist which many owners refused. Mysteriously, some of these theaters burned to the ground. He also pressured radio stations to destroy records after playing them once. These aggressive stances got him elected the national president of the AFM in 1940 by a unanimous vote. By 1942 more than half of the 138 thousand AFM members were unemployed. This led to Petrillo declaring at a AFN convention in June of 1942 that on August 1st, 1942 all musicians in America were to stop recording. He knew that it would be a delayed reaction as major labels would have records stocked up. However, he was confident that this strong stance would get the music industry to pay attention to his requests (Chung 2023, n.p.).

During the last few weeks of July before the ban took hold, record companies did stockpile. Decca Records recorded Bing Crosby on "White Christmas" during that time which topped charts for 11 weeks. However the stockpile did begin to run out and the public demanded new songs.

This lack of new recorded music sent many into a frenzy. The director of the Office of War said that the ban was "a threat to the war effort," acknowledging that many smaller radio stations may shut down. Others said "that it was wrong to deprive little children of music during wartime" (Chung 2023, n.p.). Musicians stated that they would still play live on the radio, though many did not think that was an acceptable compromise. This ban did however have some loopholes. Singers and instruments that were considered too amateur like ukulele, ocarinas, and harmonicas were not a part of AFM. This led to singers playing with these more unusual instruments or big singers like Bing Crosby, Dick Haymes, Perry Como, and Ethel Merman being recorded with a cappella backing tracks. Another exception was V-Discs which were recorded and distributed exclusively for American troops to keep hopes up during the war. One example is Frank Sinatra's "Close to You" which was released to troops with full orchestra but released to the public a cappella (n.p.).

After six months of the ban, in February 1943, Petrillo proposed that record labels pay a royalty to AFM for each record sold which would be used as a trust fund for unemployed musicians. The big three major labels at the time, RCA Victor, Columbia, and Decca, rejected the proposal. Just after the one year mark in September of 1943, Decca, the smallest of the three, gave into Petrillo's demands as they were on the verge of bankruptcy. Next small, new labels began to accept the proposal, taking advantage of RCA and Columbia holding out. However, all the popular big band leaders were signed to the major labels. So these labels recorded genres like polka, gospel, and later bebop music. Meanwhile musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Kenny Clarke, and Charlie Parker, longed to break from the set formula of the big band, leading to a new jazz language being created. It was fast and virtuosic and had the jazz sound that these small labels were looking for. This allowed this new genre to break through in the music industry which may not have been possible without the ban limiting major labels and recording the top artists. This

created competition for these big three labels like Apollo, Guild, Musicraft, Dial, Signature, Savoy, and more. With all this growth, RCA and Columbia finally gave into the band in November of 1944 (Chung 2023, n.p.).

The reason this story is important to bedroom production and the music industry is because it shows how limiting major labels can make space for new ways to make music, diversifying what we get to hear. From being able to find records with ukulele and harmonica to the beginnings of popular a cappella to the popularization of bebop and new forms of jazz, these smaller labels brought new forms of music into the spotlight. This story is also important in terms of getting musicians paid for their work. We will continue to see this as we go into the present day as the push continues to remove power from major labels and diversify the voices we get to hear everyday.

Throughout the history of recorded music, major labels have been gatekeepers (Groenningsaeter 2017, 8). Coming from the 1960s there has been a push to decentralize the recording industry and work against the "economic dominance of major labels" (Barna 2022, 199). Technological advancements pushed this forward by "democratizing the production and distribution of music (Hracs 2012, 443)." Globally in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, there were dozens of large and small record labels. During the 80s and 90s however many of the smaller labels merged or were purchased by larger ones. By 1999 there were five main labels controlling music production, Bertelsmann AG from Germany, the EMI group from Great Britain, Seagram/Universal from Canada, Sony from Japan, and Time-Warner from the United States of America (444). Every aspect of music production from recording to promotion to distribution was controlled by these labels (433).

With everything from recording quality to promotion potential, major labels benefited from technological advancements (Hracs 2012, 445). That is until the creation of MP3s. MP3s unlocked the ability for artists marginalized by the mainstream music industry to distribute their music in other ways (McLeod 2005, 521). New distribution channels like Napster began to arise as file sharing started to distribute power away from the major labels (Harcs 2012, 449). Napster went into legal battles with labels and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) for "copyright infringement and encouraging the downloading of pirated songs and illegal files" being forced to remove all copyrighted music from the site (Hracs 2012, 450). However this did not stop more services from taking Napster's place. Apple's iTunes was created as a pay per song service. As of August of 2009, it accounted for 25% of the physical and digital music market and 69% of the digital market alone (451). Because of these e-retailers, labels had less control over the distribution and advertising of their music. iTunes for example began to promote singles in their top ten lists more than overall albums which shifted the music purchasing choices consumers made on their site (452).

The music industry is however responsible for this shift to what is called "the dark days of downloading" (McLeod 2005, 325). In the 1980s, record companies wanted to switch to selling CDs however listeners wanted LPs and cassettes. They forced shops to stop selling LPs, closing many stores. This caused a fast shift as listeners replaced their collections with CDs causing them to become expensive. However even when CDs became more expensive, artist royalty rates stayed the same. CDs are the reason that MP3s and music sharing began as listeners could 'rip' songs and upload them online (325-6).

Many people believed that MP3s would kill the music industry. However people believed the same of many of the advancements in music technology over the years like music recording

and the radio. When music recording began, some artists did not want to be recorded because they did not want people copying them. However many of those artists are now lost to time without records of their music. Some also thought radio would kill the industry because listeners would not be paying for the records they are listening to. However on top of advertisements bringing in money, listeners would often go buy their favorite records after hearing them on the radio. A similar line of reasoning shows that free downloads can be a good thing, particularly for the artist. When band Wilco was dropped from their label because their album was "uncommerical," the group put their songs on a file-sharing network so fans could listen for free. Instead of this hurting their sales, the album ended up being their biggest album landing on the Billboard Top 20. Their next album was leaked on file-sharing networks before its official release. The group was asked how they felt about it and said, ''Well, that's a little bit like asking me how I felt about the sun coming up today. It's an inevitable thing and not something we ever perceive as a problem'' (McLeod 2005, 524).

Fundamentally musicians want their music to be listened to and for many musicians it did not matter what price their fans paid for the songs since they did not get any royalties. Kembrew McLeod (2005) noted in his paper about MP3s and the music industry that "While there are always going to be freeloaders who will never pay for music, that does not characterize the majority of fans who share music" (352). He cited a 2000 study from the University of Southern California which found that 73% of students that downloaded MP3s still bought the same number of CDs or more. A 2003 Jupiter Research study found that fans sharing music online were likely to pay from legitimate online music services in the future. Often listeners will find an artist through file sharing and then purchase that album or the artist's next album to support them (325). When iTunes launched, listeners showed that they were still willing to pay for digital copies of music with most

downloads costing 99 cents. However for each 99 cent song the label would get 65 cents, iTunes would get 34 cents, the artist would get 10 cents. This kept artists making almost the same amount as if the label was selling a CD even though the manufacturing costs were much lower. iTunes only barely covered "advertising, hosting the files, and a workforce that runs the service" with that 34 cents. iTunes would have failed if not for the iPod which was created to put their downloads on (526).

Even with the major labels' power being somewhat distributed, they maintained much of their hold on the industry. The reason major labels have dominated for so long is that they had control of the equipment to produce and record as well as the connections and ability to get music distributed. By controlling things like publicity and cross promotion, labels make it hard for small artists to find a hold in the market. This meant that the cost of getting their music to retailers or onto the radio was too expensive for small artists (McLeod 2005, 527). The continued dominance then led to the creation of independent labels. In the 1990s, women like Ani DiFranco, Michelle Shocked, and Aimee Mann began their own labels after having been burned by major labels. These independent labels often use a profit sharing model where as a song incrues profit, first the expenses are paid and then the money is distributed mostly equally amongst the artists on the song. The point of many of these labels is to share knowledge and resources in order to successfully share music with the world. This is not necessarily the easiest or best choice financially but it is helpful in creating spaces for cultivating creativity and community in the music industry (527). In the early 2000s, many independent labels had a rise in profits while major labels laid off large portions of their workforce because of their overhead costs and large physical infrastructure (528). Independent labels were able to be competitive not only because of their leaner infrastructure but because of the added freedom it gave to the artists. Without major labels, artists can keep the

copyrights for their music allowing them to keep the music available at all times and allowing them to make and sell merchandise (529). Brian Hracs (2012) notes in his article on independent music production that:

> In the early 1980s, being an independent musician was a choice. Some people didn't want to work towards a major label deal because there were restrictions and conditions attached to that. . . . Now very few artists can still get signed to major label deals, so the majority of artists end up on the independent side. (453)

This shift has been made possible by the technological developments discussed in previous sections. It has freed musicians from labels and from locations since artists no longer had to live in New York, Los Angeles, or Nashville to produce their music (456). There are both benefits and consequences to independent labels, many of which are shared with bedroom production as will be discussed in later sections. Artists can now make a living independently with these labels which is one of the main reasons that bedroom production is possible today. Many bedroom artists, like one of the case studies we will discuss later on girl in red, release music under an independent label of their own making. Without the technological advancements and the distribution of power in the music industry, bedroom production would not be able to flourish the way it does today. In the next section we will discuss how this is particularly important for women finding their place in the music industry.

Women, the Home, and the Music Industry

In order to properly discuss how women have driven the growth of bedroom production, we must look at women's relationships with the home and the music industry as a whole. In the following section, we will dive into the history of women working and making music at home looking at early modern Europe, in the 15th through 18th centuries. We will then look towards the modern day, covering the 20th and 21st century, showing how women have found space in the

recording industry. This will address the gendered space of music production existing in the masculine worlds of music and technology and how self production has been a major and necessary opportunity for women to develop their skills. Through this history, we will see how women have been pushed to find other ways to play, record, and share their music with the world while navigating male dominated, music industry paths.

Women and Making Music at Home

Throughout many different cultures in history, especially from western viewpoint, women have been associated with home and domesticity. Philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in the 18th century that "There are no good morals for women outside of a withdrawn and domestic life; … the peaceful care of the family and the home are their lot" (Reich 2001, 148). While women were at home to take care of their house and children, particularly those with means would take up interests like music. Moreover many of these women were expected to engage with the arts to keep their families cultured and entertained, though these activities were not to become professions. Wealthy women in early modern Europe were expected to read music, sing, dance, and play at least one instrument, though of course only at home (Pendle 2001, 60-1). Through the 17th and 18th centuries, women who composed and performed music would hold concerts in their homes to share their music as this was more culturally acceptable than women composing pieces to be performed in concert halls (Jackson 2001, 104, 119). Though women faced prejudice in becoming professional musicians, this did not stop them from making their own space to share their music just as bedroom producers do today.

In the 18th century as technology grew, it was not just upper-class but also middle-class women who were able to spend time developing their musical skills including piano and voice. This was promoted by the prospect of improving their "marriage possibilities" by being able "to

provide entertainment in the home" (Reich 2001, 148). Industrialization continued through the late 1800s and early 1900s also making it possible for families to have fewer children. This continued the trend of technological advancements allowed more women to pursue interests like music as they did not need to care for as many children or work in as many capacities. Lower class women however were still not experiencing all of the same benefits (Citron 2001, 176). This demonstrates that women in the past have been able to seize new technologies making production more accessible to them, as we will also see in the future with bedroom production.

Women are often associated with specifically vocal music. Whether it be an opera singer or the lead singer in a band, women are more often acclaimed vocalists and less accepted as instrumentalists. For women who composed music in the 19th century for example, art songs or lieder were considered more acceptable than 'masculine' sonatas or symphonies. These were songs often discussing nature and love that were performed with piano and voice (Reich 2001, 152). This is quite similar to bedroom pop music as it often has relatively simple instrumentation and expresses the internal thoughts of the composer. One example of such a composer is Fanny Mendelsohn, sister to Felix Mendelsohn. Mendelsohn was told by her father and brother to keep her music in the home and to prioritize her family. She held weekly concerts at home, encouraged by her artist husband, and eventually had some pieces published though this was not common for women at the time (154). While she stayed mostly within the bounds of the acceptable music styles for women, she was able to find ways to express herself and create music even when society did not provide an easy method of doing so. We will see this reflected bedroom production also, as women push to teach themselves and create their own ways into the music industry. The next section will continue along the path of women and music to the beginning of production and

recording. We will see that women return to music in the home to empower and grow their skills as they push to find their place as women composers and musicians did before them.

Women in the Music Industry: Self Empowerment and Self Production

To begin this section, we will look at how women have interacted with music recording over time. At the beginning of recording history in the 1880s and 90s, many women helped to push new recording technologies through field recordings, particularly documentary field recordings, where equipment was taken to live events. A number of these women including Alice Cunningham Fletcher, Frances Densmore, and Laura Boulton were ethnomusicologists, recording sounds to be preserved in history. Boulton traveled the world capturing approximately 30 thousand music recordings. She was also known for building a quick rapport with those she was working with to get the best recording of their music (Marrington 2020, 14-13). Using these new technologies, these women, traveling and working on their own terms, made sure that unique voices were preserved. They also showed qualities looked for in modern producers as they worked with performers to get the best sound.

During the 1930s as recording became more and more studio based, a small number of women were able to find their way into the studio as producers under very particular circumstances. The first female jazz producer, Helen Oakley Dance, was a concert promoter for jazz artists. Because of her rapport with jazz musicians she was able to get into the Brunswick label's studios in Chicago. In 1936, she moved to New York to work in A&R at Irving Mills where she produced collaborations between popular jazz artists (Marrington 2020, 14). Once again we see that women having confidence, making connections, and building rapport is key to their success. It was more rare to find women working in sound engineering during this time. However one example is Mary Shipman Howard who worked in recording in the 40s and 50s. Though she

was fascinated with music technology, she was originally barred from getting a job at NBC as a recording engineer because of her gender. She reflected on this saying "it was unusual for a woman to be a recording engineer, particularly as far as the union was concerned" (14). She began to work at NBC as a secretary but as men were shipped out for war she was given the job of disc cutter. Dissatisfied with NBC, she began her own studio and hired Don Plunkett, later a founding member of the Audio Engineering Society, to assist her. She recorded both industrial recordings and produced and released songs recording musicians like Ethel Waters (13-15). Once again we see that in order to make their way in music technology and production, women needed to create their own spaces pushing to make their voices heard.

In the 60s and 70s, women continued to try to find ways into music production but were often unwelcome. Just as Howard started, many women interested in the field were placed as secretaries but did not as easily make their way into the studio. Some women were finding a hold in more "fringe" music recording fields like electronic music. Women like Linda Fisher, Suzanne Cianni, and Pauline Oliveros were finding use for new synthesizers (Marrington 2020, 21-2). This genre was new and experimental, not yet well established by men in the music industry (22), so similar to bedroom production, women were able to find room to grow their music production skills in this new style.

Going into the modern day, women still have trouble finding space in the traditional studio settings. In the article "Addressing Gender Equality in Music Production: Current Challenges, Opportunities for Change and Recommendations" the authors note that:

> Although music production encompasses a broad selection of disciplines, job roles, practices, and methodologies, it is arguably one of the least gender-diverse occupations. The ratio of male to female music producers is estimated to be 47 to 1. (Brereton, Jude et al. 2020, 219)

The authors went on to look at trends in women in highschool and college taking music classes in the UK. These students were much more likely to take performing and composing classes than music technology classes (221-3). Specifically "In 2015 only 12% of Music Technology students in Higher Education were female" (223). Many schools promote early distinction between specialization in the arts and the sciences and a higher proportion of women choose to specialize in the arts. Data summarized by these authors showed that boys were more likely to take high level classes in a combination of arts and science subjects compared to girls. Women who enter college with an interest in music may therefore already be discounted or dissuaded from pursuing music technology as they may not have the proper math and science background from highschool (230). Another valuable statistic showing the lack of women in music production and engineering is that as of 2016 it was estimated that only 7% of the Audio Engineering Society (AES) members were not male (223). All these measures demonstrate that women are not yet well represented in music technology and production.

Though their numbers within the music industry remain low, as we have seen throughout music recording history, women have been finding holes and making space for themselves. But why does it take so much pushing to get women into the studio even now? Both professional music making and technology and therefore music production exist in gendered spaces. Henrik Marstal (2020) pointed to the the male domination of music recording:

> The advent of studio recording seems indeed to be a male issue, even in the early twenty-first century. If that is to change, it might be necessary to reclaim the notion that music-making activities of all kinds are always gendered, since more or less stereotyped gendered relations and conceptions always interact with each other, between the people involved. This is not only the case when female musicians or, much more seldom, female engineers or producers are involved. (129)

Here he makes the connection that music making has historically been male dominated and therefore that history affects modern music recording even now as barriers for women as

performers, particularly as instrumentalists, are starting to be broken down. Later, showing technology's gendered background, he notes that men are recognized as the users and creators of technology therefore making STEM related fields exist in a masculine space (130). Since music and technology are both masculine spaces, the combination of the two music technology and production is even more securely masculine.

Marstal (2020) later talks about how rare it was to find women in decision making roles in the studio. This could be seen in the infamy of Yoko Ono's appearance in the studio during the Beatles' recording of The White Album which was heavily discussed in the press (129-30). This illustrates the fact that women are also not historically placed in positions of power or leadership roles which also affects the culture surrounding women being in control of a potentially male artist in the booth. He also quotes Mavis Bayton (2006) who stated that there are fewer 'female' spaces, noting that places like bars are viewed as "male 'playgrounds' to which women are 'invited' on special terms" (136-7). Women claiming a male dominated space like the studio is therefore seen as pushing or stealing in the battle between empowerment and antagonization.

This leads to the concept of self production, where women find their own space and control their own voice. Jeremy Lascelles, CEO of Chrysalis Music, said the following in response to the low numbers of women in production reported:

> Why aren't there more female producers? A very, very good question and there are but they're basically producing themselves. All the producers that you can think of, female producers, 90%, I can't think of any exceptions to this, they're all artists themselves. (Wolfe 2012, n.p.)

Since the early 1960s one of the most popular routes for women who are songwriters and musicians trying to break through in the industry is self-production (n.p.). Paula Wolfe (2012) in her article "A Studio Of One's Own: Music Production, Technology And Gender" discussed women self producing by relating music production to other comparative fields like literature and writing. The

title "A Studio Of One's Own" comes from Virgina Woolf's (1929) thoughts on "women's efforts to self-determine through their writing from the time of Shakespeare" (n.p.). She wrote that women needed "a room of one's own and five hundred a year" (n.p.). This means that women need time alone and space to develop their creative skills which can be seen today with bedroom production. Lucy O'Brien (2002) added on Woolf's comment saying that women have always used creative endeavors to make sense of their world in a space that belongs to them rather than the space that is already dominated by men (n.p.). Krissi Murison who at the time Wolfe interviewed her was editor of the UK music magazine *New Musical Express* noted how often the very successful women artists have been solo acts. She says:

> I wonder whether the reason they're solo artists, as opposed to bands, is because they feel much more confident sat at home in their bedrooms working on music by themselves, getting themselves ready before they take it out to anyone else… also if you think about… blogging culture, suddenly opening those doors for a lot of female writers…, all the programmes that you can get on your Macbook, or whatever, that suddenly it allows you to be yourself in a room and do it…you can play with it and tinker with it and I wonder if that's been empowering for female artists? It's all that, I dunno, garageband, whatever it is, that allows you to sit at home and do it yourself. (n.p.)

Murison makes multiple key insights here. First, women being able to gain confidence working on their own seems to lead to these women being successful solo artists, which may be one of the reasons there are often more successful solo women than women in bands. The second is her comparison of how technology has allowed women in writing to create blogs and publish online without the aid of a magazine or newspaper to how women in music can use garageband and new recording technologies to create songs to share without the aid of a major label. Just as these bloggers need to be the writer, editor, and advertizer, these bedroom producers need to be the musician, sound engineer, advertiser, and so much more. However, doing all these different tasks,

gaining all these different skills allows these women to grow their confidence and practice so that they can become successful.

From these stories and statistics we have seen that there still are not enough women in the studio due to the gendered environment of music and technology. However, we can also see that women will push to have their space and that allowing them to discover and develop their skills in a comfortable space on their own can lead to their empowerment and success. We will detail more of the benefits and consequences of bedroom production for women and more generally in the following section.

Effect of Bedroom Production on Music and Artist

Does where a record is recorded affect the final product? Generally speaking, scholars agree that recording in the bedroom or other spaces does have some impact whether it be the acoustics of the room or the mood and environment set by the space (Groenningsaeter 2017, 9; Vad 2017, n.p.). The goal of this section is to discuss the effects, both positive and negative, of bedroom production on the artist and their music. For the positives, we will focus on how the bedroom can positively influence creativity and intimacy in music and lyrics and give the artist feelings of security, empowering them to make their own choices with their music. Tying these ideas to the experience of women, we will address how women in particular may find advantages gaining confidence working on their own production, being allowed to make their own creative decisions. We will also touch on bedroom production's influence on collaboration and the overall problems with traditional studios.

For the negatives, we will take a look at how bedroom production may impact work life balance with work, rest, and hobbies occurring in the same or similar locations. This can affect not only the artist's perception of space but time. Particularly, we will look at how work life balance

issues may be emphasized for women due to the work associated with the home and feminine ideals. We will also touch on how quality may be impacted by lack of experience and how an artist may be stretched thin juggling many different roles. Lastly, we will tie in some musicians' direct opinions on comparing home and professional studios through Kaloterakis's 2013 study and tie together the overall effects from the proceeding sections.

Positives: Influence on Creativity and Intimacy

In Mikkel Vad's 2017 article, "Perspectives From The Spatial Turn On The Analysis Of Space In Recorded Music," Vad addresses that many aspects of space influence our perception of music. That is to say that not only where a piece is listened to but where it was written as well as recorded all influence the music. Therefore recorded music has the ability to represent spaces that are physically and temporally incompatible, creating blended spaces (n.p.). In terms of bedroom production, many of the pieces are written and recorded in the bedroom, bringing an intimate feeling to the music even when listened to on a train, in a park, or in a stadium. These feelings of intimacy can be tied to the artist's feelings of comfort in their own private space, but also how the room itself looks and feels with lighting and furnishing choices (Groenningsaeter 2017, 9, 24). Particularly for teenagers and young adults, who often use the bedroom for "temporary self-isolation and cultivation of a private self" and as both a social and private space, this feeling of intimacy can be emphasized (Groenningsaeter 2017, 25).

Being on their own in this private space where they are free to make mistakes and learn can have a positive impact on the artist's feelings of security. A bedroom or home studio can create a relaxed work environment where an artist can experiment. They can also feel less time pressure as they are not paying for studio time as they do in a professional studio (Groenningsaeter 2017, 22; Kaloterakis 2013, n.p.). Self-production means that artists are in charge of every decision

allowing them to take control of their music both financially and creatively. It also allows the artist

to view their work and process as a "fun, liberating, and empowering activity" (Tomaz de Carvalho

2012, n.p).

Creating this music in that safe, private space can also have benefits in terms of creativity.

Kaloterakis (2013) used Phillip McIntyre's definition of creativity from his 2008 research for his

paper addressing creativity in home studios:

> Creativity is a productive activity whereby objects, processes and ideas are
> generated from antecedent conditions through the agency of someone, whose
> knowledge to do so comes from somewhere and the resultant novel variation is seen
> as a valued addition to the store of knowledge in at least one social setting. (n.p.)

Based on this definition, we can see that creativity comes in many forms. It points out the idea of

"novel variation" which can be hard to achieve when maintaining the same, uninterrupted

environment. Kaloterkais notes that in Delaney's book "Laptop Music" being in a more open

environment with distractions can actually inspire creativity as events occur around you out of the

norm instead of the controlled, quiet environment of the studio (n.p.). The limited equipment and

musicians can also prompt the artist to find unique ways of producing the sound they desire. The

non-ideal environment can also lead to mistakes and random sounds appearing in a recording.

These singular moments can bring a sense of magic and uniqueness to the recording (Tomaz de

Carvalho 2012, n.p.). Kate Bush who does her own production for much of her music was quoted

by Front Row BBC Radio 4 in 2011 talking about her song *Lake Tahoe* and a mistake that made

it into the final version of the track:

> I was just getting near the end of the take and I was playing so softly that at one point my
> finger didn't hit the note on the piano so suddenly there was this space, there was silence
> and I thought, 'no, no I'll just keep going' and actually that's the take we used on the record
> because it just had a feel about it but there is this little hole in the track. (Wolf 2012, n.p.)

This shows how an artist can pick specific, imperfect takes because they elicit emotional responses or draw the listener into their story. Whereas, in a professional studio with a producer or sound engineer, they may stop the recording, delete the take, or recommend against using the imperfect recording.

Another aspect of bedroom production that can add to the feelings of freedom and creativity is access to collaboration. Many bedroom producers use social media to reach their audiences. In the process, they also find fellow creatives making music, art, or videos with whom they can collaborate. In this virtual setting, artists can use both real time and asynchronous tools in order to make music that otherwise may have been impossible to create (Groenningsaeter 2017, 23-24). I have personally seen Connor Price (@connorprice_), an independent artist from Canada, with his "Spin the Globe" series on TikTok collaborating with artists around the world. In this series, he spins the globe and lets his finger land on a random country. He then finds an artist in that country to collaborate with. He has created music with artists from Zambia, the Netherlands, India, Japan, South Africa, Brazil, and Germany. This series has gotten millions of likes and views with the top video from the series receiving 71.5 million views as of April 2023 and created a global listening community for Price.

In Kaloterkais's study, he asked participants if the place art is created affects the creative process. Amongst the classical musicians all but one answered no. Some said the boundary of a professional studio or performance space instead of the home actually creates more excitement and creativity. For the sound engineers, location was considered a huge factor to all participants. Again with the pop and rock musicians, they all agreed that the space affects the music. They said that the home environment is friendlier, making you feel that you are not constantly judged and that mistakes matter less. These musicians also said that the sound engineers present in a

professional studio can make them feel worse about their performance, making them perform less well.

In order to understand how these impacts may be unique, we will now talk about some common problems artists have with traditional, professional studios. Traditional studios separate artists into boxed sections. Even when the musicians are all in the same area, there is still a separation between the sound engineers and the musicians. This not only creates a very formal feeling environment but a power dynamic where sound engineers and producers become in charge of the artist's sound (Groenningsaeter, 16-17; Kaloterakis 2013, n.p.). Groseningsaeter (2017) in his thesis "Models of creative collaboration in the bedroom recording studio" quotes Daniel Lanois, known for his one room recording technique:

> I also got tired of somebody trying to talk to somebody else in the studio and they're waving their arms and their microphones aren't on and their frustrations would build. I thought [about] why these people don't have problems when they're up on stage, and it's because they're relatively close together and there's no glass, no segregation. (19-20)

This feeling of separation is not how artists are used to performing in a live, collaborative environment, therefore feeling unnatural. This limit on collaboration is also emphasized by the fact that traditional studios often do not have spaces to hold more than 4 musicians meaning it is not an ideal place for a full band to work through new music (Groenningsaeter, 17).

To tie together these positive effects of bedroom production with my thesis of women pushing the production style forward, let us look at the positives in terms of the experience of women. In Paula Wolfe's 2012 study "A Studio Of One's Own: Music Production, Technology And Gender" she talked to women in music production. She noted that all women in her study express a desire to create music in a private space. Though not all of these producers were bedroom producers, those who used other musicians, sound engineers, or masting engineers still did the

majority of the compositional and production processes alone. Being able to foster their music and production skills alone often at home allows women to foster confidence in their ability and creativity whereas for men, they often have that confidence without needing to feel that their skills need to be perfect. Women also like to learn from other women and most recording studios are dominated by men with whom women may feel uncomfortable speaking their mind. Wolf quoted musician Caro Snatch who said that:

> playing on your own…you're not worrying about what people are going to think…just on your own, you've got that freedom. No one's judging you, you can't criticize yourself. I think for women, especially, I found that as a girl, starting off, that it was really important that no one told me what was right or wrong and therefore that's how I developed my sound. (n.p.)

This act of developing and taking control of their sound leads to confidence in their decision making abilities. Snatch was later quoted talking about how she could assert her choices. If she wanted a £3000 reverb and for the sound to go through a Neve desk, she could argue for her choices even when a professional sound engineer or producer disagreed. She noted that on her first album she encountered men who would say "Oh no, you can't do that," to which her response was "Yes I can because I want to" (n.p.). There has been a noted shift over time as more women develop their skills with self-production, gaining that confidence. Wolf quotes Dave Pye, who worked with many women in the studio over a ten year period, who said:

> I think that now the women who are in bands that I know or the women that are creating music are way more empowered…they're the key creative force behind the band…and that's more what I see now as a woman's role within a band or as an artist than it was 10/15 years ago. (n.p.)

This shows that women are taking control of their sound and not allowing themselves to be put into the background because of the confidence they have gained in their abilities through self production.

Negatives: Quality and Work-life Balance

Bedroom production inherently means that artists will be creating music in the same space they live, maybe even sleep in. There is a conflict produced as the bedroom or home becomes a space of creativity and rest. The boundary between rest, work, and play may be blurred (Groenningsaeter 2017, 2; Barna 2022, 191, 195). Within this multifaceted space, the artist must also hold many roles as composer, musician, producer, sound engineer, mix engineer, mastering engineer, manager, and advertiser depending on the circumstance. This can become complicated as if the artist becomes overwhelmed with the technical aspects of their record or distribution and advertising, they may not be able to focus on the music they are creating (Barna 2022, 196; Groenningsaeter 2017, 8-9; Tomaz de Carvalho 2012, n.p.). Self-production and promotion are promoted "in the capitalistic spirit of digital, platform based entrepreneurialism (Barna, 196)." This creates the danger of self-exploitation as it becomes easy for the artist to overwork themself trying to do it all possibly on top of a job, keeping a house, and a family. Though earlier we addressed how having no time restriction can put less stress on getting the perfect take on the first try there can also be damaging effects as if time does not cost money one can keep working at all times for as long as possible (Barna 2022, 196; Groenningsaeter 2017, 22).

In order to understand how issues with work-life balance may affect artists, we will look at two studies done surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic following working adults trying to balance working from home with their home lives. In the 2022 study "Blurred Boundaries: An Examination of Learning and Working in the Home During the Covid-19 Pandemic" the authors present a few concepts to define boundaries. We have and create mental and physical boundaries to separate different aspects of our lives. This can be as big as the home being for rest and the office being for work or as small as the dinner table is for eating and the desk is for working (Gao et al. 2022, 32).

They reference that a 2000 study done by Ashforth and his colleagues on boundary theory shows that:

> …the blurring of roles across psycho-social domains, as a result of the micro and macro transitions undergone in daily life — such as those experienced on the commute from one's home to the workplace, a promotion at a job, or retirement — serve to illustrate the fragile and dynamic nature of boundaries as social constructs and their interface with their carefully maintained schemas in their various iterations and forms. (33)

This addresses that shifts in our boundaries can disrupt our view of work and other aspects of daily life. During the pandemic, the boundary between work and home or school and home disappeared (33-34). This led to changes in how time was perceived and distributed between the work and home domains. Overall the study discussed blurred boundaries in terms of interpersonal, spatial, and temporal boundaries using individual ethnographic interviews, conducted over eight months in 2021 (35, 38). The results included that families needed to redesignate spaces in order to separate work and school from home. However many families did not have the space to do so which made physically separating work/school and home/relaxation difficult (40).

In the 2021 article "Work and home boundary violations during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of segmentation preferences and unfinished tasks" the authors used the idea of boundary violations which "occur when certain events or behaviors breach or neglect the boundary between work and private life" (Kerman et al. 2021, 785). The paper included two studies addressing how boundary violations may affect satisfaction in the domains of work and home using daily journals and online surveys. Secondarily, they also considered if boundary violations lead to more unfinished tasks (786, 798, 794). In their first study, they found a link between work boundary violations and home satisfaction. However they did not find significant data to support this in the second study (799). They found that overall boundary violations lead to more unfinished tasks and that unfinished tasks correspond to domain dissatisfaction. Interestingly, when home boundaries

were violated creating unfinished home tasks, the study showed an increase in work satisfaction. This was not true in reverse as when work boundaries were violated creating unfinished work tasks, there was not a significant increase in home satisfaction (800). Overall both studies found that violated or blurred boundaries have an effect on the mental separation of tasks, can lead to more interruptions and dissatisfaction, and have a long term impact on family structure and mental health.

These disadvantages tie into one of the other issues with bedroom production. Without a sound engineer or producer, the artist has no one to give feedback on takes and give advice as they record and edit (Groenningsaeter 2017, 22). This professional expertise can be invaluable as some technology can be hard to immediately understand or use to its full potential. Though it has become cheaper and relatively easier to use music technology due to the surplus of explanatory videos and websites online, it is also easy to skip steps and not fully understand how to make the best choices with the technology. It is also hard to develop the self-evaluation skills to edit your own music as the artist knows the song so well in a specific context, their ears may not agree with their brain (Tomaz de Carvalho 2012, n.p.). Personally, I believe that this is an important aspect to bedroom production. You will not do everything perfectly on the first try nor will you have the listening skills you need right at the beginning. The point is to grow and understand how to create the sound you want to create, not to simply mold to whatever the current industry standard is. Kaloterakis (2013) found that many of his participants emphasized the importance of professional expertise. Many musicians like Bob Dylan acknowledge that without their producers or sound engineers they may not have been able to achieve the sound they wanted as they knew the ins and outs of the software and hardware being used. However, as shown in the previous section, there is a fine line

between an artist getting a professional's advice and being pushed by a producer to make creative choices the artist disagrees with (Kaloterakis 2013, n.p.; Tomaz de Carvalho 2012, n.p.).

Once again to turn to the thesis of this paper, we must look at how these negatives may impact women in particular. Overall women have often been associated with the home and as seen in the history of women in music and production, both technology and song-writing, engineering and production have been heavily associated with men (Wolf 2012, n.p.). There is a different view of women being artist-producers, as they are often labeled as singer-songwriters whereas men are often viewed as "entrepreneur-artist with prestige" (Barna 2022, 198). When it comes to work at home, women are often tasked with the majority of childcare and house upkeep making it much less a place of leisure than it is for men. The pandemic heightened this with women working in a field outside of music as they now had house labor, music production, and their day job all in one place (198). Guitarist Mavis Bayton said in Wolf's 2012 study that:

> Musicians schedule their lives around music; mothers schedule their lives around their children. Only highly successful – and rich – women musicians can resolve this contradiction satisfactorily. (n.p.)

This can make work-life balance with bedroom production even more difficult as women with homes and families have to balance home tasks with their work and hobbies. However, there are those that point out that doing production at home allows for more time at home where one can deal with more tasks and spend more time with children when needed. Kate Bush was quoted in contrast with Bayton saying "It's very important to me now that I have a child. I wouldn't have been able to work at all if I hadn't been able to work at home" (n.p.) This does point to Bayton's last sentence as Kate Bush is a highly successful, rich woman who has the ability to create a professional studio and work when she wants to.

Generally this points to the fact that access to the music industry is a privilege even if it is bedroom production. There are still costs to be considered and many people may not have access to a quiet, private room to record their music let alone a personal computer to use for extended periods of time. Accessibility to music production has considerably improved but we can not say that it is easily accessible to the middle and lower class (Wolf 2012, n.p.; Tomaz de Carvalho 2012, n.p.).

Gender was also considered in the work-life balance studies addressed previously. In the 2022 "Blurred Boundaries" study, the authors said that gender does play a role in the distribution of tasks in the home. This can be further emphasized when the couple has children (Gao et al. 2022, 33). The second article (2021) on boundary violations found that women without children prioritized work leading to unfinished home related tasks and a decrease in satisfaction in the home domain. However women with children were not able to postpone home tasks, more often rejecting work related tasks in order to finish home tasks. For women with children, they found that both work interruptions for home tasks and home interruptions for work tasks led to an overall dissatisfaction in the domain that was interrupted. They mentioned that their findings that gender affects this dissatisfaction is consistent with other studies as women tend to take on more obligations regarding the home (Kerman et al. 2021, 801).

Overall Effects

Considering all these positive and negative effects, what can we say about bedroom and self production? In Kaloterakis's 2013 study, he asked participants "If money weren't a factor would you record at home?" Unsurprisingly based on precious negative responses to home studios, classical musicians all said no. These musicians crave professional feedback in a recording environment. Hobbyists were divided with a mix of people looking to get into professional spaces

and others who enjoy self-production. The pop and rock musicians had a more in depth discussion resulting in some wanting a professional studio, some wanting a home studio, and some wanting a hybrid. The home studio gave them the space to be creative however in a professional studio they did not have to think about anything but performing. One person that wanted a hybrid said that the ideal studio would be one that is professional with the intimacy of a home studio. Lastly for sound engineers, two participants said they preferred a professional studio, two said they wanted a professional studio at home, and one said they preferred a hybrid similar to the hybrid discussed in the pop and rock musicians group. I think it comes down to what you want and need to produce your music. If you are someone who is comfortable letting go and allowing professionals to take the reins, trusting that they will do well, or you are someone who does not want to learn all the technical aspects of bedroom production, then professional studios are most likely a better option for you. However if you are someone who wants to find your own sound and understand what happens to produce music or if you just have a lot of strong opinions about your music, bedroom production may be a good fit. As with any method, there are benefits and drawbacks to bedroom production so each artist must choose for themselves.

Bedroom Production Artist Case Studies

In order to fully understand bedroom production and women, particularly those of intersectional identities, it is important to look at some examples of women in bedroom production as case studies. In this section we will look at artists including girl in red, mxmtoon, Clairo, UMI, and dodie to see how bedroom production has affected their music, life, and career. Particularly, this section looks to highlight how these artist's identities and vulnerabilities come through in their work as these aspects are hallmarks of the bedroom production sound and key to showing how

these artists may not have been able to create their work without bedroom production. Some of these artists have moved away from bedroom production as they signed to labels but are still influenced by their origins in both their music style and fanbase.

girl in red

Marie Ulven Ringheim, better known as girl in red, is a Norwegian musician born in 1999. Though she did not come from a particularly musical home, she taught herself how to sing and write music with guitar at 13 with some help from her grandfather. She is down to earth and personable as well as "openly unashamedly queer." In fact, for the lesbian community, girl in red has become a secret way to ask if someone also likes women by asking "do you like girl in red?" (Burns 2021, 1; Megarry 2020, 36; Lewis 2020, 84). Daniel Megarry from *The Gay Times*, described her as "refreshingly unfiltered when talking about life and her career" saying that she lacked the "the rigorous PR training that so many A-list celebrities go through to present a picture-perfect image of themselves" (36). This honest way of being comes through not only her interviews but throughout her music as well.

Ringheim started releasing her lo-fi, indie-pop music under the name LydiaX on SoundCloud in 2015, switching to the name girl in red when she released "i wanna be your girlfriend" in 2016. The song hit 5000 streams in 5 months sending her career into the spotlight. In 2018 she then released "summer depression" and "girls" and then EP "chapter 1" which contained all three songs and two more "4am" and "say anything." When she released her second EP "chapter 2" in 2019, she began touring (Burns 2021, 1-2). As Megarry said "At just 20 years old – and barely two years into her career – … girl in red has completed a tour of the United States and Europe, and achieved millions of streams with her music," all without the backing of a label (36). In 2020 she released a few singles though her full debut album was delayed by the pandemic

(Burns 2021, 2). She releases her music through her own label World In Red with AWAL (Artists Without A Label) following the path of other indie and pop artists including Kim Petras, Allie X and Rex Orange County (Megarry 2020, 37).

Ringheim still uses bedroom production techniques on all her songs though she says her process has changed over time. At the beginning, she used to play a lot of guitar and write in amore unstructured way. Her song "i wanna be your girlfriend" was written this way and then later recorded with more added layers and instruments. Now she uses the DAW Logic to write out hooks and ideas then vocal lines. She says that she wants to "step out of the bedroom pop label" because she wants to see her work in "bigger places," playing not in clubs and coffee shops but in stadiums. She expands on this by saying "I want to keep expanding my sound, going with my impulses, and changing. I don't want to be predictable. I want to be forever changing and evolving" (Lewis 2020, 84). This points out a difference between the idea of bedroom pop as a genre compared to bedroom production as bedroom pop is more limited in terms of how people view it. This can be seen with Billie Eilish as she no longer was considered a bedroom pop artist as soon as she became more largely famous, playing in stadiums, though her sound still has the vulnerable quality of bedroom production.

In regard to not having a label, Ringheim talked about how the music industry is becoming more democratic "because a lot more people have voices instead of just the dictators of the major labels handing out record deals." She talked about how she sees others like Billie Eilish and FINNEAS making "bedroom music" and that isn't something that has to be small, it doesn't need to be indie, it can be anything." She enjoys the freedom of being an independent artist as she can dress and act like herself, not being forced into a single image simply because a label thinks it will make more money (Megarry 2020, 37). There is a bit of contradiction here as her sentiment

expressed in the Lewis article is that she thinks bedroom pop is a limiting genre however I believe that this shows that she views the genre as limiting, not the method of production.

In terms of her identity as lesbian woman, Ringheim is very open about herself and her beliefs. She wants to "create a space for young queer people" and believes she is achieving that: "That space has been rapidly growing in the past few years and it's still getting bigger. I still get messages from people saying how much safer they feel and that they're just existing with their sexuality rather than stressing about it. I feel like [my music is] a safe space" (Lewis 2020, 84). She believes that making queer art, music, and movies is important to build a community and foster a better, more accepting world (Megarry 2020, 36). The reason she can be used as an indicator of queerness is that her identity comes through so strongly in her lyrics. One of the many examples is her hit song "i wanna be your girlfriend." The whole song is sung to a girl named Hannah and in the chorus she sings "I don't wanna be your friend, I wanna kiss your lips."

Her songs are not only vulnerable with her queer identity but with her mental health and problems as well. Nat Burns (2021) of *Lesbian News* says that the "Content of pieces includes romance, loss, depression and mental health, generally emotional" (3). Lewis describes her lyrics as heartfelt (84) and Megarry emphasizes their relatability for her audience and their brutal honesty (36). One of her songs, "i'll die anyway.," contains the lyrics "Accepting I'm pointless isn't the hardest, when it's so completely obvious." This is seen again in "summer depression" as she sings "Pretty face with pretty bad dreams, no one knows I cry in my sleep, waking up feeling like shit, it's a normal thing to feel like this." These lyrics are blunt and her songs make you feel like you are in a daze feeling comforted by shared feelings and experiences. Regarding her honesty she said:

> I've never second guessed my honesty or what I should write about, but I definitely didn't think people would like it as much as they did. In a weird way, I

> feel we need to see more sad moments, because most of what we see on Instagram is just people's highlights, we just see people's good sides all the time. And if you're not a part of that and you're at home feeling like shit, then I think it's good to have someone you can listen to and realize, 'Okay, I'm not alone feeling this way or that way.' (Megarry 2020, 36)

This call to vulnerability would not be able to be executed in the same way in any other style of production. There is something different about a recording being entirely your own as you record alone, edit alone, and feel alone and then reach out and share it with people who have felt the same.

Overall, girl in red's discography and what she has said about her production process and life show some of the best of what can come out of bedroom production, a community, a social shift, and most of all good music. These concepts are echoed throughout the stories of other artists like mxmtoon who we will address next.

mxmtoon

Born in 2000, Maia is a Gen Z, singer-songwriter and artist from Oakland California who goes by the name mxmtoon. She has been described as a "child of the internet" (Burns 2021, 4) as well as quiet, thoughtful, and understated (Smyth 2020). As David Smyth noted in his interview with her in 2020, even "everything she writes is in muted lowercase." She started playing violin at age 6 followed by cello and trumpet but did not begin singing in public until joining a school rock band in fifth grade. She then learned guitar and ukulele and began writing songs in 6th grade. At the same time, she also began posting her own drawings under the name mxmtoon. Later on she started to post her songs on YouTube, secretly recording them in the guest room of her parents house (Burns 2021, 2; Megarry 2020, 72).

Through these songs, she was discovered by a lofi producer, Peachy, who produced a song featuring her called "Falling for U" which received 40 million streams on spotify within the next year. This led to her writing, producing, and releasing her own EP, Plum Blossom, in 2018 which

quickly gained over 100 million streams and was followed by her touring with Khai Dreams in 2019. Due to her music's success, Maia took a gap year before starting college to continue work on her music. During this time she produced her debut album, *the masquerade*, in 2019. Spotify even created a podcast called "21 Days" following her as she made the album. Her breakout song on *the masquerade* was "prom dress" which almost immediately hit 100 million streams and became a popular TikTok sound through 2020 (Burns 2021, 2; Megarry 2020, 72). Megarry said the album takes "the mundane and sad moments of life" and gives "them a deeper meaning" (72). *the masquerade* was accompanied by a graphic novel also created by Maia called *Adventures of Mxmtoon: the masquerade* (Burns 2021, 1).

During the pandemic, she wrote and released an EP duo. She wanted to focus on each individually so she recorded and released them separately. The first, *dawn*, included seven songs including two early release singles, "fever dream" and "quiet motions" and was released in April of 2020. This EP is the more pop style with a variety of instrumentals including guitar, piano, scythe, and ukulele. The second, *dusk*, also included seven songs and was released in October of 2020. In terms of style and topic, this EP was much softer with a more lofi sound mainly featuring ukulele and piano and introspective lyrics about life and the pandemic (Burns 2021, 1-2). Most recently she has released her second album, *rising*, which follows similar themes to much of her music including melancholy, sweet love songs and songs about overthinking and growing up. All of her music has been self released with the help of AWAL (1).

Maia is bisexual, coming out via Twitter by writing "I'm bisexual by the way" in 2017. She says that she was inspired by seeing other creatives that were out saying "I want to be another voice that is comforting for them [her queer audience] and they're not alone. I'm very proud of who I am, and I'm in a place where I'm proud to talk about it" (Megarry 2020, 72). Born to a Chinese

American mother and German Scottish father, Maia is mixed race. She says that this along with her bisexual identity are a large part of who she is and therefore her art. She describes her being as "between binaries" as being bixsexual, she negotiates heteronormative and queer standards and being of mixed race and culture she balances Chinese, European, and American practices and ideals. She says that "Having all these identities that fit in the middle of what people and what I'm used to, has largely informed the way I view the world and the way I walk in it. It happens even if I'm not consciously aware of it, when I make work it is always going to be impacted by my identities" (Megarry 2020, 72).

In regards to bedroom production, Maia has been an outspoken proponent of the production method. She says that she thinks the ideology behind bedroom pop is that anyone can make music. She describes the bedroom as more of an idea, the idea of "a person sitting in a small space and using whatever resources you have to make songs that you're proud of" (Roos 2020). She credits a large part of the development of bedroom pop to the internet and how much more accessible music and art have become. She says that "when I started, I was using a cheap USB microphone from Amazon that sounded really bad, and I would make all my music on GarageBand, which was free software that came with my computer" (Megary 2020, 72). Maia is a fantastic example of someone who wanted to write songs to vent and understand herself and then used the most basic equipment available to her to reach out and share her story with others. This is the basis of why bedroom production has become so popular. She later goes on to say that "There is no right way to do it anymore, and that opens up a lot more avenues for artists and creatives to make art and come up with new ways to share it. … I think a lot of the music world and a lot of musical artists are just now trying to figure out what other ways this can be done" (Megary 2020, 72). Maia shows

no indication of ever wanting to be signed to a major label and produce in the studio. She intends to self-release and continue to record her music the way she wants to.

One of the reasons I chose to focus on mxmtoon as one of my case studies is how social media has affected her career trajectory. As stated earlier, she was discovered and encouraged through YouTube and has continued to make much of her fan base through social media. As of 2020, she had "close to 750,000 Instagram followers, 757,000 subscribers to her YouTube channel, over 380,000 on Twitter, 332,000 watching her live streams on Twitch and a gigantic 2.2 million on TikTok" (Smyth 2020). In her early teenage years, she wanted to be a YouTuber as that seemed more in reach than a pop musician. She said that:

> A music career felt like a much more traditional pathway, and didn't seem like something that was approachable for me as a mixed race, bisexual kid. On YouTube there were people with the same identities as me, openly talking about who they were and what was going on in their lives. Also it seemed like a place where you can be creative and do original things, and it was my dream to be able to make whatever I wanted at any point. (Smyth 2020)

This use of social media made it so she could reach out, find a community, and share the many aspects of her creativity as a self proclaimed introvert. As she stated, "Yes, the internet is an extrovert's realm, but it also feels like a safe place for introverts to talk" (Smyth 2020). Tiktok has been a particular credit to her success as she says that her generation, Gen Z, has used the platform to lift each other up and share art that would not have a platform otherwise.

> To have that music be shared on such a wide platform and see such rapid success is incredible, because it really changes who is able to make a hit song, it's not just whatever pop star has released this massive album and has a ton of cool features, it can be the next bedroom pop-producer who's just making songs because they really like to, and then all of a sudden, overnight TikTok has turned it into a viral trend. That's turned the music industry on its head, in terms of popularity, and it's so spontaneous in the way that it happens that I don't know if there's a way to tell whether a song will be a hit anymore. It kind of just happens. (Megarry 2020, 72)

She describes her involvement with the internet and social media as higher than the average within her field and that is because she wants to be accessible to her fans. She says she has stayed and talked with fans for hours after performances to listen to them vent and give them a hug. The community she has fostered is supportive and gentle. On twitter she received over 35k likes for writing "give yourself a pat on the head , u did good job today !! u are alive" (Smyth 2020).

This is reflected in many of her songs. For example her song "quiet motions" encourages listeners to take a moment alone, watching the world move and take it slow by saying "Hold your breath, count to ten, It's okay to feel so small, Let it out," and later "Isn't it nice to be all by yourself? … These quiet motions, my favorite moments, take my advice, isn't it nice?" In her song "show and tell" she talks about her tendency to overthink and her experience feeling stuck during the pandemic by saying "I'm stuck in my brain, I'm going insane, Can somebody help me, please?" and later "Just want a break, My heart seems to ache, I'm craving some normalcy." These sentiments strike chords with her young audience who are going through similar experiences (Burns 2021, 4). As Megarry puts it, she has "a relatability that a new generation have been yearning for" (72). Similarly to girl in red, Maia believes that art needs to address both the good and bad feelings we have:

> I think happiness is wonderful and it should be celebrated, but sadness should as well. I started writing music when I was experiencing depression and anxiety, and it felt like a lonely thing I was going through by myself, but it's helped me to see I wasn't the only person going through it. I think being emotionally vulnerable is one of the strongest things you can ever do as a person or an artist. It takes a lot of bravery to voice what's going on inside your head. (72)

The similarity between mxmtoon's and girl and red's opinions about sharing their sadness and vulnerability are striking and show the underlying current of honesty that flows through bedroom production.

Throughout her music and interviews, mxmtoon has shown how to create a community through bedroom production. The connections she has made particularly through social media have led to her being able to pursue her music and art full time as she lives in Brooklyn, New York (Burns 2021, 4). We have seen a strong connection between girl and red and mxmtoon's thoughts about the music industry and how bedroom production and independent labels can help diversify the music industry and create honest, relatable music for new generations. These connections can be seen not only between these artists but throughout the interviews and music of so many women in bedroom production.

Personal Experience

In order to fully understand bedroom production and its effects, I personally embarked on a journey to complete my own EP with a goal of four songs. In order to prepare, I made sure I had adequate technology, researching microphones, interfaces, and DAWs, and decided which songs I would record. Throughout the process, my goals evolved as I saw the capabilities of my DAW, heard the songs from a new perspective, and encountered time and work-life balance issues as a full time college student. In this section, I will detail more of my process, the good and the bad I encountered along the way, and answer the question: Would I do it again?

My Recording Process

Originally, I made a fairly thorough spreadsheet and schedule for my recording process. This however proved difficult to balance with my college school work, vocal stamina, and creativity. I began to focus more on working when I felt motivated which made it more of a fun process similar to that of my songwriting process in general. I started with my song "hold you" as I felt like I had the strongest idea of what it should sound like. I recorded piano using my keyboard

and recorded the main vocals a few sessions later. One of the hardest parts about finalizing aspects of this song for the recording was tempo. I found that so many times it sounded too slow or too fast depending on my mood because I performed it slightly differently each time. I ended up recording it once at a faster tempo and then rerecording later at a slower tempo. It was fascinating to hear it faster and realize that it was not right. I also typically played an opening intro for the song when performing it live but I found the song worked a lot better without it so I removed it from the recording. It was particularly enjoyable to record the background vocals for this track as they felt like they gave the song a new life and new character. One example is that during the last double chorus, I improvise over the melody. I had never experienced the ending with both the chorus melody and my runs and riffs. This brought the song together and made it feel like something I could actually hear on the radio.

Before I finished "hold you," I began work on "wait." This song was the hardest vocally for me. It required high belting for every chorus and extra at the end. The biggest constraint in recording this song was balancing the health of my voice with other concerts and events I had to perform at. My favorite parts about recording this piece were hearing the drums and background vocals. Once I found the right drum beat, which as someone who is not a drummer was quite difficult, the piece came alive. During the second verse, there is my favorite moment of background vocals on the EP over the lyrics "I know that." Everytime I hear it I get so excited, and I never would have been able to hear that three part harmony without having made this EP and figuring it out myself. The opening a cappella trio was also completely new as of this recording. Being able to add these dimensions to the piece really made me so much more confident in my songwriting and musical capabilities.

In between working on "hold you" and "wait," I worked on "ocean." This song was not even written before the beginning of this semester. I had a poem I had written in the fall and I decided to see if I could make a song with it one evening. Over the course of that evening, I recorded the whole song with piano, main vocals, and backup vocals. It was a unique experience to be writing and recording a song at the same time. I only had to play the piano correctly once and the melody was made in tandem with the vocal harmonies. It is also through-composed which made it unique in terms of my history of songwriting. It felt very self-reflected and vulnerable in terms of the music and particularly the lyrics as it explored understanding the ebbs and flow of love. I constructed the piece to change keys from "wait" to "hold you" so it made my EP feel seamless. Because of the water themes in the piece, I also recorded rain and train sounds from outside my apartment, placing the song in my space. After playing the song for some of my peers, they reported that the song sounded like I was singing to them in their living room, it was like I was performing it live but with more depth. I think this points to how bedroom production can bring others into a moment in time and emotional space.

The last song I recorded for my EP is a short outro called "goodnight." This song is one I wrote when I was a freshman in high school in order to help myself calm down and fall asleep after a stressful day. I would loop it until I was too tired to keep playing. This was the only song on the album I recorded with ukulele rather than piano which plays into a common instrumentation for bedroom pop used by artists like mxmtoon and dodie. The point of this recording to me was to bring the listener into this dazed, sleepy headspace hoping to sooth them after a long day as the song did for me so many times. I wanted it to be simple and clean to achieve that feeling.

Overall, I found that I really enjoyed editing the songs. Though my skill definitely increased from song to song so I found myself going back to fix issues from previous songs. With

every song I did I was able to use my DAW faster and more easily learning the best ways to modify tempo and add effects. The next time I record myself I know I will develop even more skills which makes me excited to keep going.

Would I do it Again?

Making this EP has been a truly unique and fascinating experience for me. Being able to hear my songs in a new light with drums and background vocals I had only heard in my head was a joy. Particularly, the fact that I was able to make decent sounding recordings with little mixing and mastering experience, grew my confidence in my musical and song writing abilities. I did not know what this process would be like going in but I did know it was going to take time and effort. It was difficult to reprioritize my songwriting and recording before some other class assignments because I never viewed it as work before. I found it hard to take breaks once I had started something because I wanted to get the perfect take or figure out the perfect sound, even if I was four hours into working on that song.

Listening to these songs all together brought me so much confidence and joy. After showing the pieces to my friends and hearing what they liked and liked less I felt even more reassured. One of my friends said she could easily see herself playing "ocean" on repeat. Though I love listening to my songs, knowing that someone else might connect with my lyrics or just enjoy the songs makes me see a potential in my music and myself that I did not necessarily see before.

Overall I would say my experience aligns with many of the positives and negatives of bedroom production I discussed in previous sections. Work-life balance is hard, especially when you are used to something being a lower priority. However, the confidence and joy I gained from being able to create something by myself that now I can dance around to in my apartment is irreplaceable. So the answer to "Would I do it again?" is a resounding yes. Though hopefully I

won't have to balance it with the constant job of being a student. I viewed this whole project as an opportunity to learn and do something I never felt I had time for, which I think is the beauty of bedroom production. I hope to get better at recording, particularly mixing and mastering as I learn more so next time I record something in my bedroom it is even better.

Conclusion

In this last section of my paper, I will summarize my argument and what we have learned about women and bedroom production. First, in the section History of Bedroom Production we discussed our definition of bedroom production and the technological advancements and music industry changes that lead to it being possible. We began by defining bedroom production by discovering four of its key characteristics which were that it should (1) be done in a home environment, (2) create a professional quality sound, (3) be cheaper than professional studios, and (4) be done mainly alone or at least without the help of a professional sound engineer or major label. Secondarily we found that there are strong ties between bedroom production and the internet and social media and that the music made using this method often expresses the identity of the artist with an intimate and personal sound.

We next looked at the technological advancements that lead to bedroom production's existence. These included DAWs which allowed for music production to be a solitary experience needing less equipment, MP3s which allowed for music to be quickly and easily downloaded on 'narrow band' internet connections, and social media which allowed artists to find their own audience and community to share and create their music. Lastly, we looked at the more social political aspects of the music industry looking at the history of recording labels. Addressing issues with musicians not being paid as recording became more popularized, we saw how the 1942

recording ban made space for smaller labels to record new varieties of music including ukuleles, harmonicas, a cappella music, and bebop music. We then looked at how file sharing networks allowed artists to distribute their music in new ways outside of major labels and how independent labels, often started by women, allowed musicians to keep the rights to their music and make music from anywhere.

The following major section, Women, the Home, and the Music Industry, looked at the history of women making music at home and women in music production. We began by looking at early modern Europe to understand how women have made music at home for generations whether it be by choice or out of necessity. We saw how as technology changed and advanced, women were able to push for their place in the music world. As we continued into the modern day, we showed how women have had to fight to be in the studio and how they have used their skills to record more diverse genres and voices including their own. Through some key statistics, we saw that women are still underrepresented in music technology and production and we addressed some key reasons as to why. Both music and technology have separately existed as heavily masculine spaces where women have often been unwelcome. Though each space has grown individually, the intersection between those two spaces, music technology and production, has not grown to be as inclusive as it exists as an even more securely masculine space. There are also some secondary reasons including that sound engineers and producers have power over the artist and women are dissuaded from being in such a position and that women pushing to enter a male space are often antagonized. Lastly we addressed that women have a history of self production. Women often produce themselves to have control over their own sound. This is connected to the concept from Virgina Woolf (1929) that women need time and space on their own to develop their skills and

understand their world outside of men and the pressures of a male dominated society particularly in fields and spaces controlled by men.

Next, in Effect of Bedroom Production on Music and Artist, we looked at how bedroom music production can affect both the sound of the music and the artists themselves. We started with the positives showing how the bedroom can foster intimacy and creativity in the music in comparison to traditional studios. For women particularly we saw that this self production can empower them and give them confidence in their own production choices. We then looked at some negative aspects of bedroom production showing how it can lead to difficult work life balance. This can be exacerbated for women as the home is already often a space of work with the majority of household chores and childcare being given to women.

In Bedroom Production Artist Case Studies, we looked at girl in red and mxmtoon as representative examples of women in bedroom production. We saw how each artist expresses their vulnerability and identity through their music and strives to create communities for those that have similar life experiences. Lastly I described my own personal experiences bedroom producing my own EP. I connected my experience to research as I found that the experience truly was empowering and gave me confidence to continue moving forward in the music technology industry.

At the beginning of this paper, I stated that the growth of bedroom production is a direct result of women, particularly those that also belong to underrepresented groups like people of color and the LGBTQ+ community wanting to create a safe space to release and produce music and to find ways into the male dominated music industry. Tying together all that we have learned about women and bedroom production, I believe that we can clearly see that women have a long history of using self production methods to grow their skills and share their perspectives in male

dominated spaces. We also saw how the bedroom can be the perfect space to empower women to tell their own stories and develop their skills. Through our case studies we have seen direct examples of queer identities and mixed race identities being placed in the forefront of some of the most prominent artists in bedroom production today. Furthermore, women will continue to push this technique forward as they continue to break into the male dominated music technology industry gaining confidence in their skills and self along the way.

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